

Education talk put to the test ^[1]

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Source: Globe and Mail

Format: Article

Publication Date: 6 Oct 2009

EXCERPTS

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By the account of Charles Pascal, the education expert he enlisted to craft an ambitious model for early childhood learning, Mr. McGuinty is more committed to education than any Ontario premier since Bill Davis.

Mr. Davis, though, was a builder who launched his province's community college system and presided over a broad expansion of the elementary, secondary and university systems. Mr. McGuinty has been more of a fixer - attempting to improve the existing system, not expand it.

That's about to change. Midway through his second term, Mr. McGuinty is set to put his own indelible mark on public education. Having taken an interest in early childhood education for as long as he's been in politics - "The very first question I asked, as leader of the Official Opposition, was about children," he proudly points out - he's set to start rolling out a provincewide program starting next year.

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"We've made a number of dramatic improvements in our schools - much more than just increasing funding by, I think, close to a third," Mr. McGuinty says. "We devoted ourselves to introducing stability, and putting in place the kinds of supports that help our kids achieve better academically."

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He casts full-day learning in that light. "On what basis do we choose to compete at the beginning of the 21st century, an era of globalization and a knowledge-based economy?" Mr. McGuinty says. "I want to compete on the basis of knowledge."

It's not so controversial an idea as, say, a harmonized sales tax. But attempting to rush it out, with the limited funds available, carries risks of its own. If the program begins in chaos, or the model put forward by Dr. Pascal collapses when parts are left out, his dreams of joining Mr. Davis as an "education premier" may go up in smoke.

"As my old man used to say, the best way to begin is to begin," Mr. McGuinty offers. "So we're going to begin." At long last, the talk will be put to the test.

-reprinted from The Globe and Mail

Region: Ontario ^[2]

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