

Do not abandon early learning idea ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Critics of Ontario's plan to offer full-day kindergarten to all 4- and 5-year-olds have landed on the beguiling idea that we'd all be better off if the government simply gave parents the money instead.

"Parents could receive a minimum of \$9,199 dollars per child, annually," argues the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, a group dedicated to supporting "mom-and-dad marriage and family life."

What parent wouldn't accept thousands of dollars? But setting aside the questionable assumptions in the institute's report, it illustrates a common myth: that all-day kindergarten is about helping parents.

If all-day kindergarten is combined with fee-based before- and after-school child care, it certainly will make it easier for many parents to work and reduce their child-care costs. But that is not the primary reason for doing it. Rather, full-day learning is about what's best for children. Right now, more than one-quarter of our children arrive in Grade 1 significantly behind their peers, and too many never catch up. Children's lives should not be predetermined at such a young age.

...

This is why McGuinty's decision to begin implementing full-day kindergarten next September is the right move, even in the context of a \$24.7 billion provincial deficit.

...

Kindergarten attendance is not mandatory in Ontario, so parents don't have to send their 4- and 5-year-olds to school all day. But abandoning a public program in favour of giving parents money to make their own choices is an approach that has been tried before -- by Stephen Harper's federal Conservatives when they killed a national daycare program and replaced it with \$100-a-month cheques to families. That move has already cost taxpayers almost \$9 billion without creating a single child-care space, while the taxable cheques cover little more than a few hours of babysitting. Some choice.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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