

# French division ahead of the class <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

As the Winnipeg School Division ponders full-time kindergarten for students, it only needs to look at the province's French school division to see it working.

While WSD trustees will debate a motion next month to start full-time nursery and kindergarten a year from now and have it fully in place by 2018, Division scolaire franco-manitobaine superintendent Denis Ferré said his division phased in full-time kindergarten in 1999, and had it in all schools by 2003.

"It has been positive," Ferré said Tuesday. "There's no way we would go back."

In a few months, some DSFM nursery students will also be immersed in francophone culture full time.

The division will start a pilot project for nursery students at one of its schools in January.

"We know this has an impact on student learning," he said.

"You have to be sure you conduct it all with the daycare, but at the end of the day it is good for kids."

This week, WSD trustee Mark Wasyliw tabled the motion that will be debated at the board's Oct. 7 meeting.

Wasyliw said Ontario has full-day enrolment in both kindergarten and nursery and it has produced positive results.

He said Manitoba doesn't fund nursery, but does provide funding for half-day kindergarten.

Both Brandon and St. James-Assiniboia School divisions have full-day kindergartens in a few schools, while some rural areas have full-day kindergarten every other day to reduce busing costs.

Daycare advocates warn if the division adopts more full-time classes for younger students, they should be brought into the conversation early so they can prepare for the change.

"It would be significant for people because a full school day is not a full work day for most people," Pat Wege, executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association, said.

"There would still be a need for child care for before and after school, holidays, and inservices. It's hard to staff those times because people don't want those shifts."

Don Giesbrecht, CEO of the Canadian Child Care Federation, said when Prince Edward Island created full-time kindergarten, it fast-tracked education so early childhood educators could be upgraded into kindergarten teachers.

Giesbrecht said Ontario is still struggling to work out the kinks on the child care side, but the evidence shows getting children into school full time at an earlier age is beneficial.

"(Wasyliw) is right. The data coming from Ontario about the education of the children is bang on," he said.

"Early education has tremendous benefits. But you need the whole education system to link up with child-care programs."

Paul Olson, president of the Manitoba Teachers Society, said there are benefits to full-time kindergarten and nursery, but he worries about funding.

Olson noted the province is already reducing kindergarten to Grade 3 class sizes and "if the province does too many initiatives at once, you could undermine them all."

Education Minister Nancy Allan could not be reached for comment, but provincial spokeswoman Naline Rampersad said the government's current priority is reducing class sizes from kindergarten to Grade 3 so young children get more individual time with teachers.

"We know that the early years are critical for laying a strong foundation for student success," she said.

A spokesman for the provincial Progressive Conservatives said they are developing a policy and they consider it a major issue.

"We are not prepared to make a statement on that, except to say we are listening to Manitobans and will continue to be all ears over the next several months as our party policy process continues," the spokesman said.

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**Region:** Manitoba <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** full-day early learning <sup>[3]</sup>  
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