



Standing Committee on Social Policy: Bill 242 – Legislation to Implement Full-Day Early Learning Programs

Research findings from Toronto First Duty and their implications for full day learning in Ontario

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Background: Initiated in 2000, Toronto First Duty (TFD) is a children’s service delivery model that combines education, child care and family supports into a single program. For almost a decade TFD sites have served as laboratories for best practice in service design and have allowed policy makers, academics, experts and practitioners to “touch and feel” the difference between integrated and conventional service delivery.

TFD inspired the November 2007 appointment of Dr. Charles Pascal to advise the government on the best way to implement full day learning in Ontario. Working within this mandate the resulting report, *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing early learning in Ontario*, uses the opportunities provided by full day learning as a bridgehead to create a 0-12 child and family service system. The report details how to effectively couple new public investments with existing resources to maximize results. Its recommendations are integrated and well crafted. They don’t allow for cherry picking.

Toronto First Duty has ten years of ‘made-in-Ontario’ experience determining what works and what doesn’t when bringing together different institutional and professional mandates and cultures. We encourage policy makers and implementation teams to carefully consider the lessons learned and apply them to these important education reforms. We would welcome the committee to include in its deliberations a visit to Bruce Public School and the Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre where the model is largely in place.

Following are some of the lessons from the Toronto First Duty research that can help inform the legislation before us:

Lesson 1. An integrated staff team improves program quality.

In the TFD model a team of teachers, early childhood educators, teaching assistants, family support, recreation and health professionals plan and deliver the program working from a single pedagogical approach and using the same space and resources.

The educator team reflects a ‘whole school’ approach, facilitating ongoing communications, planning and goal setting between professionals working with preschoolers and their families, their counterparts in the Early Learning Program and those working in the elementary grades. For example, ECEs are also assigned to the

elementary grades, working with teachers to plan activities and continue support for children's learning into extended hour and summer programming.

TFD research shows that with strong leadership, joint professional development and time for program planning, the integrated professional team strengthens the common pedagogy, curriculum and learning environment for children and creates stronger links between parents and schools.

Knowledgeable and supported educators are prerequisites of good programming and successful child outcomes. If Ontario's educational reforms are to fulfill their promise, working conditions must be conducive to each member of the educator team applying her/his skills and knowledge to create the learning environment. This is particularly essential in the Ontario context where the majority of teachers do not have child development training.

Wage differentials between certified teachers and registered early childhood educators are expected and should reflect educational differences. However the significant salary differential between teachers and early childhood educators is incompatible with a learning environment where teachers and ECEs work side by side to deliver the program. School boards need to be resourced and directed to provide working conditions conducive to recruiting, retaining and building a strong educator team.

Specifically we recommend the committee consider:

- Wages for early childhood educators that comply with pay equity requirements.
- An exclusive professional and employment classification for early childhood educators working in the early learning, extended day and summer program.

Lesson 2. An integrated approach to children's services encourages programming appropriate to the developmental needs of children.

The Toronto First Duty design brings together the child development approaches of early childhood education with the more academic aims of the Ministry of Education. The integrated model appears to stand out in pushing back against developmentally inappropriate curriculum and pushing out a progressive vision of what learning should be: building engaging active learning; more coherence and less modularization; whole child development including supports to build self-regulation; parent capacity to work with schools; and, community supports for child development and learning

A seamless program that blends childhood development at the core of expectations for children, will deliberately and effectively support cognitive development and tap into children's individual interests drawing out their capacities.

Working conditions that discourage the development of a strong teaching team can threaten the effectiveness of the program. We therefore recommend the committee consider:

- Capping class sizes in the Early Learning Program to 26 children during all hours

- of operations.
- Placing a time limit on exemptions for boards hiring staff without appropriate ECE qualifications.
 - Directing school boards to schedule adequate time for joint planning by the educator team(s).

Lesson 3: Integrated early childhood service delivery reduces daily stress and hassles in family life.

Parent surveys suggest higher levels of parent satisfaction with programming at Toronto First Duty sites compared to sites where education, child care and family support programs are offered separately.

Further study of the impact of integrated services on the daily lives of parents and their children indicated that service integration is associated with lower levels of daily parenting hassles, greater satisfaction with some forms of support, and fewer transitions for children throughout their day.

In TFD sites, parents named both teachers and early childhood educators as part of their social support network. At sites where kindergarten and child care are not integrated, only early childhood educators were named.

Fewer transitions between home and school were associated with better child outcomes. This was also true for programming that minimized transitions between preschool, four- and five-year old programming and elementary school.

Year round programming has been shown to be effective at reducing achievement gap between children living in advantaged and disadvantaged circumstances. Middle-class families build on their children's literacy skills through summer activities. Children in low-income families do not have the same access and lose skills. As summer learning losses accumulate over the years, disadvantaged students fall further and further behind.

Offering extended day programming only during the 188 days that schools operate will create enormous challenges particularly for the 77% of Ontario families with both parents in the paid workforce. Child care programs are not in a position to reserve space and staff to cover off summer holidays, professional development days and school breaks. Program fragmentation will increase as parents find their child care alternatives shrink and transitions for children between school and out-of-school programs will intensify.

We would strongly urge that the legislation reflect the need for year round programming to ensure optimal opportunities for all children and their families.

Lesson 4: Integrated early childhood delivery facilitates parent participation in their child's early learning.

Later educational goals of reducing achievement gaps and school dropout rates begin with comprehensive early supports that engage families and build child readiness.

Research found that parents in Toronto First Duty sites were more involved with their child's learning, felt better able to offer support, felt more empowered and responsible for speaking with program staff, and were more likely to sustain their involvement in their child's schooling through the primary grades than parents whose children attended conventional kindergarten and child care programs.

The report of the Premier emphasizes parent involvement as a primary focus and advantage of the proposed educational reforms. Creating schools as neighbourhood centres for families from birth onward is a proven outreach strategy to both advantaged and disadvantaged families.

Program enrolment affects both the quality and financial viability of the extended hour and summer programming. Year round programming attracts stable enrolment, allowing cost efficiencies for both boards and parents. Larger enrolment makes it feasible for school boards to hire staff dedicated to the supervision and administration of extended hour and summer activities, responding to the valid workload concerns of principals.

We therefore recommend that policy and legislation support the development of Child and Family Centres to accompany the roll out of the Early Learning Program.

We further recommend that school boards be directed and resourced to provide extended hours and summer programming for children 4-12 years.

We thank you for your attention.

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The complete research report is available at:
www.toronto.ca/firstduty/TFD_phase2_final.pdf

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How a Toronto First Duty site works

Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre

The Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre (*BWELC*) serves a mixed income community with a large new immigrant population. It is a Toronto First Duty (*TFD*) site demonstrating integrated, accessible child care/kindergarten/family service delivery. The Centre is located in Bruce Public Junior School, 51 Larchmount Avenue. Hours are 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, year round. BWELC serves children and families from the pre-natal period to grade three. The school has classes up to grade six.

Site partners:

Bruce Public Junior School and WoodGreen Community Services (a multi-service community agency) are the lead site partners. The school principal and centre manager (employed by WoodGreen) jointly supervise the program. The management committee includes parents, WoodGreen; Bruce School; the City of Toronto's children's services and public health divisions; Toronto District School Board (TDSB); the Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation (ACF); the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto.

Five elements identify a TFD program:

- **Integrated governance:** The partners pool their resources to plan and deliver the program. Bruce School supplies the physical space and staffing including the principal, kindergarten teachers, parenting staff, teaching assistants and administrative support staff. WoodGreen supports the centre manager, ECE staff and resource teacher in addition to providing administrative assistance and professional development. TDSB contributes professional development and release time for the principal and kindergarten teachers in addition to the support of its superintendents and early years' department. The Foundation for Student Success supports the nutrition program. The Parenting and Family Literacy Centres delivers parenting activities. Toronto Public Health delivers pre and post-natal programming, additional parenting programs and early identification & referrals. Children with special needs and families requiring additional assistance access help through WoodGreen, TDSB and the City of Toronto. ECEs also support classroom activities during school hours and direct after-school programming for children in Grades 1-3. The continuity of consistent adults is viewed as important particularly for children as they make the transition to the primary grades.

The Atkinson Centre for Child and Social Development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education provides research and development. The Atkinson Charitable Foundation and City of Toronto provide funding for minor capital, start-up, and transition and operating costs. The TDSB funds the half-day program for children 3.8 – 5 years. Communications, research and program development is supported by ACF.

- **Seamless access:** Through a single enrolment process families are able to access the full range of activities the program offers. Participation is flexible – parents may attend at anytime with their children.
- **Integrated early learning environment:** The school's classrooms are licensed under the Day Nurseries Act allowing multi-use of space to support children's development and health and safety standards.
- **Staff teams:** A teaching team of early childhood educators, teachers, family support staff and educational assistants deliver the program using a common curriculum, resources and space. Integrated staffing allows a child/adult (teacher or ECE) ratio approximating the requirements of the *Day Nurseries Act* and is well below the provincial 20-children/teacher cap mandated for the younger grades.
- **Parent participation:** Parent participation is paramount to children's success. Parents are welcome to take place in all the activities of the Centre all the time. This includes eating lunch or snacks with their children, joining in their children's classroom activities and participating in adult-only classes or in parent/child activities.

BWELC demonstrates the potential of integrated child and family programming. It meets the multiple and changing needs of families with a variety of supports and resources from the prenatal period through to adolescence.