



**Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia  
Meeting with Ministers:  
Minister Stan Hagen and Minister of State Linda Reid  
December 7, 2005**

**ECEBC has requested a meeting with you today to discuss the recent announcements regarding the allocation of the Federal Early Learning and Child Care dollars.**

**ECEBC Background Information**

The Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia (ECEBC) is an organization whose membership comprises individuals holding a license to practice issued by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Member's practice settings are usually those licensed to provide services for children ages 0-6. In many cases licensed ECEs also work in a variety of other service agencies including; school age care, child care resource and referral agencies and other family and child serving agencies, post secondary Early Childhood Education and Care programs and many more. Members of ECEBC may also be individuals who are not licensed ECEs but may work in related professional areas.

ECEBC has a lengthy history of working closely with government in regards to childcare regulations and consultations. In fact this history dates as far back as the early 1970's. It is our intent through this discussion to strengthen the working relationship we have had for many years.

**Our concerns are as follows:**

**1. Early Learning and Child Care**

ECEBC has increasing apprehension that an apparent divide between early learning and childcare is being created in BC. Our concern for the issue began with the announcements from Minister of Education Shirley Bond, promising new initiatives through her Ministry, that will help children become 'school ready'. Suggestions for these new initiatives include early learning centers, all-day Kindergarten or perhaps 'pre-school' programs. At this time ECEBC feels it is important to comment on our views related to this issue.

**ECEBC believes that quality childcare is early learning.** . Quality ECE programs for young children, including group day cares, family childcare programs and pre-schools, create play-based learning environments that stimulate social, physical, language, imaginative, cognitive and emotional development of young children in a holistic way. The isolation and specific focus of Early Learning Initiatives such as literacy and ‘school readiness’ is counter to evidence based research that identifies a play based approach as the optimum environment for the holistic development of the child in the 0 – 6 age range. Literacy and cognitive learning are woven throughout the ECE curriculum in an intentional and comprehensive way, but not isolated as the only important aspects of development. The government decision to section off a portion of the Federal dollars into the Ministry of Education (separate from MCFD) has created a public perception that learning only happens in environments that focus on early literacy and school readiness. This perception is false and undermines and fragments early childhood development services. This split reflects serious misunderstandings about the role quality child care plays in promoting childhood growth, development and learning and about the needs of the majority of BC’s working families.

In the document “What the EDI is (not)” by Hillel Goelman and Clyde Hertzman, the benefits of the ECE curricular focus is described: “It seems to us that many who are not in the field of ECE do not yet understand that research has shown that play-based, child-focused, developmentally and culturally appropriate approaches to learning and development in the early years are the most successful programs both in short- and the long-term.” (Goelman and Hertzman, 2005, p. 3)

“The foundation of early childhood education and pedagogy is brain development and learning. All developmental domains influence brain development and while the young child’s brain is adaptable, it is also vulnerable. Environmental experiences that match the developmental level of the child are most advantageous to optimum brain development.” (Pollard, 2005) Developmental Psychologists have identified that emotional development and regulation, social skills, and the ability to attend and focus are equally important to early school readiness and success as literacy and cognitive abilities. “A program that allows the child to make connections between his or her lived experience and symbolic or representational knowledge becomes the foundation for future understandings.” (Pollard, 2005).

*Early childhood educators who have the same training and qualifications as those who work in licensed childcare centres deliver BC’s licensed pre-school programs. The main difference is that pre-schools are part-time programs that children attend for a few hours, 2 or 3 days a week.*

**ECEBC is hearing that in some communities around the province “free” preschool is being offered through the school districts. We are greatly concerned for a couple of reasons.**

1. Free Preschools will have a devastating affect on the preschools that already exist in those communities.

2. We have concerns over who is providing the preschool programs to the children. In some cases, we know they are not Early Childhood Educators. We have also heard that in some situations Early Childhood Educators are being asked to volunteer their time in order to support these programs. We feel this is a great injustice to the people working in our field.
3. In one school district in the province, childcare programs that have existed in schools for 10 years are being asked to leave so that preschools can take their place. We are very concerned about the misunderstanding that school districts appear to have about childcare versus preschool and the learning opportunities that exist in all quality early childhood programs.
4. In some school districts, space that was provided for free or at a very low cost is now much more expensive, forcing programs to increase costs to parents or find other locations.

In 2003, over 126,000 BC mothers whose youngest child was under the age of 5 were in the paid labor force. Labor force participation rates are even higher for mothers of school-aged children. These families and their children need stable quality childcare for the full working day. **While preschools are an important part of a comprehensive range of childcare services in a community they do not meet the needs of working families.**

**ECEBC does not oppose an effective working relationship between education and child- care.** If planned properly and in consultation with Early Childhood Educators in their communities', children and families can benefit when childcare programs are located in or near schools. They benefit when schools and providers work together to ensure a smooth transition into kindergarten. They benefit when childcare programs have access to school resources like libraries, gyms and playgrounds. However, they do not benefit when School Districts seem to view the new federal childcare funds as a source of revenue and are offering empty school space at 'market rental rates' for on-site childcare. **We are asking the provincial government to ensure that Federal dollars are not used to supplement the budgets of other Ministries.**

## **2. Quality Childcare A Definition**

Research shows that quality childcare is essential in the growth and development of young children. There are many factors and challenges that go into providing quality child care services for children and families:

- **Training and education of Early Childhood Educators** is integral to creating quality services for children and families. Governments must recognize that there is much needed support required in BC for the training institutions, if we are to continue to provide the training necessary to maintain high quality standards in child care settings. It has been increasingly difficult to attract students to 1 – 2 year training programs to be eligible to work for \$8 - \$13 per hour.
- **Recruitment, retention, remuneration, and recognition of Early Childhood Educators** provide the foundation for sustainable quality childcare. A variety of

issues impact retention and recruitment of individuals to the Early Childhood Education field. Respect and recognition of the value of this important work with young children is lacking. Wages that are commensurate to education and level of responsibility to families and children are currently woefully inadequate. Both of these factors result in the inability to attract qualified applicants, and once training is complete, professionals often leave the field. According to Child Care Human Resources Sector Council “Working for a Change: Canada’s Child Care Workforce” November 2004 report the average salary for an Early Childhood Educator in BC in the year 2000 was \$22,428. This is with a college diploma! An important factor related to quality is the effectiveness of the program developed and implemented for the children. Highly qualified, trained, remunerated and supported staff who experience high job satisfaction are better able to respond to all children, to plan and support developmentally appropriate programming, and to provide care that respects diversity and values all children and families.

- **Legislation and Standards play an integral role in proving quality services for children.** It is imperative that high Standards are legislated and monitored in order to provide quality services. Over the years BC has maintained an effective level of standards that childcare programs have had to maintain. ECEBC feels that these standards need to continue to reflect group size, physical space, and health and safety precautions. These standards also need to reflect the importance of promoting best practices to stimulate play and learning, and the well-being and safe care of all children.

### **3. Increased subsidy versus a publicly funded childcare system**

- ECEBC supports the position put forward by FIRST CALL that identifies childcare as the foundation for a strong and well-supported early learning and childcare system. We believe that the ELCC agreement signed by B.C. and the Federal Government should prioritise the development of the foundation for a publicly funded childcare system, rather than continuing to prop up a fragmented system of subsidy that supports some parents but does not provide access to licensed quality early childhood experiences for all children and families, regardless of their economic status.
- As documented in the Advocacy Forum release in September we feel it is important to emphasize that the subsidy system is not the way to ensure access, promote quality or support stability. According to the OECD report of 2004 “subsidy funding to child care centres is often inefficient (many eligible parents are unable to access subsidies – see Cleveland and Hyatt, 1997), and costly to operate both at governmental and early childhood centre level.”

- ECEBC recognizes that the money available now is not enough to create the system immediately, however, we believe that targeting funding to the areas of Quality (make more money available for wages/benefits for ECEs), Affordability (reduce the amount of cost to parents, who currently pay 80% of childcare costs) and Accessibility (increase the money going into increasing childcare spaces) will lay the foundation for the system that we have been advocating for over 25 years.

### **3. Creation of a College of Early Childhood Educators**

ECEBC has advocated for the creation of a College of Early Childhood Educators with the goal of developing the infrastructure and capacity of Early Childhood Educators to regulate and monitor our membership over the past 5 years. We strongly feel that the time is right to support our members in their progression towards increasing professionalism. The College of Early Childhood Educators would retain the authority to provide legislated oversight, standards and member requirements that uphold the profession.

ECEBC has had several meeting with governments regarding the ECE college. In 1988, ECEBC began working in partnership with the Community Care Facility Board to shift responsibility for the certification, registration and program approval functions from the Ministry to ECEBC. In 1996, ECEBC was advised to promote the establishment of a professional College or Board of Registration. As a result, ECEBC applied to the Health Professions Council for regulation under that legislation. ECEBC was turned down by the HPC in April, 2001.

Although the HPC turned down the application, they stated that;

***Analysis of the criteria supports the need for regulation of ECE and the ability of the applicant to be self-regulating profession. The applicant has demonstrated leadership in the profession and has established an organizations structure necessary for professional governance. (Health professions council, 2001, p.20)***

In addition, because of concerns about the vulnerability of the client group the council undertook a careful review of risk of harm associated with early childhood practice.

They determined;

***that the practice of ECE may involve a risk of physical, mental, or emotional harm to the health, safety or well being of the public.***

Further, they stated;

***in the council's view monitoring continuing competence is important in the practice of any profession which involves a risk of harm to the health, safety or well-being of the public (p.19).***

The HPC also stressed in their report that;  
*the existing regulatory scheme is primarily one of facilities licensing, not professional practice regulation. As such it does not contain the key features of professional regulation whose primary object is to serve and protect the public, provide a code of ethics and professional accountability, continuing competency monitoring, standards of practice peer review, and adequate disciplinary structures to assure public safety (p22).*

ECEBC knows that Government has heard from other early childhood community stakeholders the importance of the development of a College of Early Childhood Educators. ECEBC will be working with these stakeholders to develop a proposal for the development of this college.

## **Conclusions**

**ECEBC requests that the government take a leadership role by publicly recognizing, respecting, and valuing the important work provided by Early Childhood Educators in the Province of BC.**

**ECEBC believes that combining funding from all federal agreements (ECDI, MLF, ELCC) replacing provincial cuts and investing in an articulated, community based accountable child care plan would allow BC to start to build a system that would focus on the QUAD principles.**

**ECEBC believes the government should move to an adequate, accountable, direct operating program that is tied to affordable parent fees, and improved quality through adequate compensation for child care providers.**

**We recommend that the BC Government address the needs of children from birth to 12 years of age.**

**ECEBC will continue to advocate for ongoing support for a publicly funded national child care plan at the Provincial and Federal level.**

**As the representatives of Early Childhood Educators in the Province of BC we respectfully request a position on the Provincial Child Care Council. We look forward to your reply.**

**Thank you meeting with us to discuss the important issues facing child care in BC today. Together we are confident that we can build a system for all BC children.**