

Reforming Ontario Early Learning: A Review

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Within this paper we address and illuminate the reformation of Ontario (Canada) early learning. A gradual opening of early learning in Ontario will eventually see all four and five year olds in Ontario able to attend full day early learning with child care, before and after school provided by the provincial Government of Ontario's Ministry of Education. The benefits of such a change are both academic and societal and are built upon global research findings which have informed the process and our discussion.

We argue, as many have, that full day learning is an effective tool for educating children in early life and will better prepare them for the future by closing the learning gap currently noted by Grade One. This early learning will benefit dual income earners and children from low SES backgrounds predominantly, while also being beneficial to all young learners, as long as the curriculum meets the needs of individual learners. Past research fundamentally supports full day learning at the age of four, but all programs must involve qualified staff with low student to teacher ratios. The investment in early learning will enhance outcomes, and yet, for early learning students in Ontario to benefit from this new program, we identify several crucial requirements:

1. Class sizes remain below 26 students.

2. Teachers and Designated Early Childhood Educators DECE's effectively must work together to meet the needs of individual learners.
3. Adequate funding of the education system is crucial over the long term.
4. Teachers and DECE's need to be trained.
5. Professional development for teachers and DECE's.
6. DECE's must have training in early childhood education for the classroom (play based learning).
7. Roles and responsibilities of principals need clarity (supervision)
8. Student (26) numbers in a class will require two supervisors during lunch and recess.
9. DECE's roles within the class must be clear (such as who will teach, who will be involved in classroom management and when planning will be done with the DECE and teacher).

We believe there will be challenges during the implementation phase including curriculum, staffing, infrastructure, staff responsibilities, and class sizes. Nonetheless, in time, this early learning initiative should prove to be a successful program where all children can be given the required attention and support to be successful at an age where their ability to learn is optimal. A slow implementation process will jeopardize early learning, and failure to heed our recommendations could doom the new Early Learning Program in Ontario, Canada.