

Ministry of Children
and Youth Services

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Ontario

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Ms. Linda Stewart
Association of Local Public Health Agencies
502-425 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M5G 1T6

Linda
Dear Ms. Stewart:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Preschool Speech and Language Program funding and for forwarding your association's resolution. I appreciate the opportunity to respond and provide you with some information.

The ministry's Preschool Speech and Language Program makes every effort to give children and their families the help they need as early as possible so children get the best possible start in life. Local Public Health Units also play an important role in supporting the development of children's communication. I understand that 11 of your members are lead agencies for the Preschool Speech and Language Program, and that health units across the province are actively involved in raising awareness of speech and language delays and supporting the delivery of the program. I appreciate this ongoing work, as well as your contribution to this important area of child development.

Speech and language services in Ontario were historically funded by different sources and delivered in a variety of ways. The introduction of the Preschool Speech and Language Program in 1996 built on these existing services in the community by integrating the services of all agencies and enhancing the services available to children across the province.

The positive efforts of the Preschool Speech and Language Program lead agencies and local steering committees, as well as this government's funding enhancements since 2003, have created a consistent, efficient and effective program to serve children and families across the province. I agree that there's still more work to be done to support our most vulnerable children, including those living in remote areas, and I welcome your ongoing support of these efforts.

I recognize that speech and language skills are essential to a child's healthy development. However, due to the current economic challenges, my ministry is not in a position to grant increases to the base budget for these programs this year. Ministry staff have been working with the lead agencies for the Preschool Speech and Language Program in order to find efficiencies in program delivery and ways to maximize positive outcomes for children and their families.

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As you're aware, the responsibility for the delivery of speech and language services to school aged children is currently shared by the Ministries of Education, Health and Long-Term Care and Children and Youth Services. Our ministries are working together to undertake a review of the School Health Support Services program and planning for the introduction of the full-day early learning program. Both these initiatives could impact the delivery of speech and language services to school-aged children and will involve stakeholder consultation and input. I encourage your association to take advantage of these opportunities as they arise. Information about the School Health Support Services review will be available later this fall.

If you have suggestions on how your association can support the delivery of the Preschool Speech and Language Program, please contact Marlene Stein, Manager of the Early Learning and Child Development Branch, at 416-327-4869.

Thank you again for sharing your concerns and for your ongoing support of this important program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deb Matthews".

Deb Matthews
Minister

c: Ms. Marlene Stein, Manager