

Full Day Kindergarten

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The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) salutes the Liberal government for turning its attention to the very young. Catholic Teachers welcome the appointment of Dr. Charles Pascal and look forward to his report on a full day of learning. Providing 4 and 5 year olds with equal learning opportunities will help to ensure that every child can reach their full potential.

The Association hopes that Dr. Pascal will recommend full day Kindergarten, delivered by certified teachers working in the publicly funded, regulated and accountable school system.

Research confirms that the success of full-day programs is directly tied to the quality of the teachers.

Good Kindergarten programs can make a dramatic difference, but not if they are done on the cheap. Employing untrained staff, scant materials and big classes is no more than child minding, worthless and possibly harmful.

Certified teachers have more to offer than other professionals. They are qualified to provide an enriched learning environment while gauging a 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. Play is structured to ensure that learning is optimized. Teachers understand the whole child and can best help integrate them into their future world of learning.

Public confidence must be maintained with the new program. Parents need to know that their children are learning from accountable professionals. Teachers have experience and training on how to work effectively with

parents. It makes sense to establish a parent teacher relationship as early as possible and maintain a seamless transition from Kindergarten to higher grades. Over 80 per cent of Ontario parents send their children to a kindergarten program because they are confident in the current system. This confidence should be enhanced not ignored.

A full day program can be integrated easily into the current school system. Spaces for new full-day Kindergarten programs are opening up because of the present decline in enrolment. The current structures can be modified to accommodate the needs of a full-day program. Already eight Catholic Boards are operating full-day programs. Then offer a model on how to expand the program into other boards. Conversely, moving away from a full day program would be detrimental to the children and teachers in these communities.

It is OECTA's position that caring and qualified certified teachers under one roof, in one system under the mandate of the Ministry are best equipped to provide optimal 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 greater consistency in regulation, funding and staffing, as well as equal opportunity for high quality education and care for all children.

The research is clear. It is important that the program be implemented correctly from the start. A full day of learning with highly trained and respected professionals will ensure children's cognitive, emotional, physical, social and linguistic needs are met. **OECTA's complete research paper can be found at www.oecta.ca.**