

Kindergarten Working Conditions Report  
KPRDSB  
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## **Introduction**

In February, 2008 a survey was developed by the KPR ETFO Kindergarten Working Committee to gather information regarding the new Kindergarten Report Card, the resulting impact on the Kindergarten program, and workload for teachers. Surveys were collected and data was disaggregated in March, 2008 at the KPR ETFO office.

Of the 120 Kindergarten teachers in KPR, 94 responded, a whopping 78%. 90 surveys were on time (75%) and used for data collection. Surveys came equally from across the three regions: Clarington, Northumberland, and Peterborough.

Respondents included teachers with varying levels of experience, classroom makeup, and assignment. Over 80% of the teachers had taught Kindergarten prior to this year, giving respondents an ability to compare their current experiences with past ones.. Even people on leave felt that they wanted their voices heard.

## **Findings**

The surveys showed a number of trends shared by a majority of the teachers. Comments and responses were very unified in many of the areas covered.

### *Format of the Report Card*

- 88% feel that they cannot communicate new and varied information in five reports over two years easily and effectively.
- 73% feel that the quantity of marks on the report card is inappropriate.

Kindergarten children attend half time, which means SK students receive a report card after only 20 days in school. Kindergarten is often a child's first exposure to a structured setting and basic skills are focused on in those first months. Kindergarten is not a mandatory program. Children come with varied backgrounds: some with nursery school, some not having attended JK.

There are 30 marks to be entered and be accountable for on the report card. Students are given six marks for Personal and Social Development, four for Health and Physical Activity, five for Language, five for The Arts, five for Math, and five for Science and Technology. Teachers feel that this is not enough time to properly teach to the students' developmental level, assess, re-teach, and evaluate when seeing the students only thirty days per term.

### *System Assessments*

- 89% feel that system assessments (i.e. KPLA) are not manageable during classroom instruction time.
- 82% use their preparation time to complete assessments.
- 81% feel that SMART goals add to their assessment load.
- 70% feel that the system assessments are not developmentally appropriate for Kindergarten students.

Teachers feel that KPLA does not match the newly introduced Kindergarten Program. Many of the tests are developmentally inappropriate (phonemic awareness), and others do not provide good information for informing instruction, making them an ineffective and inefficient tool for teacher use.

It takes the average Kindergarten teacher one hour to administer KPLA and PM Benchmarks for one student. Students cannot sit and do these in one sitting, so they must be broken up over a period of time. Kindergarten students are often very distracted and are unable to complete these assessments in group situations. The accuracy of the assessment is affected when done in groups and some students will not perform to their ability in front of their peers.

It is crucial that the teacher do these assessments themselves so they can glean as much data as possible, for example from body language, etc. Students are often too shy or don't perform to their best when working with strangers on these tests. Many are visibly frustrated when having to miss preferred activities like gym or library.

Kindergarten teachers understand that SMART goals are useful tools, however school-based SMART goals are often inappropriate for the developmental levels in Kindergarten, especially when students are only attending school half-time.

### *Programming*

- 97% feel that their programming is affected by the time they spend doing reports, SMART goals, and system assessments.
- 84% remove things from their program to make time for system assessments.
- 83% feel that the timelines and expectations impact their ability to provide appropriate programming.

Assessment is overtaking programming. Teachers feel they are spending excessive amounts of time in order to get all of the assessments done for submission. They feel that submission dates do not coincide with report card dates and this assessment often needs to be redone for accurate reporting.

In order to ensure that all data is compiled for submission, teachers are removing important program components such as guided reading, small group work with the teacher, and crafts in order to have in-class time to administer the assessments. "You can weigh a pig as often as you'd like, but it won't help it grow."

### *Workload*

- 93% feel that their workload has increased this year.
- 0% feel their workload has decreased.
- 93% have been physically and/or emotionally affected by their workload this year.
- 91% feel this year has been more stressful than previous years of teaching Kindergarten.

Over 50% of teachers say their workload has increased anywhere from 25 to 74 percent. The Board has direct control over this increased workload as KPLA and the report card are board-mandated initiatives, not Ministry ones. Teachers feel that the workload is strongly interfering with their personal lives. This workload is physically and emotionally exhausting, leading to physical symptoms of stress.

### *Returning to Kindergarten*

- Given the option, 23% of teachers would not return to Kindergarten next year.
- 13% have not yet decided, and would only return if changes were made.

Over one third of Kindergarten teachers in the Board do not wish to return to the job. These are experienced Kindergarten teachers who provide families and students with their first contact to the educational system. This statistic represents a troublesome loss of expertise.

## **Suggested Actions**

### KPRDSB Kindergarten Report Card

- Fewer formal reports per year.
  - SK students: Term 2 & 3, JK students: Term 3
  - See Appendix 2, Hamilton-Wentworth Report Card (three times in two years)
  - See Appendix 3, Simcoe County Report Card (twice per year)
- Have report card reflect continuum of growth for the two year program

- See Appendix 3, Simcoe County Reporting Notes to Teachers
- Make the report card web-based
  - See Appendix 3, E-Teacher report
- Fix jargon and achievement levels for parents
  - See Appendix 2 (for jargon free terms), Appendix 3 (easy to understand levels)
- One mark for the whole subject area, while still listing all the overall expectations teachers used to teach

#### System Assessments

- Submission dates should align with reporting periods
- Fewer tests, fewer times per year
- Revamp tests to co-ordinate with Ministry program and developmental abilities of students
- Create assessments that can be done within the context of an operating Kindergarten classroom

#### SMART Goals

- Kindergarten teachers create their own SMART goals with their unique class compositions in mind
- Eliminate SMART goals for Kindergarten students

#### Workload

- Have board acknowledge and take into consideration when making decisions, that;
  - Kindergarten students attend half-time, leaving teachers with fewer opportunities for Board initiatives.
  - Kindergarten students require more care and supervision, as they are only beginning to develop their basic self-help skills, self-control, and independence.

#### **Conclusion**

It is evident that Kindergarten teachers have strong and unified views in terms of the current workload. This is an emotional topic and Kindergarten teachers strongly wish that their voices be heard. The workload has created job

dissatisfaction and a work environment that teachers feel is not meeting the needs of their students.

Teachers feel that the changes occurring in the Kindergarten program are contrary to the basic philosophy of early childhood education. They feel strongly that the Board expectations are not meeting the needs of children in their classes and their parents. We have become too achievement based and along the way have lost sight of the unique developmental nature of the Kindergarten program.