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## Full-day Kindergarten: Ontario

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# Academic Leadership Journal

January

2010 the Premier of Ontario announced the province was introducing full-day kindergarten as of September 2010.

The transition would be over a five year period with 39 schools phasing in full-day learning for four and five year olds at the start of the 2010-2011 school year. What is full-day

kindergarten? Miller (2005)

provides a clear explanation: “A

full-day kindergarten program is a program in which a child attends school each weekday for approximately six hours. Two other types of programs are half-day

kindergarten programs, in which the child attends school each weekday for 2½-3 hours in either the morning or the afternoon, and alternate-day kindergarten

programs, in which the child attends school every other weekday” (p.1). Up to this point in time, the latter

two types of programs were operating in the province of Ontario. So, why the change?

There

has been tremendous pressure on the government to adopt full-day kindergarten

as a replacement for half-day and alternative day kindergarten. But, the reasons have been more non-educationally

based with the educational reasons used as the language of argument.

The

lobbyists have pushed for full-day kindergarten on costs. The costs have been those associated with parents who must otherwise pay for daycare services. CRS (2010) report:

- Depending on where

you live, daycare costs can vary from \$ 200 per month to more than \$ 800 per month.

- Monthly daycare in

the Chatham, Ontario, area averages \$ 826 while similar daycare in Winnipeg, Manitoba, is only \$ 395.

- Cheapest surveyed

city for Daycare is Montreal with an average cost of \$ 205, based on the \$7-a-day child care law in Quebec.

- Average monthly

cost in some Canadian Cities: Montreal \$205.00 Winnipeg \$395.00, Regina \$ 415.00, Fredericton \$ 420.00, Saint John \$ 430.00, Yellowknife \$ 605.00, London

\$ 640.00, Kitchener \$ 650.00, Toronto \$ 800.00, Ottawa \$ 800.00

· Fees are based on full-time daycare (5 days per week, 8 hours per day) for a four-year-old child in a for-profit daycare center.

These costs are offset by The Universal Child Care Benefit set up by the federal government. The Benefit provides qualifying parents monthly installments of \$100 per month per child under the age of six. From this data it is clear the province

of Ontario (see average monthly costs for Chatham, London, Kitchener, Toronto, and Ottawa) is the most expensive province for parents with daycare age children. CBC News (2009) reported

“Daycare advocates in Ontario fear that the province could lose 15,000 subsidized spaces in the province within a year, as the final installment of the old federal subsidy program runs out in March 2010. There are calls for the provincial government to pick up the tab.

Daycare ... is getting more and more expensive. Except for 2005, the cost of daycare has risen much more than the overall rate of inflation every year since 2003. Stats Canada says that in 2008, the Consumer Price Index rose by 2.3 per cent over 2007. The average cost of daycare across the country was up by 6.1 per cent.”

The

Premier of Ontario in announcing the movement to full-day kindergarten gave full creditability to the reasoning of the lobbyists – “parents now have a place to send their children without the cost of paying for daycare and it may also free up some parents to employment outside the household” (Tong, 2010). The dominance of a societal concern in an educational issue reinforces the social role that schooling plays in the fabric of the economy.

However,

this additional pressure on the school system is not necessarily a positive move. Hammer (2010) reported the following school board reaction, “Many boards say projections for funding the all-day kindergarten program already look too sparse. Toronto District School Board chair Bruce Davis said that the province’s funding model calculated the pay of early childhood educators below his board’s union-mandated rate. He said funding figures from the ministry would soon be reviewed by the board’s budget committee, which would have to figure out how to fill any gaps.” Starzyk (2009) reported results of a survey of Ohio school districts that revealed school districts “would have to come up with more than \$200 million to add teachers and classrooms for the move to full-day kindergarten.” Mrozek (2009) was empathic that the costs of full-day kindergarten be appreciated before implementation of same.

Mrozek (2009), Manager of Research, Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, “put the costs of full-day kindergarten in Ontario between \$1.5 billion and \$1.8 billion annually, with costs rising to over \$6 billion [for] full implementation.”

The educational benefits of turning over four and five year olds to the school system have been debated without consensus. Mrozek (2009) investigated the outcome in the jurisdictions of Quebec, California, Georgia, and Oklahoma. Findings revealed that the increased public costs resulted in “less than stellar results”.

In the case of Georgia, Henry et al (n.d.) found the performance of children at the end of grade one to be similar regardless of whether they attended full-day kindergarten. Plucker and Zapf (2005) claim “there has been relatively little evaluation or discourse regarding the impact of full-day kindergarten on students’ performance in subsequent grades. The research that has been conducted is far from conclusive” (p.1). Mrozek (2009) takes the position that if the learning outcomes are not achieved then in essence the government “is on the road to one tremendously expensive babysitting service”.

Rothenberg (n.d.) reported because of an increase in the influence of television and family mobility, 5-year-olds are apparently more ready for a full-day school experience than the children of previous generations. Nevertheless, there is not conclusive evidence to state this is the way to go. The gain has been found to be more short-term as opposed to long-term. For instance, Le et al (2006) found that “while full-day kindergarten programs have been shown to have some initial positive effects on student achievement, it unknown whether the apparent lack of enduring benefits merits the costs associated with their implementation” (p. xiii-xiv). Overall, Rothenberg (n.d.) found “research suggests that, as long as the curriculum is developmentally appropriate and intellectually stimulating, either full- or half-day scheduling can provide an adequate introduction to school”.

Socially, it is generally shown that giving one’s child to the school system as early as possible will allow the system to shape the child so the child fits the mold required of the system. The work of Holmes and McConnell (1990), Cryan, Sheehan, Wiechel, and Bandy-Hedden (1992), and Clark and Kirk (2000) clearly revealed that full-day kindergartners exhibited more independent learning, classroom involvement, and productivity in work with peers. Each of these characteristics is sought after by the school system for all students. Thus, instilling these characteristics in children at 4-years of age provides the school system a more functional

student once the child enters the regular school years.

Politically,

the government of the day wins as parents who have found day-care too expensive or not accessible have stood and applauded the decision. This applaud is especially important to the government at a time when it is facing great financial difficulties and an election not far in the future.

Education critic Elizabeth Witmer (cited in Hammer, 2010) is quoted as saying "“I think from day one we have really questioned whether or not this is a priority for the educational system in light of the \$25-billion deficit and in light of some of the other priorities for our schools.” In the province of Ontario special education and building renovations are two areas in need of increase funds. It is unlikely such areas will receive

the much needed funds given the high price tag to the implementation of full-day kindergarten. The

concerns of Witmer are supported by Le and others (2006) of the Rand Corporation. Investigating the

association of full-day kindergarten with student achievement, Le et al (2006) concluded “the decision regarding where policymakers should direct funds needs

to be guided by a cost-benefit analysis that compares investments in full-day kindergarten programs to investments in other potential interventions, such as those that promote nonacademic readiness skills” (p. xiii). Another political issue that will need addressing is what happens to existing childcare centers/daycare centers. The proposal speaks of a partnership

between teachers and early childcare educators (ECE) within the schools. But, if the ECEs move into the school

the consequences for the existing childcare centers is likely closure (see, Canadian Press, 2009). Closure

means unemployment which means another problem for government.

The

Premier has undertaken a shuffle of his cabinet; changed the Minister responsible for education. A new

face, an additional mandate for the school system, a shortage of funds, and an election in the near future should put education on an interesting ride. The move to adopt full-day kindergarten

has been politically driven and will have labour consequences. Whether the move will in the future provide Ontarians more productive citizens remains an unknown. The time span between entry into full-day kindergarten and graduation from high school has too many intervening variables to ever provide a conclusive answer.

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