



May 6, 2026

VIA E-MAIL: [minister.edu@ontario.ca](mailto:minister.edu@ontario.ca)

The Honourable Paul Calandra  
Minister of Education  
438 University Ave. 5th Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

**Re: Importance of Play-Based Learning and the Role of DECEs in Ontario's Kindergarten Program**

Dear Minister Calandra,

On behalf of designated early childhood educators (DECEs) working in Kindergarten classrooms in public schools across the province who are collectively represented by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), the Ontario School Board Council of Unions (CUPE–OSBCU), and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO), we write to underscore the critical importance of play-based learning in the early years and to highlight the essential role of DECEs as pedagogical leaders within Ontario's Kindergarten program.

Play-based learning is a foundational and evidence-based approach that supports the holistic development of young children. Decades of research demonstrate that younger learners learn best through exploration, inquiry, and meaningful engagement driven by their natural curiosity. Through play, children develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, creativity and imagination, as well as the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive capacities necessary for long-term success.

Central to this approach is the professional expertise of DECEs. Their specialized knowledge of early childhood development supports the design of responsive, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate learning environments that honour children's agency and support diverse learning needs. Working collaboratively with teachers, DECEs strengthen the overall quality and effectiveness of the Kindergarten program and are indispensable to its success.

While the 2026 Kindergarten Curriculum continues to reference play-based learning, it does not reflect the same depth of research, context, and pedagogical grounding found in earlier versions of the program. This approach risks diminishing the importance of play-based learning and may inadvertently undermine the integrity of Ontario's early years framework. It also risks minimizing the specialized and essential role that DECEs play in supporting children's learning and well-being.

Given the extensive body of research supporting play-based learning, we urge the Ministry of Education to reaffirm its commitment to this foundational approach. We further call on the

Ministry to explicitly recognize and strengthen the role of DECEs as pedagogical leaders and experts in early learning within all relevant policies and curriculum documents.

Ontario's publicly funded education system has long been recognized for the strength of its early years programming. Maintaining this standard requires continued investment in, and commitment to, evidence-based practices and the professionals who deliver them.

We welcome the opportunity to work with you to ensure that Ontario's Kindergarten program continues to meet the developmental needs of all children.

Sincerely,

David Mastin, President  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)

Joe Tigani, President  
Ontario School Board Council of Unions (CUPE–OSBCU)

Martha Hradowy, President  
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO)

FC:MG