

A few dissenters should not prevent Ontario from modernizing child care

The Government of Ontario is seeking [feedback on proposed regulatory amendments](#) under the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA). Comments are due by December 1, 2017.

One of the items under consideration is an optional approach to age groupings and ratios (Schedule 2) that was introduced in May 2016 and came into force on September 1, 2017. The option is described in Table 1.

The amendment that deletes the new age groupings and ratios should be revisited. No rationale has been given for its removal. The option is backed by scientific evidence regarding the importance of stable, secure environments in group infant and toddler care. It is consistent with groupings in several other Canadian jurisdictions and it makes good sense to the financial well-being of child care centres.

Eliminating Schedule 2 is equally problematic because it signals that Ontario can no longer test new methods of service delivery. The proposed age groupings and ratios are not yet intended for broad implementation. Instead they provide the ministry with permission to pilot the model in selected sites accompanied by an independent evaluation. The research design is in development with input from systems managers, child care providers and other stakeholders. It would be highly disappointing if adherence to the status quo by a few dissidents thwarted experimentation based on sound evidence.

Table 1 Regulation 137/15, Schedule 2 Age Groupings and Child:Staff ratios

Item	Name of age category	Age range of age category	Ratio of employees to children	Maximum number of children in group	Proportion of employees that must be qualified employees
1.	Infant/Toddler	Younger than 24 months	Younger than 12 months: 1 to 3 12 months or older but younger than 24 months: 1 to 4	12	2/3
2.	Preschool	24 months or older but younger than 5 years	1 to 8	24	2/3
3.	Kindergarten	44 months or older but younger than 7 years	1 to 13	26	1/2
4.	Primary/junior school age	68 months or older but younger than 13 years	1 to 15	30	1/2
5.	Junior school age	9 years or older but younger than 13 years	1 to 20	20	1/1

Schedule 2 is an option that responds to fundamental changes in the context of licensed child care centres:

- Expanded parental leave to 12 and now 18 months
- Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) for 4- and 5-year-old children

Many children enter a child care setting around 12 months starting out in an infant room which takes children up to 18 months old. Within six months they will transition to a toddler room and then transition again a year later to a preschool room. Multiple transitions sever children's relationships with their educators and peers creating unnecessary anxiety and insecurity for young children and their families. The proposed option means children transition only once from infancy to entry to FDK.

From the centre's perspective: Schedule 2 is an option that mitigates the challenges presented by current age groupings:

- Regardless of age of entry, infants are able to build relationships with a consistent group of educators and peers providing them with the confidence and security to comfortably transition to preschool.
- It allows operators to better address the high demand for infant and toddler spaces when preschool spaces may be empty after the September exit of four-year-old children to FDK.
- In many settings the preschool group would effectively be children from 2 years until entry to FDK but the option allows operators to also accommodate FDK children before- and after-school. This could be valuable in some locations, particularly where numbers of children are low.

The proposed option was foreshadowed in the [report to the Premier](#) in 2009 on full day kindergarten. It was assumed that reorganization of groupings would be necessary. The changes were proposed to support educators who strive to provide secure and stimulating early learning environments and to the support the financial viability of centre operations.

Schedule 2 is one group and ratio option. Not all centres will want – or be permitted --to use it. Physical environment and enrollment patterns must be taken into account. However, it is an option that deserves testing to assess its ability to better meet the needs of young children and their families in select settings.

Unfortunately the response period for the amendment changes coincided with the longest college strike in Ontario's history. As someone who was an ECE faculty member for 25 years, I empathise with the emotions, demands and the workload facing faculty on their return to work. Yet ECE faculty know more than most the toll on children and educators of frequent transitions. For their sakes, I urge you to share your expertise and experiences.

Responses will be accepted to Dec. 1, 2017 at: [Feedback Requested: Regulatory Registry Consultation Document supporting the Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework under the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014.](#)

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