

Community Scrambling for Way into Early Learning and Child Care Consultations

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While Linda Reid, BC's Minister of State for Child care, proudly claims that she is looking for the widest possible range of views about how BC should spend \$633 million from the federal government for regulated child care, parents, child care providers and early childhood organizations are scrambling to find out when and where their voices can be heard.

Given that the province signed an Agreement in Principle on Early Learning and Child Care with the Federal Government on Sept. 29, 2005, they have known since February that the money was coming. They have also known for months that, under the Agreement, they would be required to consult with communities to develop an Action Plan.

To make matters worse, there are two 'cross government' consultations going on at the same time. One is being driven by the Ministry of Education which is now responsible for early learning and one by the Ministry of Children and Family Development which is responsible for child care. Government claims that both consultations will lead to an integrated plan for Early Learning and Child Care – but the child care community has no idea how to get in the door of the Education consultations. There is no information on the website and participation seems to be by invitation only.

"The signs are increasingly disturbing" says Gyda Chud, leading Canadian early childhood development expert. "This government seems determined to separate 'early learning' from 'child care'. Yet, the research is clear – quality child care is early learning. Young children learn through play. Their social and emotional development most directly affects their ability to grow and thrive. Narrowly defined 'school readiness programs' are not the way to go. They don't meet children's needs and they certainly don't meet the needs of working mothers."

"We are hearing from parents and front line child care workers across BC about their anger and frustration" says Sharon Gregson, an active parent advocate.

"The federal money should be good news for children, families and communities. It should be spent to bring fees down for parents and wages up for workers. Its enough to make a difference and too much to waste" says Susan Harney, Chair of the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC.