

Unravelling over 'seamless' day for kids ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

My daughter will go into kindergarten next September.

That means she could be part of the province's experiment with full-day learning.

It would be great for her. It would be hell for me.

Until recently, I was one of those people doing the daycare dance on the subway platform at 5:30 most weeknights -- shifting nervously from foot to foot, checking my watch, leaning out over the platform edge to gaze pleadingly down the empty train tunnel.

My daughter, Lyla, went to a fabulous daycare a subway stop away from home. There were closer daycares. But only one took infants -- babies younger than 18 months -- and it was harder to get into than Harvard. The waiting list was 1 1/2 years long.

Now I have a son, too.

First problem: while the neighbourhood school might take Lyla for a full day, it won't take my son Noah. He's too young. He'll have to go to Lyla's old daycare, a subway stop away. Two drop-offs. Two pickups. Double stress on the subway platform. Daycare breakdance.

All-day learning was supposed to cure this affliction. The plan, drafted by the premier's special adviser on early learning, Charles Pascal, transforms elementary schools into community hubs, offering any service a child could need from conception to age 12. It would be like the supercentre of child development, with prenatal classes, nutrition courses, counselling, literacy programs and parenting classes. When the kids got older, they could attend after-school classes in music, sports, even conflict resolution, the report suggests. And, importantly, there would be flexible child care for kids, from the time they are infants right up to age 12.

Pascal calls this system a seamless day that runs over a seamless year. The kids of working parents wouldn't face the daily shuffle from babysitter to school to daycare, and working parents could face Mondays without cracking open another bottle of Tums.

Instead, the premier has announced a seamless day only for children in kindergarten at a handful of schools, starting next September. And it is only seamless on days the school is open.

On days the school is closed, the child care will be closed. Which is regularly: P.A. days most months, March break, Christmas holidays and the summer. All 51 weekdays of the summer. Taken together, the seamless program will leave parents in the lurch for child care for 73 weekdays.

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Stressed-out parents aren't great for children. They have a "harder time meeting the needs of their child," says Tomoko Arimura, a Ph.D. student studying parental stress and child development at OISE. "Parenting stress is linked to parenting behaviour. The more stressed they are, the less likely they are able to engage in a positive way with the child."

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Unless the premier revises the plan to be truly all-day throughout the year, they will be even more statistically stressed out.

In five years, when all-day learning is phased in across the province, Ontario will be full of kids with the "cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills necessary to succeed," Pascal says in his report. Their parents will have the cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills necessary to get psychotherapy.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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