

All-day kindergarten gets high marks in Ontario ^[1]

Author: Hammer, Kate

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EXCERPTS:

Children in Ontario's full-day kindergarten program are getting a leg up in the classroom, especially in reading, vocabulary and phonetics, according to preliminary data collected by researchers at the University of Toronto.

Students in all-day senior kindergarten scored significantly higher than their half-day peers on tests relating to literacy, numeracy and fine motor skills.

The findings, which have yet to be published, come at a time when Queen's Park has been advised to cut the full-day program entirely in order to help the province cope with a \$16-billion deficit.

Since it was introduced in the fall of 2010, full-day kindergarten has become popular with parents and teachers. It is being gradually rolled out and won't be in every school until the fall of 2014.

Critics have characterized it as an expensive form of government-backed daycare. The recent Drummond Report recommended either eliminating the program to save \$1.5-billion a year, delaying the roll out until 2017 or reducing staff in order to make it more affordable. The McGuinty government has vowed to continue to fund the program.

Meanwhile, parents across the province have fought to bring the program to their school as soon as possible.

Across the country, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island recently introduced all-day kindergarten programs, and Alberta is considering a similar move. Quebec has had full-day kindergarten for years.

This new, early evidence in Ontario suggests the benefits are significant, even after accounting for student age and the education level of the child's mother. In addition to the test results, parents of full-day senior kindergarten students reported more positive assessments of their children's social skills, speech and muscle development.

"These results were pretty dramatic," said Janette Pelletier, the lead investigator and professor at the University of Toronto. "This is seeming to suggest that the program is having great effects but it's very preliminary."

The researchers followed 329 children in Peel Region, west of Toronto, at both the Catholic and public school boards, and the preliminary data are based on testing conducted in the 2010-11 school year.

Among seven measures of student learning, there was one exception: Children in full-day junior kindergarten scored significantly lower in a test of early writing skills than their half-day peers.

Some teachers and parents have raised concerns about whether pupils in junior kindergarten, when most children are 3 and 4 years old, may be too young to go to school full-time.

Dr. Pelletier said she didn't know what might account for the exception and added that, among the older group, in senior kindergarten, full-day students were ahead in their early writing skills.

Doretta Wilson, executive director of the Society for Quality Education, said the program's price tag can't be justified by short-term gains, especially given the economic climate.

"It costs a lot out of the education budget," she said. "The proof will be to see if those gains will be sustainable and if they stay with those kids over the long run."

Dr. Pelletier and her colleagues intend to track the students' progress into their Grade 3 year.

-reprinted from the Globe and Mail

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: kindergarten ^[3]

full-day early learning ^[4]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/12/03/all-day-kindergarten-gets-high-marks-ontario> [2]
<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/kindergarten> [4]
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