

Junior-kindergarten proposal sparks division [CA-AB] ^[1]

Author: Mahoney, Jill

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EXCERPTS

Alberta Learning Minister Lyle Oberg thought there would be little debate over a recent recommendation to establish a junior kindergarten program. What he heard surprised him.

Instead of the "slam dunk" he expected, Dr. Oberg discovered opinion was deeply divided despite the experiences of other provinces that have brought four-year-olds into their education systems.

Over the next few weeks, Mr. Oberg and his officials will take a crash course on the pros and cons of optional junior kindergarten with the goal of making a decision on the matter -- as well as whether to extend the existing half-day senior kindergarten curriculum to full days -- early in the new year.

The two proposals were contained in an October report by the government-appointed Learning Commission, which conducted a lengthy review of Alberta's education system and made 95 wide-ranging recommendations totalling \$597-million over five years.

Yesterday, Dr. Oberg announced that his government accepted 84 of the proposals, rejected two and sent nine for further review. Along with kindergarten, those subject to additional consideration include: removing principals from the teachers union, establishing a new collective bargaining model and reviewing postsecondary education.

The opposition New Democrats were critical of Dr. Oberg's lack of action yesterday, noting that the commission consulted with many experts before issuing its recommendations. "Why is the minister now still saying that he needs to listen to experts who may have something more to say?" leader Raj Pannu said. "I think it needs to be accepted by the minister as a fundamental first step."

The kindergarten recommendations were seen as key to the report's goal, which is "Every child learns, every child succeeds." As Learning Minister, Dr. Oberg is aware of the philosophy that embraces early-childhood education.

"It's been shown to help our children," said Janette Pelletier, a professor at the University of Toronto's Institute of Child Study. "The long-term studies have shown the positive effects of junior kindergarten."

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

Tags: kindergarten ^[2]

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