

Fighting over the kids [CA-ON] ^[1]

Editorial

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EXCERPTS

Two months ago, Premier Dalton McGuinty's early learning adviser proposed a future where our schools operate as community hubs for families, with 4- and 5-year-olds benefiting from a full day of learning.

Yet, even before the government has committed to fully implementing this welcome vision, elementary teachers are out to make it so expensive that it is unlikely the government could ever afford it.

Public elementary teachers have declared there is no place for early childhood educators in classrooms, and that full-day learning must only be done with a full-day kindergarten teacher.

Given that kindergarten generally runs for just half a day right now, this could mean hiring twice the number of teachers - at enormous cost - and, according to experts, it is not even what's best for children.

Charles Pascal's report, *With our Best Future in Mind*, outlined a blended system of teachers and early childhood educators providing full-day programming for 4- and 5-year-olds.

This model gives children the best of two worlds - teachers who are experts in the curriculum and preparing them for Grade 1; and child-care workers trained in early childhood development.

When McGuinty indicated his support for a blended model, he acknowledged there would be pushback from teachers. "We're going to have to find a way to work together on this."

Sadly, at their annual meeting this week, Ontario's public elementary teachers have shown they are not interested in doing that. They approved a resolution to launch an aggressive campaign to "keep teachers in kindergarten classrooms."

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This is about offering children more than what they have now.

This resolution, and the heated words from union leaders, simply makes teachers look like a self-serving interest group out to raise its membership numbers at a time of declining enrolment. Teachers are also setting themselves up for conflict with early childhood educators, parents and school administrators - all the people who should be united and keeping the pressure on the government to implement full-day learning in a timely fashion.

McGuinty has said he will begin rolling out full-day learning in September 2010. Whether he extends it to all children within three years, as Pascal's report urges, or uses the economic downturn as an excuse to delay full implementation for much longer, remains to be seen.

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Right now, more than one quarter of them arrive in Grade 1 significantly behind their peers.

Ensuring our youngest students have access to full-day learning as quickly as possible is where our attention should be right now. Not on this misguided attempt by teachers to bolster their own ranks.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: funding ^[3]

staff ^[4]

full-day early learning ^[5]

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