



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

## **Submission to the BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services**

September 2010

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) is a voluntary, non-profit organization of parents, child care workers, interested citizens and community organizations. Our advocacy for a publicly funded, high quality, affordable child care system is substantiated by international and local research that shows that a universal approach to quality child care promotes healthy child development at the same time as it:

- supports families and their workforce participation,
- reduces child poverty,
- advances women's equality, and
- deepens social inclusion.

We appreciate the significant public policy change of full school-day Kindergarten that the Ministry of Education is phasing in for five year old children across British Columbia, by September 2011. As this expansion of Kindergarten hopefully reflects a new provincial commitment to universal, publicly funded, publicly delivered and democratically controlled services for young children – the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) views this as a positive step forward.

However, as welcome and as necessary as the expansion of Kindergarten is for BC's five year old children and their families – it is a far cry from the expansion required in this province to respond to the vulnerability of children before they enter Kindergarten and it provides no assistance at all to the working families of younger children.

Through our previous submissions we informed the provincial government through the Select Standing Committee on Finance of the compelling arguments for investing in a system of early care and learning in BC. It remains disappointing therefore that BC is not initiating a system of early care and learning for its youngest citizens as Ontario and now PEI are doing. The Ontario government is proving it is aware of the economic rationale for investment in child care, which this month grew even more compelling with the release of findings from respected economist Robert Fairholm of the Centre for Spatial Economics. His study documented that:

- *early learning with extended day child care options provides a greater economic benefit than any other sector of the Ontario economy:*
- *every \$1 million spent on early learning and child care creates 29 jobs: at least 23% more jobs than the next highest industry and a third more than the number of jobs generated by \$1 million in construction spending.*
- *every dollar invested in early learning and child care increases the economy's output (GDP) by \$2.02. This is one of the highest GDP impacts of all major sectors.*

In addition, the study found that investments in early learning and child care more than pay for themselves in terms of benefits for society, with a \$2.42 payback through increased earnings, improved health outcomes and reduced social costs.

Governments continue to invest heavily in infrastructure and construction industry stimulus. Fairholm's study shows that investments in our social infrastructure, and especially in early learning and child care, are critical and provide a much stronger economic boost.

In the February 2010 BC Speech from the Throne, we heard the Lieutenant-Governor say:

*New partnerships with the private sector and parents will enable the establishment of neighbourhood preschools for four-year-olds and three-year-olds within communities over the next five years. They will provide families new voluntary options for public and private preschool across B.C.*

Eight months later it remains completely unclear what was meant by those words and sadly in the meantime the child care crisis has worsened considerably across our province.

- Fees for service have increased to the point where many families can no longer contemplate using quality, licensed care for their children while they work;
- Wages and benefits for early childhood educators remain appallingly low for their level of responsibility and education; and
- Rather than increasing the numbers of spaces to meet demand we see spaces are closing under the pressure of providing quality services with little government funding.

In 2008, faced with the ongoing BC child care crisis, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates took the bold step of developing a plan for and costing out a universal child care system for children aged 1-12 that would bring down parent fees to 20% of cost, overall, and pay early childhood educators a living wage. We demonstrated that BC has the capacity to build such a system.

In 2010 we are now faced with BC's implementation of full school day Kindergarten for 5 year olds and the promise from the Minister of Education of 'pre kindergarten' for 3 and 4 year olds to follow. On the one hand, the extension of universal, publicly funded, free services for young children is progressive and welcomed. On the other hand, to date, BC is proceeding without a strategy that recognizes and is inclusive of existing child care services or meets the needs of all families – especially working families.

Recognizing the immediate need to provide government with a useful plan and the citizens of British Columbia with hope for a better future, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC has partnered with the Early Childhood Educators of BC to offer a new and creative approach to how the provincial government can and should integrate early care and learning into a system that works for children, families, early childhood educators and communities. (For more information see <http://cccabc.bc.ca/cccabcdocs/integrated.html>)

Our Emerging Plan for an Integrated System of Early Care and Learning in BC is consistent with the principles that have been presented to this Committee in previous years – that dollars must go into integrated programs rather than continuing the artificial divide between child care in MCFD and early learning in MoE, and that new dollars must build on existing community strengths.

The Plan has the exciting possibility of moving British Columbia forward with a new system to meet the needs of children and families with quality services much like those offered in other jurisdictions across the country and around the world.

In closing we strongly urge you to consider the cost effective realities of investment in the early care and learning of our youngest citizens – realities publicly recognized by many including the Vancouver Board of Trade<sup>1</sup> and the UBC Human Early Learning Partnership.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Business releases landmark report making economic case for early childhood investment: pay now or pay later. Vancouver Board of Trade. September 13, 2010

<http://www.boardoftrade.com/files/PDF/Policy/2010/EconomicAspectsOfKidsNCrime13sept10.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 15 by 15: A comprehensive Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC. Prepared by the UBC Human Early Learning Partnership for the Business Council of British Columbia Opportunity 2020 Project August 2009. <http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/research/initiatives/social-change/15-by-15-smart-family-policy/>