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NEWS

Transition program for kids entering school ending

The Halton District School Board is preparing to end the practice of allowing parents to gradually integrate their young child to school life.

The public board has historically allowed the gradual entry of students to offer a more supported beginning to their schooling career, by combining parent visits with shorter stays by the child in a classroom.

The board updated its direction around gradual entry in 2011 to, it says, reflect the introduction of Full-Day Kindergarten across the province.

For the 2016-17 School Year all HDSB schools will welcome all children on the first day of school in September.

Exceptions to the practice may be requested by parents who feel their child would benefit from gradual entry. Those parents will be asked to call their child's school's principal to make arrangements; schools will be provided with a gradual entry framework for such requests.

Schools will be offered first-day supports through the deployment of specific staff to support principal and kindergarten teams in welcoming the youngest learners.

A checklist of best practices and first-day considerations will be provided to schools to provide a smooth transition away from gradual entry.

Board officials say a number of factors drove a review of the practice of gradual entry:

- The 2016-17 school year calendar does not allow for a status quo approach to gradual entry due to a three-day instructional week. A shortened week makes gradual entry impractical and more disruptive than helpful.

- All but two HDSB elementary schools offer a Full-Day Kindergarten Before-and-After School Program. Many JK/SK children are enrolled in these programs, which are required to begin on the first day of school. The board's childcare operators annually scramble to provide space and programs for those students.

- The majority of students entering JK are prepared to start their learning on the first day of school in September as approximately 85 per cent of incoming Year 1 JK students were part of formal childcare or pre-school programs

- Gradual entry poses a hardship for many parents/guardians who must make alternative childcare arrangements, often at a cost, for a short period of time

- The vast majority of kindergarten classes are staffed with two educators who are qualified to support the transition of young children to school

- The practice of gradual entry delays the process of analyzing the enrolment numbers for September realignment

- The Education Act does not support the practice of gradual entry.



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