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To: [Fedy, Barb](#); [Vokes, Sharon](#)
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Subject: RE: Link to May 2014 Bluewater District School Board Report re Rural Schools/ARC Reviews
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Subject: Celebrating milestones and beginnings for full-day kindergarten / La maternelle et le jardin d'enfants à temps plein : un nouveau jalon de franchi, un nouveau début à fêter

When approximately 265,000 four-and five-year-olds start school for the first time next week, something amazing will happen. Full-day kindergarten will be just plain ordinary kindergarten, the same program that is offered to every four- and five-year old across the province. But of course, there is nothing “plain” or “ordinary” about this amazing play-based program that’s proven to dramatically boost early development.

Kindergarten – just like public education – has changed dramatically due to the hard work, dedication and dogged determination of trustees and senior administrators, school administrators and board staff, teachers and ECEs, and parents and the community. Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards, in partnership with school boards, have played a key role in the successful roll-out of this program. The beneficiaries of this hard work are the same people who inspired it in the first place – the children of our great province.

I know there are classrooms and child care programs where the finishing touches are still being applied to ensure everything is ready for the first day of school. And I want to let you know how much the Early Years Division team and I thank you for everything you have done to make this amazing milestone a reality.

When I was thinking about how long this day has been in the making, I thought we could trace it back to April 2010, with the passage of Bill 242 that created the legal framework for full-day kindergarten. Or perhaps back to November 2009 and the creation of the Early Years Division.

Some might go back to the release of *With Our Best Future in Mind*, in June 2009, or to the appointment of the Early Years Advisor in 2007. We might look at the French-language school boards that started offering half-day kindergarten and half-day free child care since 2000 as a catalyst. Still others might trace the beginnings of full-day kindergarten to the Toronto First Duty project that started in 2001 or to the first Early Years Report by Margaret McCain and Fraser Mustard in 1999.

I could keep going backward in time tracing the influences that brought us to our current milestone. I’m more grateful than I can say for the contributions of all those people whose previous research, advocacy, wisdom and perseverance have contributed to our current success. I’m thankful that many of you are with us to see your work come to fruition.

So, in a few days, more than a quarter-million four-and five-year-olds will stream through the doors to their kindergarten and be greeted by an educator team. These children will be reaching the finish line of what has been a long journey undertaken by educators and the government on behalf of young children and families.

But we know our work never truly ends. In fact, it feels like it is just beginning. We’re just starting to build a culture of play-based learning in kindergarten and we’ve only just begun to spread the benefits of inquiry-based learning to the remainder of the primary grades and beyond. The

relationships between ECE and teacher teams are continuing to evolve. We have much more professional learning and development to accomplish.

During the coming school year, you can expect an update to the draft kindergarten program. Also look for more results from our evaluation of full-day kindergarten – now including information about how the children are progressing as they advance through the primary grades.

In the Early Years Division, we're nothing short of amazed at the progress that's been made on behalf of young children in Ontario. And we're not alone. Each year, many international delegations from around the world travel to Ontario to visit our full-day kindergarten classrooms and learn more about what we're doing. Each one of you is a part of this remarkable made-in-Ontario story!

As the school year begins anew, as you observe tearful farewells from some parents parting from little ones for the first time and see the wide-eye looks of anticipation on the faces of the young learners, imagine that scene playing out in every elementary school across Ontario. Isn't it wonderful?

Jim Grieve *Assistant Deputy Minister, Early Years Division and Diversity Champion for the Ministry of Education*

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