

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

Working for a publicly funded, non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible and accountable.

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EQUITY FOR BC'S WORKING FAMILIES AND THEIR CHILDREN March 2007

Recent provincial cuts to child care spending make this government's bias against working families and their children crystal clear. Let's look at the facts.

Minister of State for Child Care, Linda Reid, now expects working families, who already pay more for child care than for post-secondary education, to pay even higher child care fees to cover the cuts. After all she says, now they get \$100 a month (before taxes) for every child under the age of 6 – it's only reasonable that they spend this on child care.

At the same time, her government is spending \$5 million of the federal ELCC funds for 'Strong Start' programs across BC and is giving School Districts another \$12 million from the ELCC funds for 'Early Learning Grants' to enhance early learning. And, the province takes a very different approach to funding these 'early learning' programs. Strong Start programs are delivered and governed by accountable, democratically elected School Boards. They are located in public schools at no cost. They are free, universally accessible and staffed by well-paid, qualified early childhood educators.

These are the very elements of a quality child care system that BC needs – with one big exception. Strong Start and other similar early learning programs are only for children who can come with a parent or a caregiver.

As BC's Deputy Minister of Education says, "Strong Start early learning centres are parent/caregiver participation programs for children who are cared for in homes during the day..." because, according to Mr. Dosdall, "Children who attend quality child care and preschools are already benefiting from early learning supports." (Report on Education, Feb. 23, 2007)

We couldn't agree more! So why are parents who use child care and pre-schools the only ones who have to pay for their children's early learning experiences?

It's time for equity for working families and their pre-school children. We call on the province to immediately adopt a policy that treats licensed child care the same as other early learning programs. The first steps are to:

1. Eliminate rental charges for licensed non-profit child care in public schools.

As a start - School Districts should use their Early Learning Grant to waive rental fees for on-site community non-profit child care for a year while they negotiate with the provincial government to have this cost built into their on-going operating budgets.

2. Provide the same number of 'free hours' of early learning experiences for children in licensed child care as is available through Strong Start.

As a start – the Child Care Operating Fund (CCOF) grant should be increased to cover the full cost of 15 hours of care a week per child in licensed child care. Costing must include wages and benefits equal to those provided to staff in Strong Start programs.

The majority of BC families with young children are working families. Mothers are in the work force to stay. The economy needs our skills and our families need our income. We have a right to participate in our communities and we are not going away. It's time for government to treat our children fairly.