

Hardwiring our children for success [CA-ON]^[1]

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Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 9 Sep 2009

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Summer is over. Our children are back at school and our representatives have returned to the Legislature. We hope this means that we'll also get back to a discussion about how Ontario will implement the recommendations of Charles Pascal's recent report on early learning, *With Our Best Future in Mind*. We share this hope personally, as citizens who believe our province cannot afford to waste the talents of even one child. As child health professionals, we wholeheartedly support the report's recommendations describing a program that will impact the health and well-being of Ontario's next generation.

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There is increasing evidence about the link between the effects of social and economic conditions on health and development. Both during pregnancy as well as early in life, specific exposures have long-lasting effects, some positive, some negative. Simply put, the brain - like all the other organs in the body - is environmentally sensitive and requires specific sensory input at particular times in order to develop pathways. The richer and higher quality the stimulation, the richer the resulting connections. Strong associations have been demonstrated between increasing traumatic childhood events, for example, and a variety of serious illnesses in adulthood such as coronary artery disease, depression, alcoholism and even teen pregnancy.

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One-quarter (and in some neighbourhoods as many as 70 per cent) of our children are not kindergarten-ready by the time that they start school. These Ontario children arrive in Grade 1 with vulnerabilities - physical, emotional, social and/or learning difficulties - that will challenge them throughout their lives. As well as insufficient experience with words and numbers, this high percentage of children commonly lack age-appropriate social skills which allow them to interact in a friendly way with other children.

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Ontarians have been presented with a treatment plan supporting transformational change for young children and their families. The Pascal report is firmly grounded in what is best for children and families, making use of the considerable evidence that has accumulated on best practices in early childhood education and care. Putting this program into action will go a long way toward beginning to transform Canada's last-place dismal Early Childhood Education Council record, at least in Ontario.

Early learning addresses our economy's needs in the short and long term. It is about immediate stimulus through new infrastructure and job creation, and it is about positioning Ontario's workforce to excel, to meet the global challenges that lie ahead and ensure a prosperous future for all of us. Overwhelming evidence tells us we can expect a positive influence on the health-care system over the full adult lifespan through better lifelong and upstream practices, and better health choices in life.

As pediatricians affiliated with the Hospital for Sick Children and the University of Toronto, we applaud the premier for his initiation of this major advance, a progressive move. The transformation to a coherent early childhood education and care system will be a most welcome one. When this plan is implemented, Ontario will fast become the leading jurisdiction in Canada on the early years with access, outcomes and innovation. We can only hope that every jurisdiction will choose a similar path.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario^[2]

Tags: child development^[3]

kindergarten^[4]

full-day early learning^[5]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/09/11/hardwiring-our-children-success-ca> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856>
[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-development> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/kindergarten> [5]
<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8149>