



25 November 2013

The Honourable Liz Sandals
Ministry of Education
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Sandals:

Re: Changes re Providing Extended Day Programming to Families with Financial Need

I would like to arrange an opportunity to meet with you to discuss strategies that would improve equity of access to the Extended Day Program for Ontario families.

We are concerned that providing Extended Day care in schools largely to those who can afford it serves only to widen the economic gap between rich and poor by giving significant educational and logistical advantages to rich families that are denied to the poor. The expansion of public education to include integrated childcare programs must be done with the principle of equity of access as a highest priority. To do otherwise is inconsistent with the government's stated goal of reducing poverty and with the underlying principles of public education. Equity of access to public education is a foundational principle of democratic society and, indeed, the very reason for public education's existence.

Over the past four years, your government has dedicated considerable resources towards the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten and the Extended Day Program in Ontario schools based on the belief that *"early learning and child care is crucial to Ontario's success by providing enriched early learning experiences that promote future well-being. The sustainability and growth of the economy depends on the strength of our workforce, and many parents and families rely on child care in order to work, go to school or participate in retraining"* (*Modernizing Child Care in Ontario Discussion Paper*)

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board shares your belief in the value of early learning and in the need to support access to integrated child care for children of all families in our community. School Boards have responsibility for student achievement and well-being in legislation. Clearly, by the Ministry's own statements, Extended Day is an essential component of this mandate.

The OCDSB has become a leader in the delivery of the Extended Day Program in Ontario. Currently, our district offers Extended Day Programs in 77 sites. As we rolled out Extended Day, we noticed a disturbing trend that the uptake in schools in low socioeconomic areas was much lower than in higher income areas of the city.

We have worked hard to ensure the program is available and either directly offered by the District or in partnership with a third party provider. However, we remain concerned that the current structure of the program is not accessible for families with demonstrated financial need. We are not able to offer unused spaces to families at a reduced cost and the municipal childcare subsidy system does not adequately meet the needs of our communities.

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We understand that, under the *Education Act*, the Consolidated Municipal Services Managers (CMSM) are responsible for the administration and management of the fee subsidy process and developing local policies to allocate funding in a way that best meets the needs of their community. We continue to work with our CMSM to advocate for change. However, if school districts are going to play a central role in the provision of child care, then we need to work directly with the Minister of Education on removing barriers related to fee subsidy and program access. Several of the solutions we wish to explore to increase equity of access do not necessarily require additional funding from the Ministry but changes to legislation.

As we were advised by Ministry staff that it would be contrary to legislation to open unused existing Extended Day spots to families waiting for subsidies, on 24 September 2013, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board passed the following motion:

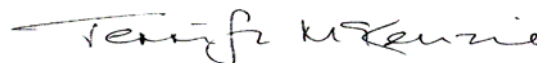
- A. THAT a legal opinion be sought through OPSBA to identify potential ways that Boards might be able to offer unused extended day program places, potentially at no cost, to families with demonstrated financial need; and
- B. THAT the Chair be directed to advocate for changes to provincial legislation, regulations and policies such that the extended day program is not inaccessible for families with demonstrated financial need.

Our district has sought a legal opinion and has been advised that our ability to make unused spaces available to families in need is contrary to the legislation. In order to address this problem, we require legislative change.

I would like to arrange a meeting with you to discuss the barriers inherent in the current system and to identify strategies that would better support the provision of the Extended Day Program to families in need. In this regard, Maureen Strittmatter, OCDSB Senior Board Coordinator, maureen.strittmatter@ocdsb.ca, will be in contact with your office in order to seek a meeting at your earliest convenience.

I look forward to speaking with you in more detail about our shared objectives for equitable access to early learning for Ontario students.

Sincerely,



Jennifer McKenzie
Chair of the Board

cc All Area MPPs
Education Critics, NDP, PC
Michael Barrett, Ontario Public School Boards' Association, OPSBA
Jim Grieve, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education Early Learning Division
Charles Pascal, Special Advisor on Early Learning
The Atkinson Charitable Foundation
The Education Foundation
Growing Up Great, Ottawa
Best Start Network, Ottawa
Trustees and Student Trustees, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
Senior Staff, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
Chairs of Ontario School Boards