



KINDERGARTEN FACT SHEET

KINDERGARTEN WORKS!

Ontario's model for Full-Day Kindergarten, which includes a full-time teacher and designated early childhood educator (DECE), is based on international research and created by experts, educators and partners in the field.

With its play-based learning foundation, it has been shown to provide lasting benefits for children's reading, writing, numeracy, self-regulation and social skills. It is an investment in human potential and a long-term vision for children.

Kindergarten is universally accessible and provides an equitable start to school for every early learner in the province. Investment in early learning and healthy child development has been shown to have lasting benefits for educational and economic success as well as social adjustment into adulthood according to Dr. Janette Pelletier.¹

Despite this, the government has signalled it is considering changes to Kindergarten for the 2020-21 year that could significantly alter the current model.

Kindergarten in Ontario is Visionary

Charles Pascal, one of the architects of Ontario's Kindergarten program, states that the certified teacher and designated early childhood educator team model "has shown major results when it comes to children's social, emotional and cognitive development."²

It is key that in the Ontario Kindergarten model there are two educators. The certified teacher and designated early childhood educator each bring specialized knowledge and skills to best nurture the development and growth of every student. They ensure that children's academic and socio-emotional skills are fostered with the support and guidance early learners need.

According to research, Ontario's Kindergarten program has shown lasting benefits for children's self-regulation, reading, writing and number knowledge to the end of Grade 2, including some benefits for vocabulary.

Students in Full-Day Kindergarten are significantly more likely to meet provincial expectations for reading in Grade 3.³ A recent study also found that quality early childhood education reduces the number of students that require special education supports in primary years, and the intensity of supports required.⁴



Kindergarten teachers have knowledge of the elementary curriculum – Kindergarten to grade 8 and child development. They understand how the Kindergarten Program expectations link to later elementary grades. They are responsible for student learning, effective instruction, formative assessment and have ultimate responsibility for evaluation and formal reporting to parents.

Designated Early Childhood Educators have knowledge of the learning needs of young children aged birth to five. They study early childhood development, social-emotional skills and bring a focus on age-appropriate program planning to provide opportunities to facilitate experiences for children and contribute to assessment and evaluation of the children’s learning.

Early childhood researcher Kerry McCuaig notes that with both educators in the classroom, “they are able to capitalize on children’s individual needs and inquiries. They have the time to know their students very well and to identify problems and intervene early before a child becomes too frustrated and discouraged to try.”⁵

Hundreds of educators and parents have shared their stories on the success of Kindergarten at BuildingBetterSchools.ca/FDK.

Students

Research shows that Kindergarten students have better work habits, higher levels of active engagement, exhibit more positive and fewer negative behaviours, are more independent and less withdrawn.⁶

Kindergarten is particularly beneficial for children of low socio-economic status and children from diverse backgrounds. Positive effects are especially pronounced students using languages other than English at home as there is more time to use and practice oral language.⁷

Economic Benefits

To put Ontario’s experience in perspective, Canada ranks last in early learning spending of all comparable Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.⁸ This makes Ontario’s expenditure in its Kindergarten program unique and worth preserving.

As TD Bank Group Chief Economist Craig Alexander has said, “Universal public education for children is expensive, but it’s money well spent. It’s going to have a payoff over the entire lifetime of the child. For every dollar spent, the economy gets back between \$1.50 to \$3.00. That return jumps into the double digits for disadvantaged children.”⁹

Current Situation in Ontario

Kindergarten Class Size

ETFO supports implementing a Kindergarten class size cap of 26 students. Negotiated class size caps of 30 students in 2017-18, and 29 students in 2018-19 were a first step toward this goal. The government intends to leave hard caps on class size in place for Kindergarten through grade 3; however there continue to be classes with more than 29 students. The lack of adequate space in non-purpose-built Kindergarten classrooms to support the play-based program and manage classroom behaviour are significant challenges. In many cases students have learning or behavioural issues that have yet to be formally identified and supported.

Funding

The Ministry of Education has no plans to change the funded average class size for Kindergarten. The educator to student ratio will also remain the same. A Ministry announcement in March 2019 stated that the DECE staffing ratio would change from 1.14 to 1. In the past, DECE replacement (supply) costs were not funded separately from teachers so a 1.14 DECE ratio was used. Going forward, the government intends to have a new and separate funding structure for DECE “supply” costs which would still maintain the current DECE to student ratio.

The Need to Preserve the Current Staffing Model

In its public consultations, the government has signaled possible changes to Kindergarten and its staffing model starting in 2020-2021. ETFO’s position is that the teacher and designated early childhood educator each bring specialized knowledge and skills to best nurture the development and growth of every student. The team is critical for both the academic and socio-emotional skills of every child and a key foundation of the model.

The Kindergarten model is an important investment. For Ontario’s children, Kindergarten is the start of school with a curriculum that will continue to build through the elementary grades. The program is demonstrating positive results and lasting benefits for children’s reading, writing and number knowledge as well as self-regulation. Creativity, innovative thinking, collaborative problem-solving and self-confidence have also shown growth.

As former Assistant Deputy Minister of Early Years Jim Grieve has said, “Ontario’s new Full-Day Kindergarten program reflects the intersection of research, international best practice and policy that integrates the needs of families, children, schools and other stakeholders.”¹⁰



What you can do

Join us in protecting Kindergarten with a full-time teacher and a DECE.

Maintaining and investing in the current Kindergarten program, including the full-time certified teacher/DECE team is critical to ensuring that Ontario's youngest students get their very best start. The Ontario government needs to make a commitment to preserving the current model of Kindergarten and make an investment to ensure that children's learning is not sacrificed.

Take action at BuildingBetterSchools.ca/Kindergarten

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- 3,6,7 Janette Patricia Pelletier & James E. Corter, A Longitudinal Comparison of Learning Outcomes in Full-Day and Half-Day Kindergarten, The Journal of Educational Research, Jan. 3, 2019, tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220671.2018.1486280#XC6B3EwZSqo.twitter
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- 5 Kerry McCuaig, Full-Day Kindergarten is What Ontario Needs For a Stable Future, The Conversation, Feb 10, 2019, theconversation.com/full-day-kindergarten-is-what-ontario-needs-for-a-stable-future-111335
- 8,9 Kelly Pedro, Is Full-Day Kindergarten Making the Grade?, Child Care Canada, April 18, 2018, childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/04/full-day-kindergarten-making-grade
- 10 Jim Grieve, Transforming Early Learning Vision Into Action in Ontario, Canada, International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy", 6(2), 44-54, 2012, link.springer.com/article/10.1007/2288-6729-6-2-44