

MOVING TO A SYSTEM OF
integrated early care & learning IN BC

Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning

APRIL 2011 2nd EDITION



ECEBC | early childhood
educators of BC

COALITION OF
**child care
advocates**
OF BC

UPDATE — Fall 2011

This Plan was first released in April 2011. Since then, interest in, excitement about and further development of the Plan have continued. Two important updates include:

1. \$10 A DAY

HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership) has now confirmed that, with the new investment recommended in this Plan, parent fees can be reduced to:

- \$10 a day for a full time early care and learning program;
- \$7 a day for a part time early care and learning program; and
- Free for families with annual incomes of under \$40,000.

(See <http://blogs.ubc.ca/newdealforfamilies/new-deal-for-families-2/>)

The Early Years Centres proposed in the Plan (pg. 12) will use new public funds they receive to bring fees down to these rates. They will also use the funds to raise ECE wages to an average of \$25 an hour plus benefits. Child care will be affordable for BC families and those who care for children will earn a living wage.

2. SUPPORT FOR THE PLAN GROWS

Excitement about the Plan is growing by leaps and bounds. Hundreds of individuals from across BC and a significant number of municipalities, school districts, labour and community organizations have endorsed it. They recognize the Plan's potential to make a real difference for BC children, families and communities and are urging politicians to commit to the Plan's vision and work with communities to immediately begin its implementation.

Add your support at www.cccabc.bc.ca/plan/endorse-the-plan/

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The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC are pleased to share our *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning*.

Our Plan offers a concrete, innovative and ambitious way forward and provides a framework for significant and lasting system change in British Columbia.

THE PLAN...

Builds on well-established evidence...

A growing body of research clearly demonstrates that:

- Public spending on the early years is a wise social and economic investment;
- Quality child care *is* early learning;
- High quality early years programs promote healthy development;
- Children and families need, and have a right to, quality care and learning; and
- Current policies and approaches are not working.

Responds to two conflicting realities...

BC is implementing full school day Kindergarten for 5-year-olds and promises some form of pre-Kindergarten for children aged 3 and 4. While publicly funded, universal programs for young children are long overdue, BC still has no plan to meet the needs of working families, no plan to ensure infants and toddlers (a significant number of whom are in unregulated care) have access to quality care, and no plan to recognize the impact of full school day kindergarten on child care.

BC families face a crisis in accessing quality, affordable child care. Fees are too high — the second highest family expense after housing. Wait lists are too long, with a regulated space for only about 20 per cent of BC children. And, the wages of college trained early childhood educators are too low, forcing many to leave the field to earn a living wage.

Recognizes that change is here...

BC's Ministry of Education is playing a growing role in services for young children. Change is here and, for better and worse, it is impacting children, families and child care services. We can either wait for change to happen and react to its impact or, as we have chosen, use our voices to inform and drive the change.

Is a “made in BC” solution, informed by national and international evidence...

While this Plan grew out of the lived experience in BC and builds on our strengths, it also owes much to lessons learned elsewhere. Based on the evidence, it rejects corporate, big box child care as the answer to the current child care crisis and instead looks to public systems that work well — systems that integrate child care and education under one lead ministry (increasingly Education), and where child care and learning come together as strong and equal partners.



THE PLAN...

Incorporates the best of child care *and* public education...

The Plan focuses on the integration of child care programs regulated under the Community Care and Assisted Living Act, Child Care Licensing Regulation, with early learning programs delivered by schools. On the “child care” side, this includes family child care, pre-school, group child care for infants, toddlers and 3 to 5-year-olds, and school aged care. On the “school” side, it includes Kindergarten and Grade 1.

This focus, which flows from the mandates and expertise of the two sponsoring organizations, affirms the pivotal role child care plays in supporting families. Licensed BC child care providers interact, on a regular basis, with the families of close to 65,000 children under 6 years of age; this makes child care the largest front line support service for BC families with young children. Given the child care crisis experienced by many families, child care is a top priority.

We support strong family policies and comprehensive services such as income supports, pre/post-natal health services, family resource and parent education programs, and early intervention services — just to name a few. We remain committed to working with the broader early years’ services sector and beyond to meet the needs of all families and children.

Emerged through an extensive community briefing consultation process...

In 2010, we briefed British Columbians on our *Emerging Plan for an Integrated System of Early Care and Learning in BC*.

We distributed over 5,000 copies of the emerging plan, conducted an online survey, and received written comments from more than 700 individuals and groups. We responded to over 60 invitations to present the emerging plan, and as a result visited more than 25 BC communities. We also hosted an on-line webinar that reached hundreds more. Our audiences included, and went well beyond, the child care and community social services sectors. We are proud of the breadth and depth of this briefing process and the meaningful dialogue it encouraged and supported.

We are amazed and humbled by the positive response our emerging plan received.

While there are some who don’t agree with the direction of the Plan, don’t see themselves in it, or aren’t ready to endorse it — overwhelmingly, people are excited by the Plan’s potential to make a difference and want policy makers to give it serious consideration.

We value all we learned through the briefing process and thank everyone who took the time to listen and share. The Plan is much stronger as a result of the input. We trust it answers some questions and clarifies and strengthens some of the ideas we shared.



THE PLAN...

Acknowledges and celebrates innovative practice in BC communities...

As we travelled the province, we heard inspiring stories about the work being done in communities, from early childhood community tables and coalitions to programs at colleges and universities, originating from front line practitioners, groups and individuals that do the best they can every day, often with little support. As important as this work is, it does not replace the need for system change that would make innovative but now isolated examples the daily experience across British Columbia.

Demands change from us all...

Change is never easy — perhaps least of all for child care providers who have faced years of instability, band-aid solutions and broken promises. We know our Plan requires a cultural shift — a shift that may take a generation to fully achieve. It will take an openness to learn, a willingness to trust, and a generosity of spirit: all values at the core of quality early care programs. We are confident that with these values early childhood educators can and will continue to find their voices to help change the world for children, their families and the workforce.

Doesn't answer every question...

Some elements of the Plan need more discussion and refinement. This includes a workforce development strategy, aligning the child care regulatory framework with the new system, integrating Supported Child Development and Child Care Resource and Referral, embedding early childhood practices into Kindergarten and Grade 1, strengthening the school age care component of the Plan, and coordinating implementation with the broader range of early childhood development and family support/parent education services.

So, our invitation to those in the education, family support, early intervention, health, recreation, library, and post-secondary systems and beyond remains wide open. Please share your vision of how we can work together to honour and advance services and supports for children and families. We welcome the dialogue.

Finally, our Plan is generating unprecedented excitement. The next step is for policy makers to embrace the vision and make a commitment to get on with the job. We stand ready, willing and able to help them do just that.

THE BIG PICTURE

Conditions Needed to Support the Plan



Good early childhood education (ECE) practice recognizes that to support a child, one needs to understand the environment in which children live: their families, communities, cultures, and broader society. Children do best when they are supported by strong and healthy relationships, first in their families and then in their communities and beyond.

The same is true for systems like this proposed *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning*. To grow and thrive, this system needs a strong and supportive environment.

This Plan includes four conditions to support a system of early care and learning: strong family policy, commitment from federal *and* provincial governments, First Nations and Aboriginal community control, and adequate and stable funding.

Strong Family Policy

Strong family policy is good for children, families, communities, and the economy. The 2009 report *15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC*, commissioned by the Business Council of BC and produced by UBC researchers at the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), indicates that while families are unique in many ways, they have three overarching needs that public policy influences significantly: time, resources, and a range of supports to help them educate and care for their children.¹

15 by 15 recommends:

- **Increased time and resources for families**, including enhanced parental leave taken by both parents, revised employment standards to reduce work/life conflict after parental leave, and expanded financial supports for low-income families; and
- **Increased community services**, including expanded access to high quality early learning and child care services, regular opportunities for monitoring children's healthy development, and ongoing coordination and integration of early years' services in communities.

15 by 15 calculates that the lack of work/life balance wastes over \$400 billion in economic investment today and will cost our economy 20 per cent in GDP growth over the next 60 years — undermining growth across all sectors. However, when working together, governments and communities can create broad, equitable access to the conditions that help children and families thrive.²

This Plan clearly addresses the key missing community service — early care and learning — but its ultimate effectiveness depends on all the elements of strong family policy being in place.

1 *15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC*, April 2010, p. 20
<http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/research/initiatives/social-change/15-by-15-smart-family-policy/>

2 *Fast Facts: Smart Family Policy for Strong Economies*, based on *15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC*.

Commitment from Federal and Provincial Governments

While the design and delivery of systems of early care and learning are provincial responsibilities, both provincial and federal governments have an obligation to honour their commitments to young children and their families under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes the right to access quality early care and learning.

The role of the federal government is therefore to:

- Legislate and fund an enhanced parental leave program that extends benefits to all, enables parents to take up to 18 months of leave, and provides families with an adequate income level; and
- Transfer dedicated funds to provinces, territories and First Nations to help build quality, universal systems of early care and learning. While systems could and should reflect diverse needs and experiences, federal funds would be tied to building systems that are universal, high quality, affordable, inclusive, and democratically governed.

This “made in BC” Plan clearly meets these requirements for federal funding.

First Nations and Aboriginal Community Control

First Nations and Aboriginal communities are rightfully claiming and exercising control over culturally relevant programs for their children and families. An effective early care and learning system must provide Aboriginal communities with the power and resources they need to govern early care and learning services that meet their needs. Enhanced dialogue with BC’s Aboriginal peoples is needed to learn from and with them about supporting children’s holistic development within their communities.

Full support for the right of First Nations and Aboriginal communities to design and deliver services that meet their needs does not absolve the early care and learning system of its responsibility to provide culturally welcoming and affirming programs for all children.

Adequate and Stable Funding

A transformation of early care and learning services from the current “user fee” market system to a publicly funded and delivered system is critical to the success of the Plan. This will require significant additional public funding *and* a change in the way these funds are delivered.

Given the historic underfunding of a broad range of early childhood development and family support services, funding to implement this Plan cannot come through reallocation of existing program funds. New investments are required.

Building on previous costing models, HELP’s *15 by 15* report calculates that the additional operating cost for a universal, quality, inclusive early care and learning system for BC children under the age of 6 would be \$1.5 billion annually. Given that this Plan also includes services for elementary school aged children, the full operating costs would be somewhat higher.³ Yet, *15 by 15* also identifies multiple benefits that offset these costs, even in the short term.

As part of a 10-year implementation strategy, funding would increase incrementally over the first five years, with a commitment to stable, long-term funding.

A fundamental change in the way public funds are delivered is equally important. Public funding must be tied to clear system accountability measures with transparent monitoring to ensure it is used to achieve public goals.

Initially, existing child care services that integrate into the new system would be funded through contracts for service or similar funding mechanisms. As Boards of Education (school boards) develop new programs to meet demonstrated needs, these programs would be funded directly, as is the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system.

3 A complementary capital budget to retrofit existing or create new quality spaces will also be required, as will a higher level of investment in ECE post-secondary education.

MOVING FROM A PATCHWORK TO A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

Legislative and Policy Change

This Plan proposes a sea change from the current patchwork of fragmented child care services to a cohesive, democratic system of early care and learning.

Historically, the development of child care in BC has depended on the initiative of community groups and individuals. However well-intentioned, the result is a patchwork of isolated programs, high levels of operational fragility, and no guarantee that programs exist where they are most needed. While ad hoc development has not worked for children, families or communities, it is no surprise that some providers value the autonomy they now have over their operations.

The shift from stand-alone programs, no matter who operates them, to a cohesive, democratic system will take time — perhaps a generation. With the right elements in place new generations of early childhood educators will enter a system in which they are respected and supported by the communities to whom they are accountable.

The Plan includes three initiatives that are the foundation of a democratic system: legislation, a new home in the Ministry of Education, and a new role for Boards of Education.

An Early Care and Learning Act for BC

A new Early Care and Learning Act would turn international commitments to honour children's and families' rights to quality early childhood programs into law — for which government can and would be held accountable.

The proposed new Early Care and Learning Act would enshrine the rights of:

- All young children (from birth to 5 years) to access high quality, integrated care and learning services that respect their unique developmental needs;⁴
- All children from age 6 to 12 to access high quality before and after school care that responds to and respects their developmental needs;
- All families, on a voluntary basis, to access quality, affordable care for their children;
- Families to be actively engaged in their children's early care and learning programs;
- First Nations and Aboriginal communities to govern, develop and deliver early care and learning services that meet their communities' needs;
- Children with extra support needs to be fully supported and included; and
- Children from families facing economic, social or cultural barriers to be fully supported and included.

4 While this plan supports extended parental leave of 18 months, some families will want and need infant care.



The Early Care and Learning Act would also define how the system is governed and funded, and set out the regulations within which services operate.

This Act would replace the current provision for “early learning programs” in the BC School Act, which narrowly defines Ministry of Education early learning programs as those designed to “improve readiness for and success in kindergarten” and restricts access to only those children whose parent or designated caregiver can attend with them.⁵

Enshrining access to early care as a right equal to the right to public education will help overcome the historic divide between relatively well-funded, universal public education services and relatively poorly funded, poorly regulated, privatized child care services.

An Early Care and Learning Act would bring “child care” to the table as a strong and equal partner with public education and help protect against a downward extension of the narrowly defined academic readiness approach to programs for young children.

A New Home for Early Care and Learning in the Ministry of Education

While BC’s public schools face many challenges, a new home in the Ministry of Education provides an historic opportunity to extend the strengths of the public education system to a public system of early care and learning. These strengths include:

- **Universal entitlement for all children.** The School Act provides this for children from age 5 and up; the new Early Care and Learning Act would provide this for children from birth to age 5.
- **Public funding.** BC law requires that no user fees be charged for Kindergarten to Grade 12 education.⁶ This Plan proposes a move to affordable, but not yet free, access to early care and learning.⁷
- **Democratic control.** Elected Boards of Education can strengthen civic engagement in, and ownership of, a public early care and learning system.
- **Public understanding and support.** Just as the public expects and accepts schools in every community, they will come to accept and expect early care and learning as well.
- **Respect and fair compensation for the workforce.** The Plan proposes a way for early childhood educators to increase their education and strengthen their profession.
- **Infrastructure to deliver.** Rather than create new administrative structures, this Plan proposes to make use of the existing infrastructures of the Ministry of Education and Boards of Education.

5 School Act, Revised Statutes of British Columbia, 1996, page C-12.
<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/revisedstatutescontents.pdf>

6 Ibid, Section 82, page C-73.

7 Parent fees would account for no more than 20 per cent of the overall cost of early care and learning programs — with supports to assist low-income families.



A home in education does not mean children would start school at a younger age or that all early care programs would be located in schools. Rather, this Plan calls for the Ministry of Education to be responsible for a system of community-based early care and learning programs for children from birth to 5 years. Children would still start school at age 5 when they enter Kindergarten.

To fulfill this new mandate, the Ministry of Education would need to establish an Early Care and Learning Division with responsibility for stable funding, transition planning, licensing and regulatory frameworks, and workforce development. A designated Director of Early Care and Learning would also be required.

A New Role for Boards of Education

With a new home in the Ministry of Education, elected Boards of Education would be mandated and funded to plan, develop, and govern the delivery of a range of early care and learning (ECL) services in their districts — whether these services are located in community or school facilities.

To undertake these new responsibilities, Boards of Education would be required to:

- Work with municipal/regional governments and the child care community to develop and implement ECL plans. With annual targets and reporting benchmarks, ECL plans would guide the integration of existing child care services into the education system and the development of new ECL services to meet unmet needs, within a 10-year implementation strategy.
- Create ECL standing committees comprised of families and other stakeholders to guide board decision-making.
- Designate at least one elected board of education trustee as an ECL liaison.
- Assign knowledgeable staff to support ECL programs and find ways to integrate licensing, support for children with unique needs, and resource/referral responsibilities into the new system.
- Ensure that all ECL programs operate in stable and appropriate spaces, whether in schools, on school grounds, or in the community.
- Provide professional development for school district administrators and staff about the board's new responsibilities and programs.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COME FIRST

Early Care and Learning Programs and Services



The central goal of a new public system of early care and learning is to meet the needs of children and families. While the policy environment and governance structure outlined above lay a foundation for that system, it is the services the foundation supports that matter for children and families.

With a well-functioning system, families can access quality care and learning services when and where they need them, without having to worry about the infrastructure that makes it possible. This Plan provides an innovative set of services that build on the strengths of the public education system *and* on the strengths of quality early childhood education.

Early Years Centre Networks: Putting Care at the Core

This Plan proposes a system of Early Years Centre (EYC) Networks: clusters of early care and learning programs that meet the needs of infants, toddlers, and 3 to 5-year-olds while their parents are at work, school or home.

EYC Networks would integrate child care programs now regulated under the Child Care Licensing Regulation into a unified service. These would include group care for infants, toddlers, and 3 to 5-year-olds, family child care for mixed ages, and pre-schools for 3 to 5-year-olds.

EYC Networks are a top priority as they meet the needs of both children and working families and address the current child care crisis.

EYC Networks would be:

- Neighbourhood and community networks of regulated full and part-time early care and learning programs from which families select the program that meets their needs;
- A better way to meet the needs of 3 and 4-year-olds than pre- or junior Kindergarten because they put “care at the core” and meet the needs of working families;⁸
- Staffed by qualified early childhood educators and family child care providers;
- Play-based programs where children have opportunities to develop physically, socially, emotionally, morally, spiritually, culturally, cognitively and creatively, where each child’s self-esteem is enhanced, and a warm, loving atmosphere is maintained;⁹
- Places that support a partnership between families and early childhood educators through positive and respectful relationships;
- Diverse enough to offer a range of pedagogical approaches to early childhood education; and
- Key players in a coordinated and integrated broader system of early years’ services.

8 Early Childhood Educators of BC, Code of Ethics, 2008.

9 Ibid.



In Early Years Centre Networks, early childhood educators and family child care providers would be part of a collegial team, allowing them to learn from and with each other, share resources, and pursue career paths. Over time, the public will come to understand EYC Networks and expect them to be in all communities — just like libraries, parks and fire halls.

Development of Early Years Centre Networks

Early Years Centre Networks would develop in two ways: evolving from existing providers, and creating new EYC Networks to meet demonstrated needs.

EVOLVING EYC NETWORKS FROM EXISTING PROVIDERS

Existing group child care, pre-school and regulated family child care providers who want to be part of the new system and are prepared to meet the new accountability measures could become part of a neighbourhood EYC Network.

To be part of an EYC Network, providers would:

- Embrace a shift from independent operations to participants in a democratic system;
- Affiliate, at the neighbourhood level, with other providers into a unified EYC Network;
- Develop a plan to demonstrate their readiness and ability to meet the system accountability measures (see below); and
- Complete an application process to enter into contracts for service or similar funding mechanisms with the local Board of Education.

These EYC Networks would offer programs in existing child care or pre-school facilities and affiliated family child care homes. Given that communities may not already have a full range of child care services, flexibility would be required.

CREATING NEW EYC NETWORKS TO MEET DEMONSTRATED NEEDS

Boards of Education would develop and operate new EYC Networks in response to the needs identified in their early care and learning plans. These EYC Networks could offer a full range of inclusive services, including full and part-time group programs for infants, toddlers and 3 to 5-year-olds, pre-schools for 3 to 5-year-olds, and full and part-time affiliated family child care homes for mixed age groupings.

New group programs could be located in schools, purpose-built facilities on school grounds, or other appropriate community facilities such as community recreation centres. Over time, EYC Networks would be available in every community — just like elementary schools. In rural communities where young children travel long distances to school, EYC Networks could include family child care homes or small group programs closer to home.



Early Years Centre Network Funding and Accountability

EYC Networks would be core services delivered by the new public early care and learning system. As such, they would receive operational funding, through new public investments in early care and learning, to meet five system accountability measures:

- Cap parent fees at an affordable level (accounting for no more than 20 per cent of the overall cost of ECL programs, with supports to assist low-income families);
- Meet improved staff education and wage levels;
- Welcome all children, including those with extra support needs;
- Address demonstrated community need; and
- Offer play-based programs that are consistent with the BC Early Learning Framework or evolving Aboriginal frameworks.

Early Years Centre Networks that evolve from existing services would receive operational funding through a contract for service or similar funding mechanism from local Boards of Education, while EYC Networks developed by Boards of Education would be funded directly by those Boards. These new increased funding mechanisms would replace the current Child Care Operating Fund, which would be phased out as EYC Networks develop. A province-wide formula to recognize differences in regional operating costs would be required.

EYC Networks would be held accountable for public funds through mechanisms such as open financial records, filed financial statements, audits, and other measures.

Given that a small parent fee would still be required, the need to support low-income families would continue. During the transition period to the new system, the current child care subsidy program would remain in place to support families who do not yet have access to an affordable space in an EYC Network.

Providers who choose not to participate in the system would be able to continue to operate independently, if they meet licensing requirements; however, they would not receive any of the public funds tied to the new system of integrated early care and learning.

For examples of how EYC Networks might look, see page 16.

Kindergarten and Grade 1

Quality early care and learning programs are critical to children's development and, whether in child care, Kindergarten or Grade 1, share many common features.

While school entry would still begin at age 5, and Kindergarten and Grade 1 would continue to be governed by BC's School Act, this Plan integrates the first two years of school into the system of early care and learning.

To offer children optimal care and learning experiences, this Plan enhances Kindergarten and Grade 1 by:

- Bringing qualified early childhood educators (ECEs) into Kindergarten and Grade 1 rooms to work with teachers as professional colleagues (see page 18 for new ECE educational standards);
- Maintaining existing legislated class sizes for Kindergarten and Grade 1 so that, with the addition of ECEs to Kindergarten and Grade 1, there are sufficient adults to support full school day, play-based programs;
- Offering an extended full day and full year program for working and other families who want or need it, at the same location and with stable adult/child relationships;
- Respecting the vital role played by Education Assistants (EAs) in public schools and working with them to support the successful inclusion of children with extra support needs; and
- Enhancing early childhood education expertise and perspectives within the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system.

School Age Care

Quality school age care plays a critical role in children's development. While at work or study, families rely on school age care for their children. Consistent, genuine and caring relationships with qualified school age care providers who support children's growing independence are an essential element of an effective early care and learning system.

While more work is needed to deepen the school age component of this Plan, as a starting place:

- Regulated school age programs would offer before and after school care and full day care during non-instructional days and school breaks for children from Grade 2 to the end of Grade 7.
- Boards of Education would be responsible for providing quality school age programs wherever there is an identified need.
- Like EYC Networks, school age programs would receive public operating funds to meet the five system accountability measures:
 - » Cap parent fees at affordable levels;
 - » Meet improved staff education and wage levels;
 - » Welcome all children, including those with extra support needs;
 - » Address demonstrated community need; and
 - » Offer programs that support children's holistic development.
- Existing school age providers who want to be part of the new system and agree to meet these accountability measures would be funded through contracts for service or similar funding mechanisms with Boards of Education.
- New programs to meet demonstrated needs would be developed and operated by Boards of Education.
- School age programs would work in cooperation with other community services to provide care that meets the full spectrum of children's developmental needs throughout the year.

EARLY YEARS CENTRE NETWORKS

Some Examples

Evolving EYC Networks from existing providers

An urban EYC Network that brings together existing:

- group programs in recreation centre
- free-standing community based daycare
- family child care homes
- school age child care in elementary school (run by recreation centre)



An EYC Network in a small community that brings together existing:

- free-standing pre-school
- family child care homes



Creating new EYC Networks to meet demonstrated needs

A new urban EYC Network that includes:

- purpose-built child care on elementary school grounds; links with Kindergarten, Grade 1 and school-age programs
- community based pre-school
- family child care homes
[with connections to other community services]



A new rural EYC Network that includes:

- new group child care/pre-school program in elementary school
- family child care homes in surrounding communities



BUILDING CAPACITY

Investing in the Workforce



The success of this proposed system of early care and learning depends on investing in a respected, well-educated and fairly-compensated workforce.

This would:

- Enhance the quality of early care and learning programs by raising educational standards for all providers;
- Build on ECEs' ethical commitment to pursue, on an ongoing basis, knowledge, skills and self-awareness to be professionally competent;¹⁰
- Respect the culture, values and expertise of the field of early childhood education; and
- Move ECEs toward parity with teacher credentials and remuneration.

While a comprehensive workforce development strategy is required, this Plan includes three steps for building workforce capacity: a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education as a new educational standard, a diploma as a minimum credential for providers, and support for existing ECEs and providers to upgrade their qualifications.

Bachelor of ECE as the Educational Standard

A Bachelor of Early Childhood Education as the new educational standard recognizes the importance and value of the work done by early childhood educators and invests in their development. It builds on BC's existing Bachelor of Early Childhood Care and Education and calls for additional degree programs with diverse specialties.

New Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECE) degrees should reflect the breadth and depth of knowledge required to support all aspects of the new system, including care for children from birth to age 12 in a variety of settings, care for children in mixed age groupings, support for children with extra needs, and partnering with teachers and other staff members in Kindergarten and Grade 1 classrooms. Articulation with related degrees in fields such as Child and Youth Care would be required. Post-baccalaureate diploma programs with early childhood education specialties for teachers and other professionals should also be available.

Within five years, at least one early childhood educator in every EYC, Kindergarten, Grade 1, and school age care program should hold a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education degree or a bachelor's degree with an early years specialization from a related field.

¹⁰ Early Childhood Educators of BC, Code of Ethics, 2008.



Diploma as the Minimum Credential for Providers

This Plan includes establishing a diploma as the minimum credential for all child care providers, including those working in family and school age care. This goal recognizes that current educational requirements for ECEs, as well as family and school age providers, are not commensurate with the importance and value of their work and relegate the sector to low wages and recruitment and retention problems.

This standard builds on existing ECE diploma and certificate programs, the Good Beginnings Program for family child care, the Responsible Adult Course, and other courses related to school age care. Diploma programs would address the work done across the sector, including the specific work done in family and school age care, and be articulated with BECE degrees so that diploma graduates enter a bachelor's program at year two or three.

Support for Providers to Upgrade Qualifications

The goal of supporting existing ECEs and providers to upgrade their qualifications recognizes that while future practitioners will enter the sector with new educational standards in place, existing practitioners may need support to upgrade their education.

Existing training and experience would be recognized and incentives provided to support practitioners to upgrade their education while they continue to work. Programs would be available across the province and made accessible for all. Strategies to welcome ECEs who have left the field back into the new system would also be helpful.

Mature providers who may not want to upgrade their education to the new standards could remain in their current positions, with their current qualifications, until they decide to retire or move on.

GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE

Building on Strengths

One of the strengths and challenges of implementing this Plan is that it requires change from all partners in the new system.

The cultural shift required to move from stand-alone, isolated child care programs into a cohesive, democratic system may be hard and will definitely take time — perhaps a generation.

Existing ECE practitioners and providers entered the field under different expectations and circumstances. For some, the current high-demand, low-supply market serves their business interests. Others value the independence and autonomy they have over their operations. Others, who have experienced years of instability, are wary. Some may not want to move into a new system. The Plan respects the right of providers to continue to operate independently, as long as they meet licensing requirements; however, they would not receive the public funds tied to the new system and its accountability measures.

Fear of change and private interests must not stand in the way of meeting the needs of BC children and families and respecting the value of early childhood educators.

This Plan:

- Builds on existing community child care services that have been created and nurtured in communities, despite the obstacles;
- Welcomes all existing providers who are excited by the Plan's potential and want to be part of the new system — children and families need their services and the new system needs their wisdom and experience; and
- Ensures future generations of early childhood educators will enter a field where their work is respected and supported by, and accountable to, the community it serves.

Implementation will take generosity of spirit, community engagement and vigilance, and an openness to learn through practice — and make adjustments as needed.

Implementation

Once legislation is enacted, an initial five-year budget commitment within a 10-year implementation strategy, with annual benchmarks, will be required. This time frame provides a stable context for implementation, assures the community of government's long-term commitment, and provides opportunities for learning and adapting as the Plan moves forward.

Significant investment and action will be required in the first five years. This front loading will provide access to quality, affordable early care and learning services to large numbers of BC children and families as quickly as possible.



The four initial implementation steps are:

1. A COMMITMENT FROM ELECTED OFFICIALS TO EMBRACE AND IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

Primary responsibility for enacting this Plan rests with the provincial government, which needs to commit to its vision and goals. The needs of BC children and families should be a non-partisan issue that garners support from all. A federal commitment to support BC's implementation of this Plan will also be critical to success.

A commitment from Boards of Education to take up their new mandate for early care and learning is essential. Support and cooperation from municipalities and other public governing bodies is also important.

2. ENACTING THE EARLY CARE AND LEARNING ACT

The first step is for the BC Legislature to pass an Early Care and Learning Act. This will provide a stable legislative and regulatory framework for implementing the Plan and alleviate legitimate concerns about a downward extension of a narrow academic-readiness focus.

3. DEVELOPING A FIVE-YEAR STABLE BUDGET

Successful implementation will require a stable budget on which to proceed; this is the only way to assure child care providers, Boards of Education, and other partners that the necessary funds will be there to reach the targets and timelines they establish. A five-year budget, with annual reporting on benchmarks, will keep the Plan moving.

4. WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS TO DEVELOP TARGETS AND TIMELINES

Boards of Education will need to develop early care and learning plans with targets and timelines for providing early care and learning services for all, with a priority on services that meet the needs of young children *and* working families.

Boards of Education should give top priority to expanding access to full-time programs for young children before they enter Kindergarten through the development of EYC Networks. This addresses the biggest missing piece of the system and ensures more BC children get the quality early experiences they deserve. It responds to the majority of BC families who need quality, affordable care for their children while they work or study. And, it recognizes that the current crisis is most acute for infants and toddlers who, at their most vulnerable stage, are over-represented in unregulated care. Within this priority, districts can and must develop early care and learning plans that build on their communities' assets and respond to their communities' needs.

MOVING THE PLAN FORWARD



Our *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning in BC* offers a concrete, innovative and ambitious way forward. It provides a framework for significant and lasting system change. While it does not yet answer every question,¹¹ the excitement and interest it has generated are unprecedented and only continue to grow.

Moving the Plan forward depends on a willingness to meld this excitement into a cohesive voice that resonates with the public and impels decision makers to act.

For ways you can endorse and support the Plan to move it forward visit:

www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabdocs/integrated.html

www.ecebc.ca/news/integrated_project.html

11 For more detailed answers to frequently asked questions see www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabdocs/integrated.html and www.ecebc.ca/news/integrated_project.html



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