



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

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The election didn't change much...

BC's 2009 provincial election has come and gone. Despite the best efforts of child care advocates – politicians across the board did not have the courage or imagination to position child care as part of the solution to our economic and social problems.

In spite of very high levels of public support for government investment in early care and learning – it seems that politicians are not yet convinced they will win or lose based on their child care platforms. They believe that even voters who support child care put other issues first when they decide how to vote – and often they are right.

The tragic irony is that this time, given the shocking low voter turn out, any candidate who reached out to families on child care wait lists with concrete solutions might well have brought enough new voters to the poll to win a seat.

On the surface, the election didn't change much for child care. The same government is in office. The balance of power is about the same and many of the same individuals are back in Victoria.

The election certainly didn't change BC's child care crisis. Fees are still too high; wages too low and there aren't enough programs to meet the needs of children and of working families.

The challenges remain...

As we see it – some of the key challenges we face include:

- A government that underestimated the depth of the economic crisis, promised to keep the deficit at \$495 million and now is desperately looking for 'savings'.

As we saw in 2001 and 2007, the child care budget is always vulnerable. We may have to fight to hold on to current spending levels let alone keep government to their election promise of \$8 million more for child care in each of the next 3 years.

We also think it's likely government could cut spending on early childhood development initiatives that were funded with federal child care transfer payments.

- A government that claims they cannot invest in early childhood until the economy is better and an opposition whose election platform only promised significant growth in child care if finances allowed.

The government is using the current economic situation as a rationale for inaction on moving forward with All Day Kindergarten – even though their own feasibility study recommends it for 5 and 4 year olds.

Let's remember this government didn't invest in child care when times were good. More importantly, it's clear that neither the government nor the opposition see investment in early care and learning as essential to BC's economic recovery.

- A government that continues to insist on a false divide between care and learning. Once again, the Premier has given responsibility for Early Learning to the new Minister of Education but left child care with the Minister of Children and Family Development. His decision to eliminate a Minister of State for Child Care, as ineffective as she was for child care, from the Cabinet Table is one more indication of the low priority he places on the care of BC's youngest children.

But, there are opportunities...

We are often accused of being eternal optimists. It's a label we wear proudly. So, when we look underneath the surface, we do see opportunities for progress.

- The BC government now recognizes, at least in theory, the importance of quality, universal, publicly funded, democratically controlled services for young children.

We expect that movement, if any, will come through the Ministry of Education's mandate for Early Learning and will be spurred by recent developments in Ontario that offer a vision of truly integrated early care and learning for 4 and 5 year olds.

(http://www.ontario.ca/en/initiatives/early_learning/STEL01_139326)

In BC, the government's own Early Childhood Learning Agency's 2009 report on the feasibility of All Day Kindergarten has accepted the evidence that:¹

- Quality early learning programs have a range of benefits for children.
- Care and education are not separate concept.
- Quality matters.
- Programs should be play-based, holistic and developmentally appropriate.
- Before and after-school child care needs to be part of an integrated system.
- Specialized, adequately paid educators are important to programs' success.

The BC Report also highlights significant international developments including a "trend towards full coverage by the education system for children age three to six. Many countries are working towards offering two years of free (publicly funded) early learning before Grade 1."

From the start, the CCCABC has said that if done well – the expansion of All Day Kindergarten can help build a publicly funded, community controlled, high quality, universal system that meets the needs of children and working families. But, if done poorly, it can undermine childhood development, create more barriers for working families and further destabilize BC's fragile child care services.

Our priority this fall is to develop, with partners, a vision for how BC can best build an integrated system of early care and learning and to then hold government accountable for delivering on its unfulfilled promises.

¹ For full Report see http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/ecla/topics/ecla_report.pdf

- A renewed understanding of the role public spending can play to stimulate the economy provides the opportunity to make the case that investment in early care and learning is the best infrastructure investment government can make.

Even in difficult economic times, BC has the capacity to build the child care system we need. In fact, our continued economic strength depends on a substantial investment in child care. Investing in child care creates local jobs, generates local spending, makes it possible for communities to attract and keep young families and builds social cohesion.

It helps families struggling with the impacts of the economic down-turn and ameliorates negative impacts of poverty on young children's growth and development.

Finally, investment in early care and learning has the long term benefit of ensuring that Canada's children get the best possible start. The evidence is clear that high quality experiences in the early years make a difference to children's long term health and well-being. While good experiences reduce social costs down the road – poor experiences can do harm and end up costing us all more.

- BC's official opposition has indicated that, since the last election, they now understand the need to publicly articulate a positive vision for BC's future.

This is an opportunity for us to advocate that the opposition move beyond their understanding of the current child care crisis to advance a concrete and bold solution that puts building a high quality system of early care and learning at the core of their economic and social policy.

Our vision hasn't changed either...

One more thing that hasn't changed since the provincial election is our commitment to advocate for children and women's right to access early care and learning services.

We are still calling on government to:

1. Build a universal, high quality system of early care and learning that meets the developmental needs of children AND the needs of working families.
2. Set targets and timelines for lowering parent fees, raising caregivers wages and creating more community services.
3. Invest adequate and stable public funds to achieve these goals.

Here's what you can do to help:

- Call your new or returning MLA and let them know that child care is an issue in your community. Tell them that government policies have failed but there are solutions.
- Send the Premier an email at Premier@gov.bc.ca to let him know that the child care crisis has not gone away and that you expect action.
- Email us at info@cccabc.bc.ca if you want to be a CCCABC contact in your community.
- Join us with a membership in CCCABC at <http://cccabc.bc.ca/about/join.html>

**Don't let anyone tell you we can't do it.
BC has the strength and capacity to get the job done.
Now, let's make sure our politicians get on with it.**