

NEWS RELEASE

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New policy for children a great first step

TORONTO – The announcement today of new policy for Ontario’s young children will lay the foundation for important changes to come, says Ontario’s independent parent-led organization, People for Education.

“This plan is not only going to be great for children and families in the short term,” says Annie Kidder, Executive Director of the organization. “Over time it will strengthen Ontario’s economy, build social cohesion, allow schools to act as true community hubs and develop a stronger society of engaged citizens.”

Structural changes will have long term impact

People for Education applauded the creation of a new Early Years Division in the Ministry of Education. The new division will be responsible for developing a framework and a vision for programs for children from zero to 12 years of age. The group also applauded the Premier’s promise today to “create a comprehensive service system for younger children and their families.”

“Creating a new government division may not sound very sexy, but it is a real and permanent change that will allow the Ministry of Education to take the lead in creating more cohesion in all of our programs for kids and families,” says Kidder. “We hope that eventually this division will also be responsible for all of our programs for children from 0 to 12, including child care and other programs that are currently the responsibility of municipalities and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.”

Economic benefits proven

Economists say that investment in early learning has a better cost/benefit ratio than any other forms of economic stimulus. It pays in job creation now, and in long term savings in health care and social services.

Still to come:

- Best Start Child and Family Centres overseen by municipal authorities. Dr. Pascal envisioned the centres as a form of “one stop shopping” for children and families. The current system of child care, parenting centres, early identification supports, Early Years Centres, Family Literacy Centres etc. can be confusing and families often find it difficult to find the support or care needed.
- Summer programs. In his report, Dr. Pascal recommended that programs for 4 and 5 year olds include extended days and the summer. This step is yet to come.

- Programs for 6 to 12 year olds. The new policy announced today suggests the province will “call on its community partners to plan and develop before-and after-school programs for six- to twelve-year olds.” In the Pascal report, the recommendation was that the province “provide sufficient funding to school boards to cover occupancy and related costs for the operation of extended day/year programs for children from 4 to 12 years old.”

What’s next?

Implementing the new vision will take time, but it will eventually support schools as centres of their communities – able to provide all of the programs, services, information and support that children and their families need.

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