

**Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care**  
**Coalition ontarienne pour de meilleurs service éducatifs à l'enfance**



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June 21, 2010

Hon. John Milloy  
Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Mowat Block  
900 Bay Street  
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

Dear Minister Milloy:

Over the last several years, we have seen a disturbing trend of the closure of child care centres at Ontario's Community Colleges.

- Two years ago, St. Lawrence, Canadore College and St. Clair College closed their centres.
- Last year, Durham College closed it's child care centre.
- This year, Cambrian College and Northern College announced closures of their child care centres.

Some colleges operate "Lab Schools" which are child care centres integrated into the early childhood education program. Other colleges operate campus child care programs for the benefit of students and faculty, while also taking ECE placement students.

The recent closures of child care programs at Ontario community colleges are completely unacceptable.

Those centres provide much needed child care for students, staff and faculty. The unfortunate reality for Ontario's families is that Ontario does not have enough high quality, licensed child care programs to meet the demand.

In addition, the closure of these programs also has a negative impact on students studying early childhood education. To become a "Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE)", students are required to do four placements in a child care setting and be evaluated on working with children and families and his or her ability to implement curriculum in a practical setting.

We believe that all colleges with an ECE program should be mandated to have a “lab school”. A lab school is an essential part of a high quality early childhood education program.

However, there is another reason these closures are short-sighted and working against important provincial priorities.

As you know, your Government has launched an ambitious transformation of services to young children, starting with the implementation of full-day learning for 4 and 5 year olds.

Ontario is currently undergoing a transformation of our system of early learning and child care programs. The Premier appointed an Early Learning Advisor (Dr. Charles Pascal) and embraced his report “With Our Best Future in Mind”.

Dr. Pascal has accepted a position as Advisor to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services in order to set up Child and Family Centres – a key part of the vision to transform services for young children.

“With Our Best Future in Mind” states that Child and Family Centres should be operated by municipal authorities, school boards, post secondary institutions or not-for-profit agencies.

Child and Family Centres will be innovative organizations providing a wide range of services to children and families. Dr. Pascal writes:

“Lab centres operated by postsecondary institutions are essential to the preparation of the early childhood workforce and can test resources and explore best practices. Existing lab centres could be converted into model Best Start Child and Family Centres, and training institutions should partner with local school boards to develop model placement opportunities for their students in Early Learning and Extended Day Primary programs”

With Our Best Future in Mind, page 36

Those colleges who are closing child care centres or lab schools are working against the crucial provincial priorities to transform early learning.

Finally, Ontario’s community colleges will greatly benefit from new attention to early childhood education.

The Early Learning Division has sounded the alarm on the shortage of qualified ECE’s to meet the greater demand for full-day learning and child care programs once the program is fully implemented.

Your Ministry has an incredible opportunity to develop a vibrant apprenticeship program as part of a human resources strategy to support the huge number of staff working in

early learning today without formal qualifications. The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care is pleased to see high numbers of students enrolling in early childhood education.

Building for the future, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care would like to work with your Ministry to ensure no further closures of college based child care programs. We want our community colleges to showcase successful teaching strategies to ensure Ontario children can benefit from highly trained teachers with an early childhood education diploma.

The closures of these programs are very serious. Without an intervention, Ontario could lose our entire network of community college child care programs and lab schools.

Now is the time for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to take action. We are requesting a meeting to consider how best to protect the existing child care centres and lab schools on Ontario college campuses.

We believe there are solutions and look forward to meeting with Minister Milloy to end this disturbing trend of closures that imperils Ontario's ability to train a new generation of early childhood educators.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tracy Saarikoski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T".

Tracy Saarikoski  
President, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

Cc: Hon. Leona Drombrowski, Minister of Education  
Jim Grieve, Assistant Deputy Minister, Early Learning Division  
Hon. Laurel Broten, Minister of Children and Youth Services  
Dr. Charles Pascal, Ontario Early Learning Advisor