

A young child with dark hair, wearing a yellow t-shirt with a colorful pattern and blue shorts, is riding a red tricycle on a paved playground. The child is seen from behind, moving away from the camera. The playground has yellow painted lines and arrows on the asphalt. In the background, there is a black chain-link fence. The left side of the image is a solid red vertical bar.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN
MOVING ONTARIO FORWARD

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

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The background image shows a classroom setting. In the foreground, several children are sitting on a tiled floor, looking towards the left. A teacher or adult is partially visible on the left, pointing at a large mat on the floor that has the letters 'a' and 't' repeated in a grid. In the background, there are wooden shelves filled with various supplies, including baskets, boxes, and containers. The overall color scheme is a warm, reddish-orange hue.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ETFO welcomes the government's plan to provide full-day kindergarten programs for four- and five-year-olds and looks forward to working with the government on its implementation. The plan brings Ontario more in line with developed countries that have a strong commitment to the education and development of young children.

ETFO recommends that

1. All junior and senior kindergarten programs be taught by teachers who hold a certificate of qualifications to teach in Ontario.
2. All junior and senior kindergarten programs be located in a publicly funded elementary school.
3. The Ministry of Education actively promote the importance of interactive, play-based learning, as outlined in the *Ontario Kindergarten Program*, to school boards and school administrators.
4. The Ontario government facilitate greater expansion of school-based hubs to coordinate children's services.

OTHER JURISDICTIONS

A number of government studies done in Ontario over the past ten years support full-day kindergarten. Nevertheless, given funding restraints, relatively few school boards now provide full-day kindergarten.

Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick all offer full-day senior kindergarten. Most European countries provide universal educational programs for children aged three to five years and there is a growing trend to extend these programs to children younger than

three. Among OECD nations, public spending for early learning and child care ranges between 0.2 to 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Canada's spending is the lowest of the 14 countries for which the data are provided.

BENEFITS OF FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Current research demonstrates that full-day kindergarten programs contribute to school readiness, improved literacy achievement in higher grades, narrowing the gap in achievement levels for lower socioeconomic status (SES) students, improved retention rates, and better integration of kindergarten into the elementary school community.

IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

In Ontario, teachers must complete three or four years of university education and a year at a faculty of education. Kindergarten teachers have qualifications to teach in the Primary/Junior division, (kindergarten to grade 6). In addition to these minimum requirements, 22 percent of ETFO's members who teach kindergarten have Primary Specialist qualifications; 9 percent hold a master's degree.

A 1998 Caledon Institute study of child care and kindergarten programs found that kindergarten teachers were more likely to deliver quality programs and parents did not support replacing kindergarten teachers with college-trained early childhood educators.

Qualified teachers are more likely to participate in professional development. Professional development is linked to enhanced student achievement.

IMPORTANCE OF LOCATING KINDERGARTEN IN SCHOOLS

Elementary schools provide access to physical resources, such as gymnasiums, large outdoor play space, and libraries, and the additional skills and program support provided by specialist teachers

and professional support personnel. Locating kindergarten programs in elementary schools integrates kindergarten students with the school community. Keeping full-day kindergarten programs in schools will also significantly contribute to keeping small, rural elementary schools viable during this period of declining enrolment.

IMPORTANCE OF A PLAY-BASED PROGRAM

As Ontario moves to expand kindergarten to a full-day/every-day model, it is crucial the program be based on developmentally-appropriate philosophy and teaching practices. Play-based learning contributes to literacy development, math and science skills, and social competence. These are the skills that children need to be successful learners in grade 1 and beyond.

TOWARDS A MORE INTEGRATED MODEL OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

ETFO supports staff with early childhood qualifications being included in kindergarten programs recognizing that teachers have a legislated responsibility for delivering the Ontario curriculum. Given the workload associated with teachers' responsibility to perform individual diagnostic tests and summative evaluations and report to parents, however, the inclusion of ECE-qualified staff in kindergarten classrooms should not affect the primary class size cap of 20 students.

ETFO supports an expansion of school-based child care. Child care before and after school and during lunch hour provides important support to families and contributes to a seamless day for children. Further, ETFO supports schools being used as the hub of more integrated children's services.



INTRODUCTION

THE provincial government's plan to expand educational programs for four- and five-year-olds represents a significant policy initiative in Ontario. It reflects the research that points to the critical importance of helping children develop cognitively, emotionally, and socially in their early years so that by the time they reach grade 1, when formal schooling begins, they are prepared to be successful learners.¹ If Ontario's longer-term vision for early childhood education is to develop a comprehensive system of programs and resources to support child development, then providing full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds is a logical place from which to begin.

In this paper, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) outlines

- the benefits of expanding junior and senior kindergarten to full-day/every day;
- the importance of staffing these full-day programs with certified teachers;
- the benefits of locating full-day kindergarten programs in public schools;
- the importance of ensuring kindergarten programs are based on age-appropriate play-based learning; and
- the direction in which we should be headed to realize a more integrated system of early years programs in Ontario.

BACKGROUND

The announcement in the 2007 Ontario Liberal Party election platform regarding full-day kindergarten

programs is grounded in a number of studies commissioned by recent provincial governments. The 1988 Radwanski report² recommended that school boards be required to provide early childhood education from the age of three; the 1994 Royal Commission on Learning report³ supported this recommendation; and the 2000 report of the Education Improvement Commission⁴ recommended phasing in full-day junior and senior kindergarten over a five- to seven-year period.

Full-day kindergarten programs are not new to Ontario. In recent history, school boards did receive funding support for full-day senior kindergarten, largely aimed at enhancing educational programs in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods. In 1996, for example, \$16.8 million was allocated to full-day senior kindergarten.⁵ The Conservative government cancelled the funding for full-day senior kindergarten in 1999-2000. This action forced boards to cancel or drastically reduce their full-day programs. Today, within the public boards, there are four boards that offer full-day junior and senior kindergarten programs in some of their schools and eight that offer full-day senior kindergarten programs in select schools.⁶ French-language school boards receive funding to provide full-day junior and senior kindergarten programs as part of the government's first-language enhancement policy for francophones.

Ontario vs. Other Jurisdictions

► Within Canada

How does Ontario's full-day kindergarten policy compare to other provinces and territories? Quebec, where there are full-day kindergarten programs for five-year-olds and \$7/day full-day child care programs widely available for children aged 0 to four, stands apart from the rest of the country in its comprehensive, accessible early childhood programs. Since 2000, Prince Edward Island has offered some full-day programs for five-year-olds through a system of child care centres, some of which are located in schools. Nova Scotia has had a full-day senior kindergarten program since 1997; in 2008 the government

decided not to extend a pilot project of full-day junior kindergarten. New Brunswick has made full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds compulsory. The Yukon introduced full-day senior kindergarten for all Whitehorse schools in 2005. British Columbia has recently announced a new Early Childhood Learning Agency that will assess the feasibility and costs of full-day senior kindergarten and whether to move to full-day junior kindergarten by 2010 and full-day programs for three-year-olds by 2012.⁸ The remaining provinces and territories offer half-day programs for five-year-olds.⁹ (Alberta failed to adopt the Alberta Commission on Learning recommendation in 2003 to establish full-day senior kindergarten.)

► On the international scene

Despite the progress on kindergarten, the Canadian situation poses a stark contrast to many other developed nations. Most European countries provide universal educational programs for children aged three to five years. Programs are available to all children of parents who seek the program regardless of the parental employment status or family income. These programs are delivered through the equivalent of our Ministry of Education. Increasingly in Europe, the trend is towards offering programs for children younger than three. In Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, where the compulsory school age is seven, high-quality early childhood education programs are made universally accessible and affordable through significant public investment and a fee structure based on parental income.¹⁰ Programs for children aged three or younger are also available in Belgium, Italy, and Portugal.¹¹ The extent of universal programs for children aged 0 to 6 in many European countries is reflected in the level of spending these states commit to early childhood education. Among the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations, public spending for early learning and child care ranges between 0.2 to 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Canada is the lowest spending of the 14 countries for which the data are provided. Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and

Finland are the highest spenders; the United States is ahead of Canada in ninth place.¹²

Countries like Canada, the United States, and Australia, have adopted a divided model for early childhood education in which kindergarten programs for five-year-olds, and in some instances for four-year-olds, are directly funded and universally available, but where child care programs for younger children are funded on a targeted welfare model through a separate government agency.

The move to full-day kindergarten programs in these nations is the first step towards moving closer to the European model that recognizes that children learn from birth and will only thrive with programs that are well funded and staffed by well-trained and fairly compensated educators. The United States is ahead of Canada in this regard. Enrolment of five-year-olds in full-day kindergarten programs has increased from 25 percent in 1979 to 63 percent in 2000.¹³ Children of lower socioeconomic status (SES) are particularly targeted for enrolment in US kindergarten and pre-kindergarten (our JK) programs.

BENEFITS OF FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Most of the research related to full-day kindergarten has been conducted in the United States, but there is a growing body of Canadian research on the subject. In 2001, ETFO published a position paper on kindergarten issues¹⁴ that included a consideration of full-day programs. The federation concluded at that time that, while there were significant merits to full-day programs, reducing class size was a higher priority. Now that Ontario is well on the way to reducing primary class size, it is the appropriate time to move forward on full-day kindergarten.

Academic Benefits

Recent research has benefited from large-scale national longitudinal studies of students enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs. The overall findings are strongly supportive of the benefits of full-day programs, particularly when measuring academic



outcomes. These findings are supported by smaller US and Canadian studies.

A significant body of research focuses on the benefits that children from lower SES backgrounds derive from full-day kindergarten programs.¹⁵ A longitudinal study of Edmonton public schools begun in 2000-01 concluded that

“it is clear that a full-day kindergarten experience enables children, particularly those from educationally deprived backgrounds, to acquire the skills needed to become emergent readers at least to the point at which they are at par with children from more educationally advantaged communities.”¹⁶

A US study of four-year-olds in a low-income urban community found that “even students who are far behind at entry to preschool can develop vocabulary, math, and literacy skills that approach national norms if provided with extended-duration preschool that maintains reasonable quality standards.”¹⁷ A full-day kindergarten policy would clearly support the Ontario government’s goal of reducing the achievement gap between students with lower SES and students from more advantaged backgrounds.

Other studies point to the gains on literacy and language measures on the part of children enrolled in full-day programs that are of particular importance to English language learners.¹⁸ As Ontario demographics change as the result of trends in recent immigration to the province, this benefit is of particular importance. According to 2006 Census data, 75 percent of immigrants to Ontario between July 1, 2005 and July 1, 2006 came from countries where English is not the mother tongue. More than one third of these immigrants were under the age of 19.¹⁹ Full-day kindergarten should therefore be viewed as an integral part of successfully integrating young immigrant children into the school system.

Research is still continuing on the extent to which the benefits of full-day kindergarten endure into higher grades. A 2002 analysis of over 17,000 grade 3 students in Philadelphia found that when their

promotion rates, achievement test scores and report card marks, and school attendance were examined, “students who attended full-day kindergarten were considerably more likely to be on grade level than students who attended half-day kindergarten.”²⁰

Better Teaching Conditions

While evidence suggests that students from lower SES may particularly benefit from full-day kindergarten programs, the research is also clear that all children gain from the extended day. Full-day programs provide more opportunity for teachers to work individually with students and incorporate play and social activities into the curriculum. In a recent US study

“Teachers stressed how additional time affected their ability to provide higher-quality instruction, enhance the curriculum, and initiate needed interventions...They were now able to present curriculum in a time frame more conducive to learning.”²¹

Improved School Readiness

Not surprisingly, teachers report that children enrolled in full-day kindergarten are often more prepared for grade 1. “They do better with the transition to first grade, show significant gains in school socialization... and are equipped with stronger learning skills.”²² A US literature review concluded that children who attend full-day programs “were found to engage in more child-to-child interactions, experience greater improvement in social skills, and have better self-concepts.”²³

Improved Attendance and Retention Rates

Longitudinal studies have also found that children in full-day programs have better attendance during the kindergarten years and through the later primary grades.²⁴ The benefits of full-day programs may also include improved grade retention.

“Full-day kindergarten may help students remain on grade as they move ahead in school. This result can offset the cost of extending kindergarten and even lead to long-term savings for schools and districts.”²⁵

Kindergarten More Integral to the School Community

A further benefit of full-day programs is that kindergarten teachers report they feel more connected to their colleagues and that kindergarten becomes a more integral part of the school community. A small Saskatoon study, for example, reports that full-day kindergarten students “are seen as fellow students and full partners of the schools’ learning communities rather than as part-time visitors.”²⁶ This factor should contribute positively to students’ transition to grade 1. It should also decrease any sense of isolation from the rest of the school and provide greater opportunities for kindergarten children to participate in school activities.

Summary of Benefits

The research strongly supports the Ontario government policy on extending junior and senior kindergarten to full-day programs. It is clear that full-day programs contribute to school readiness, improved literacy achievement in higher grades, narrowing the gap in achievement levels for lower SES students, improved retention rates, and better integration of kindergarten into the elementary school community.

IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

It is important for the Ontario government to implement its full-day kindergarten policy based on key indicators of quality. An important quality indicator is staff qualifications. The 2007 Liberal election platform and the 2007 Throne Speech leave the door open as to the staffing model for the full-day program. The platform refers to a plan to implement “full-day preschool”; the Throne Speech refers to “full-day learning” for four- and five-year olds; and, during the 2007 election campaign,



the Premier called the program “full-day kindergarten.” It is ETFO’s policy that junior and senior kindergarten programs must be taught by members who hold a certificate of qualifications to teach in Ontario.

To entertain an alternative model would be problematic on a number of levels. Staffing any portion of the instructional day with personnel not holding teaching credentials would lower the standards of the program, contravene the legislation that governs teachers’ instructional responsibilities, and create problems for existing full-day kindergarten programs that are staffed with qualified teachers. In an effort to reduce costs, the former Conservative government proposed to replace kindergarten teachers with early childhood educators. The proposal was withdrawn in the face of strong opposition, including from the Ontario Teachers’ Federation and its affiliates, the Ontario College of Teachers, school trustee associations, and parent organizations.

Kindergarten Teachers Trained to Support Transition to Grade 1

The primary role of kindergarten teachers is to develop foundational skills and assist young children prepare for the more formal learning that begins with grade 1. Kindergarten teachers’ training and location in elementary schools are key to that role. The Ontario kindergarten program states:

“In order to support the continuum of learning from one grade to the next, Kindergarten teachers need to be aware of the curriculum expectations for Grade 1 and later primary grades. Knowledge of the literacy and numeracy continua, in particular, is critical for teachers as they lay the foundations of learning.”²⁷

In Ontario, teachers must complete three or four years of university education and complete a year at a faculty of education. Through their faculty of education credentials, kindergarten teachers have qualifications to teach in the Primary/Junior division.²⁸ These qualifications provide them with knowledge and training about the curriculum and

expectations for students from junior kindergarten to grade 6. This knowledge is essential to the work they do in their kindergarten classrooms.

Teacher Qualifications and Training

A recent OECD report regarding early childhood education in Canada was critical of the lack of early childhood development content in Canada’s teacher training programs. At the same time, the report found that one of the few studies to measure kindergartens across a number of Canadian provinces, using the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale*, rated 70 percent of the kindergarten programs acceptable to good. The report further found that the training available in child care was problematic, especially when compared to teacher training.²⁹

The importance of educators who work with young children having a university degree is increasingly recognized. A three- or four-year university degree is required training for this sector in New Zealand and in most of Europe. It is also the trend in the United States.³⁰ A recent US study that examined the extent to which university-educated teachers and early childhood educators with less than a bachelor’s degree had developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) in their classrooms found, in general, that those “with 4 years of college or more, even if in an unrelated field, held stronger DAP beliefs than those with less education, even if that education was directly related to working with young children.” Further, the research found that “although specialized education was found to be related to child-centred learning, it did not relate to beliefs connected with classroom management, assessment, and issues related to literacy content.”³¹ The author of the study concluded:

“Teachers of young children, first and foremost, need depth and breadth of education and experience, exposure to a world of ideas and perspectives, along with the skills to communicate and express their knowledge fluidly – the type of knowledge, skills, and stimulation acquired most handily through a 4-year degree program.”³²

Although there is a US trend toward requiring all early childhood educators to have university degrees, that is not the current situation in Canada or in Ontario. A 2000 Canadian study of 1998 data on early childhood educators' level of education reports that 60.6 percent had a two-year college credential, 5.8 percent a three-year college credential, and 15.8 percent a B.A. degree or higher.³³ It will be up to the newly formed Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators to determine the future qualifications of their members.

ETFO cautions the Ontario government, however, not to entertain the notion of replacing qualified teachers in kindergarten programs with staff with lower credentials. Such a policy would be soundly rejected by the teaching profession and parents. A 1998 Caledon Institute study of child care and kindergarten programs in four Canadian provinces concluded that the presence of trained staff was the most important indicator of high quality in both child care and kindergarten. The report found that kindergarten teachers were more likely to deliver quality programs and that parents did not support replacing kindergarten teachers with college-trained early childhood educators.³⁴

ETFO recognizes the value of primary teachers having knowledge of early childhood development. The federation promotes the acquisition of training in this specialized area through its Additional Qualifications course for kindergarten teachers accredited with the Ontario College of Teachers. The most appropriate way to ensure primary teachers have sufficient knowledge of early childhood development is for faculties of education to include it in their curriculum and to require teachers graduating with Primary/Junior qualifications to have practicum placements in kindergarten classrooms. The increasing number of concurrent education programs in Ontario, which involve significantly more practicum experience, makes this policy straightforward to implement.

Teacher Participation in Professional Development

Research points to the importance of specific teacher professional development in contributing to enhanced

student achievement. A recent study based on the US national longitudinal study of kindergarten students found that teachers who participated in coursework in methods of teaching reading and mathematics “were associated with higher student achievement.”³⁵ Teachers as a professional group have a record of participating in professional development at high levels. A 2000 Canadian study reported that:

“Over 85% of all teachers indicated that they had engaged in formal courses and workshops in the previous year, as compared to 49% of the entire Canadian labour force, and 67% of those in the labour force with university level education.”³⁶

The study also found that teachers, on average, spend four hours per week in formal learning related to their jobs.

During the school year all Ontario teachers participate in professional development provided by the Ministry of Education or their employing school board. Recently this teacher in-service has focused on supporting improved student achievement in literacy and numeracy. ETFO provides a wide array of professional development programs for its members. The federation also provides specific professional development and resources for kindergarten teachers, including regional conferences, summer institutes, training videos, on-line learning, and curriculum resources. All these additional supports and resources have a significant impact on what skills and knowledge kindergarten teachers bring to their classrooms.

IMPORTANCE OF LOCATING KINDERGARTEN IN SCHOOLS

Physical Plant

The physical plant and location of kindergarten is also an important element of the overall quality of the program. Generally, elementary schools provide kindergarten students and their teachers with access to important physical resources such as gymnasiums, large outdoor play space, and libraries.

Also, as observed in the OECD report, “kindergarten classrooms are generally invested with well-trained teachers, good pedagogical material and suitable (indoor) furnishings.”³⁷

Specialist Teachers and Support Personnel

Full-day kindergarten students have increased access to the additional skills and program support provided by specialist teachers. Phys. ed., music, and library resource teachers significantly enhance the programming available to elementary students. Special education teachers as well as primary consultants and professional support personnel, accessed through the school board, provide important early identification and intervention services related to students’ special learning needs.

Integration with the School Community

Locating kindergarten programs in elementary schools also offers considerable benefits in terms of integrating kindergarten students into the school community. Kindergarten students participate in school concerts, environmental projects, and the annual school fun day. Older students join kindergarten students through school “Reading Buddies” programs and other mentoring activities. These activities benefit both the younger and older children.

Keeping Elementary Schools Viable

In addition to the physical and academic benefits, keeping full-day kindergarten programs in schools will also significantly contribute to keeping small, rural elementary schools viable during this period of declining enrolment. Declining enrolment is affecting all but three of the 31 public district school boards in Ontario. The additional number of full-time-equivalent students provided through funding full-day kindergarten could keep a number of smaller elementary schools open, continuing to serve as the hub of their community.

IMPORTANCE OF A PLAY-BASED PROGRAM

As Ontario moves to expand kindergarten to a full-day/every-day model, it is crucial the program be based on developmentally-appropriate philosophy and teaching practices. An extensive body of research supports play-based learning for this age group. The importance of play-based learning is an essential message in the extensive research reported on in Ontario’s own *Early Years Study*:

“Learning in the early years must be based on quality, developmentally-attuned interactions with primary caregivers and opportunities for play-based problem solving with other children that stimulates brain development.”³⁸

More recently, this emphasis on a developmentally appropriate curriculum for early childhood education is the basis of *Early Learning for Every Childhood Today: A Framework for Ontario’s Early Childhood Education Settings*.³⁹

Literacy Development

Structured play-based learning fosters literacy skills among kindergarten-aged children.

“When teachers provide a thematic organization for play; offer appropriate props, space and time; and become involved in play by extending and elaborating on children’s ideas, children’s language and literacy skills can be enhanced...”⁴⁰

This connection between play and enquiry-based learning is also recognized in the Ontario kindergarten program document.⁴¹ Opportunities to engage in active conversations with others are fostered in this environment. In a developmentally appropriate program, children are provided with authentic purposes for literacy at their own stage of literacy development. This contrasts with the inappropriate introduction of isolated literacy skills that may or may not be at a child’s skill level.

Development of Math and Science Skills

The Ontario Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat is also focused on fostering enhanced mathematics skills on the part of elementary students. This goal is equally grounded in appropriate play-based learning in kindergarten classrooms:

“If children lack opportunities to experience such play, their long-term capacities related to metacognition, problem solving, and social cognition, as well as to academic areas such as literacy, mathematics, and science, may be diminished. These complex multidimensional skills involving many areas of the brain are most likely to thrive in an atmosphere rich in high quality pretend play.”⁴²

Development of Social Competence

A very important goal of kindergarten is to foster social competency among young children as they prepare to begin their formal schooling in grade 1. Once again, research points to the role of play-based learning in achieving this objective.⁴³ “During play a child can learn to deal with emotions, to interact with others, to resolve conflicts, and to gain a sense of competence – all in the safety that only play affords.”⁴⁴

Teachers’ Role in Play

Teachers’ role in an interactive, play-based program is central to children’s learning. The Ontario *Kindergarten Program* outlines teachers’ role in assessing what and how children learn by observing, documenting, and analysing their play. “By using their observations, teachers can stimulate children to create, solve problems and think critically.”⁴⁵ Teachers’ direct involvement in children’s play is also important. It signals to children that play is important and promotes positive relationships between the teacher and students. ETFO supports play-based kindergarten programs through its written resources,⁴⁶ professional development offerings, and kindergarten webcasts.



Resisting the Pressure of Standardized Testing

One government rationale for extending kindergarten may be linked to the agenda to improve student achievement levels in provincial testing conducted by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). This objective, however, should not result in pushing grade 1 curriculum or teaching strategies into kindergarten classrooms. ETFO is observing increasing pressure on kindergarten teachers to introduce a disproportionate amount of direct instruction and skills-based learning to their classrooms, pressure that defies the extensive body of research that supports play-based, problem-solving learning for this age group.

The pressure on kindergarten children to demonstrate specific literacy and mathematics skills results from the stress experienced by school boards and school administrators related to the provincial targets for EQAO assessments. This government policy is influenced by the standards and assessment movements in both United States and the United Kingdom. In the US, early childhood education experts are raising concerns about the impact this phenomenon is having on domestic kindergarten programs.

“When standardized tests become the basis for teaching because adults want children to get high scores, some adults teach to the test alone. When tests can only measure isolated skills, drilling for tests sometimes replaces vivid and deep intellectual experiential education.”⁴⁷

School Readiness and School Retention

If the government’s goal is to improve school readiness on the part of children enrolled in kindergarten, then structured play must be an integral part of the program. This point is underlined in the most recent report authored by McCain and Mustard.

“The qualities developed through play are the same [as those] required to succeed in school. Children who enter Grade 1 with strong oral communication skills are confident, able to make friends, are persistent and creative in implementing tasks and solving problems, and are excited to learn, [and] have pathways for academic success.”⁴⁸

A play-based program is equally important to later school success and high school graduation rates. An American review of research on preschool curriculum studies found that children in direct instruction programs outperformed those from play-based programs up to a year after the preschool program, but not beyond. The children engaged in the play-based programs also had higher graduation rates.⁴⁹

TOWARDS A MORE INTEGRATED MODEL OF CHILDREN’S SERVICES

Role of Early Childhood Educators in Kindergarten Classrooms

Teachers have a legislated responsibility for delivering the Ontario curriculum. ETFO would therefore oppose any model for full-day kindergarten that replaced a teacher with an individual without teacher qualifications for any portion of the instructional day. ETFO supports staff with early childhood qualifications being included in kindergarten programs; the skills and knowledge of well-trained ECE staff would definitely enhance a kindergarten program.

The addition of an early childhood educator should not change the cap on primary class size. Regardless of the addition of an ECE-qualified staff, the kindergarten teacher would still have ultimate responsibility for the diagnostic testing, summative evaluations, and reporting to parents. Given these responsibilities and the workload involved, kindergarten class sizes must stay at 20 or lower.

Integration with School-based Child Care

ETFO supports an expansion of child care with schools being the preferred location of community child care programs. The government policy initiated in 1987 that required new schools to include space for child care programs resulted in the most significant expansion of child care in recent Ontario history. Wrap-around child care before and after school and during lunch hour provides important support to families and contributes to a seamless day for children. By establishing early and late shifts for school-based child care staff, there should be opportunities to integrate these staff into kindergarten programs. They would therefore have a full working day, working in both the wrap-around child care program and the kindergarten program. This model would create more full-time positions for child care staff and result in more efficient allocation of resources.

Schools as the Community Hub for Children's Services

ETFO supports schools being used as the hub of more integrated children's services. The value of locating other early childhood development and parenting programs was well articulated in the first McCain-Mustard report.

"Schools make logical sites for early childhood development and parenting centres in keeping with the concept of lifelong learning. Schools exist in local communities, have space which is adaptable to the needs of children and facilitate the integration of early child development programs in the next 'tier' of the education system."⁵⁰

There are a number of examples where different agencies provide services and programs to families through the school. Particularly in communities with significant declining enrolment and surplus school space, there is an opportunity to coordinate a wide range of children's services from a school hub.

CONCLUSION

The government's plan to provide full-day junior and senior kindergarten is a positive and important step towards bringing Ontario more in line with developed countries that have a strong commitment to the education and development of young children. The implementation of this plan must include the retention of qualified teachers in kindergarten classrooms throughout the instructional day and be based on an age-appropriate, play-based program. The move towards full-day kindergarten should involve an expansion of school-based child care services and greater integration between the two programs. Full-day kindergarten programs should be the first step in the province's expansion of directly-funded early childhood programs.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That all junior and senior kindergarten programs be taught by teachers who hold a certificate of qualifications to teach in Ontario.
2. That Ontario faculties of education be required to include content on early childhood development in their curriculum for faculty students earning their Primary/Junior qualifications.
3. That Ontario faculties of education be encouraged to require faculty students earning their Primary/Junior qualifications to complete a practicum in a kindergarten program.
4. That all junior and senior kindergarten programs be located in a publicly funded elementary school.
5. That the Ministry of Education actively promote the importance of interactive, play-based learning, as outlined in the Ontario *Kindergarten Program*, to school boards and school administrators.
6. That Ministry of Education curriculum resources support interactive, play-based learning in kindergarten.
7. That the cap on kindergarten class size not exceed 20 students, regardless of the staffing model for full-day programs, including whether or not the model includes ECE-qualified staff.
8. That the Ontario government facilitate greater expansion of school-based hubs to coordinate children's services.

ETFO POLICY ON EARLY YEARS⁵¹

1. That all district school boards be funded by the Ministry of Education to offer every-day full-day junior and senior kindergarten programs.
2. That junior and senior kindergarten programs be taught by members who hold a certificate of qualifications to teach in Ontario.
3. That school-based integrated early childhood education programs be located in schools and staffed by members who hold certificate of qualifications to teach in Ontario and [individuals] qualified as early childhood educators.
4. That maximum class size be 15 students for junior kindergarten, 16 students for senior kindergarten, and 14 for a combined junior/senior kindergarten.
5. That every junior and senior kindergarten class have at least one full-time educational assistant.
6. That formal written reporting for junior kindergarten be anecdotal only and occur in the third term.
7. That formal written reporting for senior kindergarten be anecdotal only and occur no more than twice per school year.
8. That the senior kindergarten program be mandatory for all children in Ontario.







ENDNOTES

- 1 The most important Canadian research on this subject is provided in the reports of Margaret McCain and Fraser Mustard: *Early Years Study* (1999) and *The Early Years 2: Putting Science into Action* (2007).
- 2 Radwanski, George. (1988). *Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education and the Issue of Dropouts*. Ministry of Education. Toronto.
- 3 Royal Commission on Learning. (1994). *For the Love of Learning*, Vol. II. Toronto.
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