

February 21, 2019

Honourable Lisa M. Thompson
 Minister of Education
 900 Bay Street, 22nd Floor Mowat Block
 Toronto, Ontario
 M7A 1L2

Re: Engagement on Class Size

The College of Early Childhood Educators (the College) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Ministry of Education's class size engagement. This submission focuses on the 'Kindergarten Classroom' section of the *Engagement Guide*.

The College works in the interests of children and families by regulating the profession of early childhood education in accordance with the *Early Childhood Educators Act*. Families trust the College to set high standards for the profession and hold Ontario's 53,000 Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) accountable for safe, competent, professional, and ethical practice. Almost 16,000 RECEs are employed in the publicly funded education sector; the majority in full-day kindergarten classrooms.

We consistently hear from our members that the two educator model in kindergarten programs works well and supports child development and student success – but only when it is implemented effectively. The most successful programs feature an egalitarian partnership between RECEs and teachers, as well as the respect from school boards and stakeholders for the unique and complementary professional roles.

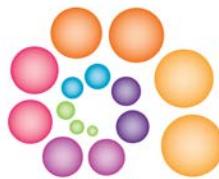
RECEs are uniquely qualified and through their practice, support positive child outcomes

Families want qualified professionals educating their children. For student success, educators must be appropriately qualified for the age-group and curriculum being taught.

The OECD has documented the importance of educator training focused on child development and the early years, as well as the educator's ability to use their knowledge to stimulate interactions, involve children, and use a variety of strategies to promote learning. Better quality programming and staff-child interactions are linked to improved learning outcomes.¹

¹ According to the OECD, "Staff-child interactions and implementation of developmental and educational activities are linked to higher levels of children's emerging literacy and numeracy skills, as well as better behavioural and social skills." p. 65.

OECD. (2018). *Engaging Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Starting Strong Series. OECD Publishing: Paris. <http://www.oecd.org/education/engaging-young-children-9789264085145-en.htm>.



In Ontario, RECEs are uniquely qualified to lead kindergarten programs for four- and five-year old children. RECEs must meet the College's registration requirements, including successful completion of a post-secondary program in early childhood education that meets the standards established by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Topics covered include the science of brain development in the early years, as well as creating effective and age-appropriate inclusive learning environments. Once registered with the College, RECEs are required to maintain competence through continuous professional learning.

Because RECEs' education is focused exclusively on child development and learning in the early years, Ontario's students benefit from having this specialized expertise embedded and actively present in the kindergarten program.

Children and families are at the centre of RECEs' practice

RECEs "understand that families are of primary importance in children's development and well-being and that children are best understood in the context of their families, cultures and communities."² They seek input from parents and families about their child's growth and learning needs and work with families to support decision-making in children's best interest.

Because children and families are central to the practice of early childhood education, RECEs are well-positioned to engage families in the kindergarten program and in children's development and learning experiences.

RECEs enable smoother transitions to school and integrated services for families

For many families, kindergarten is a period of transition from child care to school. The kindergarten program prepares children for the school environment and its academic, subject-specific structure, while benefiting from holistic, active, inquiry-based learning approaches introduced in early learning and care programs.³

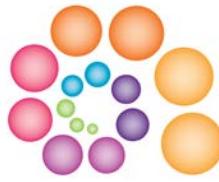
The transition from early childhood to primary education is facilitated by practices which enable continuity of professionals and pedagogy. The OECD notes that the "joint creation of pedagogical transition practices [...] can facilitate children's adjustment to school and help them settle in."⁴

These years are also a time of transition for families. RECEs have deep knowledge of the different early learning environments, as well as the kindergarten program. They are expected to maintain knowledge of community-based services so that they can provide families with information about these supports. They are also expected to work collaboratively with other professionals and community based service providers to ensure that families experience a seamless approach when accessing multiple support services.

² CECE. (2017). *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*. CECE: Toronto. p. 8. https://www.college-ece.ca/en/Documents/Code_and_Standards_2017.pdf.

³ OECD. *Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education*. OECD Publishing: Paris. p. 148. <http://www.oecd.org/education/starting-strong-v-9789264276253-en.htm>.

⁴ Ibid, p. 148.



RECEs are therefore uniquely qualified to support families and children with the transition from child care to the school environment through the kindergarten program. Likewise, they can also support seamless transitions during the day as children transition between kindergarten and before-and-after school or extended day programs.

Safety, quality, trust, and accountability

As a regulatory body, the College's mandate is to serve and protect the interests of children, families, and the public. When RECEs are accountable, the public can trust them and have confidence in Ontario's early learning and education systems.

RECEs are professional educators, guided by core values of care, respect, trust, and integrity. They are accountable to uphold standards of practice and ensure children's safety, health, and well-being in learning environments. Their understanding of child development, knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy for the early years, focus on children and families, and connection to the community contributes to success and quality in Ontario's education system.

We trust that you will find this feedback useful, and would be pleased to address any questions or participate in further discussions. We remain committed and look forward to partnering with you on the shared goal of serving and protecting Ontario's children and families.

Yours truly,

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