

# **An Opportunity for Change: A Position on Full-Day Kindergarten**

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ONTARIO ENGLISH  
**Catholic  
Teachers**  
ASSOCIATION

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) represents 36,000 women and men who have chosen teaching careers in the Catholic schools in Ontario. These teachers are found in the elementary panel from junior kindergarten to grade eight, in the secondary panel in grade nine through grade twelve, and occasional teachers in both panels, in publicly funded schools.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.01** Ontario’s plan to fund a full-day program for 4- and 5-year-olds presents a unique opportunity to expand and enhance full-day Kindergarten programs that are already operating in schools across the province. The Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association (OECTA) believes that teaching professionals, certified by the Ontario College of Teachers, employed in publicly-funded, regulated and accountable schools are most suited and prepared to deliver this program. The current school system is already endowed with structures that can be modified to accommodate the needs of a full-day program. Research supports OECTA’s position that the best program would be delivered by the most qualified professionals. In Ontario this means certified teachers.
- 1.02** Research confirms that the success of full-day programs is directly tied to the quality of the teachers who provide them. David Kirp, author of the *Sandbox Investment: The Preschool Movement and Kids-First Politics* writes about the Kindergarten movement: “Quality means well-trained educators, better salaries, smaller class sizes, and parent and neighbourhood involvement.” Good Kindergarten programs can make a dramatic difference, but not if they are cash strapped. Employing untrained staff with scant materials and big classes is no more than child minding, worthless and possibly harmful, Kirp cautions.
- 1.03** Perhaps the most comprehensive longitudinal study of the positive benefits of a first-class full-day program is the Perry Elementary School project in Ypsilanti, Michigan. This school, in a working-class town, began a program in 1961 that changed lives. The Perry Preschool was a program for 3- and 4-year-olds that used a problem-solving approach to learning. The hands-on curriculum administered by certified teachers

focused on social development, and the engagement of parents in their child's education. When measured in a comprehensive, longitudinal study against their adult counterparts who didn't attend, the participating Perry students, who are now in their 40s, have more family stability, earn more money, are less likely to receive welfare, and are less involved in crime. By 1996 the study showed that the \$1.00 investment had a \$7.16 return. By 2004 the return on the investment had jumped to \$11. These results, delivered by certified teachers employed in adequately funded programs, are conclusive and impossible to ignore (Kirp, 2007).

- 1.04** Certified teachers have more to offer children in school than other professionals. They are qualified to provide an enriched learning environment while gauging each child's interests, abilities and potential. They can access school resources, speech pathologists, occupational therapists and other specialized teachers. They are trained to individualize programs, teaching methods, assessments and planning. They can structure play to ensure that learning is optimized. Teachers' professional training prepares them to understand the whole child and best integrate each one into the world of learning.
- 1.05** Parents want the best for their children, and their confidence in the school program must be ensured. They also want the option of a fully funded full day JK/SK program for their children. Currently over 80 per cent of parents send their children to a Kindergarten program, most of which are half-time programs, a measure of the confidence parents have in the current system. This confidence should be enhanced not ignored. In preparing to entrust their 4- and 5-year-olds to "strangers" at school, parents want to know that these adults are fully qualified and

accountable. Ontario's teachers are trained, certified and have the experience to work effectively with parents. It makes sense to begin this important parent-teacher relationship when children are in Kindergarten and ensure a seamless transition into higher grades.

- 1.06** Ontario teachers are some of the most highly qualified teachers in the world. OECTA is committed to preparing its members to deliver quality Kindergarten programs and has offered symposia for Kindergarten teachers around the province, featuring such expert speakers as Dr. Stuart Shanker and Professor Linda Cameron. OECTA endorses the move by the Ontario College of Teachers to accredit Additional Qualification (AQ) courses specifically designed for Kindergarten teachers.
- 1.07** A full-day program can be integrated easily into the current school system. The current decline in enrolment is opening up spaces in school buildings that can accommodate full-day Kindergarten programs.
- 1.08** Implementation of a full-day Kindergarten program will be easy in the Catholic system where eight Catholic boards are already operating full-day programs. These eight boards provide models that can be expanded into every board. Conversely, a move away from a full-day program would be detrimental to the children and teachers in these communities.
- 1.09** It is OECTA's position that caring and qualified, certified, professional teachers working under one roof, in one system, under the mandate of the Ministry of Education will deliver the best possible learning opportunities for 4- and 5-year-olds. There are many reasons why services for these children should be integrated under one government

ministry, including fostering consistency in regulation, funding and staffing, as well as ensuring equal access to high quality education and care for all Ontario children, as modeled by Nordic countries.

- 1.10** A review of research literature confirms the benefits of quality full-day Kindergarten compared to half-day, specifically the many ways in which full-day Kindergarten benefits children and parents, and is more effective for teachers. This paper explores this research and the Ontario context.
- 1.11** OECTA is advocating for full-day Kindergarten for all children in Ontario, delivered by qualified teachers who are members of the Ontario College of Teachers. Questions may remain on how to best support and implement full-day Kindergarten in Ontario's diverse communities. To ensure that Ontario's children are to benefit from a fully realized developmentally and culturally appropriate 'full-day learning' program, consideration must be given to providing adequate funding, implementing key recommendations regarding costs and materials, as well as providing necessary training and support for teachers.

**Recommendations:**

**That the Ontario government fund full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds in full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) classes.**

**That the full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) classes be taught by certified teachers only.**

**That the full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) program be under the mandate of the Minister of Education.**

**That the full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) classes be staffed at a ratio no greater than 20:1.**

## **2. RECENT DECADES**

- 2.01** In past decades early childhood education advocates such as Laurier LaPierre in *To Herald a Child: The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Education of the Young Child (1983)*, Fraser Mustard and Margaret McCain in *The Early Years Study: Reversing the Real Brain Drain (1999)* and the *OECD Report on Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Canada, (2004)* have called for action and co-ordination from those who care about the hopes, health and happiness of our province's youngest citizens. Yet, throughout Ontario, young children's current educational opportunities can be viewed, at best, as a 'patchwork' of services.
- 2.02** For three decades, recognition of the powerful potential and undeniable importance of early years education has been part of Ontario's political and social agenda. Canadian experts have been aware of the need for changes in funding, policy and practice for many years. There have been repeated calls for universal, co-coordinated access to such programs, yet little has changed. While Ontario lags behind, the need for a unified system of education and care that would provide these childhood essentials has increased dramatically. In the absence of unified government funded programs, the publicly-funded school system has moved ahead with the implementation of full-day Kindergarten programs in some jurisdictions. Parents who are looking for information about childcare programs, often do not know where to turn for answers and support. Because governance of the school system is established, democratic and responsive to local needs, parents know who is accountable and where to find answers to questions regarding their child's needs.



### **3. NEED FOR A UNIFIED SYSTEM OF EDUCATION AND CARE**

**3.01** Now is the time for Ontario to invest in and develop a 21st century model of a Kindergarten program for 4-and 5-year-olds that can serve as a model for other provinces. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):

It is clear that national and provincial policy for the early education and care of young children in Canada is still in its initial stages. Care and education are still treated separately and coverage is low compared to other OECD countries. Over the coming years, significant energies and funding will need to be invested in the field to create a universal system in tune with the needs of a full employment economy, with gender equity and with new understandings of how young children develop and learn.

*Report on Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Canada,* (OECD, 2004, p. 6)

**3.02** In *To Herald a Child*, LaPierre cites “massive sociological, political, and economic changes in the role of the family and the child’s place in it, women’s roles, and notions of equality of opportunity that contribute to the need for comprehensive Kindergarten and care for children from all segments of society” (p. 66). *To Herald a Child* strongly recommends an integrated care and education model, characterized by language-rich environments, active play-based learning and a system that would “establish constancy of place, interaction and milieu” (p. 70). This report resulted in some new initiatives in Kindergarten programs, such as provincially funded Junior Kindergarten (JK) for 4-year-olds, but 25 years later, LaPierre’s vision of a comprehensive model of care and education has still not been realized.

#### **4. NEED FOR FUNDING**

- 4.01** Although Canada is ranked as the 4th wealthiest among OECD nations, we rank the very lowest (14) in public spending on early learning and childcare programs for young children (0.25 per cent of GDP), significantly behind other low ranking countries. According to 2006 OECD statistics, Australia spent 0.4 per cent and the U.S. spent 0.48 per cent. In terms of accessibility, again, the same report ranks Canada at the very bottom at less than 30 per cent for rates of access for 3- to 6-year-olds. Significantly, countries that invest the highest proportions of GDP in early learning, namely Denmark (2.0 per cent), Sweden (1.7 per cent) and Norway (1.7 per cent) outrank Canada in child health and wellness (UNICEF, 2007), and enjoy some of the world's highest rates of literacy (Baumer, Ferholt, and Lecusay, 2005). "As a society, Canada is under-investing in the early years. We invest about 40 times more public dollars into education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels in Canada than we do in providing early education for young children in their preschool years." (Cleveland and Colley, 2006).
- 4.02** Ontario currently funds only part-time programs for 4- and 5-year-olds. In 2004/05, Ontario funding for Kindergarten programs amounted to \$504.9 million for 113,053 Junior Kindergarten (JK) students and \$535.9 million for 127,571 Senior Kindergarten (SK) students (Friendly, Beach, Ferns, and Turiano, 2007). However, these part-time programs do not meet the educational and social needs of today's families (OECD, 2004). Some Catholic boards fund full-time programs because they recognize how beneficial full-time programs are for students, even though there is no funding.

## **5. CONSEQUENCES OF LIMITED FUNDING**

**5.01** Most 4- and 5-year-olds in Ontario are enrolled in JK and SK programs because parents appreciate the benefits of the programs. Children in urban communities usually have access to daily, half-day programs, while children in rural areas are more likely to be offered full-day programs every other day. Traditionally, this Kindergarten model was meant to offer children an introduction to school routines and practices, and allow time for age-appropriate social and play activities. A two and a half hour schedule – and in winter just two hours, taking into account the time spent wrestling with snowsuits – challenges teachers who strive to offer a full range of learning opportunities and expectations, as outlined in Ontario’s 2006 Kindergarten curriculum. A full-day Kindergarten schedule allows for unhurried, developmentally appropriate practices, exploration and inquiry, as well as time for childhood essentials such as play, stories, arts, outdoor and nature experiences (Alliance for Childhood 2005; Cameron and Bezaire, 2007). Currently, when there are not enough students to run concurrent half-day morning and afternoon programs at both the JK and SK level, the two groups are combined into larger JK/SK classes. It would be preferable to run a full-day program and group children according to age.

## **6. OTHER JURISDICTIONS**

**6.01** The United States and Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden use expanded models for early learning. In the United States, the majority of children have attended full-day Kindergarten since the late-1990s. Analyses of full-day programs find them to be associated with learning, social and behavioural benefits (Ackerman, Barnett, and Robin, 2005; Clark, 2001).

- 6.02** In Nordic countries, legislative, policy and curricular development are dedicated to a model of social welfare that is based on “the unfaltering conviction that all citizens, including children, should enjoy a high quality of life and an equal standard of living, as well as social and personal well-being” (Einasdottir and Wagner, 2004, p. 4). Kindergarten and care are readily available with no long waiting lists or patchwork of services, at minimum or no cost to families.
- 6.03** As a world leader, boasting the world’s highest academic performance scores, Finland has developed highly successful Kindergarten and care programs. Finnish children are guaranteed full-time Kindergarten and receive extended play-based Kindergarten from age 3 to 6 years. (OECD, 2006)
- 6.04** In Finland the quality of the Kindergarten program is reflected in teacher qualifications, adult-child ratios and curricular focus. Finnish Kindergarten teachers are required to hold Bachelor degrees in Early Childhood Education or in Social Sciences. Many go on to Master’s level study (OECD, 2006). Adult-child ratios in Finland are low. In classes for 6-year-olds, the maximum ratio is one teacher, with an assistant, for 13 children and the recommended maximum group size is 20 children (OECD, 2006, p. 318). National curricular guidelines are designed to serve children aged 0-6 by focusing on “the importance of care, upbringing and education as an integrated whole for young children” (OECD, 2006, p. 322).
- 6.05** The vision for successful Kindergarten is more holistic in Nordic countries. In North America there is increasing demand for academic outcomes for young children, such as achievement of predetermined

reading levels. North American Kindergartens and preschools are expected to deliver more and more primary school curriculum, much to the dismay of expert Kindergarten pedagogues (Paley, 2005). Nordic countries offer an alternate vision of teacher training and educational policy that emphasizes specialized training and education in child development and theories of attachment, while supporting and recognizing teachers for their contributions toward ensuring healthy and happy childhoods for their young pupils.

**6.06** In Finland a Kindergarten teacher's profession combines the roles of teacher and professional caregiver who provides both emotional and physical care giving. Consequently, Kindergarten teachers hold and acquire personal practical knowledge about teaching and learning but also about care giving and being cared for. (Horppu and Ikonen-Varilla, 2004, p. 231).

**6.07** Teachers in Canadian Kindergarten classrooms work in a completely different context than their European colleagues. Significantly, child poverty rates are very low in Nordic countries (i.e., Finland - 2.8 per cent, Sweden - 4.2 per cent, Norway - 3.2 per cent) (UNICEF, 2007). In comparison, Canadian child poverty rates have remained high since the 1980s. In Canadian classrooms, teachers are confronted by the consequences of disproportionately high child poverty rates for particular social groups: recent immigrants (49 per cent), First Nations (28 per cent - 40 per cent), visible minorities (34 per cent), or disabled (28 per cent) (Campaign 2000, 2007). Despite these daunting challenges Ontario's publicly-funded schools graduate thoughtful and productive citizens. By any test Ontario students are successful.

- 6.08** In Finland, most children are educated in their home language. Just 2.4 per cent of children use Finnish as a second language (OECD, 2006, p. 321). In comparison, Canadian teaching and learning contexts are much more complex, particularly in large urban centres. For example, the Toronto District School Board is the most multilingual and multicultural school board in the world. Fifty per cent of its students speak a language other than English at home (Toronto District School Board, 2008).
- 6.09** Notably, even in their fully-funded, well-supported Kindergarten system, the turnover rate for Kindergarten teachers in Nordic countries is high reflecting the challenging nature of the work. Many teachers leave the field, seeking better income, career opportunities, more favourable working conditions and less stressful work (OECD, 2006). Ontario teachers do not have high turnover rates, unlike early childhood educators.
- 6.10** Considering factors such as Canadian child poverty, growing curricular pressures and the fully informed approaches required to successfully teach in culturally and linguistically diverse Canadian classrooms, it is obvious that only certified teachers have the qualifications to address these issues and that only our school system has the necessary support services. Childcare centres simply cannot provide the services that our children need in an enhanced learning environment.

## **7. THE CURRENT OPPORTUNITY**

- 7.01** On November 27, 2007 Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty announced a plan to implement full-day Kindergarten for 4- and 5-year-olds. This promising step toward achieving equitable learning opportunities for all

children in Ontario (Shanker, December 13, 2007), is a unique opportunity to build an equitably funded and unified system of quality education and care.

- 7.02** In considering changes to traditional Kindergarten programs, policy and program changes should be based on “good theory and solid evidence” about what makes a difference for young children rather than adult social and economic needs (Walsh, 1989 as cited by Cryan, Sheehan, Wiechel, and Bandy-Hedden, 1992, p. 188). Evidence shows that full-day Kindergarten benefits children academically and socially (Clark, 2001; Rothenberg, 1995).

## **8. POSITIVE IMPACT FOR ALL CHILDREN**

- 8.01** Although initial study of full-day Kindergarten produced uncertain results, there were measurable benefits in academic achievement outcomes, most clearly for those children identified as ‘at-risk’ (Housden and Kam, 1992; Karweit, 1992; Puleo, 1988; da Costa and Bell, 2000).
- 8.02** Subsequent research shows positive impacts on academic performance for all children. Koopmans (1991), in a 3-year longitudinal study comparing half- and full-day Kindergarten, found that full-day Kindergarten programs produced significant academic advantages in Grade 1 students. Fursaro (1997), in meta-analyses of 23 studies, found that students who attended full-day Kindergarten manifested significantly greater achievement than did students who attended half-day Kindergarten. In a review of U.S. national and state (Indiana) data, full-day Kindergarten was found to offer significant benefits in the areas of academic achievement, grade level retention, special education referrals, and social and behavioural effects (Plucker, Eaton, Rapp, Lim, Nowak,

Hansen, and Bartleson, 2004). In a nationally representative study of 8,000 Kindergarteners in 500 U.S. public schools, those children who attend schools that offer full-day programs learn more in literacy and mathematics as compared to half-day programs (Lee, Burkam, Ready, Honigman, and Meisels, 2006).

**8.03** “Children attending schools that offer full-day Kindergarten evidence considerably greater academic learning compared to their academically and socially similar counterparts in half-day schools. Expanding half-day Kindergarten programs to full-day programs seems a straightforward reform to not only make schools more effective for young children but also to give them a good start on the long academic trajectory that constitutes their schooling experience (p. 199).”

**8.04** It is important to note that the Kindergarten child in a full-day program finds the transition to Grade 1 easier and is not as overwhelmed with the change as a Kindergarten child in a half-day program.

**8.05 Full-Day Kindergarten Affects Non-Academic Behaviour**

Children who attend full-day Kindergarten demonstrate more positive behaviour than those in half-day Kindergarten: “Specifically, full-day children were more involved, showed more originality and independent learning, and were less likely to be dependent, shy, and withdrawn than their half-day and alternate-day counterparts (p. 201). Similarly, Elicker and Mathur (1997) observe: “Teachers saw children in full-day classrooms as better able to initiate and engage flexibly in a variety of classroom activities, and to explore deeply and respond to challenges that were well matched to individual interests and abilities” (p. 477).



- 8.06** OECTA members working in the full-day programs observe that language and communication skills are strengthened. Children are more mature, independent and resourceful.
- 8.07** These observations are echoed in a Canadian study that revealed that children enrolled in a specially funded full-day Kindergarten experienced substantial gains in play and problem solving, language and literacy, and socio-emotional development. Play-based instruction was found to be highly effective, with significantly greater growth in reading prerequisite skills, as compared to half-day students (da Costa and Bell, 2000).

## **9. FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN IS BENEFICIAL FOR CHILDREN**

- 9.01** “If a decision to implement either a full-, half- or extended-day Kindergarten program were based on educational issues, full-day would be the program of choice. The basis for this decision is unequivocal and documented with a level of confidence that is rare for educational research” (Hough & Bryde, 1996, p. 16).

### **9.02 Less Hurried Day**

Children in full-day programs experience a less hurried day, more time for creative activities and child-centred learning opportunities (Elicker and Mathur, 1997). Full-day Kindergarten is associated with a qualitatively superior educational experience:

Systematic observations of children’s classroom activities over the entire implementation period revealed that the full-day program resulted in more child-initiated learning activity, more teacher-directed individual activity, higher levels of active engagement, and higher levels of positive affect, in both absolute and proportional terms (p. 477).

**9.03** Children have more “time and opportunity to play with language” (Fromberg, 1995 as cited by Brewster and Railsback, 2002, p. 12), as well as explore topics in-depth. Children in full-day Kindergarten also gain a greater number of social interactions (Hough and Bryde, 1996).

**9.04 Free-Play**

Young children learn as result of the way they act naturally in the world, an activity we describe as play. Children want to learn, and will do so in an environment that has been properly prepared for them. Systematic observation to compare programs with similar educational philosophies reveals that children who attend half-day spend a greater proportion of their time in teacher-led large groups, while full-day Kindergarteners spend a greater proportion in active free-play in the prepared literacy-enriched environment (Cryan, Sheehan, Wiechel, and Bandy-Hedden, 1992; Elicker and Mathur, 1992).

**9.05** In a full-day program, teachers have the knowledge and experience to know how to provide and assess activities that engage students and foster creative thinking.

**9.06 Small Group and Individualization**

In full-day Kindergarten programs, teachers more often use small-group instruction and activity (Morrow, Strickland and Woo, 1998) and provide more individual attention and instruction (Elicker and Mathur, 1997; Hough and Bryde, 1996). These findings would indicate that quality full-day Kindergarten is associated with professional guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp and Copple, 1997; Elicker and Mathur, 1997).

## **10. FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN IS EFFECTIVE FOR TEACHERS**

### **10.01 Use of Developmentally Appropriate Methods**

In full-day programs, teachers recognize opportunities to use more developmentally appropriate pedagogical methods, including more individualized interactions with children, individualized observational assessment and planning, as well as richer and more integrative curriculum planning. As with any new program, Ontario's proposed plan for full-day Kindergarten must include significant resources for continual teacher development.

### **10.02 Contact Time**

Benefits for teachers include increased contact time with children, and a reduction of the number of children teachers serve in a day (Elicker and Mathur, 1997). Teachers employ more small group activity in full-day programs, and find that other teaching strategies are augmented (Hough and Bryde, 1996). With fewer total students, teachers have more time and opportunity to get to know children, communicate with families and offer personalized attention, instruction and advice. Full-day schedules provide an environment that favours a child-centred, developmentally appropriate approach (Brewster and Railsback, 2002; Rothenberg, 1995).

### **10.03 Topic Depth and Continuity**

Full-day Kindergarten allows children and teachers time to explore topics in depth. A single-class of children permits greater continuity of activities throughout the day. Teachers do not need to transition between morning and afternoon groups of students. Full-day schedules reduce the ratio of transition time to learning time.

**10.04** “Now that we have a far more accurate idea of how the human mind develops, we must base our educational methods not on tradition but on the best current insights into how children learn... We must base it, in short, on a developmental model and on its key intent: **intellectual learning shares common origins with emotional learning...** The real ABCs come down to attention, strong relationships, and communication, all of which children must learn through interaction with adults.” (Greenspan 1997 as cited by Alliance for Childhood, 2004, p. 15)

## **11. FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN IS BENEFICIAL FOR FAMILIES**

### **11.01 Stronger Links Between Home and School**

Full-day programs benefit from more frequent communication and stronger links between home and school (Elicker and Mathur, 1997; Hough and Bryde, 1996). Parents perceive that their child’s full-day Kindergarten experience offers a more relaxed/unhurried pace, greater opportunities for in-depth exploration, extended learning and development of personal interest, as well as increased attention from teachers (Elicker and Mathur, 1997). On a practical note, in full-day programs, parents have just one adult to communicate with rather than two. Teachers benefit too as they have just one set of students and their parents rather than two. The sheer number affects attention and communication possibilities.

### **11.02 Lowers Childcare Expenses**

Full-day Kindergarten programs eliminates childcare expenses for families with 4- and 5-year-olds, and allow families’ access to a high quality education program.

**11.03** A positive outcome of funding full-day Kindergarten will be to help relieve the childcare accessibility problems. Many parents have difficulty finding quality childcare to supplement the current half-day Kindergarten program most children attend. A publicly-funded full-day Kindergarten program for 4- and 5-year-olds, under the mandate of the Ministry of Education, will relieve the space pressures on childcare centres for younger children, while at the same time ensuring that learning standards for 4- and 5-year-olds are of a quality that our children and parents deserve. For many families a full-day Kindergarten program will mean more money for the basics.

**11.04 Simpler Schedules**

Full-day Kindergarten provides simpler schedules and fewer transitions for families to manage, while requiring children to adjust to fewer environments than might otherwise be expected to include half-day Kindergarten, childcare, home (Rothenberg, 1995).

**11.05 Higher Parental Involvement**

Kindergarten programs that include family literacy initiatives offering materials and instruction to parents on how to foster their children's emerging literacy through reading aloud, storytelling, book talk, pretend reading and writing, have been found to encourage higher parental involvement and student improvement (Morrow and Young, 1997; Lonigan and Whitehurst, 1998). This also sets the stage for later parent-teacher partnerships. Parents express greater satisfaction with full-day Kindergarten than with half-day programs, and believe that full-day programs increase their child's greater likelihood for success in Grade 1 (Hough and Bryde, 1996).

**Recommendations:**

**That the Ontario government fund full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds in full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) classes.**

**That the full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) classes be taught by certified teachers only.**

**12. THE FULL-DAY PROGRAMS SHOULD BE LOCATED IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

**12.01** Schools are the most appropriate locations for Ontario’s proposed new program. Existing infrastructure in schools supports access to speech pathologists, special education teachers, occupational therapists and literacy lead teachers who are already contributing to the well-being of all young children. Similarly, by locating these programs in schools younger siblings will not be separated from brothers and sisters who often have responsibility for leading them to and from school or onto the bus. When Kindergarten facilities are integrated into the elementary school, busing costs can be contained. Through the many opportunities to participate in school events, such as working with older reading or learning buddies and involvement in other activities, Kindergarten children can be integrated into a larger community of learners.

**12.02** Health and safety concerns must also be addressed. Schools are regularly inspected for mould, water quality and other health issues. Teachers and other education workers are unionized and have health and safety representatives who ensure that workplaces are safe. Schools have an institutionalized relationship with the community health centres ensuring that there is regular dental and health screening.

**12.03** Some groups suggest that a full day of learning can be delivered off-site, in childcare centres. This overlooks the benefits that school settings offer. One of the opportunities created by declining enrollment will be the availability of space in schools to accommodate the implementation of full-day Kindergarten. Ontario's publicly-funded and accountable schools provide the safest places for children to learn and grow.

**12.04 Positive Effects of Integrated Play**

As North American models of education become more content-focused and accountability-driven, risking a shift away from developmentally essential activities such as pretend play and art, European educational systems are focusing more on these activities. Scandinavia and Finland, while achieving some of the world's highest literacy rates, recognize the value of play in Kindergarten in both policy and practice and have modified school curriculum to more fully integrate play with other learning activities – establishing partnerships between Kindergarten and elementary teachers, using mixed-age learning groups and activities that integrate play and learning (Baumer, Ferholt, and Lecusay, 2005; Lindqvist, 1995, 2001). Following Sweden's example New Zealand, Spain, England and Scotland have shifted to a 'lifelong learning' approach, coordinating 'Kindergarten' and 'school-aged' education (Colley, 2005).

**12.05** The same type of coordination would be harmonized most successfully if it were under just one ministry in Ontario. An examination of successful programs in other jurisdictions illustrates the benefits of care and learning under one ministry.

**Recommendation:**

**That the full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) program be under the mandate of the Minister of Education.**

**13. CATHOLIC BOARD EXPERIENCE**

- 13.01** For some 50 years, Ontario Catholic school boards have offered early learning programs for 4- and 5-year olds. This tradition of providing quality programs based on sound pedagogical research and knowledge in Catholic schools responded directly to community needs.
- 13.02** Currently eight Catholic school boards in Ontario offer full-day Kindergarten programs. In particular Northern Catholic boards offer developmentally appropriate full-day Kindergarten programs that emphasize play-based learning. As noted earlier, these successful programs are not fully funded by the ministry. These school boards have made local decisions to provide the full-day programs and to supplement ministry funding.
- 13.03** Currently 12 schools within the Niagara Catholic District School Board offer a full-day Kindergarten program. The board supports teachers with ongoing training on how to deliver the full-day program. Each Kindergarten classroom is equipped with appropriate resources, equipment and supplies to enhance the learning needs of the 5-year-old. Accessible washrooms and sinks with in-class sand and water tables, quiet and active learning areas and appropriate space both indoors and outside are key elements of these programs. Schools offering this full-day program often also offer before- and after-school childcare. Opportunities for interaction between the Kindergarten classes and the other children in



the school are guided and supported as these young students participate in school celebrations, activities and interact with their siblings every day. Teachers who are currently teaching full-day Kindergarten endorse the full-day program and strive to support the natural flow of the child's energy in providing appropriate early learning opportunities in a full-day setting. The program is literacy and numeracy rich, allows for self-directed play and promotes skills in oral language as extensions of learning throughout the full day.

**13.04** TCDSB offers a full-day Kindergarten program every day for over 250 students who are taught by qualified Kindergarten teachers. This program is available in 15 classrooms at seven schools. Supervision is provided by lunchtime supervisors and three of the seven schools also provide on-site childcare under the Best Start Initiative.

**13.05** The TCDSB full-day Kindergarten program provides support for students, teachers and parents. Research into student progress indicates that full-day students complete the Senior Kindergarten year with significantly greater gains than students in comparator half-day programs. Parents and staff are enthusiastic about the program.

**13.06** A Kindergarten speech-language, psychology and social support team assists teachers with students who require additional help. In addition a comprehensive program supports parents and families, while teachers receive professional development, mentoring and peer coaching.

## **14. INEFFECTIVE FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN**

**14.01** The government must not expect a full-day program to be an opportunity to improve test scores. Research from the United States is clear that children benefit from programs that are focused on more than academic goals and also address children’s social, psychological and cognitive development. We must avoid a “drill and kill” approach to full-day learning.

**14.02** The United States provides us with valuable lessons in what not to do. As political interest in prescribed ‘back to basics’ curriculum grew in American schools, Kindergarten became “more academic and skill-oriented.” It is increasingly characterized by formal structured lessons in reading, writing, and mathematics rather than emphasizing flexible social play-based teaching approaches (Elicker and Mathur, 1997, p. 460). Teacher autonomy and play-enriched curriculum are viewed as ‘at-risk,’ pressured by skill and testing reforms such as No Child Left Behind that have created a shift of curricular expectations and elementary school teaching methods into Kindergarten (Cooper, 2005). Consequently, experts caution against didactic academic instruction in full-day Kindergarten (Gullo, 1990; Olsen and Zigler, 1989), advocating, instead, for developmentally appropriate programming, characterized by child-initiated activity in the classroom, first-hand experience and informal interaction with objects, peers and teachers (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp and Copple, 1997; Elkind, 1988; Rothenberg, 1995).

**14.03** “An optimal learning environment requires observant, informed, sensitive teachers who gauge a child’s interests, abilities, and potential. A teacher’s social interaction with her or his students and the social climate created in the classroom are particularly

influential in a learner's level of engagement. This engagement is considered the key to optimal experience.” (Cameron and Bezaire, 2007, p. 139-140)

- 14.04** Significantly, a study comparing different instructional approaches found that children in didactic, highly academic programs rate negatively on most measures of motivation. Children are more likely to underrate their abilities, have lower expectations for success on academic tasks, show more dependency on adults for permission and approval, show less pride in their accomplishments and more anxiety toward school (Stipek, Feiler, Daniels and Milburn, 1995). Certified teachers understand these pitfalls and can best steer curriculum and attention to meet the social, emotional, physical, cognitive and linguistic needs of children.
- 14.05** The initiative must not disintegrate into a disjointed program under one roof that shifts children from ‘education time’ delivered by teaching professionals who are members of the College of Teachers and ‘care time’ provided by paraprofessional early childhood educators. Children deserve a full day of learning and care with the fewest number of disruptions and transitions.
- 14.06** Nor will the program operate efficiently if more than one employer administers it, as is often the case when children attend a half-day Kindergarten program and spend the balance of the day in a childcare program operated by childcare providers. Even if the children remain in the same building, there are few connections between the teachers and the childcare workers, or between the school board and the childcare operator.

- 14.07** In cases where children are shuffled between two different buildings, the disconnect is wider. There are many examples of conflict between the two very different programs. Where there are two different employers, conflict resolution is impossible. The disconnect grows wider with two different ministries involved. The Best Start initiatives illustrate some of these problems.
- 14.08** Implementation of a full-day program must not be used as an opportunity to increase class sizes. The current maximum ratio of 1:20 must remain in effect. We are opposed to adding paraprofessional assistants in order to justify larger class sizes. In these cases the teacher then has to supervise the assistants while still being responsible for assessment, program planning and parent communication.

**Recommendation:**

**That full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) classes be staffed at a ratio no greater than 20:1.**

**15. QUALIFIED TEACHERS**

- 15.01** OECTA takes the position that any professional with teaching responsibilities in a Catholic school is a member of the Ontario College of Teachers and a member of OECTA. A teacher who plans and delivers learning programs, an age-appropriate curriculum and individualized programs as needed conducts a successful program. A certified teacher is qualified to evaluate student progress and communicate with parents. These duties must not be relegated to paraprofessionals. Only a member of the Ontario College of Teachers can properly perform teaching duties.

## **16. FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS**

- 16.01** The McGuinty government plans to spend \$200 million in 2010 and \$300 million in 2011 on full-day Kindergarten programs. This ambitious goal must be adequately funded. Research clearly indicates that this investment will benefit everyone.
- 16.02** If the scope of the program becomes too large, funding and governance will become complicated. Many people and groups today see this initiative as the only opportunity to correct many decades of inadequate childcare funding. The childcare crisis has produced an idealistic vision of a publicly-funded, ‘seamless day’ program that would include Kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators.
- 16.03** OECTA doubts that the government’s proposed budget of \$200 million, for the third year and \$300 million for the fourth, will be enough to pay for a full-day Kindergarten program as well as before- and after-school childcare.
- 16.04** OECTA supports a publicly-funded seamless day, but does not advocate either short-changing a full-day Kindergarten program or spending tax dollars on an inferior substitute.
- 16.05** An option is to begin the implementation in areas that have some experience with full-time programs. It is natural to begin with the successful programs and expand from there.
- 16.06** In order to establish a successful developmentally- and culturally-appropriate full-day learning program for Ontario’s children, funding for the following must be put in place:

- Training and support for teachers
- Opportunities to share research and ideas on how Kindergarten children learn
- Additional teachers to ensure that staffing ratios do not rise above 1:20
- Space, materials and equipment to furnish developmentally appropriate classrooms
- Materials and opportunities for parents
- Specialized courses in Early Childhood Education in pre-service teacher education programs
- Additional Qualification courses for teachers, specializing in Early Childhood Education
- In-service training for teachers to provide opportunities to develop program goals and philosophies, visit other full-day kindergarten classrooms to exchange ideas, challenge and collaborate
- Funding for more and better data and research regarding the provision of Kindergarten in Ontario.

## **17. CONCLUSION**

**17.01** We note that the government describes the program various ways. A ‘full-day of learning’ is currently the popular choice. Whatever the term, OECTA believes that the program must provide opportunities for 4- and 5-year-olds to learn and that this must be delivered by members of the teaching profession who are best qualified to address the needs of their students as well as provide the care they need. Parents understand that teachers are most suited to achieve both these goals and have confidence in the profession to do so.

- 17.02** While the publicly-funded school system has some flaws, the current childcare system has serious structural deficiencies. The system is a patchwork program. The variances between good and inferior childcare centres are extreme. Furthermore, even good childcare centres cannot offer what our educational system can. What our schools do offer is a long history of community involvement and accountability.
- 17.03** The research is clear. Full-day Kindergarten provides for the emotional, cognitive, physical, social and linguistic needs of 4- and 5-year-olds. No other program can address all these needs. It is also clear that certified teachers more so than other paraprofessionals can provide both learning and care. Teachers can walk the balance between learning through play and readying children for formal education. And finally, the research shows that when programs are adequately funded children succeed. Under-funded programs are baby-sitting services at best.
- 17.04** This initiative is an exciting opportunity to bring equity for all 4- and 5-year-olds in Ontario. Today, children entering Grade 1 bring a wide variety of experiences. In addition to their socio-economic backgrounds, there are also substantial variances in their cognitive, emotional and social abilities. A full-day Kindergarten program provides an opportunity to level the playing field for every child, thus equipping them with greater chances of success.
- 17.05** We all want the best for our children. An enhanced full-day Kindergarten program (JK /SK) best meets the needs of the young learner in a practical manner. Looking to current models offers examples for successful implementation.

## **18. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 18.01** That the Ontario government fund full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds in full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) classes.
- 18.02** That the full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) classes be taught by certified teachers only.
- 18.03** That the full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) program be under the mandate of the Minister of Education.
- 18.04** That the full-day Kindergarten (JK/SK) classes be staffed at a ratio no greater than 20:1.

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