

# Child Care Advocacy Forum

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BC Association of  
Child Care Services

Coalition of Child Care  
Advocates of BC

Early Childhood  
Educators of BC

School Age Child Care  
Association of BC

Westcoast Child Care  
Resource Centre

Western Canada Family  
Child Care Association  
of BC

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## Early Learning AND Child Care It's Time to End the Divide Fall 2005

As children across BC return to school, the province is poised to sign an Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care with the federal government. Under this Agreement, BC will receive over \$600 million in the next 5 years from the federal government to begin building a quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental child care system in BC.

Even though BC has only begun to make its plans for using these funds public, one very troubling direction is emerging. It appears that our provincial government **does not understand the fundamental link between quality child care and early learning and is headed down a path that will not serve children, families or communities well.**

The first sign of trouble came in June, when Premier Campbell announced his new Cabinet and assigned responsibility for early learning to the Minister of Education and responsibility for child care to a Minister of State within the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

This split reflects serious misunderstandings about the role quality child care plays in promoting childhood growth, development and learning and about the needs of the majority of BC's working families.

Concerns continue to mount as the Minister of Education, Shirley Bond, promises new initiatives, through her Ministry, that will help children become 'school ready'. Suggestions are that early learning centres, all-day Kindergarten or perhaps 'pre-school' programs may be the way to go.

This approach reflects a very limited view of early childhood development and makes no attempt to address the needs of BC's working families. Further, these plans seem completely disconnected from the long-promised development of a Child Care Action Plan within MCFD.

Before new federal dollars that are intended for regulated child care are diverted into part-time, academic readiness or early literacy programs – we are calling on the provincial government to reconsider the early learning/child care split. Here's why:

1. Quality child care **is** early learning whether delivered in pre-school, family or centre based child care settings. Early childhood educators, backed up by a growing body of research, know that the way to support children is to encourage them to develop socially, physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Children learn through play and a narrow focus on 'academic readiness', to the exclusion of children's other developmental needs, **is not the way to go.**
2. BC's licensed pre-school programs are delivered by early childhood educators who have the same training and qualifications as those who work in licensed child care centres. The main difference is that pre-schools are part-time programs that children attend for a few hours, 2 or 3 days a week. **To suggest that 'pre-schools' are about 'learning' while child care is about 'care' is false and misleading.**

3. In 2003, over 126,000 BC mothers whose youngest child was under the age of 5 were in the paid labour force. Labour force participation rates are even higher for mothers of school-aged children. These families and their children need stable quality child care for the full working day. While pre-schools are an important part of a comprehensive range of child care services in a community – **they do not meet the needs of most working families.**
4. Contrary to recent statements made by Stan Hagen, BC's Minister of Children and Family Development, the new federal funds are not a 'windfall'. Rather, they are the result of 25 years of hard work by parents, advocates, researchers and caregivers who **raised public and political awareness about the importance of the early years, about the societal benefits of public investment in quality child care and about the needs of today's families.**
5. While there are many supports and services that can and will help young families, **the new federal funds must be used to improve access to high quality child care programs that promote children's development AND meet the needs of working families.**

That is why the Child Care Advocacy Forum opposes the use of new federal funds on initiatives that do not address children's development in a holistic way and do not meet the needs of working families.

That does not mean we oppose an effective working relationship between education and child care. On the contrary – quality child care is the cornerstone of an effective early learning strategy. And, families and children benefit when child care programs are located in or near schools. They benefit when schools and providers work together to ensure a smooth transition into kindergarten. They benefit when child care has access to school resources like libraries, gyms and playgrounds.

As a starting place, the province must **eliminate significant barriers to integrated service delivery at the school board level.** Some School Districts seem to view the new federal child care funds as a source of revenue and are offering empty school space at 'market rental rates' for on-site child care. If this continues, it will significantly reduce funds available to improve access, affordability or quality of child care programs. Some School Districts seem to have a clear preference for on-site pre-school or other part-time programs regardless of their community's child care needs. If this continues, it will put child care that meets the needs of working families at a distinct disadvantage.

The child care system that BC families and children need and deserve can't be built overnight, but there is a better way to move forward. We are therefore calling on the provincial government to:

1. Make a commitment to build a child care system that entitles every child access to quality services and experiences.
2. End the false and dangerous separation between early learning and child care.
3. Develop an integrated Action Plan that moves us away from the current user fee system to a publicly funded child care system.
4. Tie the new federal funds to implementation of the Action Plan with clear targets and timelines.
5. Establish an accountable and credible process for child care planning at the community level to establish priorities for new growth and development.
6. Remove existing policy and funding barriers that impede the co-location of child care programs that meet clearly identified community needs in public schools.