



305 Milner Ave, Suite 801
Scarborough, ON M1B 3V4
Phone: 416-299-9739 • Fax: 416-299-3480
Web: cupe.on.ca E-mail: cupeont@web.net

May 6, 2010

VIA FAX: (416-325-3745)

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Room 281
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Re: Open Letter to the Premier of Ontario: Early Learning Program at Risk?

Dear Premier:

I am writing you this open letter with increasing concern about the implementation and ultimate success of the Early Learning Program (ELP) being introduced by your government this fall. The families and children that rely on the child care system and those that work to deliver these important programs need your government to provide leadership to ensure the successful introduction of this important social program.

We believe your government is doing the right thing by introducing the new Early Learning Program. Early learning and care is a progressive social policy, one that is positive for children's emotional, social, and educational development. It is good for Ontario's families, our economy and one of the key planks of a provincial anti-poverty strategy.

Like your government, and early learning education and child care advocates, CUPE Ontario wants ELP to succeed. Integral to the success of the plan is the full integration of the Early Learning Program into public schools across the province.

The recent announcement that moved all child care programs along with the Early Learning Program into the Early Learning Division of the Ministry of Education is welcome. However, we are concerned that, even with these recent announcements, the Early Learning Program is not headed toward the kind of success we all want to see.

A clear and public implementation timeline is necessary now. Ontario's young families, the child care community, school boards and workers in the child care and school board sectors, need a context for the announcements and changes that are to take place over the next five years.

The parties involved must know what program changes will be taking place and when these changes will occur. Families need this information to make informed decisions about their children's development and care. Workers need this information to make career decisions and alleviate the high level of anxiety in the field. Administrators need this information to best be able to plan to meet the demands these changes will be placing on their organizations.

In the absence of a clear and public implementation timeline, we are particularly concerned that:

- There is a lack of transparency in funding. Even with the announcements to date, it remains unclear if all wage grant monies will remain in the municipal and community-based programs to assist with program sustainability rather than being transferred into the full-day early learning program and subsidy monies.
- Further, the transition monies are not adequate to ensure even that current levels of community and municipal programs are maintained, assist programs to adjust to the loss of the 4- and 5-year-old programs, assist with retrofitting program space for younger age programming and prevent the need to introduce higher parent fees.
- Increasingly, school boards, who are unable to operate with deficit budgets, are expressing concerns about inadequate resources to implement the first phase of ELP. Boards have indicated that the current resources do not provide adequate funding to provide the full program.

- The extended-day provisions of the ELP, an integral component to the program's success, are being challenged by some school boards who are setting high user fees for care for a program that is intended to be cost-recovery based. The provision of extended year early learning and care, including program delivery for March Break, professional development days, and summer, has not been offered by any board. To date, we have not seen a school board publically commit to a program consistent with the full vision of early learning and care as set out in either the Pascal Report or Bill 242.
- Workers in the child care sector, and new early childhood educators (ECEs) in the education sector, are being placed in untenable situations where they are **forced** to make major career choices without the benefit of a clear picture of what the government intends as the ultimate delivery model for early learning in Ontario.

In the absence of a comprehensive timeline for implementation, it appears that the Pascal blueprint is being cherry-picked from and under-resourced. This is not only disadvantaging **municipal** and community-based child care which should be enhanced by Pascal's vision, it is putting the entire ELP program in jeopardy by not funding it to succeed.

Parents are saying that, unless they are offered quality, affordable, school-based extended-day and year-round programs, there will be little incentive to enroll their children in ELP programs.

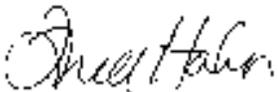
CUPE Ontario will continue to support the Pascal vision for early learning and care, and will work with your government to find solutions that yield a quality program. We represent nearly 230,000 members, many of whom are parents, who rely on quality, accessible child care in order to work, attend school and re-train for new economy jobs. CUPE also represents the majority of unionized early childhood educators (ECEs), early childhood assistants (ECAs) and educational assistants (EAs) in hundreds of school, municipal and community-based workplaces.

Strong leadership from your government is needed to make the ELP a success and ensure its introduction is not at the cost of the broader child care system. Releasing resources piecemeal, at levels that do not meet the level needed for success, is not the answer.

CUPE Ontario is looking to your government and the Ministry of Education to play an activist role to ensure the ELP implementation encompasses Pascal's full vision, including extended-day and year-round programming.

Further, we are looking to your government to ensure the child care sector, as a whole, is supported through this transition to ensure a healthy and sustainable system. That's what Ontario families want and need. It's what the economy needs and what your government needs to introduce as part of a comprehensive anti-poverty plan. Failure to act in a clear, decisive, and focused way could well mean the program will not succeed.

Sincerely,



Fred Hahn
President
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario

-30-

For more information, please contact:

Chris Watson
CUPE Communications
416-553-9410

