

Full-day kindergarten kids better prepared: study

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A new study measuring the progress and development of kindergartens suggests those enrolled in a full-day program are better prepared for Grade 1 and beyond.

Visiting Ogden Junior Public School in Toronto Tuesday, provincial Education Minister Liz Sandals laid out some of the findings of the study conducted in conjunction with Queen's University in Kingston and McMaster University in Hamilton. It aimed to determine the impact of all-day learning for youngsters and define how best to deliver the program in the future.

The study looked at the performance of students who were enrolled in full-day kindergarten versus those who took part in half-day programs and found children in the former category demonstrated improved readiness for Grade 1 compared to those in the latter group.

Parents in Newmarket had mixed opinions on the move to full-day kindergarten.

Tuyyaba Ahmad's daughter, Yasra, is now in senior kindergarten at Phoebe Gilman Public School.

"Children are learning more if they spend the whole day in school," she said. "I like it, but the children don't like it."

Stew Balneaves, whose child is past kindergarten age, doesn't think the push for younger full-time students would have flown for him.

"I would have not been happy going full-time for a four-year-old," he said.

Nancy Lozada would have also been reluctant to send her two boys to full-day kindergarten. They had late birthdays, so it would have been more difficult for them, she said. At the same time, she understands the appeal for parents feeling the crunch with the cost of daycare.

As a stay-at-home mom, it's a little different for her, she said.

"We are proud of the success of our full-day kindergarten program," Ms Sandals said.

"These new findings show that we are giving children a stronger start in school and in life.

The full-day program is helping the youngest learners develop the valuable skills that will give them every opportunity to succeed, she added.

Compared to students with no full-day kindergarten instruction, those children with two years in an all-day program saw reduced risks of social competence development from 10.5 per cent to 5.2 per cent and a reduced risk in language and cognitive development from 16.4 per cent to 4.3 per cent.

There were also reduced risks in communication skills and general knowledge development from 10.5 per cent to 5.6 per cent.

Principal evaluator in the social program evaluation group and Brock University associate professor Dr. Mary-Louise Vanderlee described the team's research as providing substantial evidence on the success of the province's full-day kindergarten program. Dr. Ray DeV. Peters of Queen's University and research director with the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Research Group agreed, adding educators discovered they could introduce new concepts sooner than they had prior to the implementation of all-day learning.

Research was conducted in a variety of ways over a two-year period and the quantitative results focused on data from 693 children, 48 per cent male and 52 per cent female, attending 125 schools. In total, 258 children were enrolled in full-day kindergarten for two years, for junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten, 210 children were in an all-day program for one year, senior kindergarten only, and 225 had no exposure to a full-day program.

The study's complete results are expected to be made available later this fall.

The York Region District School Board has 122 elementary schools offering full-day kindergarten programs and anticipates all 155 of its sites will have

all-day learning in place by the province's target of fall 2014.

The York Catholic District School Board is in a similar spot, with 57 of its schools offering all-day learning for pre-schoolers and the remaining 31 are slated to host the full-day kindergarten program by the start of the next school year.

Catholic board superintendent of education, Diane Murgaski, said she's glad to see the full-day kindergarten program appears to be achieving the desired outcome.

She further expressed hope the province will continue in its commitment to the program.

The board has not conducted this type of research itself, however, it does expect the increased opportunity for students to develop skills in oral language, self regulation and social competence will translate into increased success for students, she said in an e-mail.

The board suggests the province stay the course and continues to support professional learning for teachers and early childhood educators.

Public board superintendent of curriculum and instructional services Dr. Kathy Witherow said full-time kindergarten has definitely had a positive impact on education and those children who have gone through two years of the program have experienced the most benefit.

The board has received many encouraging remarks from parents and educators since the program launched four years ago even just in terms of how young students self-regulate and adjust to the school routine, she said. It's taking a couple of weeks to settle into the school rhythm rather than the month or two it once did, she added.

"That's a real bonus for us," she said.

—With files from
Simon Martin



FILE PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Hannah Wilkinson, 4, was all set for the rigors of senior kindergarten at Phoebe Gilman Public School in East Gwillimbury Tuesday.

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