

All day kindergarten comes to Ontario ^[1]

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Excerpt from the article:

Amid public enthusiasm and stacks of Canadian and international research on the value of early learning to get youngsters off to a good start in life, parents, teachers, early childhood educators, principals, school board administrators and trustees all find themselves on a learning curve this school year.

That's because no template exists in Ontario for the sweeping changes unveiled last October by Premier Dalton McGuinty when he endorsed a blueprint for all-day kindergarten drafted by his special early-learning adviser Charles Pascal in a June 2009 report, *With Our Best Future in Mind*.

Pascal, the Executive Director of the Atkinson Charitable Foundation and a long-time advocate of integrated services for children, bluntly stated the imperative to act. "More than one in four children enter Grade 1 significantly behind their peers," he said, adding that many of them are middle-class children with learning and other difficulties. "Too many never entirely close the gap and go on to be disruptive in school, fail to graduate and are unable to fully participate in and contribute to society."

In recommendations adopted by the premier, Pascal laid out the must-haves for early learning in Ontario: play-based kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds in classrooms staffed by a teacher and an early childhood educator working together as professional teammates; school-based, parent-paid child care seamlessly linked to the school day; and a network of child and family centres giving easy access to services that support healthy child development, timely interventions and successful transitions for children from birth to age 12.

"This is the biggest positive transformational change I have seen in my career," observes Jim Grieve, OCT, the veteran school board director named last year as the Ministry of Education's senior official for the implementation of all-day learning. "The rest of the country is watching what we are doing," he adds. "We will all be pioneers in this process in the fall."

At present, with 238,000 children in part- or full-day kindergarten, no one school jurisdiction in Ontario incorporates all elements of Pascal's big-picture vision.

In the mid-1990s francophone schools in Ontario pioneered the introduction of all-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds, but without a partnership between teachers and early childhood educators. The province's 29 Catholic boards offer half-day, alternate-day and some full-day kindergarten, sometimes working with their own or third-party organizations to provide school-based child care. Public boards offer similar kindergarten options, sometimes with school-based parenting centres aimed at boosting preschoolers' physical, emotional and cognitive readiness to learn.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: kindergarten ^[4]

full-day early learning ^[5]

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