

Build it right: Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care response to the Best Start plan ^[1]

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Source: Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

Format: Report

Publication Date: 7 Apr 2005

AVAILABILITY

- [Report in pdf](#) ^[2]

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Text of the news release to accompany Build It Right:

In November 2004 the coalition released a detailed, systematic plan to achieve universal early learning and care programs for all children ages 0-12 by the year 2015. We also reiterated our call for the Ontario government to develop a policy framework and action plan by April 1, 2005.

Unfortunately, the Best Start plan as conceived to date will not produce the high quality system we envision. While we welcome a renewed commitment to child care in Ontario's government, we urge them to improve Best Start by taking action on the ten key problems identified below.

TEN PROBLEMS WITH THE BEST START PLAN

1. Best Start will not produce a seamless service. Child care "wrapped around" part-time junior and senior kindergarten programs perpetuates the fragmented approach to early learning and care. The separation between learning and care fails to understand that when high quality child care exists &em; children's learning naturally follows.
2. Best Start does not commit to a universal system of early learning and care. Best Start retains the emphasis on a user pay/subsidy system for funding child care. This model has erected barriers to affordability and accessibility, and caused fragility of programs. Only direct public funding to programs ensures universality as well as predictability and stability.
3. Best Start is silent on early learning and care needs of children 0-3 and 6-12. It is unacceptable that there is no funding or policy offered in Best Start to expand spaces for children of ages 0-3 and 6-12 (as needed as for 4 and 5 year olds) nor to address the detrimental impact creating new spaces for only 4 and 5 year olds will have on the existing system.
4. Best Start does not protect against expansion in the commercial child care sector. Non-profit child care services are shown to be more likely to provide equitable access, be accountable to governments and taxpayers, and generally deliver higher quality care. Best Start must restrict the expansion of services using public dollars to the non-profit child care sector and implement a grand-parenting policy for existing commercial programs.
5. Best Start is unclear on the role of the informal sector in child care in Ontario. Relying on the informal sector in anyway to expand child care is unacceptable as it will not achieve quality, which we know takes place in a well funded regulated system based on best practices.
6. Best Start lacks a plan for the most essential ingredient of quality: the staff. We must immediately commit funding to improve wages, benefits and working conditions in order to attract and retain a well trained, qualified and professional workforce. Without first addressing these systemic human resource and funding issues the planned self-regulatory college of ECEs will unfairly place the responsibility of meeting regulatory standards on individual practitioners.
7. Best Start does not commit new provincial funding to child care. Best Start must include the Liberal election promise to allocate \$300 million provincial dollars to child care. In addition, the increasingly burdensome cost sharing arrangements between the provincial government and municipalities must be eliminated.
8. Best Start does not plan for adequate and meaningful consultation with all members of Ontario's child care community. Consultation with the child care community &em; including service providers, advocates and researchers is inadequate.
9. Best Start plan contains inadequate timetable and targets. After decades of waiting for a comprehensive and quality child care system for all children, waiting another 10+ years for a fragmented pairing of care and education services for only some children in Ontario is simply not good enough.
10. Best Start does not articulate the QUAD principles. The federal government has outlined its commitment to work collaboratively with

provinces and territories to build the foundations of a national early learning and child care system based on four interrelated, key principles (known as the "QUAD") that will shape a shared vision for early learning and care and go beyond earlier agreements and investments. The QUAD principles are:

- Quality: evidence-based, high quality practices relating to programs for children, training and supports for early childhood educators and child care providers, and provincial/territorial regulation and monitoring.
- Universally inclusive: open to all children, without discrimination.
- Accessible: available and affordable for those who choose to use it.
- Developmental: focused on enhancing early childhood learning opportunities and the developmental component of ELCC programs and services.

Despite agreeing to building a system based on these principles, the Ontario government's Best Start plan does not articulate or define these principles.

CONCLUSION

The timing for child care is critical. What happens in Best Start will lay the foundation for the future development of child care in Ontario. The full implementation plan for Best Start is due in December 2005, leaving time to make the changes needed to ensure the successful development of a high quality child care system.

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