



early childhood community development centre

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - January 18, 2010

SPEAKER WILL URGE PARENTS AND EDUCATORS TO TEAM UP FOR CHILDREN'S EARLY LEARNING

St. Catharines: On Thursday, January 21 at 6:00 p.m., the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC) in partnership with the District School Board of Niagara and the Niagara District Catholic School Board will be hosting a free workshop for parents, educators and community leaders. This special, interactive event will feature a presentation by Dr. Debbie Pushor, Associate Professor of Education from the University of Saskatchewan and outspoken advocate for increasing parental engagement and leadership in children's education. It will take place at the Quality Parkway Hotel & Convention Centre on Ontario Street in St. Catharines.

Dr. Pushor has been studying the relationship between families and schools for many years and notes the links research identifies between parental engagement and student attendance, grades, behaviour and even graduation rates. She notes, however, there is a difference between parental involvement and parental engagement: "Parents who are 'involved' serve the school's agenda by doing the things educators ask or expect them to do – volunteering at school, parenting in positive ways, and supporting and assisting their children at home with their school work – while knowledge, voice and decision-making continue to rest with the educators. With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial." (2005, Pushor, Ruitenberg et al. *Parent Engagement and Leadership, Teaching and Learning Research Exchange*.)

"Dr. Pushor's message is an important one," says Tammy McCormick Ferguson, Executive Director of the ECCDC. "While parents, early childhood educators and school teachers are aware that children's experiences before the age of five profoundly influence their ability to succeed in school and in life, there is not a lot of information providing practical strategies and recommendations on how parents and educators can best work together for children's benefit. In some cases, educators could be seeking out parents' involvement, knowledge and insight in more meaningful and authentic ways. Dr. Pushor sees parents as important co-leaders in the learning process."

"Parents are their children's most powerful role models. When parents partner with educators and schools to engage children and encourage lifelong learning it has a tremendously positive effect on their academic and social development. From reading with their children, to volunteering at schools and serving on school councils, we appreciate the dedicated efforts of our parent community," says Carol Germyn, Superintendent of School Support Services at the District School Board of Niagara. Yolanda Baldasaro, Superintendent of Education with the Niagara Catholic District School Board concurs and adds: "When educators find unique ways to draw out the depth of knowledge parents have about their children and find ways to incorporate it into their daily interactions with the child and family it is a tremendous source of strength."

In her presentation in St. Catharines, Dr. Pushor will share knowledge, insights and experiences gained from her work in early learning settings. She will also present concrete examples of successful efforts to shape policies and practices that enhance parental influence in young children's learning and care. This session will also provide participants with a chance to share their ideas as they interact with Dr. Pushor and one another. Discussions will be recorded and provided to attendees following the session.

The event will be hosted by the Early Childhood Community Development Centre, the Niagara Catholic District School Board and the District School Board of Niagara. The evening workshop with Dr. Pushor is aimed at early childhood educators, kindergarten and grade one teachers, parents, child care agency support staff, school board officials and other decision-makers involved in children's schooling and early education. Post-secondary students enrolled in Early Childhood Education or Child and Youth Studies programs are also invited to attend. There is no charge for this workshop, but advance registration is required. Please contact the ECCDC at 905-646-7311, ext. 304 or eccdc@eccdc.org.

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For more information or to arrange an interview with Dr. Pushor, please contact Lorrey Arial-Bonilla at 905-646-7311, ext. 321 or larial@eccdc.org. The ECCDC is a professional resource, training and referral organization funded by the Regional Municipality of Niagara, Children's Services Department, which also serves as the Systems Manager for Child Care in Niagara. The ECCDC's services are available to all of Niagara's Early Childhood Educators and teachers, as well as others involved in the care and education of young children.