

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

In the fall of 2010, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC briefed thousands of people in communities across BC about our *Emerging Plan for an Integrated System of Early Care and Learning in BC*. Some frequently asked questions emerged. Here are our responses.

Please remember – the Plan has not yet been approved by the provincial government so our answers reflect what ‘would’ or ‘will’ happen when and if the Plan is implemented.

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1. How will the Plan affect me?

Not surprisingly, the answer to this frequently asked question depends on who is asking: parents, early childhood educators, family child care providers, Board members or owner-operators.

I'm a Parent

The Plan is clear that whether or not your child attends an early care and learning program would be up to you. For those who need and want them, the Plan would increase access to affordable, quality services.

If you are using licensed group or family child care and your provider opts into the new system, your care arrangements would continue, your fees would go down and the education and wages of those who care for your child would improve.

If you are among the many BC families currently without access to quality, affordable child care, this Plan means that, over time, you would have options. If you live in a city or large town, your neighbourhood would have an Early Years Centre Network. The EYC Network would offer full time care for children before they enter school at age 5 in either a group or family child care setting, or a part time (pre-school) program. In rural communities there would be an EYC Network serving a larger area, with family or small group programs in each small community so young children don't have to travel long distances each day.

It would be up to each family to choose the program that meets their needs. Fees would be lower than they are currently and your children would be cared for by well educated early childhood educators in a play-based program that supports your child's development.

Families would still be able to make private child care arrangements with a provider who is not part of the new system and, if eligible, would receive a child care subsidy to help cover the fees the provider charges.

If you have children in Kindergarten or Grade 1, and they require before and after school care, these services would all be in one location. Your child would be able to build consistent, stable relationships with one teacher and two early childhood educators who together would offer a play-based program that supports learning. If your child is older, you would be assured that a school age program would be provided if there is a need at your local school.

I'm an Early Childhood Educator

This Plan means that over time, your profession – ECE – will be respected and valued, as it should be. You would be supported to complete a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education and you would have increased career opportunities in school and community based programs. *(See Question #2: What if I don't have the time or money to upgrade my education?)*

If you work in a non-profit or privately owned licensed child care program or pre-school, your program could join with other group daycares, pre-schools and family child cares in your neighbourhood to be part of an Early Years Centre Network. If you work for a non-profit, the decision to become part of an EYC Network would be made by your elected Board of Directors. If you work for a privately owned program, the decision would be made by the owner. Hopefully, in both cases, the decision-makers would seek your advice and input.

Your employer could also decide not to opt into the new system.

(See Question #5: What if I like things as they are – can I run my program outside the new system?)

I am a Child Care Society Board Member or a Child Care Owner

Whether your existing program is non-profit or privately owned, if you choose to become part of an Early Years Centre Network your program would receive public funds through a contract with your local Board of Education. You would be responsible for using these funds to: lower parent fees; improve caregiver education and wages; welcome all children whose families want or need care, including those with extra support needs; meet an

identified community need; and offer a play-based program. You would also be responsible for reporting in a transparent way how public funds are used to achieve public goals. (See *Question #5: What if I like things as they are – can I run my program outside the new system?* and *Question #9: What is a contract for service?*)

I'm a Family Child Care Provider

This Plan means you could join with other family child care providers, group daycares and pre-schools in your neighbourhood to be part of an Early Years Centre Network. As you do now, you would still care for children of mixed ages in your home and keep the special 'feel' your program offers.

If you choose to apply and become affiliated with an Early Years Centre Network you would receive public funds through a contract from your local Board of Education. You would be responsible to use these funds to: lower parent fees; improve your education; welcome all children whose families want and need care, including those with extra support needs; meet an identified community need; and offer a play-based program. You would also be responsible for reporting in a transparent way how the public funds were used to achieve the public goals. (See *Question #9: What is a contract for service?*)

Through the EYC Network, you would be part of a body of respected early childhood professionals. You would be supported to upgrade your education if you decide that's what you want to do. You could also share resources, learn with and from each other and find neighbourhood solutions to common problems, such as having access to casual staff. (See *Question #2: What if I don't have the time and money to upgrade my education?*)

You can also decide not to opt into the new system. (See *Question #5: What if I like things as they are – can I run my program outside the new system?*)

I'm a School Age Child Care Provider

The Plan proposes that 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. Existing school age providers who want to be part of the new system and agree to meet the five system accountability measures could apply to be funded through contracts for service or similar funding mechanisms with Boards of Education. If you work for a non-profit, the decision to become part of the new system would be made by your elected Board of Directors. If you work for a privately owned program, the decision would be made by the owner. Hopefully, in both cases, the decision-makers would seek your advice and input. All new licensed school age child care programs would be operated by the local Board of Education and their staff employed by the school district.

Over time, this Plan means that your job will be respected and valued, as it should be. You would be supported to complete the new educational standard in the profession, a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. Or, if you chose, there will be incentives to upgrade to the new minimum, a Diploma of ECE. You would have increased career opportunities in school and community based programs. (See *Question #2: What if I don't have the time or money to upgrade my education?* And *Question #3: What if I already have a degree in a related field?*)

2. What if I don't have the time or money to upgrade my education?

For those already working in the field, the Plan recognizes that you should be offered incentives and support to upgrade your education. This includes: recognizing your existing training and experience; ensuring programs are available across BC and are delivered in ways that make it possible for you to study while you work; providing financial incentives and developing curriculum that reflects the needs of the whole sector – including family and school age child care providers.

If you are a mature provider who doesn't want to upgrade your education, the Plan would enable you to stay in your current job with your current qualifications until you decide to retire or move on.

3. What if I already have a degree in a related field?

Until recently, BC didn't have any Bachelor of Early Childhood Education programs and today there is still only one. As a result, ECEs who wanted to continue their education completed related bachelor degrees in fields like Child and Youth Care. The Plan recognizes that these degrees need to be articulated with the evolving Bachelor of Early Childhood Education so that ECEs with related bachelor degrees can fully participate in the new system. Post-baccalaureate programs with early childhood education specialties for teachers and other professionals would also be available.

4. Does the Plan mean everyone has to offer one prescribed curriculum?

NO. This Plan stands in direct contrast to the standardization of curriculum for young children. It is based on the sound ECE principle that children learn through play in caring relationships and supportive environments and that each child's developmental journey is to be celebrated and respected.

The diverse 'cultures' that exist in quality child care are a strength we want to preserve. That is why this Plan welcomes a range of approaches, including Reggio Emilia, Parent Participation, Montessori, etc. The one requirement is that ALL programs are consistent with BC's Early Learning Framework and provide play-based, experiential opportunities that support children's holistic development across all their developmental domains.

5. What if I like things as they are – can I run my program outside the new system?

YES. If you don't want to participate in the new system or meet the new accountability measures, you could continue to operate a family child care, pre-school or group child care centre as long as the program meets licensing standards. You would not receive the new public funds tied to the new accountability measures.

Families could continue to make private arrangements with you to care for their children. You would not be accountable for anything beyond meeting licensing requirements. As now, families who qualify would still be able to use their child care subsidy to help cover the fees you set. Over time the Child Care Operating Fund would be phased out for programs that don't meet public accountability measures. New privately owned and operated for-profit centres could open if they think there is a market need, but would not receive public capital or operating funds.

6. Does the Plan welcome privately owned child care?

YES. The Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning welcomes existing small independent owner/operators and commercial operators on the same terms and conditions as it welcomes in existing non-profit programs and family child care providers.

If government implements the Plan, existing privately owned preschool and daycare programs that want to become Early Years Centres (EYCs) will receive new public funds to meet the Plan's 5 accountability measures – *lower parent fees, improved staff wages and education levels, inclusion of all children, meeting an identified community need and offering programs consistent with BC's Early Learning Frameworks*. Just like non-profit child care, mechanisms such as the requirement to provide publicly available financial statements prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles will be used to ensure that public funds are used to meet these public goals.

The Plan's costing model allocates all public funding and parent fees to increasing affordable access to quality services. Under the costing formula, all licensed child care spaces – whether delivered in family homes, schools, community-owned or commercially-operated – will be funded to collect the same parent fees, pay the same average wages to trained early childhood educators (school-age and family child care providers), and offer the same inclusion and quality supports.

The Plan gives Boards of Education responsibility for developing and delivering new early care and learning services to meet unmet needs. For the first time, the development of child care programs will be planned for and new services will meet prioritized community needs.

However, some child care operators may not want to be part of the new system. They may not wish to be constrained by the accountability measures attached to accepting new public funding that will reduce parent fees and raise wages. The Community Plan clearly says that these providers can continue to operate independently, as long as they meet Licensing requirements. They will of course not receive the new operating funds that are tied to the accountability measures listed above but could still accept parent subsidy dollars.

7. If private operators are welcome, why does the Plan say that commercial child care is not the way to go?

BC has always had privately owned preschool and day care centres. Until recently, these private programs have been owned by individuals, typically an Early Childhood Educator with one or two centres or a family child care home. Just like non-profit programs, these privately owned programs are eligible to receive provincial Child Care Operating Funds (CCOF) and child care subsidies paid on behalf of eligible families. As small businesses or self-employed individuals, the owners of these programs are also able to claim tax deductions for their business related expenses.

Owner/operator child care programs have always been part of communities. They are motivated to make a living by providing a much needed community service. In the absence of a 'system' within which they can practice their profession – owning a small program has been one of the only viable options. However, we cannot expect them and some good-willed non-profits, with minimal public funds, to build an entire system to meet family needs and provide a living wage for early childhood educators right across the province. In order to do that, the evidence is clear that we need to integrate existing programs into a public system.

More recently, BC has seen the growth of 'commercial child care'. These are companies, with investors and/or shareholders, who own, want to own, or franchise, a large number of child care programs. For some commercial child care companies, real estate is the most important asset rather than the quality of care. Some of these companies promote their services to a particular niche in the child care market, services to employers or early schooling. To date, commercial child care is also eligible for CCOF and child care subsidies paid on behalf of eligible families.

Commercial for-profit (some call it 'big-box') child care is quite different. While ECEs are connected to the children and families they work with, in commercial operations they are rarely the key decision makers. The corporate structure requires that the 'business' generate profits for investors. This necessitates a focus on real estate acquisition, and buying up the competition, standardized programs, lower wages and higher fees. Commercial child care sees families as customers, whereas ECEs see families as partners in providing care for children. And, when and if commercial child care fails (like it did in Australia) – families, communities and governments are left to pick up the pieces. ECEs then often find themselves unemployed or needing to start their careers all over again. The international evidence has convinced us that this is not the way to build a system that meets the needs of children, families, educators or communities.

The Community Plan for a Public System of Early Care & Learning **is** the way to build a high quality system for BC's children, families, educators, communities and our economy.

8. What about unions?

We support unionization as an important strategy for advancing the sector. Currently a number of different unions represent some BC early childhood educators, and all teachers and classroom-based school staff are

represented by one of two unions. We also support the democratic right of workers to unionize and choose which union can best represent them.

9. What is a contract for service?

The Plan proposes that operational funding tied to new accountability measures could be provided to existing child care programs that affiliate into EYC Networks through contracts for service or a similar funding mechanism.

Contracts for service (or service contracts) are a relatively common way for governments to fund the delivery of a service when it is provided by organizations or individuals who are not direct government employees.

While not perfect, service contracts may be the most effective way to transition existing providers into the new system. On the one hand, they make it possible for existing providers to keep their own identity and have some control over how services are delivered. On the other, they make it possible for government to tie public funds to public goals – in this case, the five accountability measures for EYC Networks and school age care.

The Plan calls for new EYC Networks, enhanced Kindergarten and Grade 1, and school age programs to be developed and delivered by Boards of Education. These programs would be funded directly by Boards in the same way that the K – 12 system is funded.

10. Why wouldn't new private child care centres be funded – just like private schools?

This Plan is about extending universal access to quality early care and learning programs for young children, ensuring that public investments meet public goals and building community assets. The 'private' school model doesn't help achieve these goals.

It's also important to clarify different uses of the term 'private'. In child care it describes programs that are privately owned by individuals, small companies or national or multinational corporations. These child care programs operate as businesses where the owners make the decisions, can accumulate private assets (like real estate) through the business and can make a profit. These are different from child care programs operated by non-profit societies where an elected board of directors makes the decisions but cannot receive any personal gain. Employees of non-profit societies receive a wage or salary but any assets (like real estate) belong to the society – not to an individual – and any surplus goes back into the program, not into profits.

In education, the term 'private' describes schools that are independent from elected Boards of Education. But in order to receive funds from the province these schools must be non-profit societies in good standing and offer provincially approved curriculum.

So while public funding of private schools raises serious questions for us, at least public funds that go to them cannot be used for the private accumulation of wealth or assets.

11. Where do Licensing, Child Care Resource and Referral and Supported Child Development programs fit into the Plan?

There are a number of questions about the Plan's impact on both the function and the staff employed by Licensing, Child Care Resource and Referral and Supported Child Development programs. Here are our answers:

Licensing

BC's child care licensing regulations are one of the important tools available to promote quality. That said, they focus primarily on health and safety issues rather than on some of the broader indicators of quality.

Monitoring and enforcement of these regulations is now done by Licensing Officers who are employed by Regional Health Authorities. Some Licensing Officers focus solely on child care; others are responsible for a broader range of community care facilities.

This Plan calls for a strong regulatory framework for early care and learning programs, so a licensing function would still be required. Whether this function moves into Education or remains in Health requires more discussion. The Plan also includes key elements designed to improve the quality of programs that go far beyond health and safety issues. Whether licensing could or should play a role in supporting this broader approach to quality also requires more thought and discussion.

We invite Licensing Officers and others to share their thoughts about how best to meet both the existing and new regulatory requirements of this Plan.

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR)

The CCRRs offer families and child care providers services and supports that will be needed in the new system. CCRR programs in BC already have the structure in place to assist in implementing new systems and strategies and, with sufficient funding, could expand the scope of their services.

In addition to their existing roles, we see two additional functions CCRRs could play. First, as the local experts on child care needs and availability in their communities, they have an invaluable role to play in working with Boards of Education to develop local Early Care and Learning Plans. Secondly, given their existing links with a full range of child care providers, they may well have a role to play in supporting providers to affiliate into Early Years Centre Networks.

Whether CCRRs remain in MCFD, move into a contractual relationship with local Boards of Education or become part of the in-house supports Boards of Education offer to Early Care and Learning Programs requires more discussion.

Supported Child Development

The Plan provides for the full inclusion of children with extra support needs in early care and learning programs. The costing model includes the funds necessary to make this principle a reality.

In child care, the provincial Supported Child Development program currently facilitates the inclusion of children with extra support needs in a range of child care settings through the provision of additional staffing, program consultation and individual planning – functions that will definitely be required in the new system.

The best way to bring Supported Child Development functions into the new system requires further discussion and we invite Supported Child Development Consultants, parents and others to share their ideas.

In the school system, Education Assistants (EAs) and Special Education Assistants (SEAs) facilitate the inclusion of children with extra support needs. Funding pressures have created significant challenges for these important staff members and the children they serve.

This Plan fully supports the vital role of EAs and does not propose to replace them or to reallocate existing funds that support their work. Under the Plan, ECEs and EAs would work together to support the successful inclusion of children with extra support needs in schools. We also know that many EAs have some ECE training and/or credentials and could play an important role in the workforce that would be required to make this Plan work in schools.

12. Why the Ministry of Education and not the Ministry of ...?

As we expected, there are a number of questions about why we propose to move responsibility of early care and learning programs into the Ministry of Education rather than other options. We hope these answers explain our rationale.

Why the Ministry of Education?

Often, those who ask this question assume that a move to education means we believe young children should be in 'school'. We do NOT.

Rather, the Plan builds on national and international lessons about systems that work well – systems where child care and education are integrated under one lead ministry (increasingly education) and where child care and early learning are strong and equal partners.

That is why the Plan supports and strengthens play-based, quality early childhood education and offers a clear alternative to school-based junior or pre-Kindergarten.

We are proposing a new home in education because the public education system, with all of its challenges, is based on a set of principles that to date have not extended to early care and learning programs. These include the universal right to attend school at no cost, public funding and democratic control of the school system and a high level of public understanding and support. Along with health, education is a top public priority.

Child care is currently the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, whose priority is to protect the most vulnerable children and families. Despite the efforts of many dedicated staff in MCFD, child care is not the ministry's priority and has not thrived there.

But, this Plan is about much more than simply moving the words 'child care' from the list of one minister's responsibilities to another. It's about extending the rights and principles that our public education system is based on to younger children. We believe that a home in education provides the best option for achieving this goal.

Why not a Ministry of Early Childhood?

The creation of a new ministry is a costly and time consuming process. Often new ministries command less of the provincial budget than those with longer histories.

We want to make sure that the dollars and time invested in a new system of early care and learning go to the front lines – into creating quality services as quickly as possible – rather than into administrative overhead. The Ministry of Education already has an infrastructure that can deliver on a political commitment to implement this Plan. Just look how quickly they were able to implement full school day Kindergarten for 5-year-olds.

13. What is the role of municipalities?

Many BC municipalities have worked hard to support the accessibility and affordability of child care for their residents. In the face of inaction by senior levels of government, many use their powers over zoning and development, their limited budgets and their political influence to do the best they can. We applaud their initiative but we recognize that they do not have the authority or revenue to build the early care and learning system that BC needs.

We considered an expanded municipal role in early care and learning and looked at Ontario, where municipalities have a statutory responsibility for some community services including child care. The current Ontario plan has 4 and 5-year-olds moving to the school system and municipalities responsible for programs for children 3 and under.

BC municipalities don't have the same powers or responsibilities, so we looked for a made in BC approach that integrated early care and learning for children from birth up.

That said, there is still an important role for municipalities in this Plan. They will need to be key partners in developing Early Care and Learning Plans and in facilitating the growth of Early Years Centre Networks wherever they are located – including as part of new recreation or civic facilities and new residential communities.

14. Implementation

The Plan doesn't provide for every detail, and more discussion and thought is required as we move to implementation. But here are answers to some of the common questions about how it would all work.

How much will it cost?

In the 2009 report *15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC*, the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) estimated that the operating cost of early care and learning services for children under the age of 6 requires an additional public investment of \$1.5 billion annually. HELP also identifies multiple benefits that offset these costs, even in the short term.¹

HELP's costing model is consistent with the system proposed in this Plan – access to a full or part time program for 90% of children aged 3 – 5 and about three-quarters of children under 3 (following a significantly expanded parental leave program); parent fees capped at no more than 20% of overall costs; ECE wages at an average of \$25/hour plus benefits and additional funding to include children with extra support needs and children from low income, immigrant or other families facing social or cultural barriers. The full cost of this Plan would be somewhat higher to cover the costs of services for children aged 6 – 12.

Isn't that too much?

NO. For us, every dollar invested in the new system is well worth it! First, because our children have the right to quality early experiences. And because decades of research confirm that investing in high quality early care and learning experiences has significant social and economic benefits.

Recent studies put the return at \$2.54 for every dollar invested. They also demonstrate that investing in child care has a bigger job multiplier effect than in any other sector.²

Even after full school day kindergarten is fully implemented, the combined federal and provincial investments in early education and care in BC will only reach about 0.28% of GDP³ – less than half of the average of 0.7% spent by developed countries around the world (OECD). In BC, an increase of \$1.5 billion would bring total public investment to \$1.9 billion, within range of 1% of GDP recommended by many experts.⁴

Our experience shows time and again - when governments believe something is a priority, they find the funds. The only real question is whether families and children are important enough.

Will this Plan take funds away from existing programs?

NO. This Plan addresses the need to provide children and families with quality early care and learning services – a key missing piece of BC's family policy. But, to fully support families, this Plan needs to be part of a

¹ <http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/wp-uploads/web.help.ubc.ca/2010/01/15by15-Full-Report.pdf>

Kershaw, Paul, Lynell Anderson, Clyde Hertzman, and Bill Warburton. 2009. *15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia, Human Early Learning Partnership.

² Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC). (2009) Literature review of socioeconomic effects and net benefits: Understanding and addressing workforce shortages in early childhood education and care (ECEC) project. Ottawa. CCHRSC. See <http://www.cpsc-cssge.ca/english/aboutus/completed.cfm#p5> for full report.

³ HELP presentation *Smart Family Policy Grows Strong Economies*, available at <http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/research/initiatives/social-change/15-by-15-smart-family-policy/>

⁴ 15 by 15, p. 26

comprehensive set of policies and programs including income supports, parental leave, pre- and post-natal health services, family resource and parent education programs, just to name a few.

Our organizations have a long history of supporting a comprehensive basket of services and supports for families with young children. We have never called for cuts to existing community or school programs to fund child care. Rather, our Plan calls for a new investment of public funds.

15. When does it start?

This question comes from those who are excited by the Plan and want to get going, and also from those who think it is a government plan that we have the power to implement.

The Plan is proposed by two community organizations – *not by government*. It can and will start when there is enough public support to impel governments to act.

In 2011, we are working to build that support so that every elected official in BC makes a commitment to embrace and implement the Plan. *To do this we will need the help of all those who are excited by the Plan's potential to provide a better future for BC's young children and their families.* You can help add your voice at www.cccabc.bc.ca and www.ecebc.ca.