

# No full-day kindergarten for First Nations kids <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Talaga, Tanya

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## EXCERPTS

First Nations children who attend schools on reserves are being left out of the province's innovative all-day kindergarten plan.

While Ontario projects almost half of all kindergarten students will be in full-day programs by the fall of 2012, native education is a federal responsibility and the plan is not offered in First Nations-run schools, said regional Chief Angus Toulouse of the Chiefs of Ontario.

First Nations students already face hurdles others students do not and are among the province's most vulnerable children, education experts say.

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Education experts agree full-day kindergarten gives kids an academic edge but leaving First Nations children out of the equation does not make sense.

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The investment required to support full day kindergarten programs on reserves need to come from the federal government, according to Erin Moroz, a spokesperson for Education Minister Leona Dombrowsky.

The ministry will work with First Nations to provide support such as sharing learning materials, guides and curriculum, Moroz added.

In order to improve the conditions of those living on reserves plagued with high unemployment, poverty and despair, many agree the way forward is to improve education on reserves. Statistics show nearly 70 per cent of on-reserve kids do not finish high school.

Ontario's chiefs say the federal government is currently developing an early learning strategy. However, Toulouse said they have been told "at this time no new money will be provided" for First Nations early learning.

"In other words, provincial schools' early learning capabilities will be improving while First Nations will be staying the same," he said.

Jurisdictional disputes aside, the Ontario government should step forward to provide all children with the same opportunities to learn, said Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, a group providing policy support to Native child service agencies.

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Who should pay for it should not be an issue, she added. Blackstock pointed out that Ontario supports Jordan's Principle. The principle states that children on reserves should not be denied access to services available to all other kids because of jurisdictional disputes between the federal and provincial governments.

Jordan Anderson of Norway House Cree Nation spent two years in hospital unnecessarily because the Manitoba and federal government couldn't agree on who should pay for his medical care at home. He died in hospital at age 5.

Ontario has adopted Jordan's Principle, a private members' motion passed unanimously by the House of Commons in 2007, but only to health and social services and not to education, said Blackstock. "We don't understand why this would be the case," she said. "We take the view that all children are sacred and they are all entitled to government services."

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** aboriginal <sup>[3]</sup>

federalism <sup>[4]</sup>

full-day early learning <sup>[5]</sup>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/10/10/no-full-day-kindergarten-first-nations-kids> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/aboriginal> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federalism> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8149>