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Alberta's Children Deserve Full-Day Kindergarten

"What happens to children in their first few years of life has a profound influence on their relative success or failure in school and in life in general" (Alberta Learning, 2003, p.41).

- Albertans and the Alberta government have recognized the importance of learning and development in the early years supported by evidence provided in reports and research papers from the province and elsewhere. (Alberta Learning, 2003; Alberta Government, 2014).
- Learning and development in the early years of life is critical. Child care experts, activists, and advocates have pushed for further recognition of early childhood education's critical role in societal well-being. There is a mounting body of irrefutable evidence, reports, and research papers from the province, across Canada, and around the world.
- Between 2009 and 2014, Alberta Education funded a study that gathered data on the early development of 70,000 children during their kindergarten year (Alberta Government, 2014). The proportion of children meeting all developmental milestones was low, less than 47%. The study further indicated that the vast majority of children struggling in their development lived in middle-class communities, not low socio-economic communities that one might expect. Summary of findings and recommendations can be found at www.ecmap.ca.
- The pandemic years created difficulties and deepened inequalities for many people of all ages, but children have been especially deprived of experiences required for optimal early development. Broader and richer social relationships such as those integral to an early learning environment were not possible, compromising the mental and social development of children.

Why full-day Kindergarten?

- According to credible and reliable research, full-day Kindergarten is beneficial for all children but particularly for those children at risk of school failure and requiring additional academic and social-emotional support (Blades & Tarr, 2004).
- Early brain development research indicates the importance of providing a continuum of quality educational learning experiences for young children. Access to full-day Kindergarten is an essential part of this continuum.
- Full-day Kindergarten provides more time to focus on the physical, social, emotional, language, communication and thinking skills (Blades & Tarr, 2004), and creates the possibilities for positive and caring relationships among children.
- Full-day Kindergarten programming offers more time for assessment of children's learning needs and, if and when required, the provision of support from appropriate professionals such as Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists and Speech Pathologists.

Investing in children, families and the economy

Currently, school authorities in Alberta primarily offer 475 hours of kindergarten; the equivalent of a half-day of programming. The Yukon, Northwest Territories, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia all have full day/full week kindergarten education. These programs are the same hours as regular school hours. All kindergarten programs are optional for families.

The overwhelming amount of research indicates how early childhood education is critical for the development and overall well-being of our children. Alberta is a wealthy province in need of an educated workforce, and we must take this opportunity to invest in our children and the future of Alberta.

Investment in early childhood is one of the greatest opportunities we have to enhance the health and well-being of Albertans. Not only will it make a difference to individuals and communities, it will position our province for greater economic growth and leadership in a knowledge-based society, now and in the future (Government of Alberta, 2011, p. 63).

Now is the time to be bold and take action for full-day Kindergarten.

Our children and families deserve this investment!