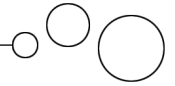


COALITION OF

child care advocates

OF BC



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

Open letter to the Minister of Education

Honourable Margaret MacDiarmid
PO Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

July 6, 2010

It was with shock and disbelief that the Coalition of Child Care Advocates heard BC's Minister of Education urge Vancouver's Board of Education to generate profit by raising child care rents by \$1.5 million.

While child care is the mandate of senior levels of government, local government also has a significant role to play in supporting the development and sustainability of child care spaces and a child care system in British Columbia.

Shamefully, in 2007, the federal government reneged on its responsibility to address Canada's failing grade on child care when it cancelled the federal/provincial child care agreement that began to build a child care system Canadians could be proud of.

And, since 2001, BC cut its own child care spending and consistently ignored the need for a comprehensive plan to address BC's child care crisis.

In Vancouver, only the city's long-standing and substantive child care commitment has helped ensure some quality child care programs remain. These commitments to the city's children and families have come from City of Vancouver Councils, past and present, the Park Board and the Vancouver Board of Education.

While these commitments cannot replace senior levels of government responsibility, within their sphere of influence, local government has attempted to meet the needs of families, knowing that child care benefits our economy, children's development and parent's workforce attachment.

It is no surprise then that over half of all licensed child care spaces in the city of Vancouver have been created through the three public bodies, City, Park and School boards. Of these public spaces, almost 50% are within Vancouver schools, a total of 2,880 spaces caring for children.

Two Vancouver Board of Education policies make this success in supporting sustainable quality child care spaces in schools possible. First, the Board only rents and leases to child care programs delivered by non-profit societies – thus ensuring that public assets are not used to generate personal profits.

More importantly, Vancouver Board of Education rents space to these child care operators on a cost-recovery basis. Vancouver's rental fees are not designed to generate profit for the VSB but rather to cover the VSB costs of providing space – costs such as janitorial services, utilities, and supplies. In the absence of provincial or federal funding, this keeps school-based child care affordable and sustainable.

In this context, the Minister of Education's preferred change in rental policy, from cost-recovery to profit-making, is extraordinarily ill advised.

It undermines the province's stated commitment to reduce vulnerability of Kindergarten children from the current shocking average of 29% to 15% by the year 2015. It runs contrary to other provincial initiatives such as Full School Day Kindergarten, Neighbourhood Centres of Learning, and the Premier's 'Great Goal' of making BC the most literate jurisdiction in North America.

And, as the experience in Richmond clearly demonstrates, this change will reduce already limited child care options for families. When the Richmond School Board increased its child care rental rates, the YMCA, BC's largest school age child care provider, closed 20% of their Richmond spaces. Their programs could not absorb the rental hikes and parents could not afford to cover the increases through higher parent fees.

This is exactly what will happen in Vancouver if rents increase to \$100-\$150 per child as the Minister recommends. Programs will close and we will have more and younger latchkey kids.

British Columbia, and indeed Canada, lag far, far behind other developed countries in levels of government investment in early care and learning programs and in children's access to these programs. To fix this, it is imperative that municipal, provincial and federal governments work together to ensure children have access to quality child care spaces, parent's fees are affordable and staff earn wages commensurate with their responsibility and training.

We strongly encourage the Minister to cease her calls to cover her government's under funding of education by raising child care rental rates. And, we call on other Boards of Education to follow Vancouver's lead and resist provincial pressure to make profit off children and working families.

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC