

Preschool blueprint [CA-ON]^[1]

Editorial

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EXCERPTS:

Ontario's approach to preschool children has long followed two separate tracks: one motivated by the needs of parents; the other a better reflection of children's needs.

The first, the necessity for child care, developed as a consequence of rapid economic and social change.

The child care industry that grew out of this need was a mishmash that reflected parents' differing financial circumstances more than it did a social philosophy of care.

The second track, the campaign for early childhood development, by contrast, was driven by evidence showing that intellectual stimulation in the early years had a positive bearing on learning in later years.

The integration of these two strands of children's lives is often hit and miss.

It is not uncommon for children to have to move from a babysitting environment to a learning environment and back every day.

The result is that one in four children enters Grade 1 with learning or behavioural problems.

While the obvious solution is to integrate learning and care in a single public, non-profit environment where children can spend their day, Ontario does not even have the administrative apparatus to consolidate these activities at this time.

But governments, at least, have started to recognize the benefits that can be achieved through reform. Ottawa and Queen's Park have committed more than \$1 billion to child care and early learning in Ontario over the next five years.

Now, a new study by educators at George Brown College and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at University of Toronto has mapped out a thoughtful blueprint for how the money should be spent.

Instead of layering new funding "on top of the dysfunctional patchwork that now exists," the study calls on Queen's Park to integrate care and early learning into a blended multi-purpose program for kindergarten-aged children, and expand it to include younger children as funds become available.

Under the auspices of a single ministry, the study envisages a core program that would be open to all children at no cost, with longer hours available for a modest parental fee.

With Ottawa's promise of new funding, this study could not have come at a better time. It deserves serious consideration by Queen's Park.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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