



Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

Implementing Early Learning - Bulletin #2

Funding and Quality

In the last provincial election, Dalton McGuinty promised a new program of full-day learning for 4 and 5 year olds. Premier McGuinty appointed Charles Pascal to write a report on how the program should be implemented. "With Our Future in Mind" was released on June 15th and laid out an early learning vision for all children from infants to 12 years old and provided a comprehensive plan of action.

At every step of implementation, we must ensure that our system of early learning and child care for all children is both sustained and strengthened. In particular, we must ensure that community-based child care services that currently serve 4 and 5 year old children, are supported to serve younger children and families with affordable parent fees, decent wages for staff and expanded services for children and families.

On October 27, Premier McGuinty and the Ministers of Education and Children and Youth Services held a press conference to announce that the Government will support and implement the report starting with \$500 million for full-day learning for four and five year olds.

Over the summer, we produced a series of information bulletins for the early learning and child care sector. Our Bulletins will continue - now that we are implementing a program of early learning, we will do regular updates on issues, concerns, and best practices with the goal of creating a stronger system of early learning and child care in Ontario.

The Pascal Report

The Pascal report set out a vision for a program with Registered ECE's working as a team with Certified Teachers to provide a half day, a regular day or an extended day of high quality early learning and care.

"The two unassailable givens that must be part of any full-day learning program are educators with child development knowledge and skills, and an effective parent engagement strategy" (page 33)

The report validates the skills and capacity of Early Childhood Educators. In particular, the report states:

As with many past reports, the report recognizes that ECE's have been underpaid for their skills and capacity. The report proposes "average annual ECE salaries of \$47,000, with benefits totalling 24 per cent" (endnote 58, page 63) for those ECE's in the full-day learning program in the schools.

What Makes a High Quality Early Learning Program?

Trained Staff Team: Registered Early Childhood Educators and Certified Teachers bring different but complementary skills to early learning and care for 4 and 5 year olds. The vision of full-day learning for 4's and 5's was to provide the an experienced staff team to work with children and their families.

The Day Nurseries Act: The Day Nurseries Act (DNA) applies to early learning and child care programs. Child care programs have minimum standards including ratios of children to adults, provision of food and

amount of time spent outside etc. In implementing full-day learning, we want to preserve the quality of programs for young children. Preserving quality is challenging as many schools already face pre-existing funding challenges.

Ratios of Adults to Children: The DNA has limits on the number of children that can be cared for by an adult. Those ratios are:

Infants 1-3

Toddler 1-5

Pre-School 1-8 (ratios for this group fluctuate depending on age grouping – for example 1-1- in a mixed 4 and 5 year of group and 1-12 when there are just 5 year old)

The new program of full-day learning will operate under the Education Act. Classroom ratios for current half-day kindergarten program are the same as throughout the primary grades: 1 - 20.

Higher ratios have an impact on the kind of program that can be offered. One adult to twenty children makes it almost impossible implement a program of “learn through play” – the best method for teaching young children. A typical child care centre will have a large room with many activities – everything from sand and water stations, to a reading centre, to computers, and art just to name a few. Research has shown that children “learn through play” but those programs must have higher staffing for supervision. The traditional school model of 1 teacher and 20 children is not appropriate for full-day programs for 4 and 5 year olds.

In announcing the early learning program, the government committed to a staffing model of two full-time Registered ECE’s, one full-time teacher for a classroom of twenty-six children (one adult for every thirteen children). This model can accommodate a “learn through play” curriculum for 4 and 5 year olds.

How Education Funding Works

A Memo from the Ministry of Education to Directors of Local School Boards set out a funding envelope for the new early learning program.

The Ministry of Education currently pays school boards a lump sum for every child enrolled. That lump sum payment is meant to cover all the costs including regular staffing and supply staff, all classroom supplies, all school services including library and school operations and assistance for special needs students. This is called the “funding formula”.

The Ministry of Education is often criticized for this funding format. While there are many factors that influence funding, including differences in special needs populations, many boards do not receive enough money to provide services to all schools and all children. Some budget items are protected, others are discretionary.

One area of protected funding is teacher salaries. If the funding in the Operating Benchmarks does not cover the cost of a more experienced teacher, the Provincial Government will may the difference. Every teacher is covered under a collective agreement or union contract. As teachers increase their years of experience their pay rates rise. If there is not enough operating funding to cover a more experienced teacher salary, the Ministry of Education takes that into consideration.

However, for other staff, there are often shortfalls in funding. Many schools have been forced to spend money allocated for English as a Second Language, classroom supplies, office and clerical supplies and professional development on supporting salaries and benefits for staff within the school.

Some of the issues we are monitoring in funding for the Early Learning Program follow:

Rate of Pay of ECE's

The "ELP Operating Funding for 2010-2011" includes funding for two ECE's at a rate of \$19.48 hour with 24.32% benefits. For a copy of the B Memo, go to www.childcareontario.org and search "B Memo".

This is far below the goal of \$26.85 / hour proposed in Dr. Pascal's report.

In addition, Registered ECE's would likely be on a 10 month contract meaning (44 weeks a year) with an annual salary of approximately \$30,000 instead of the \$47,000 recommended by Dr. Pascal in his report.

Pay Equity

In Ontario, pay equity between jobs predominately done by men and predominately done by women is the law. That means employers are obligated to ensure that wages are in compliance with pay equity plans currently in place.

Most people who work in our educational system are members of a union. High rates of unionization has led to good quality jobs with decent pay and benefits. Those unions, working with their members have been through the pay equity process and have already compared jobs and wages.

One school board, who hired ECE's to work directly in the classroom, is obligated through their contract to pay Registered ECE's \$24.19 to \$28.31 effective September 2010. The wages rates were set as a result of a pay equity job evaluation and comparison. That pay rate is still in the collective agreement, meaning the school board can not hire at the sub-standard Ministry of Education rate as posted in the "ELP Operating Funding". That school board, and others who hire Registered ECE's for higher than the proposed sub-standard rate, can not just recoup that money from the Ministry of Education. Those boards who hire for a higher wage, may have to try to find that money from within other unprotected areas of funding – making funding challenges worse for many school boards.

Whether there is a union in place or not, school boards are supposed to post the position with a pay-equity compliant wage level. If the wage is not pay equity compliant, an individual or a union may launch a complaint to the Pay Equity Commission.

If school boards hire at the sub-standard rate, a successful pay equity complaint could mean the school board is liable for back-pay for ECE's.

Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education budgeted a grossly inadequate wage for ECE's. For example, in one school board, an Education Assistant, with no experience will make \$20.52 working in the schools. To designate a wage of \$19.48 for ECE's with a two year diploma is unfair and no way to kick off a successful early learning program.

Ratios of adults to children

The ratio of 1 adult to 13 children in the early learning program counts the core day when a teacher is present. Many Registered ECE's are asking about the number of children who could be present for the extended day program.

For example, if an ECE is running the extended day with 15 children, what does she do if a child is sick, missing or needs to go to the bathroom down the hall. Is there backup in another room or another

program? At what point in the after-school extended day will school boards have a second staff person – either an additional ECE or and Educational Assistant?

When parents come to pick up children, how will they know about concerns and problems if an ECE is looking after a dozen children at the same time?

If the extended day is full-cost recovery for parents, how much will fees cost with two staff? If bussing is provided to children in the full-day program, will those costs be passed on to parents contributing to an unaffordable fee?

Children with Special Needs

The funding formula sets a per-student amount in special needs funding. A per-student amount, instead of funding school boards for actual costs, can leave some school boards without adequate funding for special needs students. Under the operating benchmark, there would be \$391.88 in operating funding per-child for special needs children.

Early learning and child care programs put a huge emphasis on early identification and we are well served by professionals with Special Needs Resource Programs. In order to take advantage of our expertise, School boards could negotiate agreements with Special Needs Resource Programs to provide services to student in the full-day learning program (normally, special needs resources do not become available until Grade 1). Including the Early Learning Program in Special Need Funding is very important as children who did not attend child care programs would have no intervention or identification of special needs until Grade 1.

Professional Development

The Early Learning Program is a new program asking professionals (Registered ECE's and Certified Teachers) to work together, side-by-side. There will be an enormous need for professional development. Those trainers must be drawn from both the education and early learning communities. To date, regional offices that are helping to implement the program in school boards have been overwhelmingly from the educational sector.

Also, on a day to day basis, there will be a need for team meetings. The establishment of a new program and team teaching will require special funding to ensure good communication and equal participation of all staff.

Integration of Parents and Family Support Staff

Early learning and child care programs involve parents directly in the operations and programming as well as direct participation during the program. Will parents or grandparents be welcome in the classroom? Will they be able to bring younger siblings with them during a visit? What role will parents have in shaping the program and making decisions about community priorities (for example a program in an areas with a dominant language that is not English to have dual language books, translation of important bulletins and working with community on important cultural celebrations and other culturally relevant issues).

Lunch Program

Providing nutritious meals and snacks keeps children active and alert. Early learning and child care programs provide hot meals and snacks to young children. How will schools ensure that 4 and 5 year old children have nutritious meals?

Summer and Breaks

The lack of a program during the summer and other breaks will be a major problem for many parents. Many parents will have to line up private day camps and other expensive programs to keep their children active and safe.

“With Our Best Future in Mind” called for year-round programs. For parents this will be one of the biggest disappointments of the program. With over three-quarters of parents in the workforce, the need for summer learning and care will affect most families. Concerned parents should contact Premier McGuinty at: dmcguinty.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org to say that they want and need quality summer programs for their children.

To ensure high quality early learning we must:

- fully staff salaries and benefits of all staff, with pay to Registered ECE's as recommended in the Pascal report
- ensure high quality programming throughout the regular day and the extended day and ensure adequate staffing (that no Registered ECE is left on her own at the end of the day without adequate backup and assistance from other staff)
- ensure nutritious meals and snacks for children in the full-day program
- integrate staff from family resource programs into the classroom to work with parents and families
- ensure the same access to special needs funding for high needs children
- ensure adequate funding for office, clerical and maintenance until 6 p.m.

For a brief report on “Research Findings from Phase 2 of Toronto First Duty and their implications for full day learning in Ontario” – go to: <http://www.toronto.ca/firstduty/index.htm>. Click link under highlights.

What Are Your Questions?

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care is collecting your questions. From big questions to small questions, send your question to andrea@childcarontario.org

For most questions, there are not answers yet. Your questions will help focus us on key issues that affect your early learning and child care program as well as make sure a broad range issues are part of decision-making.

For more information about the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care please visit www.childcareontario.org. These are times of great change and advocacy is needed more than ever.

If you are an individual Registered ECE, you should be a member of the AECEO.

If you are a child care centre you should be a member of the OCBCC.

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care is funded by our members including child care centres, family resource programs, OEYC's, individuals and provincial groups with a mandate for universal, publicly funded, high quality, not-for-profit early learning and child care programs. For membership information, please visit our website. Thanks!