

Move toward school board child-care program deserves applause ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The Waterloo Region District School Board is to be congratulated for establishing innovative seamless day programs for children and their families. The school board is demonstrating leadership that is in keeping with international developments in early learning. Canada needs more of this ambition and innovation in its education programs.

Unlike most jurisdictions, the Waterloo and Ottawa school boards both realize that high quality child care does much more than simply provide care. It enhances early brain development, creates future learning opportunities, provides supports to families, and builds programs designed to meet the needs of children with special educational needs. We hope others will follow their lead.

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School board-operated seamless day programs eliminate the stress children and parents experience when they are forced to juggle between school and day care. Even shuffling children to after-school care programs in the same school building creates stress for children and breaks up the curriculum and play-based learning.

Improving access to high quality early learning programs should be a priority for every community. Continuing to offer child care within the existing framework means that only 30 per cent of families can have access to these programs, and high staff turnover due to precarious working conditions puts quality at risk.

School board-operated programs are funded primarily through parent fees, limiting any new costs to school boards.

We see the convenience value of school board-delivered programs. But more important, we see possibilities to enrich children's daily experiences without the disruptions of moving from one program to another, under separate operators and with different educators. The school board programs ensure a high quality program within a public model delivered by highly qualified early childhood educators working alongside kindergarten teachers who are committed to a high level of professional practice that is supported by school board experts. Under the supervision of the school principal, early childhood educators become valued members of the school community.

The government of Ontario needs to establish supports that enable this to happen in a system-wide way. The report to the premier was designed to avoid overlap and create efficiencies. Released in June 2009, the early learning report launched a new discussion about the role of schools in a seamless day school program that offers programming during extended days and school breaks and move us one step further to re-establishing schools as hubs for schooling and community programs. Administrative savings gained by having school boards operate programs for children aged four through eight can be passed on to strengthen and expand programs for younger children, who are now terribly underserved.

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We are already seeing evidence of how full-day kindergarten is a huge success for children, for families and for educators. In the Waterloo board, it has led to significant increases in language achievement for kindergarten-aged children. Imagine how much more successful children would be when their learning opportunities are seamless and provided by the highest qualified educators. This is an opportunity to entrench principles of universality and accessibility for all of Ontario's children.

A publicly operated, seamless approach to program delivery will ensure holistic development of children, promote equitable access to education and a continuity of services for all children and their families.

- reprinted from the Record

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