

**British Columbia Provincial Government Budget Consultations:
Select Standing Committee on Finance & Government Services**
September 23, 2010 3:20 pm. Sandman Hotel, 1944 Columbia Ave, Castlegar

Presenters:

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K O O T E N A Y B O U N D A R Y
Community Services Co-operative

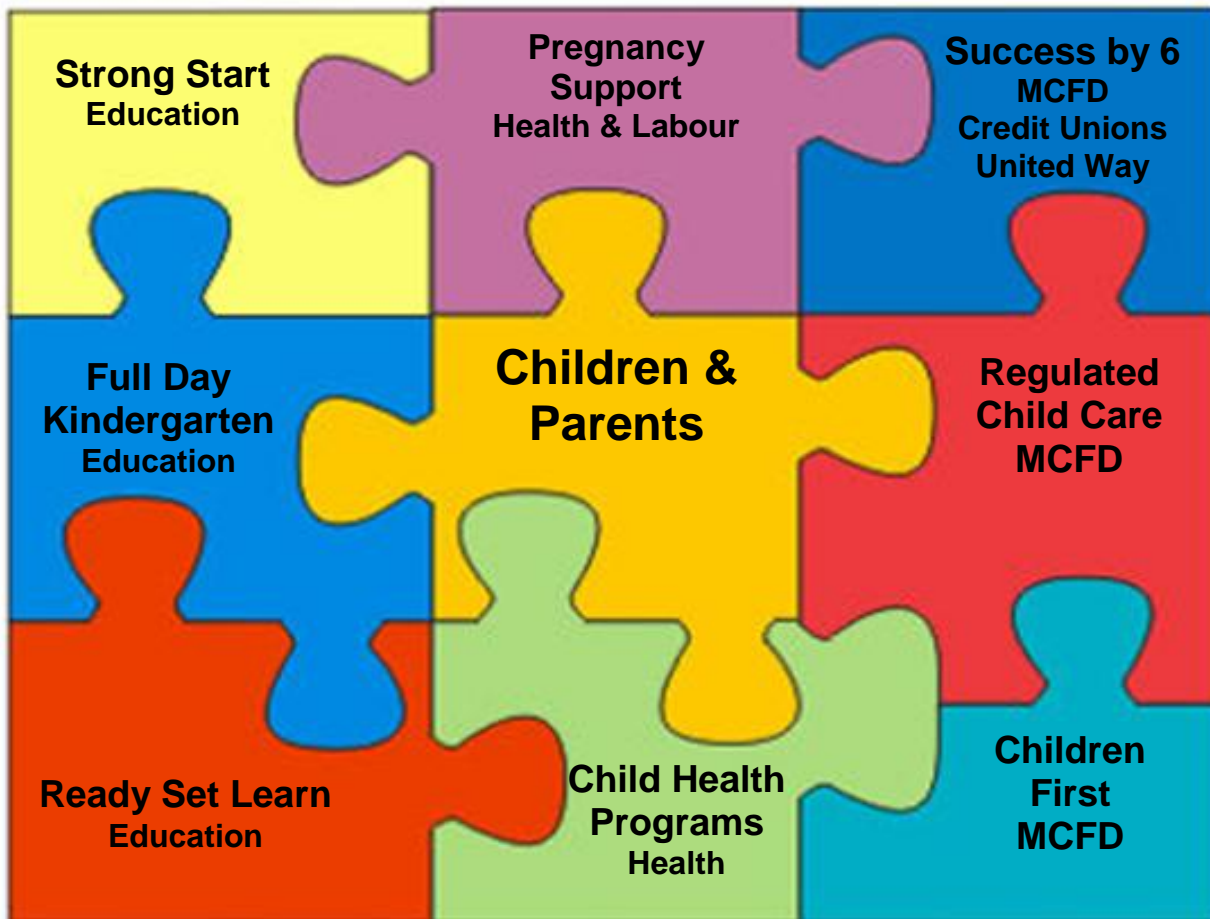
THE CONTEXT OF OUR PRESENTATION:

British Columbia's Governmental Strategic Plan (2009) commits to lowering the provincial rate of early vulnerability to 15% by fiscal year 2015/16. We know that currently the vulnerability rate across the province is 30% based on 2009 Early Development Instrument (EDI) results.

Research indicates that the best strategy to reduce early vulnerability is found in a comprehensive government policy which supports children at their earliest age, and parents to synchronize caring and earning.

This approach is promoted and supported by the Vancouver Board of Trade, Justice Institute, Canadian and BC Chambers of Commerce, Human Early Learning Partnership as detailed in its 15 by 15 Comprehensive Policy Framework in Early Human Capital Investment in BC.

In our opinion, budgetary expenditures must support a comprehensive approach with funding and partnership agreements in place between government departments as identified below to ensure maximum benefit for the expenditures.



SUCCESS BY 6 in BC is a unique partnership among Credit Unions, United Ways and the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Throughout BC, **Success by 6** is guided by Regional Councils made up of community leaders from business, education, community early childhood advisory groups, government and social service sectors. In the West Kootenay the benefits include Stars for Success, Community Action Planning, Talking Little Feet Council, Early Years Conference and Professional Development, West Kootenay Family Magazine and a Website of resources for parents and caregivers.

Recommendation: Currently, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), United Way and Credit Union Central Offices are negotiating a 3 year plan to enable this prevention focused and results oriented service to continue. On behalf of Success by 6 we support the necessary allocation of funding in the provincial budget.

CHILDREN FIRST is a program of the Ministry of Children and Family Development through regional budget allocations to support communities to identify and develop an integrated and comprehensive model of Early Childhood Development [ECD] service delivery for children 0 to 6 years of age and their families.

In the West Kootenay, **Children First** supports 8 community early childhood advisory councils that are powerful and accessible catalysts to change, at the community level, as well as allocating Children First and Success by6 funds to support service delivery priorities identified through community planning.

Recommendation: that the Ministry of Children and Family Development be provided with budgetary allocations for Children First to ensure the continuance of the work carried out at the community level by community stakeholders; viewing it as integral to the mandate of MCFD in the community.

NOTE: The combination of both programs under the Early Years Office in the West Kootenay enables maximum benefit, deters duplication of service and leverages additional dollars from the private sector.

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE PROVIDED BY THE CHILD CARE SECTOR:

Early learning and care is vital for children at their earliest age which means that the BC government strategy to decrease vulnerability at age 5 must begin much earlier.

- Programs such as Strong Start and Ready Set Learn offered primarily during the day support children with parents at home.
- What about the 144,000 children between the ages of 0-5 whose mothers are in the paid labour force? (2007 Stats Can.)
- There are only 30,000 child care spaces offered by early childhood educators with training specific to the care and education of very young children.
- Who is caring for the other 80% of children?
- These factors contribute to the high rate of 30% of BC children entering kindergarten developmentally vulnerable.

Recommendations:

- 1. The Ministries of Children and Family Development, and Education receive designated funds to effectively support all the Early Learning Initiatives which include Infant/Toddler, Group Childcare and School Age Care as well as Strong Start, Ready Set Learn and Full Day kindergarten.**
- 2. The Ministry of Children and Family Development receive sufficient funding to create additional and affordable child care spaces (West Kootenay Community Action Plan); as well as, increased funding to ensure the trained early childhood educators can be remunerated with a living wage, benefits and pension.**
- 3. To effectively tie the funding to a closer partnership between the Ministries of Children and Family Development and Education to benefit early learning and development of all young children; especially those from 0 to 5 yrs.**
- 4. To consider budgetary decisions in relation to the document: Emerging Plan for an Integrated System of Early Care and Learning in BC (Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC) as attached.**

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.

BRIEFING NOTE

Our Emerging Plan for an Integrated System of Early Care and Learning in BC

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) and the Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) are developing a **Plan for an Integrated System of Early Care and Learning in BC**. This work is motivated by BC's implementation of full school day Kindergarten for 5 year olds and the consideration 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, while Ontario and other provinces are developing integrated approaches for the provision of early care and learning, BC is proceeding without a strategy that recognizes and is inclusive of existing services or the needs of all families. Therefore a plan is essential.

Our plan builds on what is already well established. Families need access to quality care. Quality child care IS early learning. Current policies and approaches do not meet the need of BC's children and families. Public spending on the early years is a wise social and economic investment. Quality matters. **We do not repeat this evidence here.**

Of course, the plan is only viable with adequate, stable public funding for all parts of the system. While more work on specific funding mechanisms may be required, projected operating costs are in line with the Costing and Accountability Model utilized by CCCABC and the Victoria Regional Child Care Council. This model was updated in the *15 by 15 Report*,¹ confirming an incremental public investment of \$1.5 billion annually for early care and learning services for children under 6. In addition, our plan would require funding for quality school age care.

Our Starting Principles are grounded in the right of all children to access universal, high quality, publicly funded early care and learning.

And, our approach is based on our recognition that:

- Change is here. *We can wait to react to the impact or, as we have chosen, we can use our voices to inform it.*
- The status quo is not an acceptable fall back position. *Many children are not in quality care. Fees are too high, wages are too low and existing child care services are fragile. And, the ongoing divide between care and learning is making matters worse.*
- Integration of Care and Learning is a PROCESS. *This is about more than a simple administrative change and will take time.*
- Plans are NOT guarantees. *Even great plans require active engagement and vigilance by those who care.*
- The Early Care and Learning community needs to be included in the change process. *So far this hasn't happened.*

Internationally, there is a growing body of knowledge about the role of ministries of education in the delivery of early care and learning and the need for a seamless system. Our plan incorporates the related emerging policy lessons. To date we have completed an Environmental Scan of Ministry of Education involvement in early learning in Canadian provinces and territories, and a Literature Review of international approaches to governance of integrated systems (see www.cccabc.bc.ca and www.ecebc.ca).

Based on these two background documents, the evidence referenced above and our decades of collective wisdom and experience, this Briefing Note outlines the key elements of our plan. It does not answer every question or provide every detail. Rather, it reflects the consensus the two sponsoring organizations have achieved so far.

We are sharing it with key stakeholders and partners to ensure these ideas are part of the public dialogue and to learn from your reactions as we move towards finalizing the plan and mobilizing community support for its implementation.

¹ *15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC*. Human Early Learning Partnership, 2009.