

Special Advisor on Early Learning- Backgrounder – Highlights of the full day learning plan ^[1]

With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario

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Source: Canada News Wire

Format: Press release

Publication Date: 15 Jun 2009

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

Press release:

Highlights of the Full Day Learning Plan

- A single program would be in place, with a single child-focused curriculum, planned and delivered by a qualified team of educators using common space and resources.
- Families would have the option of enrolling their 4- and 5-year-olds for the full school day or half day. Extended-day options would also be provided, funded by parent fees.
- Certified teachers and early childhood educators working together would complement each other's skills and give every child a better early learning experience.
- What happens to children after the bell rings is also important – by offering affordable, extended-day and summer programming for children 4 to 12 years old the education system will be strengthened even further.
- Schools as hubs for child and family programming would contribute to better outcomes for children and stronger communities.
- Integrating early learning into a single program would result in significant savings for parents compared with the cost of traditional licensed child care for 4- to 12-year-olds.
- Best Start Child and Family Centres would be formed by consolidating many existing early childhood services into one-stop access for families that include flexible child care, parenting information and resources, play groups, intervention supports for children with special challenges, and links to community agencies.
- Municipalities would provide local leadership for programs for children under 4. School boards would provide local leadership for programs for children from 4 to 12 years old. Provincial leadership would be consolidated under the Ministry of Education.
- The first phase of implementation would include new opportunities for children living in low-income neighbourhoods - and province-wide implementation of full day learning within three years will benefit all children.
- Incremental costs to implement the full day learning plan are estimated at under \$1 billion.
- A longer-term goal is to extend parental leave and benefits to allow parents to spend more time with their babies and to reduce the need for expensive infant care.

Background:

- Research shows that children enrolled in full-day learning are better prepared for Grade 1, do better in elementary school, and are more likely to graduate high school.
- One in four Ontario children arrives in Grade 1 with vulnerabilities (social, emotional, physical) and/or learning difficulties. Full-day learning can help identify and address learning problems earlier, avoiding costly and less-effective interventions later.

Key Facts

Numbers of Children in Ontario by Age Group

0 to 12 years old: 1,886,075

0 to 3 years old: 541,701

4 to 5 years old: 275,150

6 to 12 years old: 1,069,224

(Ontario Ministry of Finance - Annual Ontario population estimates by age, 2008)

Kindergarten in Ontario

- Over 227,000 4- and 5-year-olds attend part time Junior and Senior Kindergarten.
- About 20,000 4- and 5-year-olds children attend full day Junior and Senior Kindergarten.

- About 3,400 elementary schools now offer part time Kindergarten.
- About one-third of elementary schools could now accommodate full day learning with no or minor capital investments required.

Child Care in Ontario

- 4,582 licensed child care centres programs with 236,988 spaces serving children 0 to 12 years old.
- Nearly half of all child care centres - 2,131 - are in schools.
- 140 licensed private-home day care agencies with spaces for 19,637 children 0 to 12 years old.
- More than 30 per cent of children enrolled in child care receive some fee subsidy.
- Between 65 and 83 per cent of mothers with children under 12 years old participate in the workforce (fewer for mothers with younger children and more for mothers with older children).

Family Resource Programs in Ontario

- 108 Ontario Early Years Centres provide information, resources, drop-in and outreach programs for families with children 0 to 6 years old.
- 8 Better Beginning Better Future program sites offer intervention programs in at-risk neighbourhoods.
- 122 Child Care Resource Centres provide information and resources to the early childhood care operators and family child care providers and resources for families with young children.
- 123 school-operated Parenting and Family Literacy Centres provide child and family drop in programs to support readiness for Kindergarten.

Parental Leave

- 82,426 Ontario parents received EI-funded parental leave in 2008.
- In Quebec, which designates leave for fathers, 56 per cent took time off work to be with their new babies. Eleven per cent of Ontario fathers took parental leave. (2008, Statistics Canada).

What Others are Saying

Rich and deep in substance, this early learning blueprint provides the missing link in Ontario's education reform strategy, giving the province the opportunity to take its already highly regarded world-wide education reputation to become the global leader when it comes to the development and performance of its children and youth.

-Dr. Michael Fullan, Professor Emeritus, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

In the international context, this report will be a beacon for practitioners and experts alike.

-Dr. John Bennett, Senior Researcher for the Starting Strong Network, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Paris, France

This groundbreaking report underlines the critical importance of early learning and care to the health and wellbeing of Canadians. Premier McGuinty's vision and this report provide excellent guidance for what governments across Canada must do.

-Honourable Roy J. Romanow O.C., former Premier of Saskatchewan; Commissioner for the Future of Health Care in Canada; Chair, Canadian Index of Wellbeing Advisory Board

This is both a moral issue and an economic issue. The science underlying early learning is expanding all the time. The debate surrounding it and the conclusions to be drawn from it are too important for any reasonable person to ignore. Early learning is about choice, a choice that today is not available to far too many parents in this country. Ontario's report points the way.

- Right Honourable Paul Martin, former Prime Minister of Canada

The Premier should be commended for his vision and for commissioning a report that provides an excellent blueprint to enable significantly better health and well-being for our children and their families. Let's get this done. We can't afford not to.

- Dr. Robin Williams, Medical Officer of Health, Niagara Region; Chair, Council for Early Child Development

This report reflects a rare combination of respect, sensitivity and urgency when it comes to the early learning of Aboriginal children!

- Kenn Richard, Executive Director, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto

The demands on the government are many and the choices are painful. But the government has already shown that integrated approaches must trump silo thinking. Its courageous commitment to reducing family poverty, reinforces the notion that it's time to balance short-term economic triggers with a few important longer-term investments in human development that move us more quickly out of the downturn and sustains economic progress.

- Honourable Margaret Norrie McCain, Co-chair/Author, Early Years Studies

-As educators, in partnership with parents and early child development professionals, we must seize the moment that this report offers - a truly transformational pathway for increasing the success of all Ontario learners in school and in life.

- Jim Grieve, Director, Peel Board of Education

I am so heartened to see the commitment in this report to the community hub model for schools. We know that to be successful in school and life, children need a strong start. This significant report recognizes that schools can provide a much-needed foundation of support, education and community for children and their families.

- Annie Kidder, Executive Director, People for Education

This report builds on our decade-long experience, and excellent results, in providing the best support for our children by using the complementary skills and knowledge of teachers and early childhood educators.

- Dr. Mario Lajoie, Director, Planning, Accountability, and Strategic Partnerships, French Language Catholic School Board of Eastern Ontario

We are extremely excited about this report because it fully supports a transformation of our province's early learning and care system - one that gives families equal access to full day programs through one door, in one location, taught by one team of unified early learning professionals. Children will benefit and parents will love this approach. Let's get on with it.

- Eduarda Sousa, Executive Director, Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario

The report clearly sets out the steps that the province should take to enhance early child development. It is a comprehensive and practical plan to implement the results from all the prior work on the importance of early child development and the effects on learning, health, and behaviour in later life. We need to ensure that this report will move the agenda for quality early child development programs forward in Ontario.

- Dr. J. Fraser Mustard, Co-chair/Author, Early Years Studies

A vision of the whole child! This is a clarion call for a system focused on outcomes that support healthy opportunities for all of our kids to grow, learn, and succeed. The community is eager to work with the government to implement this critically important plan for Ontario's children.

- Frances Lankin, President & CEO, United Way Toronto

It is truly heartening to read a report that describes so clearly how to embrace diversity in a respectful, effective, and practical manner.

- Jehad Aliweiwi, Executive Director, Thorncliffe Neighborhood Office

The real beneficiaries of this critically important report are the next generation of leaders - our children and their families - and in turn civil society. The recommended investment is one we can't afford to ignore.

- Charles S. Coffey O.C., former Executive Vice-President, Royal Bank of Canada

I strongly applaud the Premier's early learning initiative! The new partnerships envisioned in this report - in particular local governments and school boards - are crucial to eliminating the divide that too often gets in the way of assuring that the needs of children and their families are met in the most cost-effective manner.

- Doug Reycraft, Mayor of Southwest Middlesex, former educator and president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario

Municipalities manage and deliver services at a cost of billions of dollars every year. They have demonstrated that they are fully capable of engaging the community, planning, implementing, delivering and monitoring programs within budget. They have shown they are efficient and effective despite the over abundance of checks and balances required by the province. Municipalities welcome outcome-based accountability in meeting provincially established priorities. We are ready to do our part to implement this exciting and comprehensive report.

- Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services, Peel Region

- We are very proud to have been singled out as an example of the power of early learning teams for four and five year olds. Nous croyons que les efforts déployés auprès des tout-petits est la clé qui assurera leur futur succès.

- Lyne Caza, Principal, Ecole élémentaire catholique Le Petit Prince

This will ensure a more secure and stimulating environment for a full day of learning with a team of educators that is well-coordinated and seamless when it comes to the needs of the kids.

- Macarthur Hunter, retired Elementary School Principal

This report completely captures the kind of integrated children's services that Ontario families need. The types of early learning opportunities we have been experimenting with must become available throughout the province.

- Brian Smith, Executive Director, Woodgreen Community Services

This report fully captures what's best for young children and their families and brings together a comprehensive plan to implement some very key ideas from our Royal Commission on Learning.

- Honourable Monique Bégin, Co-Chair, Royal Commission on Learning; former Minister, National Health and Welfare; Member, World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health

This should have been done decades ago but it's never too late to ensure a more complete approach to a publicly-supported education. This initiative will secure the investments we already make in elementary, secondary and post-secondary education.

- Honourable William G. Davis, former Premier of Ontario

We don't just need more time with young children at risk, we need precise and appropriate learning strategies that create a solid educational foundation for youngsters. I am heartened that this report builds on our experience and research in supporting the needs of young Aboriginal students.

- Janet Wilkinson, former Director of Education for the Keewatin- Patricia District School Board; former chair of Northwestern Ontario Educational Leaders

A powerful report, it focuses our attention on the expertise required to provide appropriate early learning environments for young children.

