

What does it look like?

Ontario's Early Learning Kindergarten Program (ELKP), promised in 2007 and announced in October 2009, is a daring move for the McGuinty government. When fully implemented in 2015, this comprehensive program for four- and five-year-olds will cost taxpayers an estimated \$1 billion.

The ELKP reflects the spirit of Dr. Pascal's report, *With Our Best Future in Mind*, but it does not conform to all of his recommendations. In accepting OECTA's staffing model combined with Pascal's concept of a seamless day of learning and care, the ELKP is a compromise. It sets out to provide full-day Kindergarten and also to meet demands for child care.

Significantly, the government acknowledges that there is a relationship between the skills and qualifications of certified teachers and how well students progress in the five areas of learning development. It also recognizes the value of the diverse training and skills that certified Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) will bring to the classroom. The government believes that the two – albeit differently qualified – professionals can work collaboratively as a team, "in a common space, sharing resources." The success of the program depends on it. The employment of ECEs in addition to full-time teachers is necessary as a result of the extended day.

There are two components to the ELKP. First, the core program delivered by a certified teacher assisted by an ECE, where numbers warrant, runs from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Second, an extended program will run from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. and continue after school from 3:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., will be delivered by an ECE and, when numbers warrant, an additional adult. Teachers will not deliver the extended component of the ELKP.

Some roles and responsibilities are clear. Only the teacher will evaluate, provide summative reports and

prepare the children for Grade 1. The teacher and ECE together plan and implement the new curriculum, monitor students' developmental progress, communicate regularly with parents, and maintain an appropriate learning environment. The ECE is solely responsible for the activities of the extended day and for any summer or vacation programming.

Important points

- 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.
- Both the learning and care components are voluntary.
- Parents will pay a fee for the extended care component.
- The ELKP will be staffed, funded and tracked separately from current Kindergarten classes.
- The ELKP class size is up to a board average of 26 students.
- An ECE will be assigned in the core program when class size exceeds certain level, as yet undetermined.
- ELKP classes will not be combined with Grade 1 classes.
- A certified teacher will deliver the core program.
- The Ministry's Early Learning Branch will have substantial influence and control over program implementation and development.
- The *Education Act* will cover the complete program.
- The provisions in the *Day Nursery Act* will not apply to either the extended or the core programs.
- The soon-to-be-hired ECEs will be Board employees.
- The school administrator is responsible for both the core and extended programs.
- New curriculum is being developed that integrates the Kindergarten curriculum with the Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) program.

There are many challenges and concerns.

These are addressed in Issue # 3.