

**FINAL  
REPORT**

**Ontarians' Attitudes toward  
Early Learning**

July 2009

pn6512

*Prepared for:*

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

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## INTRODUCTION

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The survey was conducted on behalf of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. The survey was carried out among 900 adult Ontarians between July 15 and 27, 2009. The margin of error for a survey of this magnitude is 3.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Within this overall sample, a total of 323 interviews were conducted with parents of children under the age of eight. The margin of error for a sample of this size is 5.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The reader is cautioned that margins of error for smaller subsamples are larger.

The survey specifically looks at support for extension of kindergarten, perceptions on the meaning of full-day kindergarten and full-day learning, preferred allocation of funding for full-day learning, importance of various factors in full-day learning, support for government funding of full-day kindergarten with before- and after-school child care paid by parents, and the importance of staffing full-day kindergarten programs with certified teachers.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Two-thirds of Ontarians support the expansion of junior and senior kindergarten for all four- and five-year-olds to a full day, and support is particularly intense among parents with children under the age of eight.

When presented with three descriptions on the meaning of full-day kindergarten, the vast majority of Ontarians think it involves a full-day teacher, including having a kindergarten teacher for a full day or having a kindergarten teacher for a full day, as well as having a child care worker for part of the day.

When presented with three descriptions of the meaning of full-day learning, the vast majority of Ontarians see it as involving kids being in a classroom for a full day either with or without before- and after-school care.

When asked to choose from four priorities for how the allocated \$1 billion should be used in the implementation of full-day learning, six in ten Ontarians think the top priority should involve a full-day teacher, including having a teacher in a kindergarten class for

the full day, or having a teacher in a kindergarten class for the full day with a child care worker also there for part of the day.

When asked about the importance of various factors in designing a full-day learning program for four- and five-year-olds, the factors seen to be the most important include children learning through play, it being delivered by certified teachers, and children being taught to read and write.

Two-thirds of Ontarians support the concept of government-funded full-day junior and senior kindergarten with before- and after-school child care paid for by parents, and support is particularly intense among parents with children under the age of eight.

An overwhelming majority of nine in ten Ontarians think it is important that full-day kindergarten programs continue to be delivered by certified teachers, including seven in ten who say this is very important.

## DETAILED FINDINGS

### Support for expansion of kindergarten

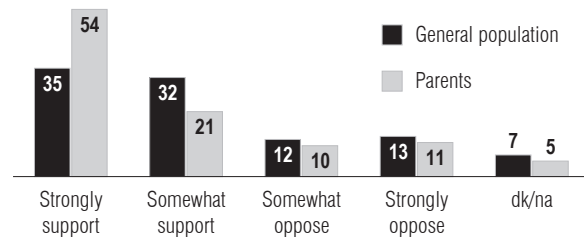
Ontarians were informed of the promise made by Premier McGuinty in 2007 of expanding junior and senior kindergarten for all four- and five-year-olds to a full day instead of the current half-day.

Two-thirds of Ontarians (67%) support the Ontario government moving ahead with this policy, while just one-quarter (25%) are opposed. Strongly expressed support (35%) is more than two times greater than strongly expressed opposition (13%).

Strongly expressed support is twice as high among parents with children under the age of eight as among those without (54% vs. 27%).

Large majorities in all regional and demographic groups support the expansion of kindergarten. Strong support tends to increase as household income and level of education increase. It is also notable that supporters of the Ontario Liberals, and to a lesser extent the NDP, tend to be highly supportive of this initiative. While support is somewhat less intense among PC supporters, 60 percent still support this initiative.

### Support for provincial government's plan of expanding kindergarten to a full day July 2009



#### Q.1

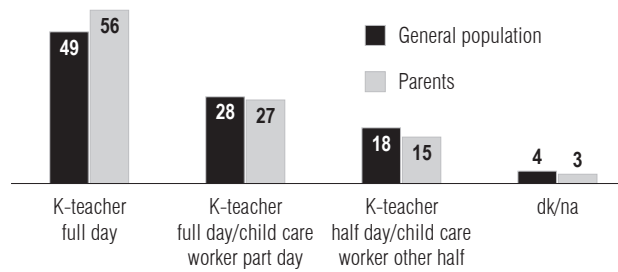
*As you may know, in 2007 Premier McGuinty promised to expand junior and senior kindergarten for all four- and five-year-olds to a full day instead of the current half-day. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the Ontario government moving ahead with this policy?*

## Meaning of full-day kindergarten

When Ontarians are asked to choose from three descriptions which best describes their expectation of full-day kindergarten, a total of just under eight in ten (77%) expect it to include a full-day kindergarten teacher – either alone in a classroom with children (49%) or along with a child care worker for part of the day (28%). Just two in ten (18%) expect it to be kids in a classroom with a kindergarten teacher for half a day and a child care worker for the other half.

Large majorities of Ontarians in all regional and demographic groups choose descriptions which include having a teacher for a full day. It is notable that Ontarians with the highest incomes are more likely than average to say the meaning of full-day kindergarten is having a teacher for a full day (59%). Also, parents with children under the age of eight are more likely than those without to think the meaning of full-day kindergarten is having a teacher for a full day (56% vs. 47%). City of Toronto residents are more likely than people in the rest of the province to think it means kids in a classroom with a kindergarten teacher for half a day and a child care worker for the other half (24%).

Perceived meaning of “full-day kindergarten”  
July 2009



### Q.2

*When you think of full-day kindergarten, which of the following best describes what you would expect this to mean ... Kids in a classroom with a kindergarten teacher for a full school day ... Kids in a classroom with a kindergarten teacher for a full school day and a child care worker for part of the day ... Kids in a classroom with a kindergarten teacher for half a day and a child care worker for the other half of the day?*

## Meaning of “full-day learning”

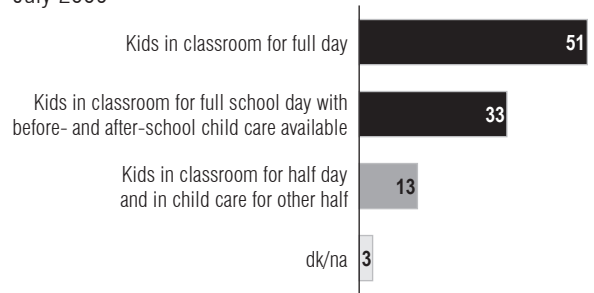
Ontarians were informed that in June, the Premier’s Advisor on Early Learning released a study with recommendations on “full-day learning” for four- and five-year-olds.

When Ontarians are asked to choose from three descriptions of what best describes the meaning of “full-day learning,” over eight in ten (84%) think the meaning either involves a full day in the classroom, including kids in a kindergarten classroom for a full day (51%), or kids in a kindergarten classroom for a full school day with before- and after-school child care (33%). Only one in ten (13%) see it as kids in a kindergarten classroom for half a day and in child care for the other half.

Large majorities of Ontarians in all regional and demographic groups think the meaning of full-day learning involves having kids in the classroom for a full day.

Those with children currently in child care and supporters of kindergarten expansion are more likely than opponents to think full-day learning includes available before- and after-school child care, while opponents are more likely than supporters to think it means only full-day school.

## Perceived meaning of “full-day learning” July 2009



### Q.3

*Last month, the Premier’s Advisor on Early Learning released a study with recommendations on “full-day learning” for four- and five-year-olds. When you hear full-day learning what do you think it means ... Kids in a kindergarten classroom for a full school day ... Kids in a kindergarten classroom for half a day and in child care the other half of the school day ... Kids in a kindergarten classroom for a full school day with before- and after-school child care also available?*

## How new spending should be allocated

Ontarians were informed that the recommendations made by the Premier's Early Learning Advisor that involve full-day learning for all four- and five-year-olds proposal will cost an estimated \$1 billion to implement.

When asked to choose which of four priorities should be the top priority in the allocation of this \$1 billion, a total of six in ten Ontarians (63%) think the top priority should involve a full-day teacher, including having a teacher in a kindergarten class for a full day (34%) or having a teacher in a kindergarten class for a full day with a child care worker for part of the day (29%). Smaller proportions think the top priority should be having a teacher in a class for half a day and a child care worker for the other half (16%), or having more day care available (16%).

Large majorities of Ontarians in all regional and demographic groups choose priorities which include having a teacher for a full day.

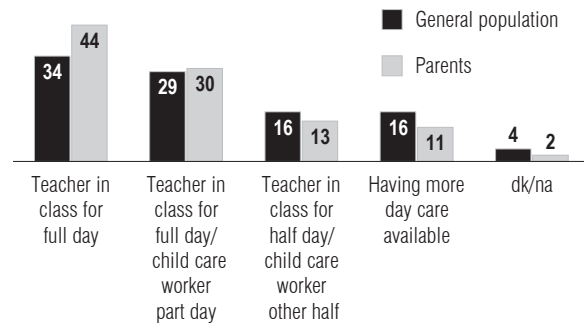
Ontarians with lower education are more likely to think the priority should be having a teacher for a full day, while those with higher education place a higher priority on having a teacher for a full day along with a child care worker for part of the day.

Parents with children under the age of eight are more likely than those without to place a high priority on having a teacher for a full day (44% vs. 29%).

Supporters of kindergarten expansion are more likely than opponents to place a high priority on having a teacher for a full day, while opponents are more likely than supporters to place a high priority on having more day care available.

Residents living outside of the GTA are more likely than their GTA counterparts to place a high priority on having a teacher for a full day (37% vs. 30%).

## Preferred government spending priority July 2009



### Q.4

*The recommendations made by the Premier's Early Learning Advisor that involve full-day learning for all four- and five-year-olds proposal will cost an estimated \$1 billion to implement. In allocating this \$1 billion in new spending, which of the following should be the government's top priority ... Having a teacher in a kindergarten class for a full day ... Having a kindergarten teacher in a class for a full day with a child care worker for part of the day ... Having a kindergarten teacher in a class for a half-day with a child care worker in the class for the other half-day ... Having more day care available?*

## Importance of factors in full-day learning

Ontarians were asked how important various factors would be if they were going to design a full-day learning program for four- and five-year-olds.

Large majorities of seven in ten or more consider the following factors to be very important: children being able to learn through play (79%), the program being delivered by certified teachers (78%), and children being taught to read and write (72%). Smaller majorities say the same of following a provincially-set curriculum (57%), being located in elementary schools (55%) and being free for parents (53%). Smaller proportions consider such factors as optional child care from early morning until the end of the work day (46%), being a full day just like the rest of elementary school (41%), being delivered by a teacher supported by a child care worker (39%) and being delivered by early child care workers (29%) to be “very important.”

Women are more likely than men to view the following factors as “very important”: children learning through play, being located in elementary schools, being free for parents, including optional child care and being delivered by a teacher supported by a child care worker. Men are more likely than women to think children being taught to read and write is a very important factor.

Ontarians with lower income are more inclined than others to think of being free for parents, including optional child care and being delivered by early child care workers as very important factors.

Parents of children under the age of eight are more likely than those without to place a high importance on such factors as children learning through play, being delivered by certified teachers, being located in elementary schools, being free for parents and being a full day just like the rest of elementary school.

Looking at the response to this question by political affiliation, there are some notable patterns. Both Liberal and NDP supporters are more likely than PC supporters to think being delivered by certified teachers is a very important factor. NDP supporters are more likely than Liberals and PCs to see being free for parents and including optional day care as very important factors.

## Importance of factors in designing a full-day learning program for four- and five-year-olds

Very important July 2009

	GENERAL POPULATION	PARENTS
Children being able to learn through play	79	84
<b>Being delivered by certified teachers</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>82</b>
Children being taught to read and write	72	75
Following a provincially-set curriculum	57	59
Being located in elementary schools	55	63
Being free for parents	53	64
Including optional child care from early morning until the end of work day	46	50
Being a full day just like the rest of elementary school	41	48
Being delivered by a teacher supported by a child care worker	39	43
Being delivered by early child care workers	29	30

### Q.5

*If you were going to design a full-day learning program for four- and five-year-olds, would each of the following factors be very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important ...?*

Liberals are more inclined than NDP and PC supporters to view being located in elementary schools as a very important factor.

Those living within the GTA are more likely than those living in the rest of Ontario to see factors, such as being delivered by certified teachers, following a provincially-set curriculum, including optional child care and being delivered by early child care workers as very important. Those living outside the GTA are more likely than their GTA counterparts to see factors, such as children learning through play and being free for parents as very important.

## Full-day kindergarten and pre- and post-school child care

Two-thirds of Ontarians (65%) support a system that would include government funding of full-day junior and senior kindergarten with before- and after-school child care paid for by parents, while one-third are opposed (33%). Strongly expressed support (28%) outweighs strongly expressed opposition (17%).

Support for this is particularly strong among parents with children under the age of eight, 38 percent of whom strongly support this policy, compared to 24 percent of those who do not have children in this age range.

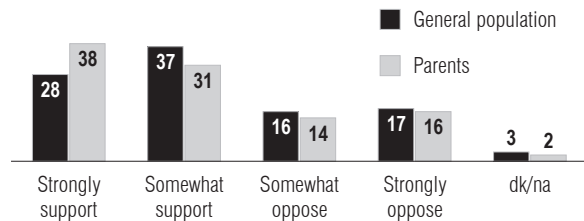
Large majorities across all regional, demographic and political groups express support for government-funded full-day kindergarten with before- and after-school child care paid for by parents.

Strongly expressed support is higher than average among the most affluent Ontarians (37%) and those aged 30 to 44 (35%).

Ontarians who are supportive of the general idea of expansion of kindergarten, particularly those who express strong support, are more likely than opponents to express strong support for this idea.

## Support for government funding of full-day kindergarten with before- and after-school care paid for by parents

July 2009



### Q.6

*Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose a system that would include government funding of full-day junior kindergarten and full-day senior kindergarten with before- and after-school child care paid for by parents?*

## Importance of kindergarten being taught by certified teachers

Ontarians were informed that, currently, all kindergarten programs in Ontario are taught by certified teachers who have at least a Bachelor of Education degree.

When asked how important it is to them that all full-day kindergarten programs continue to be delivered by certified teachers, nine in ten Ontarians (89%) think it is important, including 71 percent who believe this is very important. Only one in ten (10%) think this is not important.

Large majorities across all regional and demographic groups think that all kindergarten programs should continue to be taught by certified teachers, including six in ten or more in each subgroup who believe this is very important.

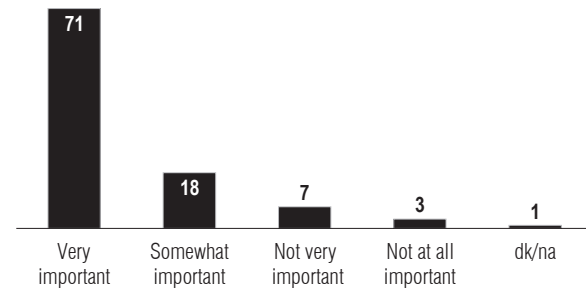
Women (74%) are more likely than men (68%) to think this is very important.

Across party affiliation, the proportions who think having qualified teachers is very important are higher among Liberal (76%) and NDP (75%) supporters than among PC supporters (65%), but still two-thirds of the last group deem this as very important.

Strong supporters of the general expansion of kindergarten are more likely than average to think having certified teachers is very important.

## Importance of all full-day kindergarten programs being delivered by certified teachers

July 2009



Q.7

*Currently, all kindergarten programs in Ontario are taught by certified teachers who have at least a Bachelor of Education degree. How important is it to you that all full-day kindergarten programs continue to be delivered by certified teachers? Is it ...?*