

Early Learning Program

What Parents Need to Know

What will the full day learning program look like?

Ontario will begin phasing-in full day learning in September 2010 as part of the province's plan to build a well-educated workforce. Up to 35 000 four and five-year-olds will benefit from the first phase of full day learning. The goal is to have the program for four and five-year-olds fully implemented in all schools by 2015-16.

Teachers and early childhood educators will work together to help children learn during the regular school day. Schools will also offer programs before and after regular school hours led by early childhood educators. There will be a reasonable fee for these programs and subsidies will be available for some families, based on financial need.

This new approach to early learning offers children an enriched learning environment designed to help them develop the foundational social, emotional, academic and physical skills necessary to succeed in school and in life.

How can I enroll my child in the full-day early learning program?

In the new year, school boards will announce which schools will host phase one of the program. If, at that time, your school is listed, you will be able to register your children in the full-day learning program through their schools's registration process. The program will begin in September 2010.

Most schools hold registration days early in the new year for children enrolling for the following September.

How will I know if my school is selected?

The schools selected for the first phase of implementation will be made public early in 2010 so that parents can make plans accordingly. The list of selected schools will be posted on the Ministry of Education's website and promoted by your local school school board.

When will full-day learning begin in my area?

Province-wide implementation of full-day learning will take some time. Starting in September 2010, full-day early learning will be rolled out in phases to ensure it is responsive and affordable, given the current economic climate.

Schools that will host phase one programs will be announced in 2010, in time for school registration. More schools will be added as we phase this in over time. The government intends

to work collaboratively with school boards, educators, child care providers, municipalities, and other partners in communities across Ontario as we move forward with implementation.

How will schools be selected for the first phase of the program?

School boards, with input from municipalities, will recommend schools based on the following guidelines:

- *Available space - the program can be introduced at a school that has classroom space available and does not require new additions or renovations.*
- *Impact on existing local child care - school boards and municipalities will work together to assess whether communities will be best served by selecting schools with existing child care programs, schools near existing licensed child care or schools in neighbourhoods where no child care is currently available for four and five-year-olds.*
- *Local need - school boards will be encouraged to consider the various needs of all the communities that they serve and how the program could meet those needs. A portion of the phase-one schools will serve low-income neighbourhoods.*

How much will it cost me to enroll my child?

The regular school day portion of the full-day early learning program for four and five-year-olds will be part of Ontario's publicly funded school system. There will be no cost for this part of your child's day.

If you choose to enroll your child in the extended hour program offered before or after regular school hours, you will pay a reasonable fee.

Details regarding the fees will be determined in consultation with district school boards. There are existing programs around Ontario and different places charge different amounts. We will make sure that the reasonable fee charged will be fair for everyone once fully implemented. As well, subsidies will be available for some families based on financial need.

Is full-day early learning mandatory for four and five-year-olds?

No. The early learning program, like kindergarten, will remain optional for four and five-year-olds. In Ontario, children are required to attend school once they turn six years old. Although kindergarten is voluntary, 90 percent of eligible children are enrolled.

Who can enroll in the full-day early learning program?

Children who will be four or five-years-old by the end of the calendar year in which they are enrolling - and who live within the boundaries of a school which offers the program - can enroll in the full-day early learning program.

Does my child have to attend the extended day program?

No. The extended day program is optional.

What will my child learn and do while in the full-day early learning program?

Full-day learning for four and five-year-olds will better prepare them for school and for life. This will provide our youngest students with opportunities to socialize with their peers and develop the academic and social skills necessary for school, including laying the foundation for each child's reading, writing and math skills.

A new curriculum will be developed for full-day early learning. Through instruction and play-based learning, children will develop their capacity in language and mathematics, build a strong foundation for future learning, engage in healthy physical activities and the arts, and develop socially and emotionally through interaction with their peers and the adults who teach and guide them.

My school already has an early learning program for four and five-year-olds. Will it still offer that program?

Schools that offer a full-day kindergarten or an early learning program can continue to offer full-day programming for their students.

Who will be teaching my children?

Certified teachers and registered early childhood educators will work together to help young students learn and grow during the regular school day. These educators will complement each other's skill sets and create a learning environment able to adapt to the unique needs of each child. With two qualified professionals in the classroom for the full school day, more students will get one-on-one attention and opportunities to learn together in small groups.

If I currently have a four or five-year-old in child care and I choose not to put them in a new full-day early learning program, will I still be able to access child care for my child?

Yes. Parents will continue to make the choices they have always made about their child care arrangements. Licensed child care centres, home day care and after school recreation programs will continue to be available.

Child care operators make decisions about their programs, including length of the program and ages served, based in large part on community and parental need. This will not change when full-day early learning is introduced for four and five-year-olds.

How will implementing full-day early learning at schools affect my current child care operator?

The impact to child care and early years programs will vary community by community. The government will work collaboratively with school boards, child care operators, municipalities, and other partners in communities across Ontario to enhance and stabilize existing child care programs.

Full-day learning for four and five-year-olds also provides an opportunity to create a comprehensive service system for younger children and their families.

What about after-school care for my older child?

Parents will continue to make the choices they have always made about their child care arrangements. Child care operators will continue to offer service based on community and parental need.

Why full-day learning. Isn't a half-day enough for young children?

Many four and five-year-olds already spend long days in a mix of child care and kindergarten.

Providing children with a stronger start on their learning will improve their reading, writing, and math skills, provide a smoother transition to grade 1 and help more students graduate. Success in school matters: it's how we build a well-educated workforce and a key component to building a stronger economy.

How can the government afford to do this at this time?

We can't afford not to. This investment in the education of our young children will have long-term benefits as it gives them a stronger start and a firmer foundation for future success in school and in life. By implementing the program in phases, we are being responsible and affordable, while giving more children and families the support they need for success.

What about Dr. Charles Pascal's other recommendations for full-day learning?

Dr. Pascal's report painted an ambitious and exciting future for early learning in Ontario. There has been a lot for the government to consider in the report. At this time, we are focusing on an integrated, extended day, early learning program for four and five-year-olds during the school year.

This will provide our children with the benefits of full-day learning, similar to older students and allows us to maximize our resources and funding to reach full implementation sooner.

A Description of the Early Learning Program

Phasing in Full-day Early Learning

Starting next September Ontario will have full day learning for up to 35 000 students. The goal is to have the program phased in and fully implemented by 2015-16.

In September 2010, up to 35 000 four and five-year-olds will enroll in the first phase of the program and 240 000 students will benefit from a full day of learning when the program is fully available.

Schools will offer programs before and after regular school hours by registered early childhood educators. For example, parents can choose to enroll their children from about 7 to 9 a.m. and 3:30 to 6 p.m. There will be a reasonable fee for these programs, but subsidies will be available for some families, based on financial need.

Selecting Schools:

Schools that will offer full-day early learning in September 2010 will be announced early in the new year, in time for parents to register their children in the new program.

School boards, with input from municipalities will recommend schools based on the following guidelines:

Available space - the program can be introduced at a school that has classroom space available and does not require new additions or renovations

Impact on existing local child care - school boards and municipalities will work together to assess whether communities will be best served by selecting schools with existing child care programs, schools near licensed child care or schools in neighbourhoods where no child care is currently available for four and five-year-olds.

Local need - school boards will be encouraged to consider the various needs of all communities that they serve and how the program could meet those needs. A portion of the phase-one schools will serve low-income neighbourhoods.

Child Care

The impact to child care and early years programs will vary community to community. The government will work collaboratively with school boards, child care operators, municipalities and other partners in communities across Ontario to enhance and stabilize existing child care programs.