

Sask. Education Ministry to expand tools for early learning in kindergarten ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

REGINA -- As the provincial government continues to focus on early education, the Ministry of Education will next year mandate the use of an early years evaluation instrument to help out the youngest students.

The tool will be used by kindergarten teachers to help identify students' strengths and weaknesses as children begin their education.

It's part of a wider plan by the government to put more resources into early learning.

The Leader-Post incorrectly reported Tuesday that pre-kindergarten would be offered universally by 2014.

While the provincial government is aiming to have pre-k available to all four-year-olds, there is no set timeline.

Some school divisions already use the early years evaluation instrument, but Education Minister Russ Marchuk said the program's expansion will help "provide extra supports" for young students.

As for pre-k, Marchuk said the goal is to provide access for all vulnerable three-year-olds.

At the moment only about 15 per cent of them are enrolled in pre-k, though figures are "a little better" for four-year-olds, Marchuk said, "because that's been targeted better.

"The goal is to help the vulnerable as soon as possible, so they come to school as ready as other children to enter the formal learning process," he said.

Saskatchewan isn't the first jurisdiction to focus on early education.

"I think early learning opportunities is a universal concept ... (and) a philosophy well-entrenched in other education circles," Marchuk said.

"The earlier you can provide an environment conducive to learning and engaging the community, the greater the benefits in the long-term. It's a very important endeavour to provide those opportunities to children."

Marchuk said it would be hard to estimate a dollar figure surrounding universal pre-k, but it was "certainly a priority.

"We have priorities within budgets, and early learning is a priority, so ... we will allocate resources as best we can to target as many of our early learners as possible," he said.

"It's a priority for us, we intend to pursue it, and we will continue to monitor and identify opportunities to incorporate pre-kindergarten."

-reprinted from the Leader Post

Region: Saskatchewan ^[2]

Tags: full-day early learning ^[3]

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