



ECEBC | early childhood
educators of BC

Susan Kennedy
Executive Director
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Ministry of Education
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Dear Ms. Kennedy:

The Early Childhood Educators of BC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Ministry of Education Early Learning Agency Consultation. The discussion is a welcome one. If the plan for early learning is done well there is the opportunity for huge potential to showcase British Columbia as a leader in early childhood development, learning and care.

Over riding the planning and delivery of full-school-day pre-kindergarten programs, certain values must be articulated and developed in the vision. These programs must have universal entitlement and access for all children. To do this well, the divide between early learning and care must be stopped. The Ministry of Education and government decision makers must recognize that children, especially children in this young and vulnerable age group, must be nurtured as well as educated. Continuing the narrow focus on early learning while ignoring all the other aspects of healthy child development must be stopped. Working families' needs must also be considered.

It is unfortunate that the response time has been so compressed, and in the future we would encourage more time so as to ensure all interested parties have ample opportunity to engage.

Early Childhood Educators - ECE's – As early childhood educators already have the education and training to provide quality early childhood education, the three and four year old programs should be run by ECE's. ECEBC believes that moving to a bachelor of Early Childhood Education would be beneficial. We believe that training for bachelor degrees in early childhood education which builds on ECE's existing education and training should be part of the long term planning for full-school day pre-kindergarten programs. In the interim, there are many well qualified ECE's in our province. While we appreciate that some primary teachers hold a minor in early childhood development, we do not propose that this education would meet the developmental and learning needs of young children.

The early childhood education work force would welcome the opportunity to work with schools. While there currently is a challenge with recruitment and retention of ECE's, plan for adequate wages and benefits commensurate with training in pre-k programs will encourage people who have left the field to return.

Child to Staff Ratios – While we understand that elementary schools in the province of BC do not fall under the regulations required through the Community Care Licensing Facilities



Act, we would highly recommend that school programs for three and four year olds adhere to current licensing regulations for these age groups. This would allow adequate staff to work with children, would ensure that each child receives appropriate care and attention from the early childhood educator and would ensure that children's safety is always paramount.

Care and Learning are interconnected and cannot be separated, not if optimum learning and development is to take place. The needs of working parents must be considered in the vision, planning and roll-out of full-school day pre-kindergarten. It will not be possible for working parents to transport their children to school for a 9:00 am – 2:30 or 3:00 pm day. Therefore wraparound or seamless childcare must be provided within the school or community space as part of the entitlement.

Community Based Programs - Many schools and school districts no longer have empty classrooms which can be used to develop full-school-day pre-kindergarten programs and therefore space requirements will be challenging. Recognize that community based programs are already offering early childhood development, learning and care. This initiative will need to rely on community programs, many of which have been built with public dollars. Recognize that these programs can be part of the solution and embrace the opportunity to use their expertise.

Provide Appropriate Programming based on research in early childhood education.

This should include rich environments planned and programmed for optimum learning through investigative open-ended play. The environment must be adequate in square meters and have varied play space. A holistic approach should be used in order to recognize the complex and inter connected needs of young children. It would be inappropriate to focus solely on academic achievement while ignoring the whole child and the complex ways that children learn and develop. Learning cannot be isolated simply to literacy and numeracy. The program must respect the varied ways that young children learn through investigation of materials and ideas, socialization with their peers and materials which challenge them. The role of the educator in the creation of child centred, emergent focused opportunities and the facilitation of learning through purposeful play is key to the programs' success.

Aboriginal Language and Culture – It will be imperative that the unique social and cultural needs of Aboriginal children are met. As Aboriginal children and families have distrust of the school system because of the residential school history, particular attention to existing and successful community based and on reserve Aboriginal programs should be considered as a model.

Physical space must be appropriate and access to the outdoors from the classroom must be considered. As children of this age require many opportunities to regularly play outside, separate fenced play yards with age and developmentally appropriate play equipment should be considered in the capital cost planning. The indoor setting should have access to water for



both washing and playing as well as a minimum of 2 toilets within the classroom space. There should be adequate space for children to be quiet and to rest if necessary.

In conclusion the Early Childhood Educator's of BC believes there is real opportunity to develop early learning and care programs that will benefit all of British Columbia's Children aged three to five.

- To develop high quality programs that will ensure children's optimal development will require careful and thoughtful reflection which incorporates current research.
- It will be imperative that equal access and entitlement is granted to all, including the children of working families.
- The existing disconnect between early learning, early childhood development and care is artificial, detrimental to good public policy and against all current research. It must be stopped.
- A downward extension of primary education will go against current research regarding how child best learn and develop.
- Early childhood educators are the best educated and trained to work with children aged three, four and five years.
- Respecting current community care licensing facilities child to staff ratios for this age group will ensure quality programming and adequate care attention and safety for every child.
- Incorporating community based childcare programs into the mix will use existing purpose built space and will ensure efficacy in public spending.

We trust this information will be used and considered as the first phase of the consultation process is completed. We look forward to further discussion and engagement as the process continues. Should you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours truly,

Sheila Davidson,
Executive Director