

One School Board Response to “The Munchkin Invasion: Does Full-Day Kindergarten deliver? Maclean’s Magazine, May 27, 2013

Does Full Day Kindergarten deliver? Early indicators point to an enthusiastic “Yes!”

The experience of the Waterloo Region District School Board, a district that has embraced both Full Day Kindergarten (FDK), and the vision of extended Before and After school programs articulated in Charles Pascal’s, With our Best Future in Mind, suggests that there are immediate and sustained gains for children.

Our Full Day Kindergarten classrooms showed a 16% increase in reading scores compared to pre-FDK results in a sample of 1600 students. After two years, this translated into approximately 260 more students reading to our grade 1 targets by the end of Kindergarten. Furthermore, our FDK student reading results are surpassing our non-FDK student results, despite the fact that this sample group reflects a greater number of schools that serve our highest poverty areas and are historically lower achieving. While the article’s author questions whether these gains will last, we are finding the gains have, in fact, lasted through grade 1. And while it is early in the study of cohort data over time, this represents some compelling early evidence from the field.

Full Day Kindergarten and extended day programs have been bold, challenging programs to implement on very short timelines for school boards and communities - there is no question around this. However, the innovative staffing model and high quality curriculum in FDK represent best practice in the field and early results point to this as a concrete way to truly close the achievement gap for children.

It is somewhat disappointing that Maclean’s pokes a misguided finger at a program that substantially invests in young children. While the author notes the cost of Full Day Kindergarten, he fails to note the historic lack of spending on Early Learning and Child Care across our country. Maclean’s readers may be unaware that Canada is tied for last place in countries achieving quality Early Years benchmarks according to UNICEF. Spending on young children as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) pales in comparison to almost every other developed nation in the world despite a definitive body of educational, economic and brain-

based research that suggest a dollar spent on young children will pay a return of more than \$2 down the road. Few other investments yield this rate of return.

There is no debate about the evidence that suggests that “what happens at home with a child is just as, if not more, important than extra time in school.” The evidence supports that the most important role in the early learning and long term outcomes of children is the role of parents. Yet, it is discouraging to see this continue to be discussed as a choice. Our children need both - excellence in parenting and opportunities to access high quality early learning in order to reach their potential and achieve success.

At the outset of the article, the author speaks to how middle class families struggle to buy a home, even with the combined income of two working parents. The reality in our region is that 84% of families have two working parents. The veiled suggestion that parents should just stay home and spend more time with their children feels simplistic and dismissive of the real struggles families face today. The costs of quality child care and housing leave many families battling high stress and poverty. Our Full Day Kindergarten and extended Before and After School programs are offering our families high quality, affordable programs that do, in answer to the author’s question, deliver.

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