

August 15, 2008

**ECLA Consultation Feedback**  
**Compiled by Terrace Make Children First Network**  
**Discussion meetings held on July 30<sup>th</sup> and Aug 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

**Present (July 30<sup>th</sup>):** representatives from Coast Mountains School District, Skeena MLA Office, Northern Health Authority, Make Children First Network

**Present (Aug 14<sup>th</sup>):** early childhood educators and childcare providers from six centres, Skeena Childcare Resource and Referrals, Make Children First Network

Both groups were in support of the Consultation Paper proposal of expanding the system of early learning and care to include children from the age of 3 but also expressed strong caution in relation to how the system is going to be implemented, funding and transition from existing system. Major changes in attitudes and adequate sustainable supports for the proposed system are essential to success.

Below please find a summary of both discussions.

**Note:** The Consultation Paper was posted too late giving everyone involved a chance to provide feedback. One childcare provider asking parents if they know about the proposal and opportunity to provide input – none of them knew about it. MOE needs to do a better job in promotion and timing.

**Comment:** It is exciting to see that the government is starting to recognize the early child development. The Early Learning Framework is an excellent document. We hope that it will serve as a guide for this new system. We are very hopeful and optimistic that this could be a start to creating a true system of childcare.

***What are your thoughts on full school day kindergarten for five-year-olds?***

- Need to look at the needs of individual children.
- Is this system going to put more pressure on children and families to be more academic? Parents and some schools' expectations are often not developmentally appropriate.
- The program needs to be play-based. 5 yr. olds need time to play and explore. Would help to address challenges many families have with transportation (in our school district, kindergarten transportation is currently only offered in one direction for bussed children)

***What about parent choice for full-school-day pre-kindergarten programs for four-year olds?***

- The program needs to be play-based
- Accessible to all families (overcome barriers of access) but optional and flexible
- Transportation must be safe – for instance, a special pre-K bus with

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- supervision, car seats
- Playground safety must be addressed
- The environment must be suitable for young children – comfortable, safe, with room to move, and handy washrooms
- Staff/child ratios must meet current licensing ratios throughout the day, including outdoor breaks

***What about parent choice for full-school-day pre-kindergarten programs for three-year olds?***

Similar to Question #2 plus:

- Issues of potty training
- What is the start-up time – at the age of 3 or September start-up?
- Teachers should follow kids rather than changing each year
- Many parents will feel that full-day programs will keep them apart from their children too long

***What do you think are the most important factors to consider in expanding early learning programs in British Columbia?***

***Concerns/Questions:***

- Impact on existing childcare centres. What happens to them?
- School staff has a mindset of a certain model – more scholastically driven rather than experiential model. Need a different approach.
- What qualifications will be required?
- What happens if this doesn't work?
- Where is the money coming from if there isn't enough for existing childcare?
- Transportation: concern about 3 & 4 year-olds on regular school buses with no seatbelts, older students, long travel times, etc.
- Current school system is underfunded and is struggling to provide education for students K-12 – concern about including children from 3 years on. This has to be done very carefully and thoughtfully, with each individual child and his/her needs in mind.
- HeadStart – can't take away from those culturally important programs, need to join forces
- What happens to the 3, 4 and 5 year olds when the classrooms are filled with school age children?
- How would therapy services be delivered to children requiring extra supports?
- What is the message to parents about curriculum? Will there be consequences (or perceived consequences) of not sending a child? Or of sending the child only part-time?
- What happens before and after school for families who work? Will there be day care on-site? Who will run that?
- Will there be fees? If there are, that will prove to be a barrier for many families

***Australia, New Zealand***

Pre-school teachers are more qualified than regular teachers – intense training in ECD

***In Canada***

People with limited education in ECE are asked to do brain development; focus is more on teaching rather than providing opportunities and experiences.

## ***Recommendations:***

### *Government Support and Leadership:*

- Take your time – do it right! Don't rush into something that is not well thought-out.
- Government needs to fund this system appropriately; existing school system doesn't need any more stress.
- These programs, if done right, will provide a very positive experience in a school – need to support and carry this experience throughout children's school life.
- Early learning and care cannot be separated.

### *Existing Centres and ECEs:*

- Include existing childcare centres in this new system, early learning and care cannot be separated. Don't destroy what currently works.
- Space may be an issue as birth rates are different from year to year, don't limit this program to just schools.
- Small groups and lovely, homey centres providing quality care are beneficial to 3 and 4 year olds. There is a richness to mixed age care that could be lost.

### *Programs:*

- Create an environment to help each child to learn how to think & interact with others, develop sense of self & self regulation
- Program should be developmentally appropriate – learn patterns, be able to think and process
- Children have different ability – we need to be wiser in interpreting behaviours of children – early screening, early intervention
- Include: regular rests, more music, more movement. Brains develop from experience – relationships
- All programs need to be culturally sensitive and inclusive.
- Licensing needs to be involved in setting up those programs.
- These programs need to be optional but parents need real choices, not just *yes* or *no*.
- What about French Immersion and HeadStart? Will schools be able to offer some specialized programs?

### *Staffing:*

- Focus on transition for existing childcare providers – funds for additional training (teacher training with ECE specialty)
- Both ECE and primary teacher have to have the opportunity and funding to receive appropriate training. Current ECE staff should be given the opportunity to run those programs, offered additional training. Wages need to be comparable to primary teachers.
- ECE training and upgrading should be ladderized and recognized

### *New Image of Public Schools in BC:*

- Work with school principals and staff to help them see their schools in a new image of a real neighbourhood hub of learning with young children, parents & extended families, and service providers flocking to their doors.
- Strengthen public school system with sufficient funding.

*Transportation:*

- Provide funds for alternate transportation for parents – special pre-K bus.

*Parent Participation:*

- Connecting with families and actively include them – incentives for employers to make it possible for parents to be involved on regular basis (at least an hour/week). It's very beneficial for parent to come and play with their kids. Also provide:
  - Parenting courses
  - Critical role of parent-child programs such as Strong Start – continue support for both.
  - Increased Maternity Leave – 12 mos. is too soon. Consider creating a seamless supportive system – support for parental leave followed by system of care and parent-child programs.

*Other:*

- Address before and after school care at the same time

*“Let’s not dismantle everything we have now in order to start over in a school environment! Let’s focus on strengthening and properly funding existing spaces, expanding on these spaces and paying ECEs a living wage! ! Let’s apply all the funding proposed to build a comprehensive childcare system.”*

Submitted by email by an early childhood educator