

Questions and Answers from the Ministry

Q. If my child's school is selected to offer the ELP, do I have to enrol my four/five-year-old in the full day program? Is it mandatory? Isn't this too long a day for young kids?

A. We are implementing a full day program with an extended day option; Kindergarten is voluntary. Parents will continue to have the choice about whether to have their four- and five-year-olds participate for the full day or half day.

Q. Dr. Pascal has released his report *Every Child, Every Opportunity* (ECEO). When will the ministry develop the early learning curriculum?

A. A new early learning kindergarten and extended day program for four- and five-year-olds is being developed for full-day early learning based on existing programs and drawing on Dr. Pascal's advice. The ministry is currently reviewing *The Ontario Curriculum: The Kindergarten Program (Revised 2006)*, *Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT)*, and Dr. Pascal's report *Every Child, Every Opportunity (ECEO)*. The process will also include consultations, focus groups, and feedback on draft materials with stakeholders, teachers, early childhood educators (ECEs), parents and early childhood experts.

Q. What role will ECEs have in the early learning and extended day programs?

A. Certified teachers and registered ECEs will work together to help young students learn and grow during the regular school day. These educators will complement each others' skill sets and create a learning environment able to adapt to the unique needs of each child. With two qualified professionals in the classroom for the full school day, more students will get one-on-one attention and opportunities to learn together in small groups.

Programs before and after the regular school day will be led by registered ECEs.

The extended day program is complementary to the instructional-day program. A parent guide on the extended day program is being developed and will be available for voluntary use at home. The ministry is also developing a program guide outlining how the extended day program will complement the core day program. Some additional attention will be paid to the development of associated supports that parents can access directly and use at home should they choose not to enrol their children in extended day. This measure will help provide parents with guidance about complementary learning activities that they may wish to use with their children outside of the school day.

Q. If you pull four- and five-year-olds out of child care centres, won't they close? How will the government mitigate impacts to the child care sector?

A. The impact to child care and early years programs will vary community by community. We asked school boards to work with municipalities and best start networks to consider the local impacts on child care when selecting their first sites. The government will work collaboratively with school boards, child care operators, municipalities and other partners in communities across Ontario to enhance and stabilize existing child care programs.

Q. How do District School Boards ensure that the phased implementation of the Early Learning Program will not result in them losing pupils to their coterminous boards?

A. Successful implementation of the ELP required boards to consult with their school communities and other key partners, including each of their coterminous boards (English Public, English Catholic, French Public, and French Catholic), Best Start networks, and Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards.

Q. Is it mandatory for 4 and 5 year olds to attend the Early Learning Program?

A. The Early Learning Program is voluntary. Children are required to attend school in the year that the child reaches the age of six on or before the first day of school in September.

Q. Will District School Boards be permitted to carry their unused allocations forward to the next year?

A. It is anticipated that District School Boards will fully utilize all the Early Learning Program spaces they were funded to provide for four and five year olds. Some boards have indicated that they intend to use other resources from their base budgets to round out their “whole school” approaches with an extra class or two (with Provincial funding then covering those classes in Year 2 and beyond). Funding flowed to Boards in the 2010-11 school year will be based on enrollment, so boards that use less than their allocation of pupil places will receive less than their full allocation of funding.

Q. Will education assistants qualify to be Early Childhood Educators?

A. Certified teachers and registered early childhood educators will work side-by-side to help young students learn and grow in each early learning classroom during the regular school day. ECEs have specific knowledge and skills gained through their educational training. To practice the profession of early childhood education, ECEs are required to meet and maintain the membership requirements set out by the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators.

Q. Does the before/after program only include the 4 and 5 year olds or will it include other children 6-12 years old?

A. At this time, we are focusing on an integrated, extended day early learning program for four- and five-year-olds during the school year. This will provide our youngest students with the benefits of full day learning. Where there is sufficient parent demand and ability on the part of a school board, some schools may offer before- and after-school programs for six- to 12-year-olds. We will work with boards if they are interested in providing additional services based on full cost recovery.

Q. Can school boards partner with an existing childcare provider to provide the extended day component of the early learning program?

A. The Early Learning initiative will be a School Board program integrating a core school day and staff with a Board-delivered extended day. This is a different, more integrated approach than one that has children moving between programs and locations. Over the phase in period, Boards will need to transition school-based programs that offer wrap-around care in partnership with community organizations to the integrated, Board-based model. Community-based partnerships can continue to play a role in Boards’ plans to serve other age groups and meet the needs of children outside the regular school year.

Q. Will the DNA requirements apply to extended day space?

A. We have asked boards to use available space for year 1 sites, and that acknowledges that those existing classrooms are expected to be acceptable. There are existing common practices for purpose-built kindergarten rooms and we don’t anticipate those will change.

Q. What if there isn’t demand for extended day?

A. We are confident that school boards will offer the full program including the extended day. In developing the best solutions for four- and five-year-olds in their communities, boards should take into account the local availability of licensed child care. Boards will need to consider whether the community will be best served by selecting schools with existing child care programs, schools near existing licensed child care, or schools in neighbourhoods where no child care is currently available for four- and five-year-olds. We understand that local circumstances will differ and we are working to ensure that boards have flexibility to help them deliver viable programs.

Q. How will fees be managed for extended day?

A. We are still working with boards, Ministry of Children and Youth Services and other partners on the details of the extended day program. We understand boards would benefit from knowing more and we are working on providing boards with further information as soon as possible.