

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

This report is an excerpt from the 2015 Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools.

In the last five years, the Ontario government has shifted the responsibility of early childhood education and family support to the Ministry of Education.

The Early Years Division now includes kindergarten programs, extended day programs, licensed child care, parenting and family literacy programs, programs for children with special needs, and other family support programs. This policy decision recognizes the importance of the early years and their link to life long learning.

During early childhood, the brain develops at a rapid rate. The experiences and learning environments that a child is exposed to at this time are linked to cognitive, social, and emotional development.¹ Decades of studies have shown that early childhood developmental processes can predict later life outcomes.²

Consequently, supports and resources in early years can be critical. Investments in high-quality early years programs are among the most effective, leading to more equitable education outcomes.³

Ontario's government has recognized the importance of early childhood programs⁴ and has made notable strides in improving access to childcare and early childhood education in recent years. Research has demonstrated that children who attend Ontario's full-day kindergarten program are better prepared for grade 1, and exhibit higher outcomes in the areas of social competence, communication skills, and cognitive development.⁵

QUICK FACTS

- Among elementary schools with kindergarten-aged children, 64% have before and after-school care for kindergarten-aged students.
- Only 41% of schools with kindergarten report having on-site child care year-round.

ACCESS TO INTEGRATED CHILD CARE

A number of new provincial policies have also sought to improve the coordination of early learning and child care, to ensure "seamless and integrated provision of child care and education programs and services." Provincial policy mandates that school boards must provide before- and after-school programs for kindergarten students at schools where "there is interest from the families of at least 20 children."⁶

Having a childcare centre in the school is wonderful! It is a much easier transition for students coming into the junior kindergarten program. It is also great for children in the older grades who go to the before- and after-school programs as they can simply go down the hall rather than having to go to childcare outside of the building. From a school perspective, this is definitely preferable as we are not worrying whether a child has got to their childcare safely.

Elementary school, Bluewater DSB

In this year’s survey, we looked at the availability of on-site child care now that Ontario has fully implemented the full-day kindergarten program.

In schools with kindergarten, 72 percent report having on-site child care for kindergarten-aged children, representing a steady increase from 2011/12 (see Figure 1).

Among the schools with on-site child care for kindergarten-aged children:

- 90% report on-site child care before school.
- 94% report on-site child care after school.
- 89% report on-site child care both before and after school.
- 41% report on-site child care year-round.

For schools with grades 1–6, 70 percent of schools report having child care. Of these schools,

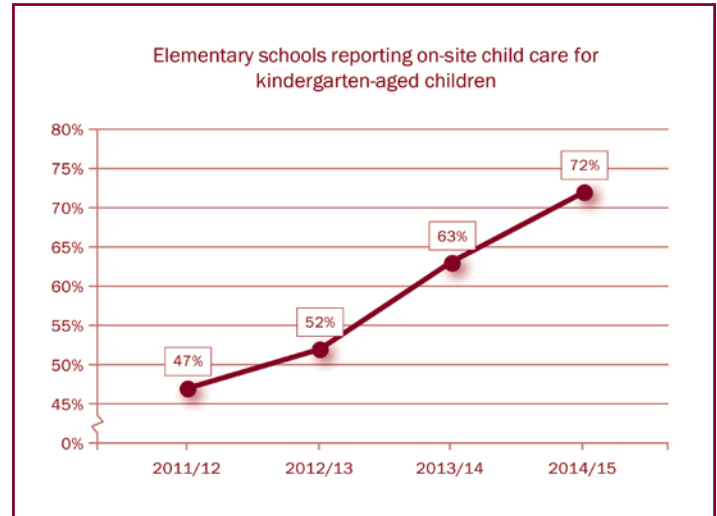
- 87% report having child care before school.
- 95% report having child care after school.
- 38% report having child care year round.

SEAMLESS AND INTEGRATED—PROMISING PRACTICES

School boards that directly offer before and after school programs are able to accommodate all families that request the program. They are not limited by space and program restrictions. This alleviates stress for families and reduces administrative challenges for school principals.⁷

Strong leadership and a commitment to early learning in the Waterloo Region and the Ottawa-Carleton District School Boards have increased access to high quality programming and on-site child care for thousands of families.⁸ Both boards provide successful examples of integrated and seamless early learning programs for students.

Figure 1



In the Waterloo Board, extended day programs are now offered in 80 out of 87 schools, providing programs to over 4000 children between kindergarten and grade 3. Older children attend Youth Development Programs offered by Conestoga College and other community partners. In the Ottawa Board, 6000 children attend before- and after-school programs in over 100 schools.

CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTATION

The growth in the availability of on-site child care is encouraging, and suggests considerable progress throughout the province. However, a number of obstacles have persisted. In rural areas, for example, schools may face challenges finding child care providers or trained staff to operate before- or after-school programs.

Only one provider was available to offer [child care] in our area, and they declined due to being unable to find employees to run the program in a rural area.

Elementary school, Upper Canada DSB

Always very challenging to share classroom space. Teachers find it invades their preparation time at beginning and end of the day. We use every square inch of space.

Elementary school, Avon Maitland DSB

In this year's survey, the challenges that schools commented on most frequently related to space limitations. Space constraints in some schools seem to be negatively influencing the seamless integration of school and care.⁹

To resolve these problems, some schools have begun to purchase portable facilities, construct new facilities, and partner with local community groups to use their space.

Sharing space is a challenge, but we have excellent communication and collaboration. Our board is now offering support through some shared [professional development] around our Early Years Strategy—very helpful in promoting shared space and shared resources.

Elementary school, Toronto DSB

FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS

The province allocates \$90 million per year to support “universally accessible programs, services, and resources in easily accessible locations.”¹⁰ These programs are organized under Best Start Child and Family Resource Centres and include programs such as Ontario Early Years Centres, Child Care/ Family Resource Centres, and Parenting and Family Literacy Centres.¹¹ In its report to the Ministry of Education, the Ontario Early Years Centre Provincial Network stressed the critical importance of an integrated system involving seamless transitions among family support programs, child care, and school.¹²

In this year's survey, however, only 36 percent of schools serving kindergarten-aged children indicate that they have a family support program.

NEXT STEPS

Ontario has made great strides in improving access to early childhood education and care. However, the integration of early learning supports across the system is a key objective in Ontario's early learning policy, and that goal has not yet been realized. To ensure that all families have access to quality early childhood supports and services, and to ensure that Ontario has a truly seamless model for early childhood learning and care, it is vital to address challenges pertaining to access and integration of on-site programs.

NOTES

- 1 Mustard, F., McCain, M. & McCuaig, K. (2013). *Early years Study 3: Making decisions, Taking Actions*. Toronto, ON, Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation.
- 2 Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., and Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime Effects: The high/scope perry preschool study through age 40* (pp. 194–215) Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.
- 3 Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (2012). *Starting Strong III - A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.
- 4 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2012). *Modernizing child care in Ontario: Sharing conversations, strengthening partnerships, working together*. Report prepared for the Ontario Ministry of Education, Toronto, ON.
- 5 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2013). *A meta-perspective on the evaluation of full-day kindergarten during the first two years of implementation*. Link: <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/FDKReport2013.pdf>. Accessed May 28, 2015.
- 6 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2014). *What Happens Before and After School*. Link: <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/whathappensbeforeandafterschool.html>. Accessed May 22, 2015.
- 7 Janmohamed, Z., McCuaig, K., Akbari, E., Ganathan, R., & Jenkins, J. (2014) *Schools at the centre: Findings from Case Studies Exploring Seamless Early Learning in Ontario*. Toronto, ON: Atkinson Centre, OISE/University of Toronto.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2013). *Ontario early years policy framework*. Link: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/OntarioEarlyYear.pdf>. Accessed May 24, 2015.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ontario Early Years Centre Provincial Network. (2013). *Best start child and family centres: Building on experience for future success*. Report prepared for the Ontario Ministry of Education, Toronto, ON.



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