

Susan Kennedy & Carolyn Henson
Ministry of Education
Partnership and Planning Department
PO Box 9158 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9H3

January 25, 2008

Dear Ms. Kennedy and Ms. Hensen,

Thank you for your letter of December 13, 2007, about our recently released report on "The rEvolution of Community Controlled Child Care in BC" (Ref. #123644). We welcome your participation in an on-going conversation about the direction outlined in the report.

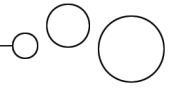
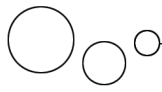
As you note, it is our analysis that the Ministry of Education has not yet adequately demonstrated that it has the knowledge, experience or commitment to build the child care system that BC needs. Your confirmation that StrongStart programs, although initially funded with federal child care transfer funds, are not intended to meet the needs of the children of working families only affirms this conclusion.

The fact that some StrongStart programs are now open on weekends does nothing to address this fundamental reality. To the contrary, it may well send a dangerous message that children in licensed child care are not receiving early learning – a view that we fully reject. And, it does nothing to redress the fact that working parents still have to pay for the early learning experiences their children receive in quality child care programs while parents who can attend StrongStart programs with their children pay nothing. That is why the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC calls for equitable funding for early learning that occurs in licensed child care and preschools settings.

(See http://cccabc.bc.ca/cccabdocs/files/0703_equity.html)

However, our analysis that the Ministry of Education has not yet demonstrated its readiness to build a child care system goes well beyond StrongStart programs and is based on over two decades of experience that highlight on-going problems. Some telling examples include:

- Despite the expanded mandate of Boards of Education to provide for early learning in schools, government's commitments to use underutilized school spaces to deliver early learning services and repeated calls for policy change from Boards across the province, on-site child care programs are still not part of the Ministry of Education's space utilization calculations. In fact, on site child



care programs are seen as a source of rental revenue when school space is available but dispensable when schools want to reclaim the space. This has led to repeated cycles of upward pressure on parent fees to cover school rental costs followed by evictions and destabilization of community child care services that serve both pre-school and school-aged children.

- The Ministry of Education's continues to focus on children's school readiness rather than on the readiness of the school to meet the needs of children. It is not clear that the Ministry has integrated the extensive research on the critical learning that occurs before children attend school into policy and practice.
- Regrettably, and despite progress in some communities, child care providers continue to report that they have to take the initiative to be included as equal partners in Ministry of Education early learning policy developments. In fact, the very points you highlight in your letter about the holistic approach in the early learning framework and the requirement that licensed early childhood educators staff StrongStart programs were responses to concerns raised by the child care community after the StrongStart and Early Learning Framework initiative's were announced.

That said, as our report makes clear, it is our view that no provincial ministry has demonstrated its ability to be an effective child care champion. That is why we are calling on those who are ready, willing and able to build a child care system to step forward. We would therefore very much welcome your views on how the Ministry of Education can act now to support community and school-based child care programs and can play a role in helping communities build and govern a child care system.

Finally, just as you retain full editorial control over your publications, so too does the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC. However, we would also be happy to review drafts of any of your public documents that have an impact on child care before they are released to ensure they accurately reflect community reality and experience.

Thanks again for your interest in our work.

Sincerely,

Susan Harney
Chairperson