

March 1, 2010

Dear OECTA Member:

I am writing to you to provide facts and insight into the reasoning behind the decision by the Provincial Executive to recommend that OECTA organize early childhood educators (ECEs) into Association bargaining units.

As you are aware, the Ontario government will begin implementing its new full-day Early Learning Kindergarten Programme (ELKP) for some 35,000 four- and five-year-olds in 600 schools in September 2010. Ontario is the first jurisdiction in North America to implement such a revolutionary programme for young children. Bill 242, the *Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act 2010*, which received first reading on February 17, provides the enabling legislation for the programme.

OECTA is currently reviewing this legislation in detail and will be recommending changes to the Bill. The Association will not endorse a law that is detrimental to Kindergarten classrooms. Teachers believe there must be a firm cap on class size and that there must be clear distinctions between the roles of early childhood educators (ECEs) and teachers. Above all, we want to ensure that the programme meets the needs of Ontario's four- and five-year-olds, their parents, teachers and ECEs.

The ELKP creates jobs for teachers. At OECTA's Beginning Teachers conference on February 19, Premier Dalton McGuinty told 350 teachers that, "five years from now, there will be over 3,500 *more* JK and SK teachers as a result of this new program." Of those, 1300 will teach in Catholic boards. The Premier added: "Teachers will be in the classroom the entire day, will continue to report on progress to parents, will be responsible for completing report cards and for additions to the Ontario School Record."

This new legislated working relationship must be implemented and managed with prudence, to protect teacher interests and preserve the quality of the Kindergarten programme. The Provincial Executive, our professional staff and legal counsel believe that, in Ontario's Catholic schools, OECTA can do this better than any other union.

No other union, teacher or non-teacher, would have the same vested interest as OECTA in fostering a mutually supportive working relationship between teachers and ECEs. It is unlikely another union would consider the interests of teachers when advocating for ECEs.

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As the bargaining agent, OECTA would be responsible for negotiating the first collective agreements for ECEs. Contract language would be written in such a way as to minimize role overlap and confusion. The negotiation of the terms and conditions of employment for ECEs would not require existing teacher contracts to be opened, because a Letter of Understanding would be appended to teacher agreements.

In addition, as the only union that represents teachers and ECEs in Catholic schools, OECTA would be in a position to provide joint professional development for these teams that would minimize confusion and foster collaboration from the beginning. It would also be able to monitor agreements, participate in staffing committees and have a voice in the grievance process.

These are the reasons why the Provincial Executive is recommending that OECTA organize ECEs.

There is no question that there will be growing pains. However, beginning with the first announcements about this plan during the 2007 provincial election, OECTA has advocated aggressively and persistently on behalf of its members to ensure that no jobs are lost and that Kindergarten teachers are confident about their futures.

Through numerous meetings with kindergarten teachers across the province I have been made very aware of the concerns of our members. Teachers have raised legitimate questions about the programme including class size, the need for additional funding for materials and resources and about how roles must be defined and delineated. I can assure you that these are being vigorously addressed with the government.

The Provincial Executive will continue to seek expert advice from the professional staff and from legal counsel as the ELKP unfolds, in order to make the best possible decisions on your behalf. I look forward to the debate on this issue during the Annual General Meeting knowing that the delegates are positioning our Association for the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Ryan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

James Ryan
President

JR/cd