

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) is the professional association for early childhood educators (ECEs) in Ontario. We support ECEs in their professional practice and advocate for recognition and appropriate compensation for early childhood professionals, so they can provide high quality programs for children and families. Well educated, well paid and competent early childhood educators are fundamental to high quality early years and child care programs that support children and families across the province. Our members work throughout Ontario in programs for young children and their families, including home based and centre based child care, full-day kindergarten, EarlyON programs and as Resource Consultants who provide services and support for children and families with disabilities.

The AECEO also advocates for a high quality, publicly funded early childhood education and care (ECEC) system that serves children from 0 – 12 years old, one that provides professional wages and working conditions for the ECE workforce. We believe the Ontario government has a critical role to play in funding and planning the ECEC system, and a responsibility to ensure that Ontario’s children and families have access to quality services and that ECEs are well-compensated for the socially valuable work they do.

Education Consultations: Kindergarten Classroom

The AECEO appreciates the need for on-going stakeholder collaboration and the opportunity to be included in the Education Consultations regarding Full Day Kindergarten and class sizes.

Question 1: What are the implications of the present ‘two educator’ model for student outcomes, educator workload and working conditions, and value for money?

Student Outcomes & the Two Educator Team

The AECEO fully supports the two educator model in Full Day Kindergarten (FDK). The partnership between a Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) and an Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT) in FDK commenced in 2010 with full implementation across the province in 2014 through Bill 242, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act of 2010 which included ECEs in Ontario’s Education Act⁵. The program was implemented to provide high quality, universally accessible Junior and Senior two year FDK to all children in Ontario⁷.

An extensive body of empirical evidence documents the learning benefits of the two-educator (OCT and RECE), play-based FDK curriculum model for children’s learning. Ontario has been, and continues to be, a leader in early learning since it acted on the innovative recommendations of the commissioned report, *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*ⁱ, completed in 2009^{5,6}. Research findings confirm that children in Kindergarten require familiar, consistent, supportive, and qualified educators to thrive. The most effective Kindergarten environments for better child outcomes are those which involve an RECE and OCT who professionally collaborate in their development of play-based pedagogy^{3,4,5}. The unique and

complimentary training of RECEs and OCTs working in partnership lends itself to rich educational and developmental learning opportunities for children at a critical point in their young lives.

Ontario's FDK program has been shown to produce powerful benefits to children in both the short and the long term. Children in FDK outperform children in half day kindergarten (HDK) in literacy and mathematics by the end of Kindergarten. The most recent set of studies on Ontario's FDK program have documented that the academic gains children achieved in FDK are still observable by the end of Grade 2^{4,6}. Vocabulary scores of children in FDK 'remain consistently higher,'⁶ which has been attributed to the additional time for learning that FDK provides. When comparing Junior Kindergarten groups (one in HDK and one in FDK) at the half year point, children in FDK had already surpassed the HDK cohort in 'reading, number knowledge, drawing complexity, and self-regulation'⁶.

In a study published in January of 2019 researchers suggest their findings provide "evidence of long-term self-regulatory and academic gains of FDK. It adds to the program and policy literature in early learning about the kind of FDK program that leads to long-term benefits, in this case a two-year full-day play-based kindergarten program co-taught by a professional team of an Early Childhood Educator and a Kindergarten Teacher. Benefits for FDK were shown in all academic areas at the end of kindergarten and most remained significantly greater to the end of the primary division"⁶.

In addition to the documented academic benefits of FDK, the current model also supports children's social development by promoting self-regulation, engagement, working memory, autonomy, social skills, self-confidence, self-concept, positive behaviours, and overall well-being^{6,7}. Healthy social development is also associated with academic achievement well into the primary grades^{4,6}.

Studies confirm that the two educator model provides children with consistency, well-being, and the emotional safety and security that is critical to academic learning and social development^{2,4}. In fact, classrooms that are denied the academic and social-emotional benefit of the two educator model can have negative effects on some children's behaviour and learning outcomes^{2,4}.

The FDK educator team is shown to be particularly essential to children's outcomes due to the uniquely qualified perspectives of each educator². A classroom with an RECE and OCT team has been described as, "by far the best-staffed room (with its) seamless care approach, (it is) relaxed, comfortable, calm, and without incident"². The secure relationships established by the two educator model work in tandem with the play based curriculum of the FDK program to support positive learning experiences for children to reach their full potential⁴.

Test scores in Grade 3 support (these) research findings, with scores that achieved or exceeded provincial literacy and mathematics expectations, with the potential to increase among children who attended FDK⁶. This is a significant long term benefit to the academic achievement of the children of Ontario due to the FDK program.

Children enrolled in FDK programs have themselves noted the importance of play-based curriculum in their learning⁶. It is the right of every child in Ontario to benefit from the FDK program.

Educator Workload & Working Condition: Connection to the Benefits of FDK

The AECEO firmly believes that RECEs benefit when they are well supported and compensated as the professionals that they are. Currently, paid hours of work among RECEs in FDK vary across the province (i.e. six or seven hours paid per day) which impacts professionals who are paid for fewer hours – and is inconsistent with the Ontario-wide expenditures within the education system. The AECEO’s policy recommendation is to change the positions of the ten thousand RECEs working in publicly-funded school systems to year-round, salaried status with compensation commensurate with other full-time educators. This would increase and equalize the quality of education the children receive across the province, enhance the collaborative nature of the partnership that RECEs have with OCTs, and, by systematizing the remuneration process for RECEs in FDK, increase value for taxpayer money^{1,5}.

RECEs are not provided with the same vital professional resources as other educators in the publicly funded school system, including paid planning time and opportunities for professional development⁴. These are critical for educator collaboration, solidarity, reciprocity, and team partnership effectiveness^{2,4,5,7}. The AECEO’s policy recommendation is to develop an Early Childhood Workforce Learning Framework which would enable quality related staff supports such as paid time for professional learning and expanded opportunities for enhancing the foundation obtained through their pre-service Early Childhood Education qualifications³.

Workplace conditions that support the two educator model include the need for recognition and clarification of the important role and responsibilities of the RECE as a professional in the FDK program^{4,5}. The resolution of union identified issues and collective agreements that reflect decent work principles as a right of all RECEs will do much to resolve these inequalities in the workplace⁵. The two educator model is worthy of being fully supported: it was intended to be a cost-effective, system enhancing, high quality educational team in Pascal’s vision of FDK for Ontario. It is consistent with best practice policies in the publicly funded school system and is anchored in Ontario’s Education Act^{2,4,5,7}. It has yet to reach its full potential.

RECEs in FDK Enhance Public Value for Money

RECEs have, through their work in the publicly funded school system, achieved some pay equity in their fight for professional pay for decent work. However, as outlined previously, the value that the RECE brings to the educator team in FDK cannot be overstated. The benefits of investing in quality programming for young children clearly outweigh the costs⁶. As noted, research overwhelmingly confirms that the two educator model benefits children, families, and educators; it is imperative that it continue⁶.

The investment in FDK has already been made; reversing this investment in early childhood education would be wasteful (not to mention costly³) and, most essentially, not in the best interests of children and families. The AECEO believes that the provincial government’s refusal to commit to FDK beyond the 2019-2020 school year will jeopardize the academic and developmental outcomes of the children of Ontario as well as reduce access to universal, high quality programming that Ontario families have

come to expect and rely on. The establishment of FDK supports working parents, reduces or eliminates child care costs, and therefore has a positive impact on Ontario's economy⁶.

The AECEO's vision is for all of Ontario's children and families to have access to high quality, affordable programs where RECEs are well supported with professional pay and decent work. This vision is founded on the assumption that early childhood education and care is a public good and a human right, not a commodity. In turn, we believe that RECEs are uniquely prepared to plan and implement high quality, meaningful programs for young children, including in Full Day Kindergarten.

Question 2: What are the implications of changes to Kindergarten class size for student outcomes, educator workload and working conditions?

The AECEO's position is that there should be no more than thirteen children to one educator (1:13) in a high-quality early childhood education environment. Therefore, in the FDK classroom with two educators there should be a maximum of twenty-six children (2:26). This is in keeping with the Child Care & Early Years Act that requires one educator per thirteen children (1:13). The maximum board-wide average is twenty-six children per Kindergarten classroom, although some classes have as many as thirty-two children. Any more than twenty-six children per classroom is too large for achieving optimal student outcomes - and calls into serious question safety and space standards².

Currently, the two educator model is implemented if there are sixteen or more children in an FDK classroom. Ontario Reg 224/10 under the Education Act contains an exception that allows for classrooms with less than sixteen children to staff only one OCT educator (rather than the two educator model of RECE and OCT). After observing several FDK classrooms, one researcher commented that "the importance of the ECE was, perhaps, never more evident than in the one classroom in the study with no ECE...in a class with only 14 students. This was the smallest classroom and it was by far the most chaotic classroom in the study"². We recommend that the two educator model be employed in all FDK classrooms in Ontario, including those with sixteen children or fewer.

As noted above, the research literature clearly documents the importance of secure relationships with educators for social development and optimal learning outcomes. Increasing class sizes in FDK will overwhelm both children and educators and will most definitely jeopardize safety, responsive relationships, and therefore the quality of the education children receive^{2,4}. Increasing class sizes beyond twenty-six children is therefore not better value for government investment.

The AECEO acknowledges that improvements are always possible in the early childhood education system – and we emphasize that government change to policy and process should be based on the highest quality research evidence, careful analyses of empirical data, and through comprehensive consultation. We appreciate the need for on-going stakeholder collaboration and are delighted to have the opportunity to be included in the Education Consultations regarding FDK and class sizes. We are conscious of the fact that the full roll out of the Ontario FDK program – one of the most innovative and economically important social and educational programs in Canada to date – occurred only 5

years ago. We are only now beginning to realize the empirical benefits of Ontario's existing FDK program for children and families. While we recognize the roll-out of a program of this size and nature would have challenges, all current evidence suggests Ontario's unique, two educator model, play-based FDK program is significantly benefiting Ontario's children and families. Undoing this progress through dismantling the existing two-educator model would be devastating to all stakeholders.

We urgently call on the government to reconsider any changes it may propose to the FDK program in Ontario without reviewing the research evidence and engaging in a formal, transparent and systematized consultation with stakeholders including parents and educators. It is imperative that Full Day Kindergarten, with the RECE-OCT educator team and a class size hard cap of twenty-six, remain universally accessible to all of Ontario's children.

¹Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (2017). Transforming work in Ontario's early years and child care sector: workforce strategy recommendations prepared by the decent work task force. Retrieved from: http://www.aeceo.ca/transforming_work_in_ontario_s_early_years_and_child_care_sector

²Bas, J. A. (2017). Well-being in the kindergarten eating environment and the role of early childhood educators. *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 42(4), 37-52.

³Canadian Economist, Pierre Fortin, has several academic publications regarding the lasting social and economic cost of eliminating the Quebec model of early education and care. For a recent document, see: https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/UserFiles/File/Policy%20Commentaries/PFortin_Twelve_Flawed_Statements_of_the_Fraser_Institute.pdf

⁴Gananthan, R. (2011). Implications of full day kindergarten program policy on early childhood pedagogy and practice. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 5(2), 33-45.

⁵Langford, R., Di Santo, A., Valeo, A., Underwood, K., & Lenis, A. (2016). The innovation of Ontario full-day kindergarten educator teams: Have they reproduced the split systems of care and education? *Gender and Education*, 30(5), 569-586. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1258456>

⁶Pelletier, J. P. & Corter, J. E. (2019). A longitudinal comparison of learning outcomes in full-day and half-day kindergarten. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 112, 1-19.

⁷Timmons, K. (2018). Educator expectations in full-day kindergarten: Comparing the factors that contribute to the formation of early childhood educator and teacher expectations. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 46, 613-628. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-018-0891-0>

¹Pascal, C.E. (2009). *With Our Best Future in Mind*. Toronto: Province of Ontario.