

# CUPE FACTS

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## Let's Rethink Child Care.

*August 2014*

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### **Can we depend on you?**

On October 27, 2014, voters will decide who will be elected to our municipal councils and school boards in Ontario. Key decisions about our child care and early learning system are made by our municipal councils and school boards.

While the province is primarily responsible for child care and early learning funding and policy decisions, municipalities and school boards have a significant role in managing the system, subsidy allocation and for programs for children with special needs.

Elected leaders committed to building a quality, public, accessible child care system is important to Ontario families.

### **A child care system in crisis**

In Ontario, our child care system is a patchwork of primarily non-profit, public/municipal and home based care. With tens of thousands of families on wait lists, accessing affordable licensed care is difficult. Compounding the situation is the way the provincial government funds child care, the introduction of full-day kindergarten, and the presence of 'big-box' private for-profit operators.

### **Funding formula**

The provincial government introduced a new funding formula for the child care sector in

December 2012. The new formula allocates funding to municipalities based on elements including child population, poverty, level of education, social assistance caseload and cost of living. Under this formula, some municipalities are receiving more money while others are receiving less. For those receiving less funding, a three-year stabilization fund of \$50 million was put in place. The stabilization funding was never an adequate way to address the negative impact the cuts would have on communities, and when the funding ends, these municipalities will be in a financial bind.

City councils in Lambton County, Sault Ste Marie and Thunder Bay are considering closing municipal child care centres, and the City of Sudbury already voted to close theirs. These centres provide leadership and innovation in child care, and often support hard-to-serve and higher needs populations. Municipal child care often meets specific needs identified by communities such as after hours or special needs care. We need to ensure all our municipal and non-profit child care centres remain open and are adequately funded.

### **Full-day kindergarten**

When the province introduced full-day kindergarten (FTK), it had signalled that stabilization monies would be made available to community-based and municipal child care centres affected by the transition of 4-5 year olds to school-based FTK programs and for the renovation of buildings, to

hire additional staff and to buy new equipment in order to expand spaces for toddlers and infants. Unfortunately the funding provided to centres by the province has been lacking. Today, many centres are struggling to remain open, challenged to provide care for toddlers and infants, which costs more than for 4 and 5 year olds.

### Corporate 'big box' child care

The experience of corporate child care in Australia and the UK shows that when corporations dominate, parent fees soar and governments make hefty payouts to support shareholders' profits. The for-profit child care sector represented 24% of licensed centre-based spaces in Ontario in 2012-13. We need to ensure that our elected leaders invest in public and non-profit child care.

The changes to child care funding, introduction of FTK and existence of for-profit operators have put many child care centres under increased stress. We need all levels of government—municipal, provincial and federal—to invest in a quality, publicly-funded child care system. The municipal and school board elections are key moments to put child care on the agenda politically.

### Let's make sure child care is on the radar in this election

Ask your municipal and school board candidates about their positions on child care by:

- Meeting with candidates and/or attending all-candidates meetings;
- Asking your electoral candidates the child care questions below; and

- Arranging a meeting with your municipal councillor and trustee after the election.

### Questions for candidates

Get candidates' positions on child care by asking questions like:

1. Municipal councillors and school board trustees oversee the distribution of child care funds. If you are elected, will you commit to consult in a meaningful way with child care workers, centres and parents about the distribution of child care funds?
2. Many municipal child care centres have been closed despite being 'best practice' providers that often have specialized services that address gaps in the child care patchwork. Will you ensure our municipal child care centres remain open [If these services exist in your community]?
3. The research shows that for-profit child care centres are more likely to be poorer in quality. If elected, do you promise to advocate against for-profit, big-box child care?
4. The current federal and provincial funding for child care is inadequate to provide base funding for child care centres with affordable parent fees and wages. If elected, will you promise to work with child care workers, parents and centres to advocate to the provincial and federal governments for increased funding for public and not-for-profit early learning and child care programs?