

# How Ontario can become a world education leader <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Op-ed from the Toronto Star <sup>[2]</sup>

### Message from David Crombie and Margaret McCain:

We are sponsoring an open letter to Premier McGuinty urging him to move forward on all the recommendations in the report of his early learning advisor, With Our Best Future in Mind. We put our views forward in an op-ed which appeared in the Star on Saturday November 13, 2010 (see link and content below) and are asking other community leaders to add their voice by signing on. Full day kindergarten is an important step, but on its own it adds to the fragmentation of children's services that frustrates parents, fails children and is costly for taxpayers. We are asking the Premier to:

- Transfer the management of children's programs to municipalities so they can begin creating child and family centres. Local governments are ready; they just need the green light from the province.
- Adequately fund child care so it can adjust to the mass movement of 4 and 5 year olds into kindergarten and refocus on expanding much-needed services for younger children.
- Direct and resource school boards to open their doors and start meeting the needs of modern families.

Together these steps would complete the birth-to-adolescence child and family system the report envisions.

If you are able to add to this effort, please confirm with [cnunez@atkinsonfoundation.ca](mailto:cnunez@atkinsonfoundation.ca) <sup>[3]</sup> with your full name and how you would like to be identified on the letter.

### Full text of the open letter:

Last fall, Premier Dalton McGuinty lauded his hand-picked adviser's report on early learning, calling it "sound advice" and promising to establish Ontario as an educational leader beginning with programs for young children.

The report is a blueprint on how to make better use of publicly financed schools by turning them into community centres open year-round and activity-filled from early morning until long after the 3 o'clock bell rings. Inside, an innovative kindergarten and care program would be available for all 4 and 5 year olds; older children could participate in after-school homework and recreation clubs and child and family centres would welcome preschoolers to early learning.

This September, full-day kindergarten opened in hundreds of Ontario schools and more schools will be added over the next two years. Every available space has been commandeered to meet parent demand. The program is so popular one might think the government would want to build on its success. Sadly no. Signs are that the promised march toward excellence in education is tripping at the start line.

A survey by People for Education, the group that keeps a parental eye on what really happens in our schools, reports that just 8 per cent of schools host the seamless learning and care program that was to accommodate the schedules of working families. Provincial directives discourage boards from operating beyond the traditional school year, leaving parents to cobble together alternative arrangements during school holidays and summer shutdowns.

In another 25 per cent of schools, outside organizations such as the "Y" fill the void. But shipping children back and forth between different programs isn't the seamless day the premier promised and it perpetuates the stress that education experts say disrupts learning in young children.

Families deal with the worst of the fallout but teachers have also noticed just how fragmented the implementation of the provincial reforms has been. A survey by their union shows 70 per cent of teachers in English Catholic schools see no connection between what happens in their classrooms and the out-of-school activities offered by independent child-care providers.

The disjointed day extends to early childhood educators who work with teachers in kindergarten classes bringing all-important play-based learning to the children's day. Some are employed by outside agencies, their workday split before and after the school day; others work for school boards during the school year but are without jobs in the summer. These professionals are already underpaid. Part-time work makes it difficult to attract and keep the best of them.

The child and family centres are another overarching component of the early learning plan. In cooperation with school boards and community agencies, municipalities were to take the lead in developing these "one-stop shops" located in schools and offering child care, resources for children with special needs, parenting supports and drop-in play groups. They were heralded as the central hub for integrating services overseen by both the province and municipalities -- a shining example of governments working together to provide cost-efficient, quality services. These centres were supposed to roll out in tandem with full day kindergarten. They are nowhere to be seen.

The report the government commissioned was two years in the making. Its recommendations drew from local, national and international expertise. This week the children's service ministry announced a new round of consultations, which is inside-speak for "let's put this on hold."

The premier has the step-by-step guide he requested to re-engineer Ontario's children's services mess. To finish the job he needs to:

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- Adequately fund child care so it can adjust to the mass movement of 4 and 5 year olds into kindergarten and refocus on expanding much-needed services for younger children.
- Direct and resource school boards to open their doors and start meeting the needs of modern families.

Together these would complete the birth-to-adolescence child and family system the report envisions. Moreover it would be popular. A recent poll showed full-day learning was the only government initiative to receive majority support from voters. Advice to the premier: when your numbers are down, do more of what people like.

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** kindergarten <sup>[5]</sup>

full-day early learning <sup>[6]</sup>

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**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/11/01/how-ontario-can-become-world-education-leader>

**Links**

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/11/01/how-ontario-can-become-world-education-leader> [2]

[https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorialopinion/2010/11/13/how\\_ontario\\_can\\_become\\_a\\_world\\_education\\_leader.html](https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorialopinion/2010/11/13/how_ontario_can_become_a_world_education_leader.html) [3]

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