

Start school at 2, study urges ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Every Canadian child should have access to publicly funded early childhood education starting at age 2 in their local school, says a new report based on an "avalanche of evidence" that shows how such programming can transform kids' lives.

"Education is well-established and a well-valued system within our country, and it's a place we feel it should be attached to, to build on," said Margaret Norrie McCain, who co-authored the report with the late Dr. Fraser Mustard and Kerry McCuaig.

"We need to think of building education downward, but at the same time not 'schoolifying' kids but stimulating kids" through optional, play-based programs.

...

The Early Years Study 3 was obtained by the *Star* in advance of its Tuesday release. In an exclusive interview in October, Mustard, who died last week, said the recommendations should be easy for Ontario, which is already implementing full-day kindergarten for 4- and 5-year-olds.

"I would come down to 3-year-olds, then 2-year-olds and 1-year-olds," he said.

"I'd move right down, and I'd pay (early childhood educators) well, and if you are telling me we don't have the money, I'd make the point that the risk for physical and mental health problems is actually set in early development."

Rather than starting a whole new program from scratch, the report argues that schools should also "become the centre of the community for families with supports and programs from pregnancy on."

Early Years 3 is the second update of Mustard and McCain's groundbreaking 1999 Early Years Study. The first update was in 2007.

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