

Stick with Pascal's plan ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

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Premier Dalton announced his government's early-years plan in June to applause from parents, childhood-education experts -- and support in this space. The plan was an endorsement of a report and recommendations by early-learning expert and government adviser Charles Pascal. His recommendations called for a "seamless day" that integrates child care with learning, came out of a 17-month study commissioned by the McGuinty government.

But implementing ideas is tougher than endorsing them and it now appears that McGuinty (through Education Minister Kathleen Wynne) is poised to deliver a plan that would put teachers in charge for the full school day, assisted by early childhood educators (ECEs).

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Pascal's report proposed a holistic, co-operative, multidisciplinary model that would have provided children with a full day of play-based learning based on a child-focused curriculum. That would eliminate the current mishmash arrangements for many parents and children in half-day (or alternative-day) kindergarten moving to child care for the rest of the time.

The changes were never going to happen overnight: Pascal recommended a three-year rollout, and McGuinty indicated in June that fiscal realities might slow things down. But this is not even a cost-cutting change. Having teachers who earn considerably more than ECEs in charge all day could cost hundreds of millions more each year than implementing the Pascal recommendations. That extra cost is why class-size caps could rise from 20 to 26.

Why the change? The province isn't saying anything yet, but opposition from the elementary teachers' unions began to mount almost as soon as Pascal's report was released. In June, the public teachers' union said the report would "replace qualified teachers ... with staff with lower credentials" and made it clear that it would not countenance giving classroom ground to ECEs.

McGuinty and Wynne aren't talking yet. But if they're going to deviate from expert recommendations on giving the best start to coming generations, they'd better have a better rationale than keeping teachers' unions happy.

Parents have waited a long time for Ontario to get this right. They'll be anxious to hear how McGuinty et al. are proceeding.

- reprinted from the Hamilton Spectator

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: kindergarten ^[3]

full-day early learning ^[4]

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