



*Working together for a community based, non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible, publicly funded and accountable.*

## **An Open Letter to BC's Child Care Community**

*June 2008*

In February 2008, BC's Throne Speech included a commitment to create an Early Learning Agency "to assess the feasibility and costs of full school day kindergarten for five-year-olds" and to conduct a "feasibility study of providing parents with the choice of day-long kindergarten for four-year-olds by 2010, and for three-year-olds by 2012." The Agency is scheduled to report back by the end of 2008. Lead responsibility for this work was given to the Ministry of Education.

At the time – few details were available but when pressed, Shirley Bond, BC's Minister of Education, suggested that All Day Kindergarten for 3 and 4 year olds might give parents another 'day care choice'.

Then, on May 28, the Deputy Minister of Education announced that the Agency had been created and a consultation process about the "expansion of kindergarten and preschool programming for British Columbia's children" was underway. A consultation paper will be available in early June and the community will have 1 month to respond.

Expanding kindergarten and preschool programming will have a significant impact on the lives of children, families, early childhood educators and child care programs in BC. So, even though the short consultation timelines make us wonder how much government really wants to listen – we are committed to ensuring our collective voices are heard.

The Consultation Paper should provide some indication of government's intentions. But, regardless of the details, our response will be based on our principles and on whether the proposed changes move us towards our vision of a community controlled, high quality, universal and affordable child care system.

So, we will be asking if the proposed changes to kindergarten and preschool programming:

1. Incorporate the principles of universality, public funding and access for all ... or is this a way to introduce user fees into public education?
2. Respect young children's developmental needs ... or is this really about a downward extension of a school readiness agenda?
3. Meet the needs of working families by offering a seamless day of care and learning ... or is this yet another attempt to divide and fragment?
4. Build on the expertise, experience and commitment of BC's early childhood educators ... or is this one more way to marginalize them?
5. Strengthen community-based child care programs struggling to provide services with minimal public funding support to date ... or is this one more way to destabilize them?

Our response to the Consultation Paper will depend on the answers to these questions. We hope yours will too.