

## **Efficiency and evidence-based practice in early childhood education and care: CRRU's analysis of the ECEC recommendations in the Drummond report**

The Drummond report (*Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services*) makes two recommendations about the full-day kindergarten (FDK) element of early childhood education and care (ECEC) but includes very little of the other key element—child care. This analysis responds to the FDK recommendations and to the virtual omission of child care from the perspective of efficiency and evidence-based practice, two of the Commission's declared approaches.

### **1. Recommendation 6-11 ((Chapter 6 – Elementary and secondary education)**

“Given the difficulties with such an approach, and the prohibitive cost of the program overall at this time, the Commission recommends cancellation of the full-day kindergarten (FDK) program, without prejudice to schools that already had FDK before the introduction of this government strategy.

The Ministry of Education should carefully develop phase-out provisions so that a child who had a full day in junior kindergarten would not move to a half day in senior kindergarten, and so that purpose-built spaces are appropriately utilized for child care”.

CRRU's response:

The Childcare Resource and Research Unit has long supported the idea of a full-day kindergarten-like publicly managed program for all three to five year olds, at their parents' discretion, within an integrated, coherent ECEC policy for programs for children 0-12 years outside regular school hours. Based on the best evidence from research and policy analysis, we observe that this is a best practice, with the proviso that the pedagogical approach should not rely on “schoolification<sup>1</sup>” and that the services are also designed to meet parents' needs for care while they work or study. The OECD noted in 2006 that most European countries provide all children with two or three years of free, publicly-funded ECEC before they begin primary school, usually for a full day. Thus, the FDK Ontario has begun to offer is neither lavish nor a frill but is well within international norms. We also note that Ontario's (ECEC) kindergarten and child care spending is considerably less than the minimum international benchmark of at least 1% of GDP. for public spending on ECEC for 0-5 year olds.

We appreciate that the Finance Minister has already said that this recommendation will not be adopted.

### **2. Recommendation 6-12 (Chapter 6 – Elementary and secondary education)**

“If the government decides to continue the implementation of the full-day kindergarten program, then the Commission recommends delaying full implementation from 2014–15 to 2017–18 and reducing program costs by adopting a more affordable staffing model, involving one teacher for about 20 students, rather than a teacher and an early childhood educator for 26 students, to help moderate salary expenditures for the program by about \$200 million. The government should not confirm full implementation of the program without assurances from school boards, teacher

---

<sup>1</sup> Schoolification is a term used by ECEC pedagogical experts to describe the “tendency to treat early childhood services as junior partners, preparing children for the demands of formal schooling”: with “the school imposing its demands and practices on other services, making them school-like” (Moss and Bennett, 2006.).

federations and support-staff unions that negotiated annual wage increases by 2017–18 will not be higher than the current trends in the broader public sector, and that the class-size increases and reductions in non-teaching staff contemplated by the Commission by 2017–18 will be achieved.

This approach would also help ease the oversupply of teachers in the labour market and reduce costs associated with correcting the current undersupply of ECEs”.

CRRU’s response re: downgrading FDK staffing:

The literature on the impact of quality in ECEC programs considering various child outcomes (academic, cognitive, social, etc.) is considered to be definitive. The research shows conclusively that "quality matters": good quality ECEC benefits children in multiple ways, while poor quality may be detrimental.

Teacher/child ratios and specific training in early childhood are two of the main variables consistently shown to have significant impacts on quality.

As the key stated purpose of Ontario’s FDK program is to have a positive impact on child outcomes, downgrading staffing by substantially reducing ratios and removing the early childhood-educated teaching staff from the team would be at best negligent and at worst harmful, especially as kindergarten is now full rather than half day.

The international ECEC benchmarks adopted by UNICEF (2008) address these key elements of quality: UNICEF sets out a 1:15 ratio of ECE-educated teachers for children 3 to 5 years, with group size not more than 24. UNICEF’s staff training benchmark stipulates that 50% of staff should be trained in early childhood education at three years tertiary level (post-secondary). (see [http://www.unicef.or.jp/library/pdf/labo\\_rc8.pdf](http://www.unicef.or.jp/library/pdf/labo_rc8.pdf))

A review of the ECEC literature on teacher: child ratios and teacher qualifications for four and five year olds (in Ontario, kindergarten children may be as young as 3.8 years) conducted by CRRU in 2009 concluded that:

- “better” ratios/class sizes are associated with better academic, cognitive, social and behavioural outcomes, better staff: child interactions, and global quality;
- a group of 24-25 children is an acceptable model for ECEC classes for fours and fives **with two adults, assuming that both have education related to working** with young children in ECEC settings (see CRRU BRIEFing NOTE - [http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/BN\\_ratios.pdf](http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/BN_ratios.pdf))

In sum, this recommendation is not evidence-based and should not be considered.

3. Child care (an “other” “discretionary social program” in Chapter 8, Social Services.)

CRRU’s response to the omission of child care from the economic equation:

Child care has been part of the Ministry of Education since 2010 but in the Drummond report it is treated as a social service, not education. Overall, however, the report barely mentions child care, an omission inconsistent with the evidence about the role well-designed child care can play in the economy. Even keeping narrowly to the Commission’s stated mandate—“Ensuring that the

government is getting value for money in all its activities.... that programs and services are achieving the best possible outcomes..” suggests that child care should have been part of the economic prescription.

Part of the problem is that although Ontario has moved child care under an education aegis administratively, child care and FDK are still two solitudes programmatically and policy-wise. This artificial divide mitigates against a more efficient, economically useful approach to early childhood education and child care.

There is good evidence that ECEC programs that are both high quality enough to support child development goals and are also designed to meet parents’ needs for care can deliver significant economic returns. However, the studies of the economic benefits of child care tend to rely heavily on returns from mothers’ employment (see, for example, Cleveland and Krashnsky, 1998). That is, when reliable child care is more accessible, more mothers – especially those who are low-income – can work outside the home. Quebec research reports that after the child care reform in the 1990s, labour force participation rates rose substantially for Quebec mothers, generating new tax revenue. Baker et al’s research (2005) calculated that 40% of the cost of the Quebec child care program was paid for through new tax revenue income and payroll taxes generated by mothers’ increased labour force participation. Input-output analyses such as Fairholm’s show that child care contributes more to economic gains than just about any other industry studied (2009, 2010). Fairholm shows that child care’s economic benefits can outweigh the public investment costs, returning most of the benefits to the provincial and federal governments in increased revenue.

The combination of short (job creation, economic stimulus, increased tax revenue) and long term benefits (positive child outcomes) pertain only if ECEC programs both provide high quality early childhood education **and** meets parents’ employment needs. Thus, designing ECEC programs so they are most efficacious for children and parents also situates them to get “more [economic] bang for the buck”. In fact, FDK would be much more “efficient” if it was part of a coherent, well-designed ECEC system, not a stand-alone.

If the Ontario government is looking for ways to make programs operate more “efficiently”, they are missing an opportunity. The best recommendation Drummond could have made to the provincial government would have been to complete the integration of “care” and “early education” and to design a policy and financial framework that will sustain it, an endeavor that will require money, policy development and political will.

Overall, the Drummond report misses the ECEC boat on all fronts even within its own narrow perspective.

February 17 2012