

Ontario unveils new kindergarten curriculum. Here's what it might mean for you

By

[Miriam Katawazi](#)

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Avalynn Kwok, 4, walks with her dad, Manny Kwok, outside Lynn Valley Elementary School as her parents drop her off for her first day of kindergarten in North Vancouver on September 9, 2021. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Darryl Dyck

Ontario has introduced a new kindergarten curriculum that will teach children as young as three years old fractions, coding and grammar through “clear and direct instruction,” and some critics say they are worried it’s abandoning research-backed play-based learning methods.

The provincial government made the announcement on Wednesday, calling the curriculum a “back to the basics” approach that will better prepare students for Grade 1 with an emphasis on reading, math, writing and science and technology.

A spokesperson for Education Minister Paul Calandra told CTV News Toronto on Thursday that the ministry was instructed to pause the introduction of the revised kindergarten curriculum by

one year specifically to provide educators with the time, training, and supports needed for “effective implementation.”

The province said teachers will receive formal training early next year on the new curriculum, which will take effect in September 2026.

“The revised curriculum is being released months in advance of September to ensure teachers have ample time to review the curriculum and prepare ahead of implementation, with additional resources and training available in the new year to support classroom delivery across the province,” the spokesperson said in an emailed statement.

“The curriculum will support each child in developing foundational reading, writing and math skills, while maintaining play-based learning that allows students to learn through play.”

The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) said its urging the Ministry of Education to provide educators with high-quality, comprehensive, job-embedded professional learning and sufficient time before rolling out the newly revised Kindergarten curriculum in fall 2026.

“Without meaningful training and dedicated implementation supports, educators will be left scrambling to learn the new curriculum, undermining student learning outcomes,” ETFO President David Mastin said in a statement.

“ETFO members are well-equipped to deliver instruction and assess skills, but they need professional learning to guide their lesson planning and instructional practices. They deserve more than a webinar and set of slides, and they must not be expected to complete this training on their own time.”

- **PREVIOUS STORY:** [Ontario announces pause on school curriculum changes, including kindergarten overhaul](#)

On the Ministry of Education’s [website, an explainer noted](#) that the four strands of the curriculum will be foundations of language and mathematics, problem solving and innovating, self-regulation and well-being and belonging and contributing. The curriculum is expected to deliver more “clear and direct instruction,” the province said.

The explainer outlined that the curriculum introduces language conventions, including grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. Students will also be expected to develop early reading and writing skills through “evidence-based systematic instruction.”

Shelly Mehta, who is a professor and a coordinator with the School of Early Childhood at George Brown College, said she worries the government is pivoting away from play-based learning, which research says works with children.

“This is going backwards. We’re regressing. It’s reminding me of the fight that we had to put in to get play based learning and stress the importance of it through sound research,” she said.

“It’s seem to be this strict rigid curriculum where children are desk and paper and play is kind of abandoned. I think that’s a big disservice and I’m very worried about this new curriculum. It’s not grounded in play-based learning.”

Mastin added that the Ontario Ministry of Education dismissed the ETFO’s repeated calls for consultation throughout the curriculum development process.

“This is the first real look we’ve had at the curriculum. Until now, we’ve seen nothing but glimpses of screenshots. That is unacceptable,” he said.

Under the new curriculum, the province stated that students will be expected to learn basic math skills earlier, including key milestones for counting, estimating, comparing, exploring number relationships to 20, and adding and subtracting to 10.

Students will also be expected to develop a “foundational understanding of fractions by solving equal-share problems” and learn to sort objects or data using one attribute, the explainer noted.

Children will also be expected to learn to describe two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects, and the location and movement of people and objects. The province added that students will learn to give and follow directions for moving from one location to another.

The province stated that students will be introduced to coding by “creating a sequence of steps and creating and following instructions involving movement.” They will also be expected to learn to use an inquiry process to answer questions and explore solutions to problems, adding that “students will conduct scientific investigations and engage in engineering design.”

Mehta said all these new subjects and goals could be learned through play-based learning instead of direct instruction, which is harder for young children to sit through.

“They have not consulted with professionals or early childhood education experts in the field. We know that children thrive through play and prefer play,” she said.

“Children are not doing well when they are passively receiving information. They are better when they are actively involved in their learning. Abandoning play based learning is abandoning a holistic approach.”

She added that play-based learning has been extended throughout the early primary grades in Boston, and they are finding that children are doing better on standardized tests.

“It’s obvious that the research out there has shown that this is the way that children learn and that their brains are still developing and its appropriate for their age to play in their early years,” she said.

Here’s what children may learn in their kindergarten classrooms starting Fall 2026:

Language:

- Speaking, listening, and using facial expressions, gestures and body language to communicate
- Word reading and spelling
- Vocabulary
- Reading fluency and comprehension
- Applying knowledge of letters, words and sentences to create simple texts

Math:

- Understanding numbers, including counting and exploring number relationships to 20
- Adding numbers to 10 and related subtraction
- Sharing equally

Science and technology:

- Performing scientific investigations to gain knowledge about the world around them
- Using engineering design to create something new or different
- Using innovative thinking to solve problems
- Using coding to help them think in different ways, solve problems and create