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Number of Ontario children with risk factors who had two years of full-day kindergarten dropped from 27 per cent to 20 per cent.

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BERNARD WEIL / TORONTO STAR

Students escorted by their parents head to their first day of kindergarten at the Fraser Mustard Academy in Thorncliffe Park on Sept. 3, 2013.

By: **Charles Pascal** Staff Reporter. Published on Thu Sep 05 2013

Those of us who held the pen a few years back to capture the best global research and practice available regarding the positive impact full-day kindergarten would have on 4- and 5-year-olds, titled our report, "With Our Best Future in Mind." Based on the research released a few days ago, our best future is arriving ahead of schedule.

Thousands of parents, practitioners, experts and policy people from Ontario and beyond contributed to the report tabled four years ago. Even the most optimistic among us could not have anticipated the remarkable [McMaster and Queen's universities' research](#) released a few days ago.

Before full-day kindergarten was on offer, 27 per cent of Ontario children entering Grade 1 were vulnerable, at risk at failing before their first day in school begins. Research also shows that too many of these children never catch up. The families whose children are dealing with language, social competence or emotional maturity issues know the human costs of these consequences. And the fiscal and economic consequences of inattention to these children who are left behind are a fiscal and economic catastrophe.

That is why these research results are off-the-charts encouraging. When looking at the evidence, the number of children with risk factors who have had two years of full-day kindergarten has dropped from 27 per cent to 20 per cent. Even after one year of Ontario's world-class play-based learning program led by our highly competent early learning educators, risk in the area of language and cognitive development has plummeted a stunning 75 per cent. Equally remarkable, after two years of FDK, risk in the areas of social competence and communication skills has been reduced by half.

These results are especially surprising given the complexity of implementing a brand new program in such a short time — from the tabling of our report in the early summer of 2009 to the onset of implementation in September 2010.

porter



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Naturally, there have been some bumps along this short road to date. Our report recommended that [child-care reforms](#) begin in tandem with the introduction of full-day learning. Our current non-system of child care remains too painful for too many families. Until we build a high-quality, affordable and publicly managed system of child care, ridding the province of the often horrific consequences of unregulated child care will remain a challenge.

Our Best Future was also clear about the need for a seamless extended day with school boards providing a consistent high-quality program provided by a single team of early learning educators. Short-sighted school boards and high-powered lobbying allows boards to use third party operators to continue the before and after child care. We wanted to ensure that the benefits of FDK weren't undone by the fragmented offerings of third parties.

But the future is clearer and better in places like Waterloo where the public school board provides the seamless approach and has created more than 2,700 child-care spaces. This has eliminated the ridiculously long waits for care that families elsewhere confront. And there are child-care operators around Ontario who choose to alter their business models to adapt and thrive rather than holding onto the status quo. The results of this new research regarding the benefits of FDK are worthy of some domestic cork-popping and global attention.

Naturally, there will be naysayers.

To those who say "my kids aren't ready," who isn't ready for a play-based program with nutrition and rest breaks as necessary? To date, 96 per cent of kids who have access to FDK are participating in this voluntary program.

To those who say "this is a huge amount to spend," the economic evidence notes that the return on investment will be huge and the program is already paying back the initial investment.

To those who use irrelevant American research based on a country that does not have FDK for 4- and 5-year-olds or a consistent, high-quality curriculum, to discredit these results I say do some real research.

And to those who say we should only target poor children, it's important to understand that 60 per cent of the 27 per cent of kids who were vulnerable going into Grade 1 at the beginning of implementation do not come from low-income homes. A universal approach with special initiatives for low-income families is the winning combination.

All governments are good at making policy. Some are even good at making good policy. But taking ideas off the page of a report and putting them in motion on the ground is rarely a pretty sight. In this case, notwithstanding those implementation bumps, there is so much to celebrate as more and more kids reap the benefits of improved health, communication and social skills that not only better prepare them for formal school but for life.

Charles Pascal is a professor at OISE, University of Toronto, and former early learning adviser to the Premier of Ontario.

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Chris3 5 minutes ago

Ah, full day kindergarten : just what the prov-libs need. Time for k8y, dud and fiz to nap.

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TorSydney 22 minutes ago

It is a great system and especially for the youngest of our schools. They can go to one place in the morning and they stay there until school hours end; or when after care ends. They don't have to be hustled from morning class; hurry over to a nursery school. The same for the afternoon classes. The children can relax and slow down in a world that shifts quickly; especially for their parents.

It's a wise investment of our tax dollars to be used for the children. FDK is for the children and I believe that was the initial intent of FDK. It benefits their parents as well.

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logicalthinker 1 hour ago

All day kindergarten was introduced by McGuinty for one reason only. That was for teacher votes by finding them full time jobs with a new program despite declining enrollment. This was an over the top expensive "dream" program that was recommended to be cancelled by McGuinty's very own economist Drummond report. Pretty much all of which McGuinty shelved because it was not in alignment with his tax and spend ideology. Stuff like this expensive addition to the spending sheet is only for good times with lots of \$\$ to throw around. NOT during this corrupt, wasteful governments cavalier attitude to terribly wasteful expenses and we all know what they are.

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Northern Cynic 2 hours ago

It figures that the first 3 comments are negative! Anyone who has studied child & youth work or early childhood education KNOWS that the studies have already been done - not in Canada but in other jurisdictions that have already emphasized the huge importance of pre-school learning and socialization. Ontario's investment in our children (and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren - I've been around for a few generations) will pay for itself, in an adult population that's much healthier in body and mind, and well-prepared to make positive contributions to society. Oh yes, my nay-saying fellow-citizens: you are in the minority, and even your glorious leader timmy hudak has stopped his condemnation of full-day kindergarten, for fear of losing even more votes.

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DonValleyDon 2 hours ago

A success on what for most children is day 2. Awesome! I wish all businesses could be so optimistic. No need for quarterly or annual reports. Looks good folks lets just run with that. This has cost millions of dollars. Most teachers I have spoken to now have 30 plus kids in the room with their ECE/TA assistants up from the 20-22 they had last year. Schools are bursting at the seams and playgrounds now have 120 kids running around areas designed for 60. But OISE says it is a success so here endth the lesson plan. I would have waited until Friday at least.

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Northern Cynic 2 hours ago

No, donnie - you'd have done what your Conservative heroes invariably do and make a really quiet announcement just before a holiday - is that what you meant by "waited till Friday"? The difference is that the Con-announcements are invariably bad news or another piece of undemocratic outrageousness - this is GOOD news. Mind, you may not be able to tell the difference - I hear that a steady diet of propoganda can have that affect on the faculties.

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DonValleyDon 1 hour ago

Thanks for your political rant.....let's look at some teacher provided facts. Many schools are without finished facilities. Storage areas for 30 plus full day kids taking up areas that used to be used for teaching. Lack of teaching supplies. Child to teacher ratios that have actually increased. Line ups for washrooms. TAs and ECEs being shuffled around to make the financial numbers work. Many experienced K TAs and ECEs displaced due to board mandated rehiring for these "new class room" positions. Mixed classes of 3-5 year olds with different learning and attention spans. No room in classrooms for group activities such as circle time. Lack of playground equipment for the larger groups. Older elementary kids being pushed to smaller play areas to accommodate more Ks. I actually speak to teachers do you? This experiment will take five to ten years to see if grade averages improve. I would have brought grade 13 back. We know the universities think that recent undergrads are not ready. We are not allowing for full education programs in high schools where electives are being pushed aside to fast track grads. When a student doing sciences can't fit biology into a course schedule over four years something is wrong. I would have waited until snow suit season for this announcement. That will be fun!

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