

Early Childhood Learning Agency
Ministry of Education
Box 9158 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC
V8W-9H3

Campbell River Aboriginal Infant Development Program Networking Group
441-4th Ave
Campbell River BC
V9W-3W7

RE: Response to Consultation Paper: *Expanding Early Learning in British Columbia for Children Aged 3-5*

Please find attached the response from the Campbell River Aboriginal Infant Development Networking Group consisting of representatives from the local area First Nations Bands and off reserve Aboriginal services.

Early Childhood Learning Agency Response Form

Part One

Given the importance of the early childhood years and the clear trends to increase and improve programs in other jurisdictions, the Early Childhood Learning Agency invites your response to the following questions.

1. What are your thoughts on full school day kindergarten for five-year-olds?

- Full day kindergarten is too long
- Full day kindergarten will take away from other programs 5 year olds participate in after kindergarten such as; Head Start where they receive language and cultural programming
- In the case of First Nations communities, it (full day kindergarten in band schools for 5 year olds) provides the additional opportunity for consolidation, expansion, exposure and acquisition of cultural programming in a community environment – with added benefits for young families to become engaged as “first educators”.

2. What about parent choice for full-school-day pre-kindergarten programs for four-year olds?

- Even if it is a choice, parents may feel somewhat pressured to put their child in school at 4 years of age just as it is an expectation now that children go to school at age 5, even though Kindergarten is not mandatory
- Again, it will take away from other programming that is play based and culturally appropriate such as that offered by Aboriginal Head Start Programs and Aboriginal Early Childhood Development Programs where Elders and family members are involved in the day to day delivery of services
- It will take away from children being with their family and extended family

3. What about parent choice for full-school-day pre-kindergarten programs for three-year olds?

- Sending toddlers to an institution such as “school” is not acceptable
- “It feels like Residential school all over again”
- Child care, daycare and preschool programs are already in place and meet the needs of young children
- In Britain there is a good history now of what they refer to as “Nursery school” that is for 3 and 4 year olds. That is a ½ day program in the school so that there is an orientation and connection to the school environment. They also do a lot of what I call “family grouping” where more than one grade level is sharing a classroom or in some cases there are open doors between classrooms and often siblings are together if they are close in age. That is a reality in a First Nations school because of size. We know that 2 1/2 year olds NEED social interaction – but not full day programming for sure.

4. What do you think are the most important factors to consider in expanding early learning programs in British Columbia?

- Supporting and expanding existing early learning programs such as daycares, preschools and Head Start programs as well as on- reserve Band run schools would be more effective as they are culturally appropriate to the specific needs of specific communities
- Early Childhood Educators are trained to work with young children and should be consulted in all early learning processes
- Staff/child ratio is a high priority for consideration. What would the staff/child ratio look like in the school system?
- Concern is there is not enough of our Children's Language and Culture in the school system, if three and four year olds enter the "public school" the learning of their culture and language will become less. Our children do well because they know who they are, they are proud of who they are, the school system has not done right by our children for years and now that we have finally have good ECD programs such as HeadStart, Early Years etc. it seems they are trying to take that away.
- Another point that needs to be reiterated is the salary and the need for ECE qualified staff teaching the children.
- I like the fact that we are having dialogue but where are the big meetings to talk this through?
- Right now parents have the right to decide if they want to put their children in childcare, will this decision now be taken away if this goes forward?