

Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Education: Statement to the Legislative Assembly

Implementing Full-Day Learning For Four- And Five-Year-Olds

February 17, 2010

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that everyone here today – indeed, all Ontarians – would agree that education has the power to change lives, that it is the key to empowering citizens and to building a better future for us all.

Over the past seven years, our government has worked hard to improve Ontario's education system and to give every student the opportunity to succeed and develop the skills necessary for future success.

Full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds is the next essential step in our quest to make Ontario's education system the best in the world.

In September, approximately 35,000 children in nearly 600 schools across the province will benefit from an enriched, integrated full day of learning.

By 2015-16, we hope to provide all four- and five-year-olds with access to this exciting new program.

Working side-by-side, a teacher and an early childhood educator will help children learn, play and grow during the regular school day.

Parents will also have the option to enrol their child in integrated before- and after-school programs, where an early childhood educator will build on the activities of the regular school day.

This will give children a seamless day in one location, with continuous staffing, familiar faces and friends, where they feel safe and encouraged to learn, play and explore.

It will also make life easier for Ontario's families.

Too many parents have to juggle their children's schedules between school and child care, while worrying about work and other responsibilities.

In addition to being more convenient for families, the long-term economic advantage of full-day learning will give Ontario a competitive edge in this global society.

Studies have shown that the return on public investment for young children is at least seven-to-one.

That's why the government is taking action today to establish the legislative framework that forms the backbone of our new full-day learning program.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand in the House today to introduce the Full-Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act.

If passed, this legislation would amend the Education Act to mandate full-day learning.

It would give school boards the responsibility and authority to implement full-day kindergarten, staffed during the regular school day by a teacher and an early childhood educator.

It would also give school boards the responsibility and authority to implement the before- and after-school programs for those young children, led by an early childhood educator.

As well, it would give boards the authority and the duty to set, charge and collect reasonable fees to recover the cost of those programs.

This legislation would also give school boards the authority to offer extended-day programs to children aged four to 12, plus offer programs on days that are not regular instructional days, such as the summer holidays.

The Full-Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, if passed, would recognize the new and unique role that early childhood educators play in the full-day learning classroom – both during the regular school day and when they lead the before- and after-school program.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation would give school boards, principals, teachers and early childhood educators the support they need to successfully implement this exciting new program.

And it would ensure that – when the program is fully implemented – every single four- and five-year-old in Ontario would have access to a stellar full-day early learning program, led by qualified staff.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is an essential part of the full-day learning program.

And this program is essential for giving our youngest students a brighter future, for giving our families the support they need, and for building a stronger Ontario for us all.

Thank you.