

# ***SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE***

## *Findings from Case Studies Exploring Seamless Early Learning in Ontario*



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## Terms Used in This Report

*Full-day kindergarten (FDK)* is an early learning program for 4 and 5 year old children operating during the legislated school day/year.

*Extended-day programs (EDP)* provide school-based activities before and after regular school hours. EDPs serve children from kindergarten to Grade 6. They are operated by either a school board or an agency licensed to provide child care.

*Parents* include the child's biological or adoptive parents, as well as all those people who identify themselves as parents by taking responsibility for the care and well-being of a child. These include extended family members, lesbian and gay families, blended families and older siblings acting as guardians.

*Administrators* are regional and school board employees who develop, plan and support school and child care programs. They include school principals, supervisors, program leaders and directors and regional children's service directors and program managers.

*A third party provider* is an agency licensed to deliver child care and contracted by school boards to deliver extended-day programs.

*Educators* refer to the kindergarten teacher and/or early childhood educator (ECE) who form the teaching team in FDK and EDP.

*Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE)* describes educators who have completed a two-year diploma in early childhood education and are registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators. Registration with the College of ECEs is a condition of practice in Ontario.

*Designated Early Childhood Educator (DECE)* is defined in the *Education Act* as a RECE who is part of the educator team in FDK/EDP.

*Kindergarten Teachers (Teachers)* describes educators who have completed a Bachelor of Education degree or undergraduate degree and two years teacher education and are registered with the Ontario College of Teachers.

*Regional children's service managers*, refers to the departments responsible for the systems management of child care and other early years services, operating under the 47 service managers --Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs).

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The opinions and interpretations in this report are those of the research team and do not necessarily reflect those of the sponsors.



## The Policy Context

September 2010 marked a significant milestone for education in Ontario: full-day kindergarten (FDK) became a universally available program for all 4- and 5- year-olds, moving early childhood education firmly into the realm of public education. The rollout took place over five years, with 260,000 children enrolled by September 2014. FDK was the first in a series of initiatives that brought all early years' services, including child care, family support and early intervention programs, under the oversight of the Ministry of Education. Unique to the Ontario model of FDK is the "seamless day," an extension of the school day to accommodate child care needs, and the educator team, where teachers and early childhood educators share responsibility for the planning and delivery of the program.

FDK was the first major addition to publicly-funded education since school boards began providing part-time junior kindergarten for 4-year-olds in the middle of the twentieth century (Cantalini-Williams & Telfer, 2010). The program's design was shaped by *Toronto First Duty*, a project piloted in five Toronto schools to demonstrate the integration of early years' services with education (Corter, Janmohamed & Pelletier 2012). It was further developed in a report by the premier's special advisor, *With Our Best Future in Mind, Implementing Early Learning in Ontario* (Pascal, 2009). The report cited the benefits of early intervention and recommended an integrated early years' system in Ontario through the amalgamation of education, family support and child care under an early learning division of the education ministry.

It provided a blueprint for service delivery centred on a seamless day. School boards would be responsible for a full-day, play-based learning program for 4- and 5- year-olds. Parents could purchase additional hours outside the core school day, a seamless extension delivered by the early childhood educators in the child's classroom. School boards would also be responsible for fee-based before- and after-school and holiday programming for children to age 12. Regional governments were tasked with the planning and development of a network of child and family centres to meet the care and support needs of children younger than 4 years old.

Plans were drawn up and parents were invited to begin the registration process. However, school boards were largely reluctant to take on responsibility for out-of-school care, and a campaign organized by daycare operators concerned about a loss of revenue resulted in a legislative amendment: school boards would retain responsibility for ensuring child care was available for kindergarten-aged children with the option of including children in older grades.

They were however given the alternative of contracting with community providers to deliver the extended-day program. The majority of school boards leaped to the “third party” option. A few tried direct delivery in selected schools, but most abandoned it. Among English language boards, only the separate and public school boards in the Waterloo and Ottawa continued to expand their own extended-day programs. Nevertheless, the legislation changed the relationship between school boards and child care. No longer was child care a tenant in the school; it was now a partner under contract to provide a mandated service.

## Methodology

The researchers were interested in understanding the impact of FDK and extended-day programs (EDP) operated by school boards and community agencies on educators, parents and administrators. The study used a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative tools for data collection. The analysis was extended through the use of surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and document analysis. The study received ethics approval from the University of Toronto and four Ontario school boards and was carried out between September 2013 and December 2014. These sites were chosen as case studies because each offers a different system of extended-day delivery. The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) and the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) host a combination of school- and community-operated EDP. The Halton District School Board (HDSB) and Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) contract out their EDP to community providers.

This study was not designed to allow a conclusive comparison between school-based and third party-operated extended-day programming, given the opportunistic nature of the sampling and its non-representativeness. The findings can be used descriptively, however, to understand the benefits and challenges facing school boards, educators and parents as FDK and EDP are implemented.

Participants included parents, educators, school and regional children’s services leaders and community partners. The researchers partnered with the WRDSB and the Children’s Services Division of the Region of Waterloo to develop a case study of that region’s school-based programs, community planning initiatives and systems created to ensure families experience fewer access hurdles.

All four school boards supported the recruitment of kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators to the study by circulating an information flyer inviting them to complete an online survey. Follow-up interviews and focus groups were conducted in Waterloo and Ottawa.

School administrators and community leaders received email correspondence requesting interviews. Individual and group interviews were held in all three communities and with administrators from all four school boards. Waterloo was the only region where parents were contacted for the study. Parent participants were recruited via email through the region's children's services division, through the school board's email system or by their child's educators. An information letter detailing the study was provided to parents prior to obtaining their consent. Once consent was obtained, parents were either provided with a paper-and-pencil option of the survey or were sent a link to the online survey via email. Parents who completed the survey were invited to participate in a focus group to further explore issues addressed in the survey. This helped build a deeper case study of the region.



To complement the study, a video was created to illustrate the experiences of parents, educators and administrators. Filming took place in Ottawa and Waterloo. Parents also consented to their children being filmed in selected kindergarten classrooms in Waterloo public schools. Signed consents for filming and broadcast were obtained.

### Sample Size

The study recruited a total of 386 parents with a child in kindergarten in the Waterloo region. The first cohort involved 133 parents solicited through the WRDSB, and a further 253 participated out of 1,482 contacted via email from the region's child care subsidy list. Of those answering the survey, 14 took part in focus groups. Among the 2,640 FDK educators employed

by the four boards, 530 teachers and early childhood educators completed the educator survey, representing a 20 percent response rate. Follow-up interviews and focus groups held in Waterloo and Ottawa involved 78 educators. A total of 46 school board and regional administrators and community child care providers were interviewed in Waterloo, Halton and Ottawa.

## Key Findings

The *Schools at the Centre* study explored the impact of FDK and EDP operated by school boards and community agencies on administrators, educators and parents, and investigated how different boards responded to FDK and the requirement to provide EDP in their community.

Through surveys and focus groups, parents in the Waterloo region were asked how FDK and EDP impact their family and their child's life and its influence on their employment decisions. Kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators' perceptions of their professional status were surveyed across all four boards. Early childhood educators were also asked about changes to compensation and benefits as a result of public sector employment. School administrators and community leaders shared ideas on factors that contribute to holistic learning and family support during the implementation of the program.

Lessons from this study inform public policy development to support a more effective and seamless approach to early learning, build stronger professional partnerships and better enable parents to support their children's early learning.



### Parents

- 85 percent of parents agreed that FDK/EDP help prepare their child socially and academically for school
- Parents were equally divided as to whether their involvement with their child's learning increased or decreased as a result of FDK

- 75 percent of parents receiving child care subsidies reported that FDK/EDP facilitates their ability to work
- Parents receiving subsidies reported that FDK/EDP relieved family stress

### Educators

- 85 percent of ECEs reported seeing an increase in benefits
- Most ECEs saw their wages either increase or remain the same, but a significant percentage in Waterloo and Ottawa (20–25 percent) took a wage decrease to work for a school board
- 25 percent of ECEs reported having an undergraduate or graduate degree in addition to their ECE diploma
- Teachers and ECEs do not always share the same views of their roles.
- More teachers and ECEs believe that teachers are responsible for literacy related activities, while both are more likely to agree that numeracy learning is more equally shared
- Both educators indicated that they share responsibility for children with special needs
- Most ECEs reported that having a union improves their professional status
- Teachers and ECEs stated that limited access to joint planning time and joint professional development contributes to weak professional partnerships
- Both sets of educators are committed to improving access to planning, which they view as central to a comprehensive learning program

### Administrators

- Administrators reported improved outcomes for children as a result of FDK
- Additional systems were developed to support the FDK/EDP educator partnerships
- Administrators reported fewer implementation challenges as lessons were learned from each phase of the rollout
- Professional development opportunities for ECEs are dependent on administrator flexibility and school budgets
- The sharing of space and resources between the school day and after-school programming is more challenging when schools do not directly operate the EDP

- Lack of ECE supply staff is problematic across boards
- More supports are required for children with special needs

## The Regions in the Study

	Halton Catholic	Halton District	Ottawa Carleton	Waterloo Region
# Schools with FDK	45	74	100	87
# Schools with EDP	45	71	93	80
# School board-operated EDP	0	0	61 (JK–Gr.6) Plus 4 licensed preschool programs	64 (JK–Gr. 2)
# Community-operated EDP	45	71	32	16 (JK–Gr. 2) 53 Youth Development Programs (Gr. 3–6)
Full-day rate for EDP	\$22.90–25.50	\$22.90–25.50	\$20.00 (OCDSB) \$19.53–37.50 (Community)	\$24.50
PD day/March break rates	\$31.00–40.00	\$31.00–42.70	\$30.00	\$24.50

With a population of 550,000, Waterloo Region has a fast-growing immigrant population. Through its community planning process, the region is developing a strategic plan to avoid gaps and duplication in child and family services<sup>1</sup>. It is committed to offering EDP in every school community and guaranteeing the program for every family that requests it.

Halton Region is one of the fastest growing in Canada with a population of 460,000. There is significant diversity of visible minorities, both foreign and Canadian-born, and about 10

<sup>1</sup> Background information on each region gathered from official websites at <http://ottawa.ca/en>, <http://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/index.asp> and <http://www.halton.ca/>

percent of the population identifies as lesbian, and gay. Ten percent of the population lives in poverty. Higher rates of poverty are found in racialized communities and among families with children. As FDK rolled out, the Halton Catholic District School Board developed a plan for extended day, working with one community provider to deliver the program. The Halton Catholic and Halton Public Boards both rolled out the extended day program at all year one sites where there was demand. Both boards worked collaboratively with region and the early years table to plan for the community. After the first year, operations were transferred from the school boards to 3<sup>rd</sup> party providers because the funding model set out by the Ministry proved to be cost prohibitive. That model has subsequently changed making it more realistic for viability. Fees and hours of operation vary with the provider. HDSB has a “no wait list” policy for EDP, but recognizes that operators are sometimes limited by the shortage of ECE staff. Halton region’s Edu-Care table is a coordination effort that brings the Region, school board partners and 3<sup>rd</sup> party providers together to work collaboratively to plan for the community needs.



The City of Ottawa is home to over 830,000 residents, with 15 percent living in poverty. The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board committed to providing EDPs in every school with full-day kindergarten. To address service inequity in low-income communities, it lowered the enrolment threshold for an EDP from 20 children to 3.

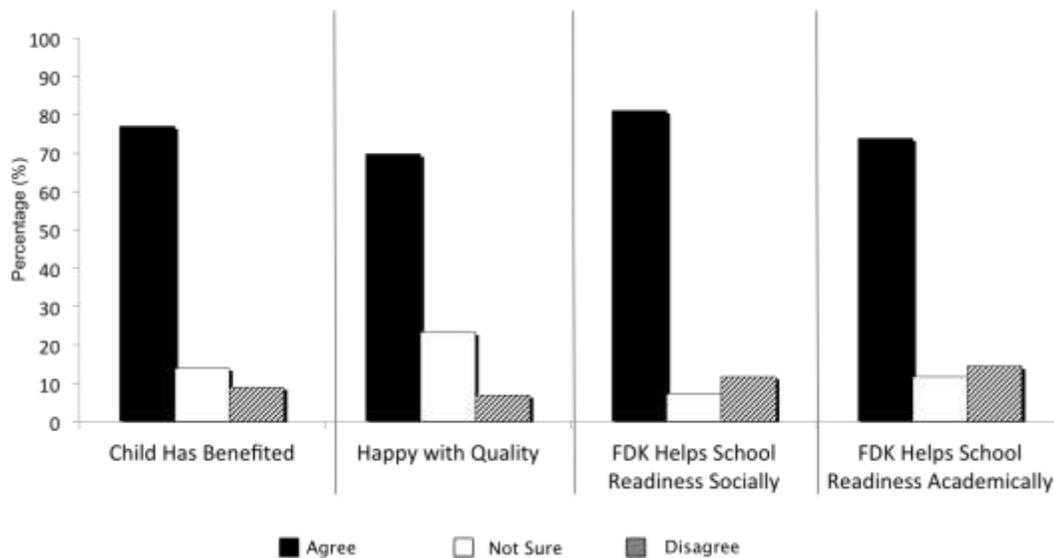
### **Schools at the Centre: Implications for Parents**

Through surveys and focus groups, parents in Waterloo Region were asked how FDK and EDP impact their child, their family life and their employment. Researchers explored whether parents found it easier to access child care and whether FDK/EDP reduced their daily stress level. Parents were also asked to report on the effects of FDK/EDP on their children’s academic, social and emotional development.

## Survey Results

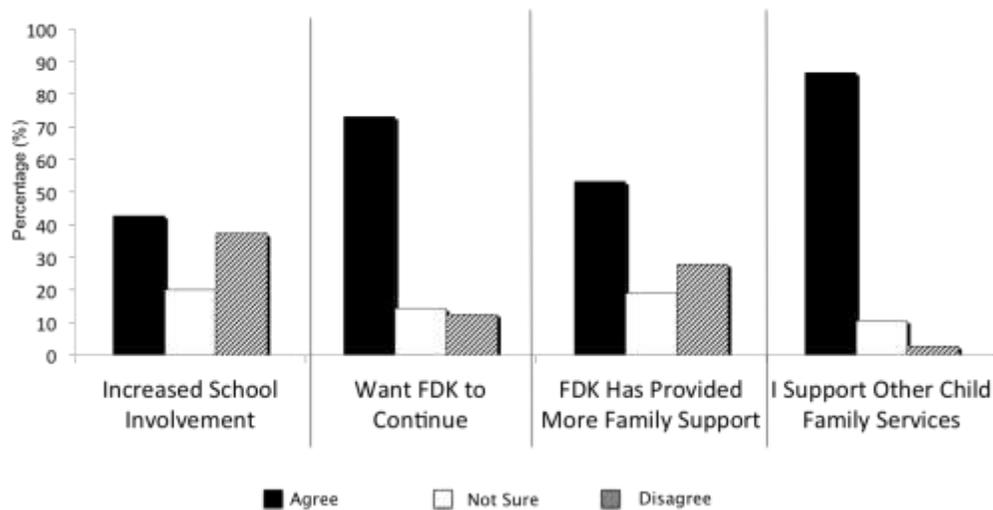
Two sets of parents took part in the study. A total of 133 parents contacted through the WRDSB in February 2014 were in the first cohort. Participants were largely mothers, married, Canadian born, English speaking and employed full-time. A second group was recruited through the region's child care subsidy list.

Over 70 percent of respondents in the first cohort agreed their child benefits from FDK/EDP and are happy with the overall quality of the programming. In addition, approximately 85 percent agreed/strongly agreed that FDK/EDP has helped their child prepare academically and socially for school (see [Figure 1](#)).



**Figure 1. Percentage of parents satisfied with impact of FDK on their children. The majority of respondents feel their child has benefited from FDK, are happy with the program quality, and believe FDK helps prepare their child socially and academically for school.**

As shown in [Figure 2](#), 75 percent of parents want FDK/EDP to continue, with almost 90 percent supporting other child/family services delivered through the school. Parents were split in their responses when asked if their involvement with the school has increased because of FDK/EDP. Although almost 50 percent said their involvement has increased, an almost equal number said it has decreased. This issue was further examined during the focus groups. Parents were also split on whether FDK provides increased family support, an issue we explore in further detail below.



**Figure 2. Percentage of parents satisfied with impact of FDK on family.** Parents were divided on whether their involvement in their child’s learning has increased or decreased as a result of FDK. The majority of parents want FDK to continue, while 44 percent feel it has increased support for their family. A large majority of parents support other programs in the school.

Because low-income families are often under-sampled in surveys of this type, additional outreach took place via Waterloo Region’s child care subsidy program. In April 2014, the Children’s Services Division contacted parents with an email address who were receiving subsidies. A total of 1,482 parents were made aware of the survey and 253 were completed, resulting in a response rate of 17 percent. These participants were also largely mothers, married, Canadian born, English speaking and employed full-time—a comparable demographic to the first cohort. Similar to parents contacted through the school board, parents receiving a child care subsidy were satisfied with the quality of programming and felt their child benefits from FDK/EDP. These parents also indicated their child was more prepared for school academically and socially. This group was asked additional questions about child care costs and the influence of costs on their work options. Despite subsidies, the cost of child care remains a source of financial stress for this group of families ([Figure 3](#)). Over 35 percent reported that child care costs present a barrier to employment. A quarter reported that FDK allowed them to return to work earlier than anticipated.

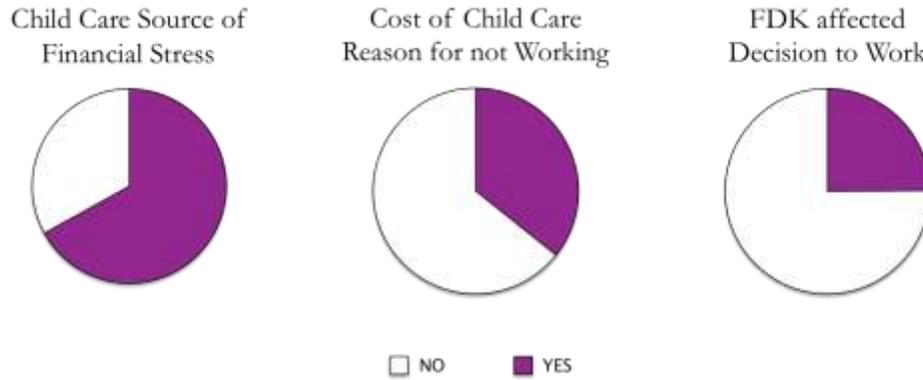


Figure 3. Percentage of parents finding child care costs a source of financial stress and a reason for not working. A quarter report FDK/EDP supported their decision to work.

This group of parents was more likely to report that FDK/EDP is a source of support to their families [Figure 4](#). Parents with limited time and resources may be less aware or have less access to services in the broader community and look to the school as their prime resource. This is consistent with findings in other studies, such as *Toronto First Duty* (Corter, Janmohamed & Pelletier, 2012).

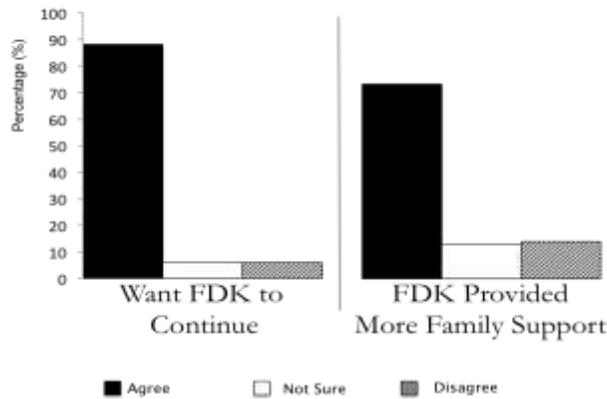


Figure 4. Parents receiving child care subsidies are more positive about FDK/EDP. Parents want FDK to continue and consider it a support to their family.

## Focus Group Results

Parents who completed the survey were asked if they wanted to participate in a follow-up focus group or interview. Twenty-eight respondents provided a name and contact information. Two sessions were held and 14 individuals took part. Participants indicated satisfaction with FDK/EDP and felt their children are happy in the program. They value play-based learning and observe a link between play and what their children learn.

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It's a great experience for my son—special ECE knowledge, and it's a fantastic play-based program—awesome job.

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When asked if FDK/EDP affected their decision to return to work or study, parents said they returned to work earlier than anticipated because of the program.

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Oh yes! 100 percent—our careers are important to us—although costs are transferred to the public system, it enables us to work and contribute back to the tax base.

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Parents were pleased with the predictability of FDK/EDP as opposed to the hassles inherent in part-time or every-other-day kindergarten. Some noted that FDK/EDP reduced the marital stressors that stem from finding and paying for child care, transferring children from school to caregiver and juggling drop-off and pick-up times. Overall, parents felt that FDK/EDP contributes to their days being more predictable and less stressful.

The larger number of children in FDK/EDP classes compared to the adult/child ratios in licensed child care was seen as a problem: “School ratios are high, placing a lot of stress on teachers. I’m not sure they can respond to kids’ individual needs,” one parent noted. Large class sizes also lead to parent anxieties about the physical capacity of FDK classrooms: “Children need more space in class. Younger kids need more gross motor movement.” Concerns were raised about rushed lunches, the quality of the food and lack of food choices during snack time.

Parents of younger children in kindergarten (i.e., December-born babies) cited the length of the school day as a difficulty. Some feel kindergarten classes are too structured, with not enough time for play. Lastly, some parents felt less involved in their child's learning. Those who were accustomed to walking their child into the child care room, talking with staff and sharing in their child's activities felt school policy and culture excludes them from their child's school life.

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I feel like a stranger in my son's life in school. Childcare enabled a communication process that was more active.

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Other parents reported being more engaged in their child's classroom and more involved in school. These parents stated that the teachers and administrators encourage them to join the school council, ensuring their involvement early in their child's school life and building on the principle of parent engagement.

Overall, FDK and EDP is valued by parents, with a caveat that certain aspects of the program could be further examined and improved upon.

## Children with Special Needs

The lack of resources for children with special needs emerged as a theme throughout the study. Principals, educators and parents alike expressed concern. Children requiring the support of an educational assistant (EA) are often not afforded that support across the EDP portion of the day.

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We have many special needs students for whom the full day is too much – too large a group, too much stimulation, too little one-to-one support for their learning and growth. All of those things are difficult in a class of 28.

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The increased stimulation in the EDP portion of the day was cited by some as too stressful for children. Children are sometimes sent home early due to exhaustion or classroom disruptions, and parents' work is then interrupted. Administrators are addressing these challenges by working with educator teams to better prepare classrooms for children with special needs. One senior administrator has developed a plan to use EAs more effectively: "I have the capacity to ensure the child still has access to their EA as they transition into the after school program. The EA can't be there the entire time, but can at least help the child settle in and then the ECEs in the after school program take over."

As young children transition from licensed child care into school programs, a plan of action that involves the child's educators, the administrators and the family would create a comprehensive approach, ensuring a more seamless transition.

### **Collaboration in Action: Waterloo's Seamless Early Years System**

Waterloo's FDK/EDP model results from a partnership between the region's children's services division and the public and Catholic school boards. The partners recognize that FDK and the potential for school boards to operate their own before- and after-school programs created an opportunity to rethink the delivery of early years' programs.

FDK, coupled with the decision of both school boards to directly operate their own after-school programs, created uncertainty for community child care providers. The Waterloo case study provides valuable lessons of the critical importance of effective communication, adequate funding and resources and strategic planning when reengineering programs to provide more effective services to meet community needs.

The lead partners established a task force to develop a common action plan. Community providers were supported to refocus services to younger children and to develop business plans to support their financial viability. The local college became an important partner and model in the transformation, both as a professional training institution for ECEs and youth workers and as the operator of a number of licensed child care programs. Conestoga College worked closely with both school boards and the region to convert space for younger children and to develop specialized recreational programs in schools for older children, ages 9–12 years.

Most of the region's schools now offer extended-day programs for children in junior kindergarten to Grade 2 and youth development programs for children in Grades 3 to 6. Where

possible, kindergarten child care rooms have been repurposed for toddlers and preschoolers. The region established a centralized fee collection system and a centralized program registry to support parents' access to service.

The taskforce has since evolved into an Early Years Steering Committee. The Waterloo Region established a Children's Planning Table to include "service providers working with children pre-birth to 12 years of age and families working collectively to plan for and create a system of more effective and coordinated services." Meetings are attended by a broad range of community organizations and often have more than 100 participants. Although it may seem challenging to plan services at this level, it provides a venue to discuss program quality and service gaps and duplication. It also brings to the forefront issues of poverty, school readiness and child health and well-being.

## Schools at the Centre: Implications for Educators

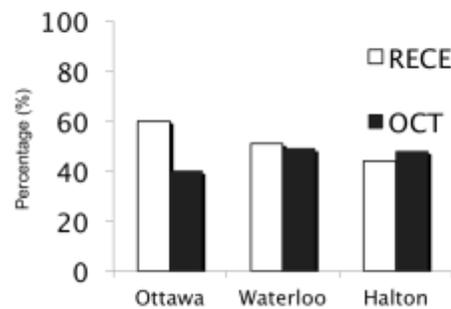
The study examined the factors related to the development of the educator team and professional early learning practices in FDK/EDP across the four participating school boards. Unique to full-day kindergarten in Ontario is the educator team. The *Education Act* states kindergarten teachers and ECEs have a "duty to cooperate" in planning and delivering the play-based curriculum. ECEs and kindergarten teachers were asked how they view their new partnership and their respective roles in the classroom. ECE perceptions of their professional status were explored, along with changes to compensation and benefits resulting from public sector employment.

The professionalism of ECEs was enhanced by the *Early Childhood Educator Act (2007)*, which requires ECEs to maintain good standing with the College of Early Childhood Educators as a condition of practice. ECEs registered with the College hold the professional qualification of Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE). Prior to FDK, school boards employed few ECEs, usually in support positions as classroom educational assistants or in outreach programs. Most found employment in the licensed child care sector, in family resource programs, in support services for children with special needs and in home child care organizations. Educators share parent concerns about the high numbers of children in FDK compare to licensed child care. However, many felt the team of two trained educators strengthens the quality of children's early learning experiences.

FDK/EDP has created over 10,000 RECE positions in school boards. Many of the RECEs hired by school boards were seasoned professionals with prior supervisory experience in child care centres. Their exit has left the sector compromised for trained staff, warranting a discussion on how to create RECE positions in the community sector offering comparable wages, benefits and job security.

### Survey Results

Kindergarten teachers and RECEs were invited to participate in the study through surveys and focus groups. Of 2,640 FDK educators employed by the four school boards, 530 participated in the study, representing a response rate of approximately 20 percent ([Figure 5](#)). Teachers and ECEs responded in approximately equal numbers across the four boards.



**Figure 5. Response rate of educators by profession and by school board - Halton District School Boards combined and Halton Catholic School Board combined.**

ECEs must successfully complete a two-year diploma and be registered with the College of ECE as a condition to practice as an RECE in Ontario. Kindergarten teachers require a four-year undergraduate degree, along with a teaching certificate and membership with the Ontario College of Teachers. Among the respondents, 25 percent of the RECEs working in FDK and EDP have an undergraduate or graduate degree in addition to their ECE diploma ([Figure 6](#)). RECEs who continue their studies beyond the diploma program often specialize in child development or child studies, reinforcing their learning in the developmental needs of young children.

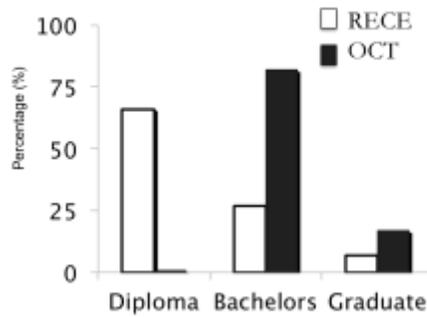


Figure 6. Educational attainment of ECEs and teachers working in FDK/EDP. Over 25 percent of RECEs have a Bachelors and/or a graduate degree.

RECEs were asked whether their wages or benefits have changed as a result of working in FDK/EDP. The majority, 85 percent, saw an increase in benefits. Wages increased for almost all RECEs working for the two Halton school boards, while RECEs in Ottawa and Waterloo reported their wages largely stayed the same, although a significant minority saw a wage decrease (Figure 7).

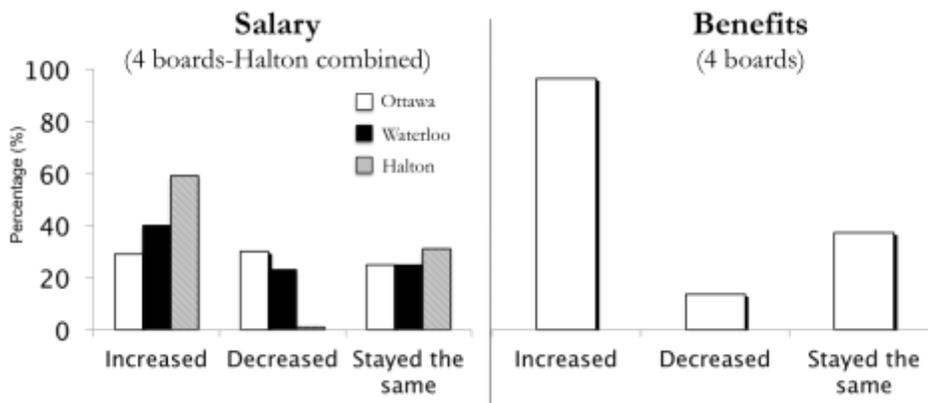


Figure 7. Changes to RECE wages across four school boards. Halton District School Board and Halton Catholic School Board combined. Changes to benefits across four school boards combined.

RECEs working for school boards qualify for the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS), while similar benefits are rarely available in the community sector. Wage differentials in Halton can be attributed to low wages in private child care. Child care wages in Waterloo and Ottawa are relatively higher, and many RECEs held longstanding jobs and even supervisory positions before coming to work for the school boards (Figure 8). In addition,

RECEs working for school boards may be working fewer hours and many do not have year-round employment as they did in child care.

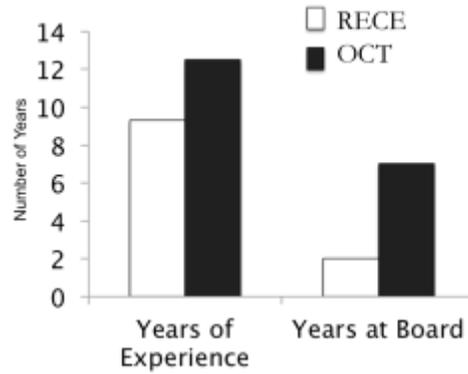


Figure 8. Years of professional experiences for RECEs and teachers. Number of years working for their current school board.

Unionization rates in the community child care sector are low. ECE respondents reported that having a union as a school board employee improved their professional status. The survey included a number of questions related to educators’ perceptions about their roles and responsibilities in a number of areas. OCTs and ECEs do not agree on their literacy roles. Results indicate that teachers perceived they hold more responsibility for literacy related activities (Figure 9A), while both educators agree numeracy learning is more equally shared (Figure 9B).

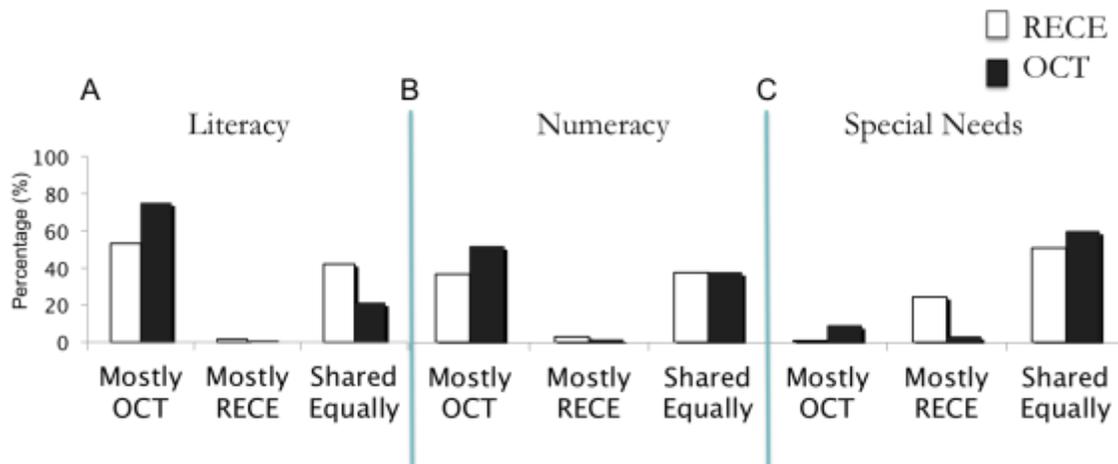


Figure 9. RECE/Teacher perceived responsibility for literacy (A), numeracy (B), and special needs (C).

Respondents reported that teachers and RECEs share responsibility for children with special needs (Figure 9C). However, views differ in terms of who is more responsible for hygiene (Figure 10).

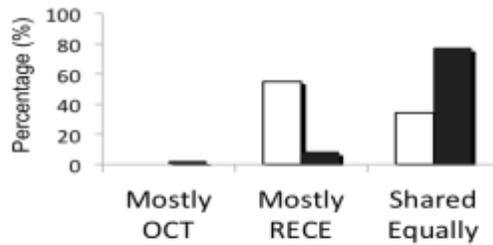


Figure 10. RECE/Teacher perceived responsibility for hygiene.

Respondents agreed that the professional status of RECEs has largely increased or stayed the same as a result of their participation in FDK/EDP (Figure 11).

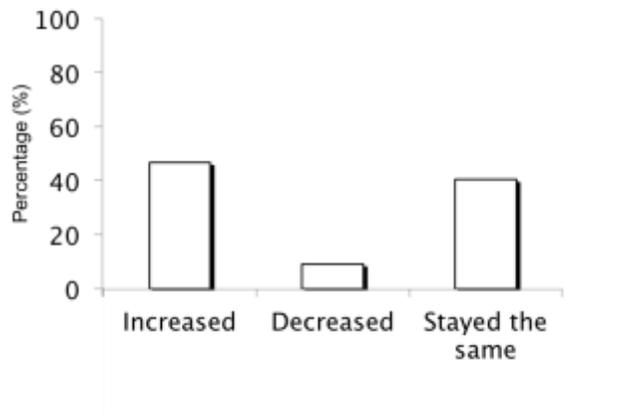


Figure 11. ECE view of professional status as a result of working in FDK.

### Comparison of Union Collective Agreements for RECEs

RECEs working for school boards in this study belong to the following unions: the Canadian Union Public Employees (CUPE), the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) or the Ontario Secondary Schools Teacher Federation (OSSTF). RECEs view union membership positively and feel that belonging to a union has enhanced their professional status. A previous analysis of ECE wages and benefits across Ontario provides interesting differences (Gananathan, 2015).

Similarly, this study looked at three collective agreements: ETFO's covering RECEs working for the WRDSB, the OSSTF agreement with the OCDSB and a CUPE agreement with a large multi-service agency contracted to provide out-of-school care for the OCDSB ([Table 2](#)). The ETFO contract recognizes the unique role of the Designated ECE in FDK and EDP and includes specific contract language covering preparation time, making numerous references referring to ECEs as professionals. The OSSTF and CUPE contracts are not specific to ECEs and encompass a broad range of other job categories, and as such are not specifically tailored to FDK/EDP program staff.

Contract Provision	ETFO	OSSTF	Third Party CUPE
Scope of agreement	Covers DECEs and occasional DECEs in FDK/EDP	Covers all professional support staff, special memorandum of understanding for DECEs in FDK/EDP	Covers all staff
Salary	Starting at \$20.09/hr, rising to \$26.27/hr after 4 years Supply staff = \$18.54/hr	Starting salary of \$19.48/hr No agreement on the salary schedule	Early Years Centre Educator: 3 steps starting at \$24.68/hr and rising to \$26/hr
Hours	7 hours per day/35 hours per week	6.25–6.5 hours per day for core program Extended program to be determined	7 hour day/35 hour week
Preparation Time	Within the core hours of work for DECEs	n/a	1.5 hours weekly
PA days	6 days/school year	Unpaid – Union may offer on-site training	n/a
Pension Plan	Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS) or Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) (for ECEs with teaching credentials)	OMERS or Ontario Teachers Insurance Plan (OTIP) if 10 or more month employees	6% of annual salary paid into RRSP
Vacation	Based on years of service Ranges from 4% after 2 years to 10% after 16 years	15 working days	1 year or more = 20 days to 30 days after 18 years
Benefit Plan	Dental (50%), health/life/ADD \$25,000 = 95% paid by employer Long Term Disability (LTD) 100% paid by ECE	Health, dental, long term disability, life insurance up to \$45,000	Employer pays life insurance: 50% for 1.5 × salary life; 5 × salary 100% for LTD @ 60% of salary 75% health premiums 6% pension 50% dental premiums
Number of times ECE is mentioned in the agreement	348 times	16 times in letter of agreement	None

Despite these differences, the benefits, pension and hours for all ECEs are similar. The ETFO and CUPE agreements offer salary and vacation grids based on experience/seniority, and provide for preparation time, while the OSSTF agreement does not. The OSSTF starting salary reflects the provincially suggested minimum of \$19.48/hr., while the other agreements have a higher starting salary and provide for increments based on years of service.

It is important to note that the CUPE agreement is with a large, long-established non-profit agency. As a result, wages and working conditions are more generous than what would normally be found in the licensed child care sector.

Despite ongoing challenges associated with uneven access to professional learning, public sector employment has opened new opportunities for RECEs in FDK/EDP.

### Interview and Focus Group Results

ECEs have a history of working collaboratively with other staff, while teachers are used to working alone and being “in charge” of their classroom. This creates differences in culture and work style that need to be addressed by the educator team. Although educators are “adjusting to working within a partnership model,” a number of participants describe the working relationship as an “arranged marriage with no time to date in advance.”

A challenge referenced by almost all ECEs was the lack of organized and paid professional development. This, along with limited access to joint planning time, was seen as a key contributor to weak professional partnerships in the classrooms. An ECE participant stated:

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How am I supposed to build my professional capacity if I can never attend the school’s professional development events? There is an expectation by the principal that we can plan the curriculum jointly, but I don’t get paid planning time and the teacher gets 240 minutes every week. I’m not saying I need 240 minutes, but we need some planning time to work together.

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Teachers also recognized the unevenness of access to planning time and professional development activities, acknowledging the value of joint planning in meeting the learning goals of the children. As one teacher stated: “I have learned so much from my ECE partner about how to relate to children based on their development and how to create an environment that is play-based but also meets learning goals. We could really benefit if we had more time together to plan rather than grabbing a few minutes here and there.” The challenge of establishing a joint professional learning framework was a common concern of administrators as well. This issue has emerged as the number one challenge in building a partnership of learning and professional practice.

## Schools at the Centre: Implications for School Administrators and Community Leaders

Full-day kindergarten has added a layer of complexity to the role of the school administrator. The addition of a new class of employees, a team teaching approach in FDK/EDP, a new curriculum framework and a new relationship with extended-day programs resulted in major changes for schools. Most administrators say the benefits outweigh the extra work, as they see the positive outcomes for children and as the bumps inherent in any start-up are

addressed. One administrator stated: “It was a complex time to say the least, but I am now more comfortable dealing with operational issues.”

A new challenge is the sharing of space and resources by staff in the FDK and EDP parts of the day. Issues become more complex when an external operator provides the extended-day child care. One principal documented a number of safety concerns, reaching a point where the program received a provisional license. Concerns were most apparent



in communities where external operators offer significantly lower salaries, hire staff for split shifts and operate without the legislature numbers of qualified staff. As a principal stated: “If the program was operated by the school board, I have the responsibility to ensure the safety and the quality of the program. I can have a direct discussion with the staff rather than through a centre supervisor.” Some informants noted that school administrators and community providers do not always share the same goals, resulting in children and families receiving inconsistent messaging.

The delivery of EDP by large multi-service providers seemed to have fewer challenges than delivery by smaller operators. Larger agencies have more capacity to develop and support communication policies. They are also able to offer professional training and additional program resources. Larger multi-service agencies were better able to reengineer their programs in response to FDK and the potential loss of service revenue for kindergarten-aged children.

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We were concerned about the financial viability of our programs if we were just doing the before- and after-school care but were pleasantly surprised to find that a 100 child threshold makes it viable to operate the EDP.

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A number of agency leaders planned in advance, anticipating the impact of FDK on their business models. In one commuter community, the agency was able to meet parent needs, provide work hours for staff and generate additional revenue by operating outside traditional hours: “We often close as late as 7:30 pm to ensure parents are able to pick up their children,” said one director.

At the service management level, partners had to overcome the overlaps and gaps in perceived responsibilities between children services managers and school boards. They also alluded to “the arranged marriage”:

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The Ministry of Education rolled this out as they would have with any other education program. It was very directive, with the boards largely in charge. That is not how things work on the childcare side.

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The school boards and ourselves already had a history of working together, so it was quite easy to pull our first steering committee together based on those existing relationships and consider the impact on families across the region.

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While school boards were focused on the changes FDK/EDP would mean for them, as the early years' system managers, regional managers considered the impact on the early childhood sector as a whole. Those with established working relationships were better able to navigate through the early part of implementation. As one leader stated:

Regional children's service managers played an active role in supporting the school board's understanding of extended-day programs and the knowledge and role that ECEs can play in the school environment. As the initial roll out of FDK/EDP ends, school board, regional and community partners are looking to the next phase, including revising existing policies and procedures to ensure transparency, improve quality and support stronger educator partnerships in and outside of schools.

Administrators agree that changes in the new *Child Care and Early Years Act*, which provides regional children's services managers with the authority to plan and manage early years' services with the cooperation of school boards and community service providers, should allow for a more rationalized and accessible service base moving forward.

## Future Considerations

Administrators and educators have already developed solutions to several of the challenges that arose during the completion of FDK/EDP. Concerns remain. Many can be addressed through dialogue and practice. Others require structural changes. Some require money. The following suggestions are not intended to be exhaustive but to share some examples and ideas observed over the course of the study.

### Parents:

Fortunately many of the concerns parents raised can be readily addressed by allowing FDK/EDP programs to set their own schedules. Parents want more access to their child's educators to maintain regular dialogue. This can be facilitated by arranging outdoor play during traditional drop off and pick up times. More time in the playground not only addresses parent concerns about the need for more gross motor activities, it provides a relaxed environment for parents to engage with their child, and with their child's educators. A flexible FDK schedule also permits educators to plan lunch and snack time in response to the children's needs rather than being programmed by an arbitrary bell. Study participants reported how children accessed their own lunches and snacks. Educators ate their meal with the children, capitalizing on the learning opportunities eating together provide.

Schools can become more parent-friendly by removing arbitrary barriers to access. A stroller friendly area (preferably with a bench) to wait inside the building on frigid days would be welcomed. The removal of signs (actual and virtual) excluding parents from areas in the school – particularly when this bars access to their own children – is required. Opening locked doors between the child care and school, so parents don't need to walk around the outside of the school to drop off children at their respective programs. These cost-free remedies can go a long way in building trust between home and school.

### Educators:

A well functioning educator team is essential to the daily experiences of children. Educator unhappiness and stress drips down on children affecting their learning and development. It is difficult to build educator teams without joint planning time. During these dedicated periods educator relationships are built and roles negotiated as the program benefits

from the assets both educators bring. Dedicated planning time requires additional resources. The province has a role to play, but so do administrators who set internal budgets and timetables. Unions have an opportunity to revisit this issue during collective bargaining. Planning time is not a universal problem for ECEs. Some ECE bargaining units traded off wages for planning time while others focused on wages and benefits to the exclusion of working conditions. The success of unions in capping class sizes in the older grades is waiting to be replicated in kindergarten.

The same issues and remedies can be found around shared professional development. Educators stressed the importance of principals participating in early years PD. Administrators with an understanding of how young children learn are better able to support the FDK/EDP partnership and are more likely to dedicate discretionary resources to FDK.

Post secondary training institutions can be major players, pre- and in-service, by ensuring all teacher graduates have a grounding in early childhood development, by preparing ECEs to work in kindergarten settings and by developing and delivering common professional development opportunities for teachers, and for ECEs working in both the public and community sector.

School boards and educator unions have the necessary infrastructure to develop strategies to strengthen FDK learning environments. More problematic are the working conditions and status of ECEs outside school boards. Community programs had few resources to adjust to the changes FDK ushered in. Too much of the sector has witnessed the deterioration of working conditions along with compensation rates. Researchers heard of minimal staffing, record numbers of positions being filled by unqualified staff, split shifts and contract work. Staff in community-operated EDP report feeling alienated in the school environment, with no 'home' for their program in the shared space where they operate. The province has responded with wage subsidies for staff working in community programs. While a generous gesture, more money alone will not bridge the gulf between public and private employment. Structural changes are required.

## Administrators

Small providers will continue to be disadvantaged in the new early years world. Large multi-service agencies have weathered the transition, largely maintaining wage levels and creating new full time positions. Service consolidation is an important avenue to stabilizing services. Another route is to expand board-operated ECP. School boards in Waterloo and Ottawa have demonstrated their ability to expand access, while providing decent work for ECEs and offering comparable or lower fees to parents. No parent spends time on a wait list when schools directly offer EDP. The quality of out of school programming also matters. Children can spend as much time in EDPs over the course of the year as they do in school. Good quality after school programming can extend and reinforce learning; poor quality undermines the gains made during the school day.

The new early years act now requires school boards to ensure EDP is available for children to Grade 6. This expanded role, together with new responsibilities for school boards and early years agencies to cooperate with regional children's service managers in early years planning, opens innumerable opportunities. With the developmental phase of FDK complete, administrators can turn their attention to building systems to raise the bar on program practice, simplifying access and begin to address neighbourhood, age and other service inequities.

Some barriers, such the inclusion of children with special needs, require immediate new resources. Other issues are on the agenda of the ministry's Early Years Policy Framework or may be addressed through regulatory changes attached to the new child care act. Still there remains room to identify and address service overlap and gaps and to institute common quality and accountability mechanisms at the local level.

Universal kindergarten is a truly remarkable accomplishment. Few innovations will make as much difference for children's outcomes. Parents, educators and administrators reflect this in their enthusiasm. Any criticisms come from a desire to create the best possible environments for young learners.

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