

September 2009

An Open Letter to Premier Dalton McGuinty

The Ontario government has before it a blueprint for major educational reform, one that will make Ontario the best place there is to raise a child. To do the best for our children, we need to create the finest possible education and family service system. *With Our Best Future in Mind*, the report of the Premier's early learning advisor, maps out how Ontario can achieve more family-centred schools that are vibrant learning hubs for children and their parents.

The plan envisions our elementary schools buzzing with parent programs, recreation, arts, social activities and homework clubs long after the last school bell rings. Our youngest learners, from infants to preschoolers and their families, will enjoy expanded opportunities for early learning and care, pre-and postnatal supports, playgroups, parent resources and health assessments. Every four- and five-year-old child will be entitled to a full school day of learning and four- to 12-year-olds will be able to participate in extended day and summer programs enriching their opportunities to succeed.

When the plan for child- and family-centred schools is in place Ontario will become the Canadian leader with a world-class education system. As the foremost family-friendly province, Ontario will attract the best and the brightest because it helps families raise the best and the brightest.

All eyes are now rightly on Ontario.

Families and children are ready. Municipalities and school boards are ready. Educators and champions of publicly funded education are ready.

This is our opportunity to get it right, for children and families today and for the benefit of all into the future.

Getting it right: The 3Rs of making Ontario the best place to raise a child

Do the right thing: Wholesale change

The recommendations in the early learning report are interdependent parts for wholesale positive change. Implementing some changes (such as full day JK/SK and not others, such as enriching out-of-school options and holistic services for parents and preschoolers) will lessen their effectiveness, add to the fragmentation that now plagues education and family services and will fail to provide accountability for investments and results.

Do it right: Adopt the goals and timetables in the report.

That means September 2010 is the start date with 2012 the rollout end date. This is a doable timeframe: 35% of our schools now have the capacity to become centres for children and families. They should be ready to go by September 2010. At the same time the provincial government should announce its plans to make all schools child and family ready by 2012.

Do it with the right resources: Build in quality from the start

Give local governments and school boards the resources they need to do the job well. Establish the provincial infrastructure required to support the new system. Ensure staff are appropriately trained and supported. Develop standards and transparent accountability mechanisms.

Premier McGuinty, we are part of a groundswell of supporters for transformative change that makes Ontario the educational place to watch.

We are committed to this vision and offer our support towards securing Ontario's best future.

Yours truly,

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