

KIDS FIRST PARENT ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

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December 10, 2013

Dear Honourable Minister Sandals,

Our organization, Kids First Parent Association of Canada, is a national registered charity promoting the optimal care and well-being of children since 1987. We are an independent grassroots group run by parent volunteers. We do not receive funding from government, unions, or business.

We have been active in early learning and child care issues for many years, and contributed to government consultations and media.

We have read the recent reports on Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) by your Ministry, the Offord Centre at McMaster University, and Queens University as well as the related September 3 press release and related media coverage.

We are deeply concerned about the quality of this research, the failure to disclose research, the misrepresentation of research, and apparent research misconduct by academics within the Ministry and university, as outlined below.

We have communicated with a member of your staff, Dr. Laurie McNelles (by phone and then by email at her suggestion), and with Dr. Magdalena Janus at the Offord Child Centre (by email) in order to better understand the studies. Dr. McNelles has at this time not responded to or acknowledged receipt of the email sent Nov 8, 2013.

In our "evidence based" times, the misrepresentation of research in the area of public policy that affects millions of children and families, and that also indirectly affects everyone in society, is a very serious matter. It must be investigated by the appropriate authorities and disciplinary action taken to rectify the situation.

We are writing to request a formal public apology and clarification from you.

We ask that you clarify that:

1 - The Ministry of Education did not make publicly available the McMaster and Queens FDK reports even though these had been provided to the Ministry in the fall of 2012, a full year before the Sept 3, 2013 media release and publicity event. This suppression of research helped in the misrepresentation of the research as overwhelmingly positive in the media because reporters and others could not read it. Had the Ministry made the

research available it is unlikely that the misleading positive message would have been published as widely.

2 - The Ministry of Education misrepresented research findings in the September 3, 2013 media release and related interviews to convey an extremely positive result for FDK when the findings were not favourable or only mediocre.

3 - The Ministry of Education has neither conducted research itself, nor been provided with research by Queens or McMaster universities, that meets basic peer-reviewed scholarly standards for sample size and balance, respondent neutrality, or reliability on the topic of FDK.

4 - The research had many biases, all favouring FDK. If the researchers had controlled for the biases the findings would have been considerably more negative for FDK.

We understand that it is very likely that you personally did not read the university studies as they are very long. We understand that you may have relied on staff to advise you regarding the existence and contents of the reports, as is usually necessary and expected.

If this is the case, we ask that:

5 - Appropriate disciplinary action, including dismissal for cause, be taken towards staff members and other academics involved in misrepresenting the findings to the public and within the government.

6 - We be notified of any disciplinary action taken.

This research and this policy directly impact the lives of millions of children in Ontario and beyond. The fact that the research is biased according to the McMaster and Queens studies in a number of ways (detailed below) should be reason enough to avoid publishing it or basing policy on it. But to take the lackluster findings from flawed research and to misrepresent them as positive is to actively and knowingly participate in harming children's development and well-being, and defrauding taxpayers.

We trust that you will act to further the well-being of children, reliable scholarship, and truthful representation of research.

Sincerely,

Helen Ward, President
Dr Suzana Kovacic, Vice President

Kids First Parent Association of Canada

SOME DETAILS OF RESEARCH BIAS AND RESEARCH MISREPRESENTATION

1 - Reliance on the Early Development Instrument (EDI) creates biased and unreliable data.

a – from "The Early Development Index and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds" in *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development* Sept 21, 2007

p.225

"...the reliability and validity of the EDI has never been formally established in a peer-reviewed journal article. Moreover, data for CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse] and Aboriginal children are scant and there are many issues regarding its use with these children that warrant attention." (emphasis added)

b –*Ibid* pp. 225-229

The authors critique the EDI for "lack of sensitivity to cultural diversity, "lack of sensitivity to linguistic diversity" and "lack of longitudinal perspective".

c - Offord p.85

"...the study respondents (teachers) were not blinded to the "treatment" category (FDK or not), and their own belief in the program could have subconsciously affected the way they completed the EDI." (emphasis added)

d - Queens p.84

"Another limitation concerns the use of the EDI as the sole measure of school readiness...consideration should be given to potential alternative measures." (emphasis added)

e - The EDI uses 'cut offs' based on percentiles. This is a relative measure which guarantees that a significant minority of children will be classified as "vulnerable" of "at risk" regardless of objective developmental criteria.

f – The EDI's use of relative measure guarantees that a "problem" will be found regardless of objective facts, and a policy solution to the problem advanced, again regardless of objective facts. This is an abuse of scientific methods aimed at influencing policy.

g – This unscientific policy-influencing purpose of the EDI was in fact stated by the foremost promoters of the EDI, the late Drs Clyde Hertzman and Fraser Mustard:

Nov 13, 2006 World Bank - Dr Clyde Hertzman Power Point slide 3

“[we will] *create an infant mortality rate of the EDI. Philosophy: no measurement, no data; no data, no problem*”

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTCY/EXTECD/0,,contentMDK:20251977~menuPK:527317~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:344939,00.html>

Mustard to Senate Committee 2007

“*Remember: No data, no problem, no policy. We developed a data system... called the ECDI...*”

http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/Com-e/soci-e/45189-e.htm?Language=E&Parl=39&Ses=2&comm_id=47

h - The EDI is intended to be used to change policy as described in *A Toolkit for Change* and *The EDI Handbook*. This policy bias limits its utility as an objective measure.

i - The Offord centre's website says "**1 in 20**" - that is five percent - of children are not ready to learn in school when they start Kindergarten. But "vulnerability" figures are given as 25-30 percent ubiquitously by media and the Ontario and British Columbia governments. The use of the much higher number and the non-mention of the lower number is another instance of gross misrepresentation of research.

<http://www.offordcentre.com/readiness/>

j - Children who are younger, male, and non-English/French speaking are more apt to be classified as "vulnerable" by the EDI simply because of these characteristics, yet it is claimed by Early Learning Advisor Dr Charles Pascal, the Ontario government, and the Human Early Learning Partnership at UBC that “vulnerable” children are more likely to become criminals, addicts, unhealthy, school failures, and a cost burden to society. This is stigmatizing to these children, their communities and families, and unscientific.

2 - Failure to disclose relevant findings

a - The Ontario Ministry of Education had the Offord and the Queens studies in the fall of 2012 but did not release them until October 17, 2013.

b - Dr Magdalena Janus in a Sept 4 2013 interview with CBC

<http://www.rcinet.ca/en/2013/09/04/study-supports-ontarios-full-day-kindergarten/> made comments supportive of the Ministry study although she was presumably not the author of it and did not disclose this fact. She spoke as if she was one of the authors, using the term "we" to describe the researchers.

If Dr Janus is an author of the Ministry study, and worked to remix the data in order to create a second more favourable study, this should be made clear.

c - She did not disclose that her own study showed contrary, negative results. For example, in all but one sub-group, the NO FDK sub-groups had lower rates of vulnerability. (See Chart 1 below).

d - She repeatedly used the biased word "benefited" rather than a neutral term such as "enrolled" when discussing children in all-day kindergarten programs.

e - She did not disclose any of the biases and limitations - for example the very small and biased sample - of the Ministry study, although she did address these in the Offord study.

f - She spoke of "advantages" and "excellent" in describing the program and disclosed none of the negative findings.

3. Inadequate sample sizes and samples biased in favour of FDK

a - The university studies note that the requirement for written parental consent reduced the sample size drastically and also biased the samples. The Ministry study does not mention this, nor did the media release or Janus' interview comments.

b - Offord p.85

"As there is solid research evidence suggesting that active consent results **in a biased sample**, it is difficult to estimate how the **low recruitment rate** and **participant bias** might have influenced the study outcomes." (emphasis added)

c - Queens p 83

"One limitation was the probable **bias in the sample** of EDI scores available for analysis. The original potential sample of kindergarten children identified to participate in the study was over 8600, but only children whose parents provided active consent were included. After requiring parents to actively consent to their child's kindergarten teacher completing the EDI, the sample dropped from 8600 to 3640 valid EDI scores, of which 169 were from children with identified special educational needs. **The participation rate of only 40% appears to have eliminated many of the children from high need schools and/or high need families.** There are clear indications in our analysis of the Kindergarten Parent Survey that **high need families are underrepresented in the EDI data. This bias toward lower need families or children from lower need schools severely limits the confidence with which any conclusions can be drawn from the study concerning the impact of FDELK.**" (emphasis added)

d - The authors do not note that the samples were also biased because they were **unbalanced in the area of language.** (see Charts 2 – 4 below) There were far more non-English speaking children in the NO FDK groups. There were also far more French immersion students in the NO FDK groups. Children learning a new language can be expected to have more challenges than those who are in a classroom using their home language.

NO FDK GROUPS HAD LOWER RATE OF OVERALL VULNERABILITY

Percentage figures from report by Offord Centre for Child Studies

CHART 1

Percentage of Children Vulnerable on 1 or More EDI Domains

* = lowest - ie best

	2 years FDK	1 year FDK	0 years FDK	Report page
Yr 1 Junior K	40.6	36*	36.5	14
Yr 1 Senior K	28.5	28.7	28.1*	30
Yr 2 Junior K	43.6	42.6	38*	47
Yr 2 Senior K	25.7	28.5	23.5*	63

SAMPLE BIAS IN LANGUAGE FAVOURING FDK

Year 1 JK – p 7, Year 1 SK – p 27, Year 2 JK – p.44, Year 2 SK – p. 60

* = significantly higher/lower percentage than other 2 groups

CHART 2 - Percentage of Students with French/English as a Second Language

	2 years of FDK	1 year FDK	No FDK
Year 1 Junior K	27.6	20*	27.3
Year 1 Senior K	19.6	21.1	24.1*
Year 2 Junior K	22.7	16.7	31.5*
Year 2 Senior K	19.6	14	26*

CHART 3 - Percentage of Students with First Language English

	2 years of FDK	1 year FDK	No FDK
Year 1 Junior K	63.6	68.2	59.5*
Year 1 Senior K	68.9	65.8	67.3
Year 2 Junior K	64.6	74.4	52*
Year 2 Senior K	63.2	74.3	53.3*

CHART 4 - Percentage of Students in French Immersion

	2 years of FDK	1 year FDK	No FDK
Year 1 Junior K	1.5	9.7	15.4*
Year 1 Senior K	5.5	14.6	27*
Year 2 Junior K	1.6	.3	15.8*
Year 2 Senior K	6	13.8	26.3*