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PRESS RELEASE

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Superior-Greenstone DSB - Full Day Kindergarten Gives Children a Better Start

MARATHON, Ontario – Those little ones waving goodbye to mom through the window of the bus on the first day of kindergarten now appear to have a greater opportunity to succeed in their educational careers than ever before in Ontario.

In a study commissioned by the Ontario government in which both Queen's and McMaster University tracked a number of areas of growth and learning of 693 full-day kindergarten (FDK) children for two years starting in 2010, the outcome is being called phenomenal in education circles.

Minister of Education Liz Sandals who attended a Southern Ontario school on the first day of school and unveiled some of the preliminary research data from the two-year study called it "nothing short of incredible."

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"We are proud of the success of our full-day kindergarten program. These new findings show that we are giving children a stronger start in school and in life. FDK is helping our youngest learners develop the valuable skills that will give them every opportunity to succeed," said Sandals.

Ontario's full-day learning program incorporates two years of a revamped curriculum for junior and senior kindergarten, and emphasizes play-based learning.

In revealing the early results of the study, Sandals referred to five areas that researchers measured, including children's physical health and well being, social competence (interaction with others) emotional maturity, language and cognition, and communication skills and general knowledge. The students' skills were measured using the Early Development Instrument

In measuring the progress and development of students who were enrolled in FDK compared to those who participated in half-day programs, in all areas students improved their readiness for grade one and accelerated their development. Comparisons of children with two years of FDK instruction and children with no FDK instruction showed that these students had a reduced risk in social competence development from 10.5 per cent to 5.2 per cent, reduced risk to language and cognitive development from 16.4 per cent to 4.3 per cent and reduced risk in communication skills and general knowledge development from 10.5 per cent to 5.6 per cent.

Education experts are touting FDK as the means whereby children could be introduced to concepts sooner than those attending with half-day programs. There is evidence that supports that children in FDK have increased their capacity to work through problems and self-regulate to a greater degree. Minister Sandals said the improvement in behavior and communication are "highly relevant to how student do; we're very pleased."

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Charles Pascal, the education professor from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education who designed the new full-day kindergarten program that Ontario began to phase into schools in 2010 expressed delight in these early findings. Pascal's pre-2010, research indicated that approximately 27 per cent of children starting out in grade 1 were at risk of failing at school. Such failure raised these children's susceptibility for encounters with the law, the risk of poverty and the development of health problems. The significant reduction in the statistical risk factors, now closer to 20 per cent, is remarkable to Pascal. "These results are even more dramatic and timely than we imagined — they're fall-off-the-chair amazing," he said.

At Superior-Greenstone DSB, both the Margaret Twomey Public School (Marathon) and B.A. Parker Public School (Geraldton) have fully phased-in FDK. By September 2014, FDK will be available in all elementary schools with the support of early childhood educators.

Future success of FDK will continue to be closely monitored with ministry and educators alike eager to gain a more robust interpretation of results from the standardized test scores in 2014, when the math reading and writing skills of the first legion of full-day kindergarteners undergo testing.

In the meantime, the completed two-year study done by Queen's and McMaster University is expected to be available later this fall.