

Concerns and Challenges

Implementation of Ontario's new Early Learning Kindergarten Program (ELKP) can be expected to pose challenges for teachers, early childhood educators (ECEs), parents and others. OECTA is striving to ensure that teachers will be comfortable and confident with the new format of the Kindergarten program. Provincial OECTA has initiated internal reviews of the program and is vigorously lobbying government and the Ministry of Education about the concerns that teachers raise.

1. Roles and responsibilities: Who does what in the ELKP classroom?

The government indicates that it will amend the *Education Act* to define the roles of the teacher and ECE. OECTA takes the position that roles and responsibilities of the teacher and ECE must be clearly defined without ambiguity. Such distinctions will help the teacher and the ECE work together.

Some differentiation between roles on the classroom team is clear already. The teacher, who is the leader in the classroom, will be responsible for report cards as well as summative evaluation. The ECE will be responsible for delivering all parts of the extended day program. The teacher will not be responsible for supervision of the ECE. This is the responsibility of the school administrator.

2. Class size

The Ministry-announced staffing ratio for the ELKP classroom is to be 13:1, while the average board

class size will be 26. OECTA is holding firm to the position that no class may contain more than 26 students, although Ministry officials have suggested that some could rise to 30. When the core program class size exceeds a still unspecified threshold, the board will be required to hire an ECE who will collaborate with the teacher, to deliver the program. If the class size is below this threshold, a teacher will deliver the program alone. Only a teacher will be present in every ELKP classroom.

3. Physical space and classroom resources

Many kindergarten teachers have expressed concern about their ability to implement a successful play-based program, because of a lack of space in their ELKP classrooms. OECTA has raised this widely expressed concern with the Ministry. The Association has recommended that all ELKP classrooms meet the Ministry-specified, per-pupil space allocation and classroom square-footage requirements. OECTA will monitor actual classrooms to assess compliance with the Ministry standard for classroom size.

The Association has recommended that the Ministry provide a list of standard resources and equipment that is required in every ELKP classroom. Kindergarten teachers also express concerns about replenishing classroom resources and equipment that is expected to wear out faster because of additional use by children in the extended program before and after school as well as in the core program. OECTA has recommended that the Ministry increase ELKP resource funding, and envelope this money to ensure it reaches classrooms.

More concerns in Issue #4