

# Full-day learning starts next year [CA-ON] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

Premier Dalton McGuinty today will announce full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds starting next year, based on a provincial adviser's \$1 billion plan that would see elementary schools become year-round hubs for children from birth to age 12.

It's unlikely McGuinty will commit to the entire \$1 billion annual price tag recommended by early learning adviser Charles Pascal in his report to be released at Queen's Park today. But the premier, who will make the announcement this morning, is expected to honour his 2007 election pledge to spend \$200 million on the plan in its first year and \$300 million in 2011.

Under Pascal's 64-page plan, one-third of Ontario school boards would offer a full day of learning for 4- and 5-year olds – blending kindergarten and daycare – as well as affordable after-school, March Break and summer programs for older students, by fall 2010. It would be available across the province within three years.

"This report is the enemy of the status quo," Pascal said in an interview. "If it's really all about the kids, then this is the only way to go."

To give parents more time to bond with their babies and reduce the need for infant child care, the report also recommends an additional six months of parental leave by 2020, including six weeks exclusively for the father or non-birthing parent. This is up from the current 52-week parental leave funded through employment insurance.

The plan would include self-employed parents; flexibility for new parents to return to work part-time; and 10 days of legislated leave annually for parents of children under 12. However, the report doesn't say how these new parental benefits would be funded.

For children younger than 4, Ontario's patchwork of children's services – from parenting centres to daycares – would be consolidated into one-stop Best Start Child and Family Centres, preferably located in schools. These community hubs would fall under the mandate of a new early learning division in the ministry of education and be overseen by municipalities, which have authority over other services for families including recreation, libraries and public health.

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The price tag for Pascal's education revolution may seem steep during a recession, but Ontario can't afford not to act, he argued.

Up to one-quarter of Ontario children arrive in Grade 1 severely behind their peers while another 30 per cent have difficulties that have not been identified, Pascal said.

Research has shown it is much easier and less costly to catch these problems – and address them – in the early years, he added.

"Not getting this right means a whole bunch of kids are getting caught up in youth violence, living lives of misery, dropping out of school and ending up unable to participate in society," he said.

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Teams of school board staff – two early childhood educators and a teacher for half the day in each classroom – would deliver a new, play-based curriculum from 7:30 a.m. until 6 p.m. Parents would pay \$27 a day for programming outside traditional school hours.

At the request of 15 families, every school would be required to provide extended-day, March Break and summer programs for children from kindergarten to age 12. The cost for older children would be \$20 per day.

Currently, year-round licensed child care for 4- and 5-year-olds costs up to \$53 a day. For older children, they cost up to \$28 a day.

Subsidies would continue to be available, starting at incomes below \$52,500 for a family with one child.

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The plan is also good for qualified child care workers, who earn an average of \$30,000 a year. As school board employees, their salaries would jump to \$47,000.

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

**Related link:** Early Learning Advisor's website <sup>[2]</sup>

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** kindergarten <sup>[4]</sup>

full-day early learning <sup>[5]</sup>

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