

Moving Canada forward: Foundations -- A national early learning and child care program ^[1]

Paul Martin - Liberal Party of Canada election platform

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AVAILABILITY

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Attachment	Size
 MOVING CANADA FORWARD - Foundations -- A national early learning and child care program.pdf ^[3]	136.53 KB

EXCERPTS

FOUNDATIONS: A NATIONAL EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE PROGRAM

The case is compelling for investing in high-quality early learning and care available to every child. Studies conducted in Canada and throughout the world conclude that good child care and early learning contribute immensely to the healthy growth of children, as well as to their physical, emotional, social, linguistic and intellectual development. Simply put, it gives kids the best possible start in life. Accessible and affordable child care and early learning are also smart investments in our economy.

To begin with, these investments respond to the reality of modern life: that both parents want to, and often need to participate more fully in the paid labour force while knowing that their children are thriving in a caring, stimulating environment. Investments in child care and early learning are also smart because they help to level the playing field for those disadvantaged by birth or background, and because they set our youngest on the path to lifelong achievement. As well, Canadians know that education is the key to success in the 21st century economy.

A strong, national program of early learning and care for Canada's children is the single best investment we can make in our future. This is clear to anyone who has ever watched a child learn to read, or gaze at a map, or work at building something with others. Child care and early learning are part of a broader pattern. Access to learning opportunities throughout one's lifetime is critical. The current Liberal government used its first budget to deliver on its pledge to reduce the barriers to post-secondary education. We raised the ceiling on student loans, established grants to first-year students of modest means and created and funded a Learning Bond to help low-income families save for college or university. Following the same logic, a Liberal government will act on the knowledge that the foundation for future achievement is set in early childhood, when intellectual and emotional potential can be encouraged and nurtured. Traditional day care can be expensive, and it does not always include an educational element. We believe that every child will benefit from learning at an early age, and that no child should be denied access to such benefits by reason of cost. That's a big part of what Canada is about. But Canada clearly has not done enough.

Progressive systems are commonplace throughout Europe. In France for example, virtually all children from the age of two-and-a-half receive care for the full school day. Denmark has a comprehensive, largely publicly-funded program for all children younger than age seven. The systems in Canada and the U.S. are nowhere near as advanced. Child care programs exist in provinces across the country, but they are very uneven. Some offer a learning component, others less so. Some require high levels of professionalism of those working in the publicly-supported system, others less so. Quebec provides the exceptional example. It is the North American leader in early learning and care. In Quebec's system, community-based organizations provide child care at a moderate fee. This is a standard to which early learning and care across Canada should be lifted. Learning from each other and embracing what has worked elsewhere in Canada, makes us stronger as a nation and as a people. That's what our federation is all about. The time has come to do more. Over the next decade we must build for Canada's children and parents an early learning and child care system for the 21st century.

A LIBERAL GOVERNMENT WILL CREATE FOUNDATIONS: THE NATIONAL EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE PROGRAM

We will phase in a contribution of \$5 billion over the next five years, beyond funds already committed, to accelerate building the national system. The Foundations program will ensure that children have access to high-quality, government-regulated spaces at affordable cost to parents. A Liberal government will enshrine in legislation four principles for Foundations

QUALITY - Each facility must be regulated by the province or territory to ensure safety and an appropriate complement of professionally-

qualified child development staff.

UNIVERSALITY - The program will be open, without discrimination, to pre-school children, including children with special needs. >

ACCESSIBILITY - The program will be affordable for parents.

DEVELOPMENTAL - The program must include a component of development/learning that is integrated with the care component.

Attempts to bring provincial programs to a high standard have been made before. The Liberal government sought in the early 1990s to put in place an early learning and child care program. Unfortunately it was not possible to reach agreement with the provinces at the time, in part because almost all governments were struggling to cope with unsustainable fiscal situations, but also due to the fact that there was no agreed-upon process to guide federal investment in the provinces' domain of social policy. However, in early 1999, a Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) was reached on principles regarding the creation of joint initiatives. Already the Liberal government had worked successfully with the provinces and territories to develop the National Child Benefit in 1997. Since then, federal commitments to the NCB have increased to ensure more than \$10 billion annually by 2007.

Meanwhile, in the area of early learning and child care, considerable progress has been made by provinces themselves and through co-operative efforts among the federal, provincial and territorial governments, notably the Early Childhood Development Agreement (2000), and the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (2003). Federal contributions in these areas were accelerated in the last budget. Existing commitments now total \$3.6 billion over five years, 2004-05 through 2008-09.

The implementation and details of the new Foundations program will be worked out collaboratively with provinces and territories consistent with the principles of the Social Union Framework Agreement. Provided provincial early learning and child care programs meet the QUAD principles, provinces will have flexibility to design a roll-out plan based on the most appropriate implementation to suit their circumstances. To receive funding under the new Foundations program, provinces and territories will be invited to pass legislation implementing the QUAD principles.

It is hoped that provinces will also contribute additional funds beyond those they are already spending on early learning and child care. Even if they do not, the federal government will provide a per capita share of funds to support existing provincial or territorial programs that embody the QUAD principles. But in this case the province's program would have fewer spaces or would develop more slowly than would be the case if the province contributed new funds. Governing is about making choices & choices about how to devote finite resources so that they accomplish the most good for the people.

A Liberal government will choose to invest in our children. Canada needs an early learning and child care system of high quality. Right now, we have a beginning, but we need to finish the job. A Liberal government will work with its provincial and territorial partners; just as we did with the National Child Benefit & to give Canada's children the start they need, the Foundation upon which their success, and ours as a nation, will be built.

Related link: News article: "PM plans \$5-billion in daycare" ^[4]

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