

How did we get here?

Background

In October 2009 the Ontario Liberal government announced that it would fund a full-day Kindergarten and child care program for 4- and 5-year olds. They called it the Early Learning Program. It is now called the Early Learning Kindergarten Program (ELKP). More than just full-day Kindergarten, more than a child care program wrapped around full-day Kindergarten, this new entity is a publicly funded, optional, seamless day of learning and care for four- and five-year-olds.

The need for the program is real. Currently one third of Ontario children that complete SK have problems in one of the five developmental indicators for learning.

What are the origins of the ELKP?

Many have advocated the benefits of early learning for decades. OECTA's efforts began over 30 years ago when the Association participated with AEFO, ETFO (formerly FWTAO and OPSTF), to commission the report *To Herald a Child*, produced by the Commission of Inquiry into the Education of the Young Child that was chaired by Laurier LaPierre. *To Herald a Child* and other reports, made sweeping recommendations: play-based learning, use of schools as community hubs, increased parental involvement, changing teacher training to include more child development and learning theories AND introducing full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds.

Since then, little has been accomplished despite much talk, solid research and intense lobbying by the education and child care communities.

During that time, the chronically underfunded child care sector became more and more fragmented. Even without dedicated funding, school boards filled the vacuum by providing full-day Kindergarten, particularly the French and Catholic boards. By January 2010, 10 Catholic boards were offering full-day every-day JK/SK classes.

The 2007 election changed the situation

Central to the Premier's desire to be known as the "Education Premier," was a decision by Dalton McGuinty to include full-day Kindergarten as part of the 2007 election platform. Once elected, the premier appointed Dr. Charles Pascal to study and report how best to implement a full-day of learning AND build on the existing wrap-around program, 'Best Start'.

Dr. Pascal released his report, *With Our Best Future in Mind*, in June 2009. It contained a far-reaching series of recommendations that touched on the needs of children from birth to 12 years of age, far beyond recommendations for just full-day Kindergarten. Not all the recommendations or their rationales were teacher friendly: He recommended staffing classes, that would have 20 four- and five-year-olds, with a *half-time teacher* and a *full-time ECE*, a proposal that the government did not accept.

OECTA lobby

The Association lobbied to ensure that every classroom would be led by a full-time teacher. Research clearly shows that teacher qualifications have a critical influence on achievement of students in full-day programs. OECTA urged the government to implement a full-day Kindergarten program, delivered by full-time certified teachers.

OECTA's lobby was successful. The government acknowledged the importance of having certified teachers in the classroom at all times and the ELKP includes full-time teachers.

The government is committed to implementing this program and ensuring its success, having invested considerable political capital in this initiative. It has been publicly attacked by those who believe the initiative is fiscally irresponsible or a concession to teacher unions. OECTA is working with the government to ensure the success of the program.