

Sensible changes for kindergarten ^[1]

Editorial

Author: Toronto Star

Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 17 Jan 2010

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Our education bureaucracy is set in its ways. So it takes political fortitude to rethink how we educate 4- and 5-year-olds and require schools to meet the needs of modern families. It takes even more to do it when it means introducing a \$1.5 billion program while the province is facing a huge deficit.

But because Premier Dalton McGuinty understands both the educational and economic benefits of full-day kindergarten - as well as fee-based before- and after-school care - the program will be offered in nearly 600 schools this September. It will be expanded to more schools each year until 2015, when it is scheduled to be fully implemented, to the benefit of 240,000 children and their families.

While many parents eagerly await the arrival of this program in their neighbourhood schools, critics have been quick to question the details and latch onto potential problems.

Are there still kinks to be worked out? Absolutely. This is a major change that involves hiring an additional 3,800 teachers and 20,000 early childhood educators, doubling what is now a half-day school program for 4- and 5-year-olds and integrating before- and after-school child care into thousands of schools.

Some of the criticism, particularly around the need to better integrate child care with the school day, has been helpful. It has challenged the government to face up to the issues and avoid unintended consequences.

Last week, for example, McGuinty encouraged school boards to offer fee-based child care during the summer, after concerns were raised that parents might have few other options.

"This seamless program will make learning easier for kids and make life easier for their parents," says Education Minister Kathleen Wynne. With each improvement, we get closer to that goal.

Public debate and constructive criticism are always welcome, but there is also a danger the new idea could be nitpicked to death. All that does is provide fodder for those who would like to undo the full-day kindergarten program before it is even fully implemented.

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Full-day kindergarten and better access to child care are progressive ideas. The McGuinty government is right to pursue this goal even during a time of limited government resources.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: kindergarten ^[3]

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