

The Honourable Charles Sousa  
Minister of Finance  
c/o Budget Secretariat  
Frost Building North, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
95 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto ON M7A 1Z1

**January 15, 2014**

**Submitted by Palmina Ioannone, Executive Director and Kerry McCuaig, Fellow in Early Childhood Policy, on behalf of the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, OISE/University of Toronto**

To: Honourable Charles Sousa:  
Re: Pre-Budget Consultation/Minister of Finance  
Via: Email: [submissions@ontario.ca](mailto:submissions@ontario.ca)

Thank you for this opportunity to submit a written response on behalf on the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, OISE/University of Toronto.

The Atkinson Centre (AC) is a well-established research centre at OISE, University of Toronto involved in numerous research initiatives in child development and early learning and care including an evaluation of school-operated extended day programs in Ontario. Our work is supported by an Early Years Task Force, which brings a comprehensive cross-section of expertise from across the province to inform early years policy development with the goal of integrating children's services to improve quality and access.

While full day kindergarten is a policy milestone, on schedule to serve over 260,000 four- and five-year-olds, unfortunately our government stopped short of implementing the bold vision for school operated early learning and care described in *With Our Best Future In Mind*.

Fewer than 20 per cent of Ontario's children 12-years and younger have access to regulated care. The dearth of safe, affordable child care options literally endangers children's lives, curtails parents' work opportunities and costs the economy in work/family conflicts. As currently organized, child care creates a low wage sector reliant on social transfers.

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We therefore strongly urge the province to amend the *Education Act* requiring publicly funded schools to provide extended day/year round programming where there is sufficient parent demand. A seamless transition from the school day into before and after school and summer programming for all 4- to 12-year-olds is a rationale and effective way of utilizing the existing assets in publicly funded education to meet the needs of modern families.

In our current system, the majority of school boards' before and after care programs are delivered by external agencies resulting in access to services that ranges from comprehensive to skeletal. There remains a significant shortage of accessible, highly quality programs for young children, particularly in communities that reflect a lower socio-economic status. Jobs for early childhood educators, which have never been well established, are being downgraded; full time work has been chopped into part time hours, topping and tailing the end of the school day. Clearly, if Ontario is to meet the intended long term outcomes of full day early learning, as described in, *With Our Best Future In Mind*, we need to move away from the piecemeal and patchwork approach to child care and deliver high quality early learning programs that are accessible to *all*.

Our research at the Atkinson Centre has demonstrated that extended hour before and after school, and summer programming for 4- to 12-year-olds is entirely cost recovery. In school districts where the boards of education directly operate these programs (Ottawa and Kitchener/Waterloo) over 5,500 new spaces have been created since 2010 without a single additional dollar of public funding. Moreover parent fees in school-operated programs have decreased while ECE wages have gone up. This results from the efficiencies inherent in having one entity responsible for both education and care.

**Rarely has there been a public policy initiative that simultaneously creates good jobs for a predominately low-wage, female sector, supports the labour force participation of parents and improves the health and well being of children for no additional public costs.**

Finally in considering the cost of full day kindergarten it is also worth considering the benefits. These come from parents who experience fewer work conflicts; children who are happy and confident in school; ECEs who are earning a fair wage and the social cohesion, which comes when societies get behind their kids.

In summary, on behalf of the Atkinson Centre we recommend the Ontario government embrace the full vision for early learning and care by completing the implement of full day kindergarten and by mandating school-operated extended day programming for *all* 4- to 12-years olds.

For more information on this topic, as well as about the Atkinson Centre, please visit: [www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson).

Palmina Ioannone. Email: [palmina.ioannone@utoronto.ca](mailto:palmina.ioannone@utoronto.ca). Phone: 416-859-3321

Kerry McCuaig. Email: [kmccuaig@rogers.com](mailto:kmccuaig@rogers.com). Phone: 647.295.2808