



AECEO Position Statement on Full Day Early Learning September, 2008

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) supports the direction of the Ontario government to publicly fund a full day learning program for 4 and 5 year olds.

The AECEO has a 58-year history in promoting professional development, training standards, standards of practice and regulation of the early childhood profession. As the professional association for Early Childhood Educators in Ontario, the lead organization that lobbied for the creation of a College of Early Childhood Educators, and the administrator of a recognized equivalency process for Early Childhood Educators, we welcome the new developments that are unfolding in our field. Among them, we support increasing public and government awareness of the:

- Recognition of Early Childhood Educators as a specialized and publicly accountable profession
- Importance of building strong foundational learning and supports during the early childhood years
- Value of integrated services from pre-birth to adolescence
- Growing need to support the diverse cultural and lifestyle choices of families with young children

The AECEO strongly believes that Early Childhood Educators, as defined by the Early Childhood Educators Act 2007 and the Registration Regulations of the College of Early Childhood Educators, are skilled professionals and, in a full day learning program for 4 and 5 year olds, are fully capable of delivering a planned and effective curriculum based on an understanding of child development and the value of learning-based play.

As the Education Act only mandates programs for children 6 years and up, the early childhood sector has been successfully delivering quality full day learning programs for 4 and 5 year olds for a number of years.

Studies such as the one conducted by Robert Coplan for the Ottawa Carleton District School Board from 1995-1999 validate the ability of Early Childhood Educators with recognized post secondary credentials in early childhood education to deliver equally successful learning outcomes for junior and senior Kindergarten children.¹

The presence of Early Childhood Educators in a variety of programs such as early intervention, special needs, early learning and care programs, drop in, and community based recreation programs demonstrates the versatility of our professionals and their ability to work in integrated programs within multi-disciplinary team settings.

¹ Coplan, R.J.. *Ottawa-Carleton District School Board: Junior Kindergarten Differentiated-Staffing Pilot Project Evaluation Report of Findings – Year III*. Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. 1999.

With an estimated workforce of 29,000 Early Childhood Educators eligible to register as members of the College of Early Childhood Educators, the accountability of the professionals working in early learning and care settings will be further validated. The growth of post diploma, specialized certificate, degree and post graduate programs in early childhood studies indicate the changing landscape and demand for additional learning in our profession. Though there are a growing number of learning opportunities for Early Childhood Educators, there is an ongoing need for adequate government funding and support for more flexible and accessible training and professional development.

The AECEO supports a full day learning program that recognizes the professionalism and accountability of Early Childhood Educators. The need to provide ongoing support to professionals in order to maintain a high standard of practice and deliver quality programs is critical.

Ontario early childhood learning and care philosophy and program goals embrace a “social pedagogy tradition”, emphasizing the importance of child development and families as partners. It balances the inseparable elements of learning and care while considering the needs of the family. Early Childhood Educators plan for the “whole child” (social, emotional, physical and cognitive), and accommodate the different learning and developmental stages, and outdoor needs of the child as an individual and within a group.

As stated in the OECD Report, *Starting Strong II Early Childhood Education and Care*:

“A distinctive early childhood approach and pedagogy has been worked out by countries inheriting the social pedagogy tradition (Nordic and Central European countries). A broad concept of pedagogy is common to these countries, that is, an approach to children combining care, upbringing and learning, without hierarchy. Rather than “schoolifying” ECEC services, there is a strong belief that early childhood pedagogy should permeate the lower classes of primary school (Martin-Korpi, 2005)...In these countries, kindergarten is seen as a broad preparation for life. Parents are seen as important partners and the early childhood institution is conceived as bridging the public and private spheres, that is, as fully taking into account the rights of parents and the interests of young children. A more holistic approach to learning is practiced and greater emphasis is placed on learning to live together and on supporting children in their current developmental tasks and interests” (p.59-60).²

The AECEO supports a full day early learning program that is play-based, holistic, developmentally appropriate, outcome-based and values the individual needs of the child and family.

² Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD Publishing., 2006.



The release of the *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings* by the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning (December 2006), is indicative of the shift towards formalizing the relationship and balance between care and learning in Ontario early learning settings.

The AECEO is supportive of the government’s move towards creating a provincial framework that “situates children within the context of a developmental continuum that extends from birth to age eight years” (p. 5)³. The AECEO looks forward to continued dialogue and involvement with stakeholders to align the early childhood approach and the Kindergarten Program to create a unified curriculum that best meets the developmental needs of young children.

How a full day learning program for 4 and 5 year olds will be administered and under which ministry it will fall are challenges that pose many obstacles. Consideration must be given to the barriers and biases that surround the legislation and ministries that govern education, health and social services.

The AECEO supports and is willing to work towards an integrated model that combines the best practices, professionals, and legislation of all three sectors in order to best meet the needs of children and families.

The AECEO therefore fully supports a full day learning program for 4 and 5 year olds that:

- Recognizes the specialized body of knowledge, training, and accountability of the Early Childhood Educator as a lead teacher or equal partner in a multi-disciplinary team environment
- Puts children first and values families as partners
- Considers the developmental needs of children
- Uses a curriculum that “situates children within the context of a developmental continuum that extends from birth to age eight” as outlined in *Early Learning for Every Child Today* by the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, December 2006
- Is publicly funded and accessible
- Utilizes and integrates current services, programs and spaces for the benefit of children and families

³ Ontario. Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning. *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings*. Toronto. December 2006.