



Q & A

On the Unionization of DECE in the Early Learning Program

1. Who are DECEs?

There is a new role of early childhood educators in elementary schools, a distinct position with defined credentials and duties -- the Designated Early Childhood Educator (DECE). The DECE is a partner in the Full Day Early Learning program and is the lead educator for school-operated extended day/year programs for children four to 12 years.

The DECE is a new professional designation with legislated duties. DECEs are directed to collaborate with teachers in the Early Learning program and they are the designated educator in extended day programs. Unlike an educational assistant the DECE has direct supervisory responsibilities in the classroom and reports directly to the principal.

2. How did the AECEO develop its position statement on unionization?

The early learning sector has been in a state of evolution in the last 5 years. In the last year alone, full day was introduced and implemented, a new designation for ECE was introduced, child care was moved from one ministry to another (from Ministry of Children and Youth Services to Ministry of Education), legislation was passed to accommodate the changes in the education sector etc... AECEO members and stakeholders were contacting the AECEO for direction and leadership on this issue. The AECEO Provincial board, as elected representatives of the membership, had a responsibility to respond to issues arising in a timely manner using, as always, the mission and mandate of our organization to guide its position.

3. Why recommend ETFO?

ETFO has extensive experience serving educators who work at the elementary level. ETFO has a great deal to offer DECEs as they have a background in providing specific professional development and other professional supports for elementary educators. Where DECEs and teachers are part of the same union a more collaborative environment for dealing with implementation challenges and solving problems will exist because issues will be dealt with within the same union family. As a union ETFO is committed to negotiating benefits and salaries that properly reflect ECE qualifications and credentials. They have actively sought out advice and have been working collaboratively with the AECEO and other early learning stakeholders in the sector.

4. *Why recommend ETFO when they initially did not support ECEs in the classroom?*

There is a misperception about ETFO's position. The initial proposal for full day early learning was to have a teacher limited to a half day in the classroom. In fact ETFO did not object to ECEs in the classroom but lobbied the government to have a teacher and an ECE in the classroom for the full day.

5. *Why does the AECEO not start their own union for ECEs?*

This is a question that has been discussed at the board level for quite some time. Research and consultation was undertaken by the staff and in the next issue of the *eceLINK* (Fall 2010) this question is fully explored.

6. *Why recommend one union or any union at all?*

The provincial office and members of the board received calls from members who were being overwhelmed by organizers of many unions. When the feature section on unionization was published a call for more direction and leadership arose from the individuals being approached by organizers. As the professional association it is our responsibility to give guidance and direction when it is warranted.

As our position statement outlines the education sector is heavily unionized and DECEs as employees of school boards would have to join a union. It is the AECEO's opinion that one union representing both partners in the full day program makes the most sense for DECEs and the early learning program.

7. *What about those members who belong to other unions? Can we still count on the AECEO to support us?*

The AECEO advocates on behalf of all early childhood educators regardless of where they work, their position, their union affiliation (if any) and will continue to do so as the professional association.

Please continue to forward your questions.....