

Full-day kindergarten gives kids huge step up, study shows

Children who have had two years of full-day kindergarten are enormously better prepared than others for Grade 1 and future success in general, a new study shows.

By: [Louise Brown](#) GTA, Education Schools, Published on Tue Sep 03 2013 Toronto Star

Children who have had two years of full-day kindergarten are enormously better prepared than others for Grade 1 and future success in general — they're better communicators who get along more with others, with stronger thinking skills and more general knowledge, according to the first major study of the impact of the all-day program.

A study of nearly 700 children showed that those who took part in the first two years of Ontario's [full-day learning](#) program are stronger in almost all learning skills than those with only one year in the program — and two to four times stronger than those who didn't go to full-day kindergarten at all.

“This research is huge; for the many children whose (academic) risk has been greatly reduced by full-day kindergarten, it shows the program is truly a life-changer,” said education professor Charles Pascal, who drafted the new full-day program that Ontario began to phase in in 2010.

Pascal said the research into the benefits of a full-day learning program predicted it would boost children's readiness to learn, “but these results are even more dramatic and timely than we imagined — they're fall-off-the-chair amazing.

“It's cartwheel time for all those early learning educators who are making such a huge difference in the lives of so many children.”

In a visit to Toronto's Ogden Public School Tuesday, the first day of school, Education Minister Liz Sandals released the full research report conducted by Queen's and McMaster Universities, which compared the skills of 693 Grade 1 pupils from 125 schools between 2010 and 2012. Roughly one-third had been in full-day learning for both junior and senior kindergarten, one-third only for senior kindergarten and one-third not at all.

The results show only 4.3 per cent of children in full-day learning for both years enter Grade 1 in danger of not doing well because of weak language skills or cognitive development — compared to a steep 14.8 per cent of those who had just one year of full-day learning, and a staggering 16.4 per cent of those with no full-day learning at all.

Likewise, only 5.2 per cent of children in full-day for two years were at risk of not doing well because of weak social skills, compared to 7.7 per cent of children with one year of full-day learning and 10.5 per cent of children with no full-day experience.

And in general knowledge and communication, only 5.6 per cent of children with two years in full-day kindergarten were at risk, compared to 7.7 per cent of those with one year of full-day kindergarten and 10.5 per cent of those with no full-day learning at all.

Sandals said the improvements in behaviour and communication are “highly relevant to how students do; we’re very pleased.”

The students’ skills were measured using the Early Development Instrument (EDI) in the areas of physical health and well-being, social competence (ability to get along with others), emotional maturity, language and cognition, and communication skills and general knowledge.

Before full-day kindergarten began in Ontario, Pascal’s research estimated that 27 per cent of children entering Grade 1 were at risk or “vulnerable” to failing at school, which then raises the risk of them running into trouble with the law down the road, facing poverty and developing health problems, all of which cost society more in social services.

Overall, when improvement in each of the skills is added together, it seems full-day kindergarten cuts the number of Grade 1 pupils at-risk to 20.4 per cent — a drop of almost 7 points.

Pascal said research shows that for every percentage point fewer kids you have at risk in Grade 1, the savings over their lifetime to taxpayers from less need for health care, social assistance or even jail can add a full percentage point to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP.) “So a 7-point drop in two years means full-day kindergarten gives taxpayers a great return on their investment,” he said.

The Ontario government has estimated that having more than 10 per cent of children “at risk” based on the EDI costs taxpayers \$1 trillion a year in higher need for social services.