

Kindergarten Parents Victoria
Budget Priorities
Submission for
2007–08 to the
State Government



KPV
Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc

develop
promote
sustain
early childhood education

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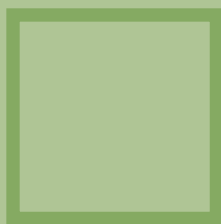
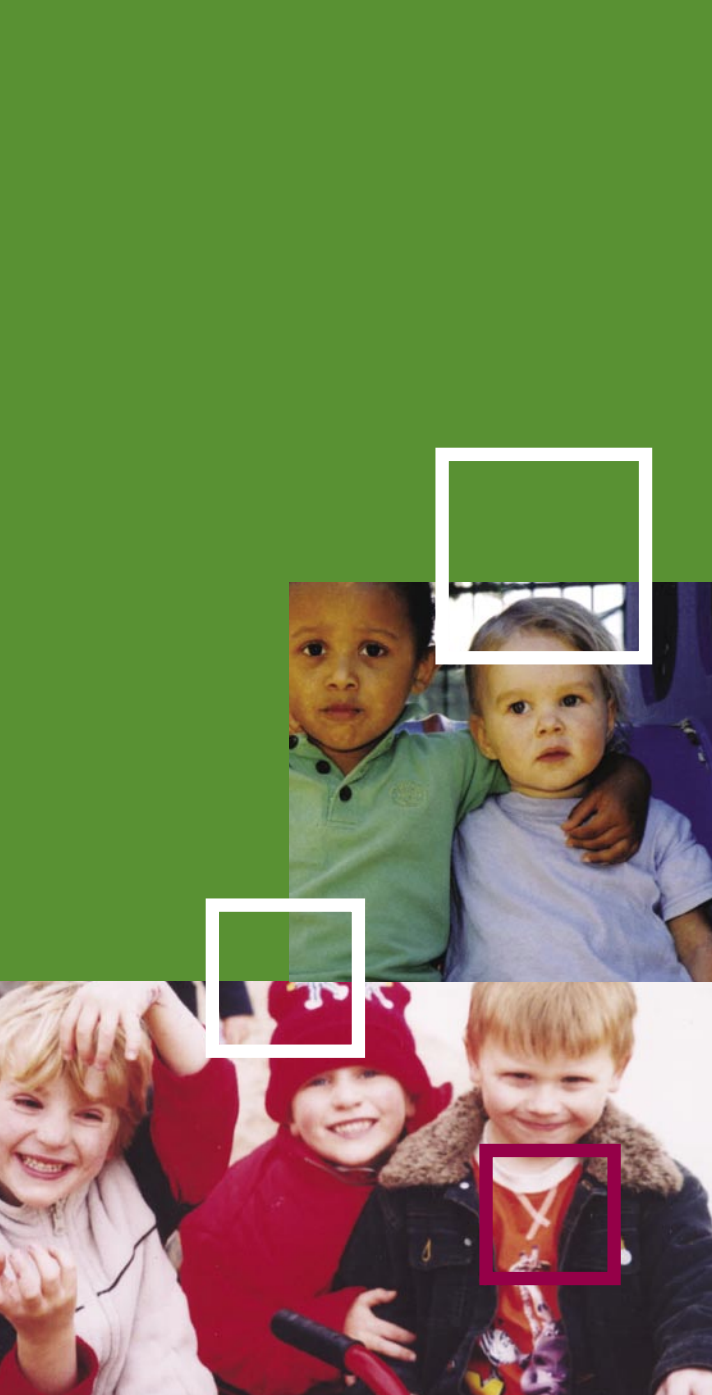
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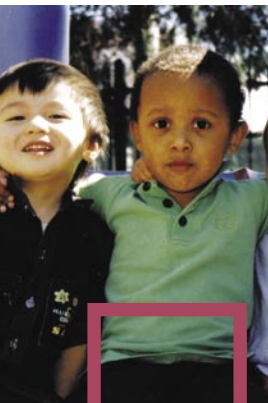
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Summary of KPV's budget priorities

Vision	Election outcome	Future	Future \$
Education for life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain kindergarten as an enjoyable part time setting for children to learn, develop and socialise through play. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Enshrine recognition of children's right to kindergarten in legislation. Promote a comprehensive fully funded national framework for early childhood education. Recognition of parents with children at kindergarten as eligible for the Commonwealth child care tax rebate. 	
Universally inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lift the kindergarten fee subsidy from \$320 to \$730 per year to make access to four-year-old kindergarten programs effectively free for Health Care Card Holders. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to phase in fully funded four-year-old kindergarten including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully subsidise the contribution currently made by parent fees – additional funding of approximately \$31.4 million Additional financial support for small rural kindergartens with less than 10 children – \$0.36 million Address inclusion of children with additional needs including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase funding for the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service Program – \$1.3 million Pilot an action research and mentoring strategy for teachers – \$0.15 million Phase in two years of kindergarten education for all children beginning with the most vulnerable including indigenous children – \$7.5 million 	\$40.71 million
Cohesive services system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest \$10 million to ensure that all four year olds at childcare centres can benefit from kindergarten programs, and encourage kindergartens to offer extended hours which are more convenient for working parents. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Information technology funding – \$1.3 million 	\$1.3 million
Involved community	<p>Reduce the burden on parent-run kindergartens with \$6 million</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support and expand management support systems Assist Kindergarten Parents Victoria to establish projects with local government to better support parent committees. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Expand funding for new cluster management and undertake independent evaluation of current models – \$0.7 million 	\$0.7 million
Excellence and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce legislation to mandate training for all staff in early childhood services to treat children at risk of anaphylactic shock. Invest \$4 million to upgrade the skills of kindergarten teachers and early childhood workers. Implement the Working with Children Check – for people who work or volunteer in child related work. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop sustainable system of kindergarten education including Workforce Plan, Quality Accreditation and Curriculum Framework – \$6.4 million Begin to rectify the employee portability of leave crisis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a Central Leave Records Bank – \$0.5 million 	\$6.9 million
Responsive and flexible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute \$20 million towards new children's centres where kindergarten and other family support services are co-located. Invest \$15 million to upgrade and better equip existing not-for-profit kindergartens and childcare centres and reduce the pressure on fees and fundraising. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Commit to a permanent and rotational capital works program that would allow appropriate development or renovation of all infrastructure for funded kindergarten programs over a 20-year period. 	

Message from the CEO



Parents know it and research evidence increasingly demonstrates it—quality early childhood education and care is crucial to ensuring strong outcomes for our children, our community and our economy.

The kindergarten funding decisions made in the 2007-08 State Government budget will have a direct impact on the more than 200,000 children, their parents, teachers and local communities, who all play a substantial role in sustaining Victoria's community-managed kindergarten programs.

We are delighted by the State Government's increasing commitment to children.

This KPV Budget Priorities Submission identifies key election outcomes that must be implemented in the 2007-08 budget as well as areas in which more remains to be achieved. These priorities are aligned to the Government's manifesto *Putting Children First – the next steps*. Our submission also indicates how they support KPV's Vision 2011—preparing children for life—which outlines our goals for early childhood education.

The OECD describes preschool as a public good. It reduces educational disadvantage and allows parents to participate in the paid workforce.*

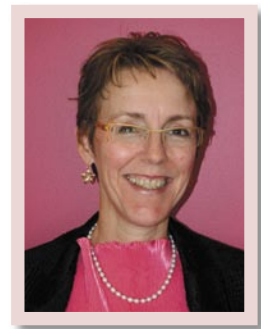
It is exciting to see this understanding starting to translate into political action. Kindergarten Parents Victoria welcome the State Government's election commitment to "retain kindergarten as an enjoyable part time setting for children to learn, develop and socialise through play." This recognition of the importance of preschool underpinned a series of early childhood election initiatives which we now look to the State Government to implement in full in the 2007-08 Budget.

KPV looks forward to contributing to each of these initiatives with the State Government and other partners in the sector. We are particularly keen to begin establishing pilot projects with local government to create early education and learning networks and encourage more effective and flexible utilisation of existing kindergarten infrastructure.

There is of course always more work to be done. KPV also looks forward to the Government working with the sector to build on these initiatives through this third term of office to ensure that all children receive the best start in life. This submission sets out some important next steps.

Our children's future also needs national leadership. It is terrific to see that the National Reform Agenda agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments highlights the need for strategies to increase the proportion of children entering school with skills for life and learning. Universal access to kindergarten must clearly be a core strategy. KPV calls on the Commonwealth and State to work together to ensure all children can reap the benefits of a kindergarten program delivered by a degree-qualified teacher.

Our children deserve nothing less.



Meredith Carter
Chief Executive Officer

*(OECD 2006 *Starting Strong II*)

Kindergarten Parents Victoria (KPV) represents close to 1200 centres providing kindergarten education to more than 200,000 Victorian children and families.

We are the leading peak, not-for-profit, non-government organisation that promotes, develops and sustains early childhood education. The centres we represent across Victoria include parent committees and kindergarten cluster managers.



develop
promote
sustain
early childhood education

Education for life

– recognition of the intrinsic value of quality early childhood education and its role in improving life chances

Putting Children First - the next steps says:

"Investment in children should promote positive child development and learning through a universal system of support to ensure every Victorian child has the services they need to advance their education, health and well-being."

KPV Vision 2011 is that:

"Every child receives a quality early childhood education experience delivered by qualified childhood teachers. Every child benefits from increased government investment in early childhood education."

1. Enshrine recognition of children's right to kindergarten in legislation.

2. Promote comprehensive fully funded national framework.

3. Recognition of parents with children at kindergarten as eligible for the Commonwealth child care tax rebate.

ELECTION OUTCOME:

Commitment to retain kindergarten as an enjoyable part time setting for children to learn, develop and socialise through play.

FACT:

- This is a major recognition of both the importance of appropriate early childhood development programs as well as the difference that kindergarten programs run by degree-qualified staff make to that process. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's *Starting Strong II* report outlines the evidence that too many Australian children aged three and four are being left behind at an age critical for brain development. Quality early learning, such as the play-based curriculum found in kindergartens has a major impact on ongoing educational achievement. The OECD argues that preschool is a public good because of two major effects—it releases parents to participate in the workforce and it significantly reduces educational disadvantage.

- The focus on learning through play is also important. Early childhood development is about more than just education and the evidence is clear that in the early years before school children learn best through facilitated play. The OECD found that preschool services can contribute greatly to preparing children for school. However too much focus on "readiness for school approach" results in programs that are poorly suited to the natural learning strategies of young children. A more "local, child-centred and holistic response" to children's needs results when the focus of "the kindergarten years (is) seen as broad preparation for life and the foundation stage of lifelong learning" (OECD 2006, 13).
- The findings of the OECD report also underscore the need for early childhood education and care to be on the national agenda. The Council of Australian Governments has adopted a focus on the early years as part of the National Reform Agenda. It highlights the need for strategies to increase the proportion of children entering school equipped with the basic skills for life and learning. Universal access to kindergarten for all children must clearly be one of those strategies.

FUTURE:

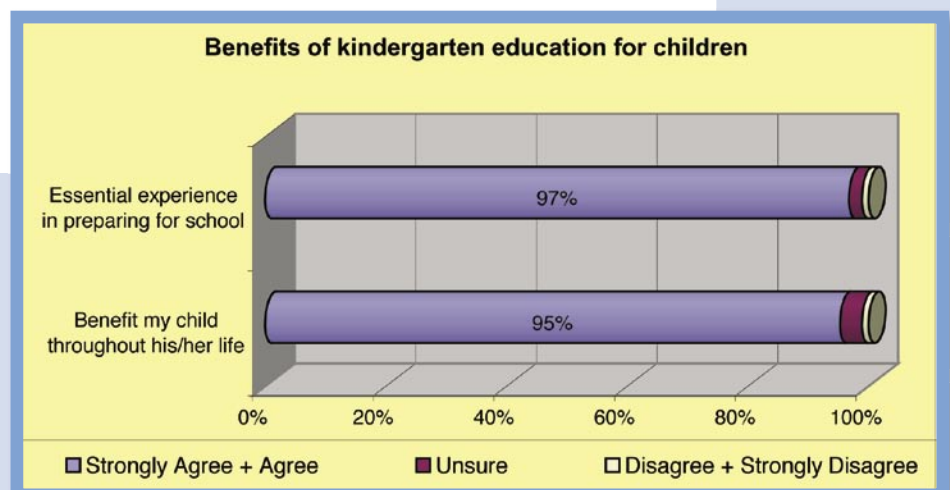
- Enshrine recognition of children's right to kindergarten in legislation. This should include mandating all early childhood education and care services to have degree-qualified teachers providing structured play-based learning.
- Work with the Commonwealth Government to achieve a comprehensive fully funded national framework for early childhood development and learning including a commitment to ensure all children can access two years of kindergarten delivered by a degree-qualified teacher.
- Support the campaign for Commonwealth recognition of parents with children at kindergarten as eligible for the child care tax rebate.



Chart I – The importance parents place on kindergarten

Parents want quality programs

Parents highly value kindergarten education because it is both an essential experience in preparing children for school and benefits children throughout their life.



Source: KPV Parent Survey 2005

Universally inclusive

– well resourced and accessible education for all children



Putting Children First - the next steps says:

"Within a universal framework additional resources should be directed towards communities where outcomes for children are poor or where the risk factors for poor outcomes are high."

The KPV Vision 2011 is that:

"There is universal participation in two years of funded kindergarten education prior to school. All children develop to their full potential; their background, abilities, language and culture respected. There is support, resources and staffing to meet the diverse requirements of children with additional needs."

4. Phase in fully funded kindergarten

ELECTION OUTCOME:

Lift the kindergarten fee subsidy from \$320 to \$730 per year to make access to four-year-old kindergarten programs effectively free for Health Care Card Holders.

FACT:

- Implementation of this commitment will make a huge difference for many families on low incomes. However, the Early Childhood Education Foundation, a trust established by KPV to support children who are unable to attend kindergarten due to financial hardship, regularly receives grant applications to support families experiencing severe financial hardship who are not Health Care Card holders.
- Parent fees have grown at a rate considerably in excess of the Consumer Price Index (CPI). See chart 2.
- Parents contribute almost half the resources needed to maintain an average four-year-old kindergarten program through a combination of parent fees, volunteer labour and fundraising.

- Currently (at least) 25 small rural kindergartens face a viability crisis due to the low number of enrolments. Under an existing anomaly, kindergarten funding for our vulnerable small rural kindergartens is far less than the cost of salaries placing an enormous burden on families in terms of fees and fundraising.

FUTURE:

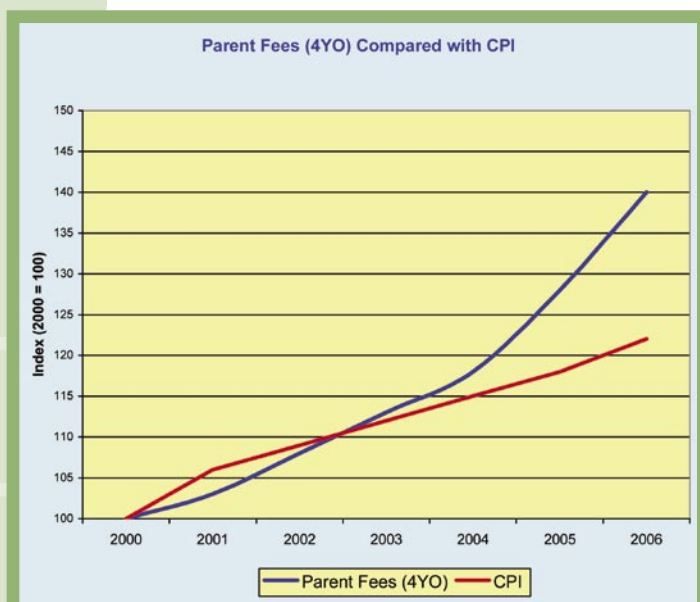
Continue to phase in fully funded four-year-old kindergarten including:

- Fully subsidise the contribution currently made by parent fees – additional funding of approximately \$31.4 million
- Provide additional financial support for small rural kindergartens with less than 10 children. (Funding of \$0.36 million)

5. Children with additional needs

FACT:

- A random KPV phone poll of almost 100 kindergartens in 2006 indicated that only 24% of respondents considered the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services (KISS) funding allocation they had been granted to be adequate.
- The strict guidelines of the existing KISS program means only those children who have very high support needs can access key extra resources, such as additional assistants. Too many children with additional needs lack access to KISS funding. For example, when children with a hearing impairment or speech delay who also have behavioural difficulties are deemed ineligible enormous pressures are placed on families, children, staff, committees and employers.
- KISS Regional Advisory Groups report an increasing number of children with complex medical needs that can require supplementary teacher training in addition to other inclusion support needs. This adds pressure to already limited budgets.
- It is extremely difficult for kindergartens to cater for children with additional needs unless these extra resources are available in a flexible manner.



Sources: KPV surveys

Chart 2 – Changes in funding and parent fees compared with CPI since 2000.

Kindergarten fees continue to rise

Kindergarten fees for four year olds have continued to increase steadily, with the metropolitan average at \$786 per annum and the non-metropolitan average at \$713 in 2006. Since 2000, there has been consistent growth in the level of Government funding for kindergarten education compared with CPI. This growth has been primarily directed towards significant increases in staff salary costs.

- The phone poll also indicated that, in addition to children for whom KISS funding was sought, teachers identified many more children who also needed additional resources but no source of funding was available.
- Committees and teachers regularly report a lack of support and resources to help provide the best education experience for children with challenging behaviours.

FUTURE:

- Increase funding to provide access to kindergarten programs for children with additional needs by \$1.45 million including increased funding of the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service by \$1.3 million to enable a 25% increase in the number and unit cost of support packages for more children with additional needs to participate in kindergarten for longer hours. (Funding of an additional \$1.3 million).
- Extend current guidelines and the definition of 'eligible children' to include those deemed by professionals to be in need of a flexible range of additional resources.
- Build on the implementation of the election commitment to upgrade the skills of kindergarten teachers and early childhood workers by developing and implementing a comprehensive training and professional development strategy for staff.
- Pilot an action research and mentoring strategy to increase knowledge and skills of teachers to address the needs of children with challenging behaviours. (Funding of \$0.15 million to train 500 teachers per year)

6. Access to two years of kindergarten education

FACT:

- The rapid growth in the number of children who access three-year-old kindergarten in recent years is evidence of the importance parents place on two years of kindergarten. A KPV Parent Survey in 2005 demonstrated that 84% of parents believe all children should access two years of funded kindergarten education.

- The research underscores kindergarten's importance for vulnerable children – those with what the OECD calls *diverse learning rights* (OECD Starting Strong II 2006). However, there is no government funding for three-year-old kindergarten programs. Parent fees put three-year-old kindergarten programs out of reach for many families, especially for the vulnerable families who are likely to benefit most from two years access.
- While the Koori Early Childhood Education Program has been a critical factor in increasing Koori attendance in kindergartens the attendance rate of Indigenous children at funded kindergarten is around 61% (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc 2006). This compares very unfavourably with 94% participation rate for all Victorian four year olds. Without data to indicate the number of Koori children attending (unfunded) programs for three year olds, at best the participation rate of Indigenous children is also likely to be significantly lower than non-Indigenous children.

FUTURE:

Promote access to two years of funded kindergarten education \$7.5 million including:

- Government to phase in access to two years of kindergarten education beginning with the most vulnerable including Indigenous children. (Funding of \$6.5 million)
- Increase the number of Koori Preschool Assistants and improve their ability to support quality programs through professional development. (Funding \$1 million)

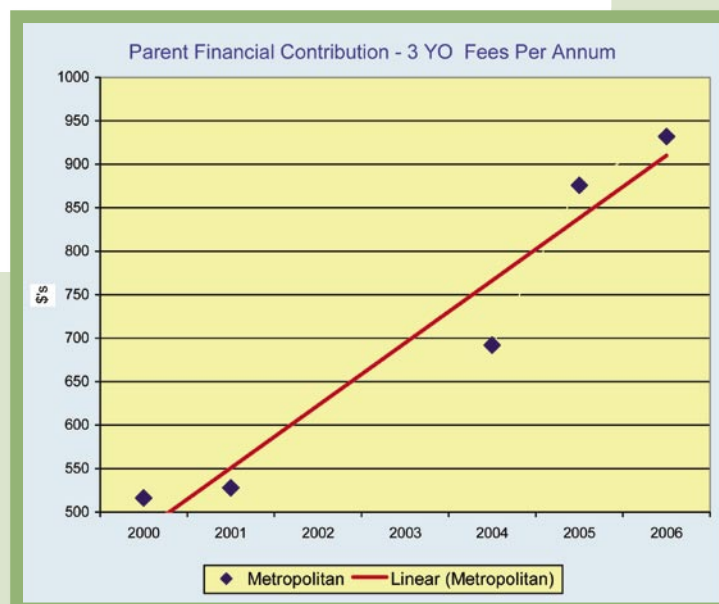


Sources: KPV Survey (1999/00 – 2000/01). Fees survey conducted by KPV July 2004 (2003/04), KPV 2004 Survey (2004/05), KPV Annual Fees Survey (2005/06), CPI ABS 6401.0.

Chart 3 – The high cost of three-year-old kindergarten

Steep increase in three-year-old fees

Three-year-old parent fees in metropolitan areas have risen by an average of over 80% in the last six years to just over \$930 per annum. Teachers' salaries have increased significantly since 2001-02. The increased cost of providing programs is passed on to parents through increased fees.



Cohesive services system

– a coordinated and multidisciplinary system



Putting Children First - the next steps says:

“Services should be more integrated with each other, co-located physically where this meets local needs, and delivered within a coordinated, system wide and multidisciplinary approach to service planning and delivery.”

The KPV Vision 2011 is that:

“There are strong and sustainable linkages and coordination between services and professionals. There is a coordinated and resourced system of early childhood education and learning.”

ELECTION OUTCOME:

Invest \$10 million to ensure that all four year olds at childcare centres can benefit from kindergarten programs, and encourage kindergartens to offer extended hours which are more convenient for working parents.

7. Information technology funding

FACT:

- Each funded community-managed kindergarten service has benefited by a government supplied computer and Internet access.
- Recurrent funding is required for Internet connections and computer training for staff and committees.
- With parent fees already high, adding these costs into a centre budget may be prohibitive.
- Computers and Internet access are now widely accepted as necessary administrative and communications tools. The Department of Human Services increasingly uses email as a means of communicating with kindergartens and a range of essential documents, such as *Children's Services Practice Notes* are only available from their website.
- Greater integration and linkages between services will deliver a more cohesive system. Other initiatives required to facilitate integration include basic measures such as IT support.

FUTURE:

Funding increase to support interconnectivity of \$1.3 million including:

- Recurrent funding for an Internet connection at all community-managed kindergarten locations. (Funding of \$0.55 million)
- Help desk support and professional development training for staff, committees and employers. (Funding of \$0.35 million)
- Software and resource development.
- Kindergartens need the IT tools to develop business opportunities and stream line administration. (Funding of \$0.4 million)

Involved community

– a partnership between professionals, parents, families and children

Putting Children First - the next steps says:

"Investment in children should ensure activities and services that are responsive to diverse local needs, promote community collaboration and give local communities a significant say in planning and delivering services."

The KPV Vision 2011 is that:

"Parents are partners with early years professionals in providing quality early childhood education. Active parent committees and parent participation in program delivery are central to community involvement with early childhood education."

8. Expand funding for new cluster management

ELECTION OUTCOME:

Commitment to reduce the burden on parent-run committees with \$6 million.

To support and expand management support systems.

Assist Kindergarten Parents Victoria to establish projects with local government to better support parent committees.

FACT:

- Parents value their contribution to kindergartens and gain many benefits, from developing new skills to increasing knowledge about children.
- 82% of respondents to the KPV Parent Survey 2005 believe that their children benefit most from early childhood education when their parents are actively involved in the centre their child attends.
- Community kindergartens play a vital role in developing community capacity and building communities. Voluntary committees of management contribute an average of 28 hours per week to the running of their kindergarten and 37% find this excessive (KPV Survey 2006).
- Cluster Management encourages groups of stand-alone kindergartens to share resources and skills to help reduce the administrative strain and statutory responsibilities of volunteer management committees. In 2007, approximately a third of community-

managed kindergartens (including local government) are within a cluster, whilst maintaining parent involvement in decision making and delivery of the kindergarten program.

- Implementation of the election commitment to increase the subsidy to \$7,000 represents a major step to a viable level of funding cluster management. Many cluster managers report that the current subsidy is substantially less than the costs involved. There are many different models of cluster management but a significant theme is cross subsidisation from auspice organisations and by volunteers, both boards of management undertaking significant management and administration tasks and paid staff undertaking additional unpaid hours.
- The Government commitment to support KPV to establish pilot projects with local government is also vital. Most kindergartens remain stand alone. An integrated planning and support strategy is required at the local level to provide more support for flexible kindergarten programs to meet the needs of children, families and local communities. This initiative will pilot a new collaborative service planning model across a network of early childhood education and care providers including cluster managers with links to other family and children's services. It will also promote more effective and flexible utilisation of existing kindergarten infrastructure and provide greater support to kindergarten staff.

FUTURE:

Expand funding for new cluster management – \$0.7 million including:

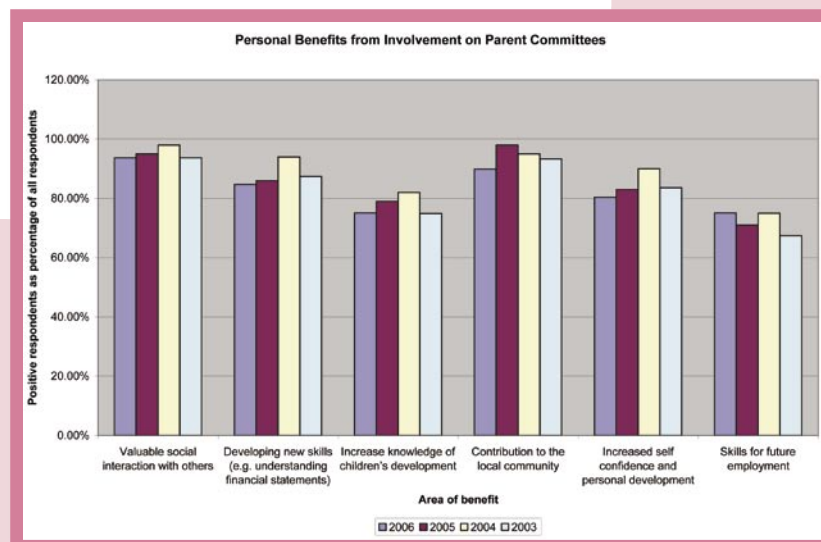
- Further funding for another 100 services to enter 'Cluster Management' models. (Funding of \$0.7 million)
- Undertake an independent evaluation of current models of kindergarten cluster management and subsidy levels.



Chart 4 – The value of parent involvement in community-managed kindergartens

Benefits of parent involvement

The value of parent involvement in kindergarten can be measured by the personal benefits parents receive from participation, in addition to the contribution made through voluntary labour and fundraising.



Source:KPV Survey 2003-04

Excellence and innovation

– higher standards of teaching programs



Putting Children First - the next steps says:

“Mechanisms should be developed to ensure policies, programs, activities and services are reviewed continually to make certain they are of the highest quality and are based on the best available evidence, not driven by historic processes and structure.”

The KPV Vision 2011 is that:

Staff are respected, valued, appropriately remunerated and have access to quality professional development. Early childhood educators are innovative and continuously expanding their knowledge and skills.

ELECTION OUTCOME:

Introduce legislation to mandate training for all staff in early childhood services to treat children at risk of anaphylactic shock.

Invest \$4 million to upgrade the skills of kindergarten teachers and early childhood workers.

Implement the Working with Children Check – for people who work or volunteer in child related work.

9. Sustainable system of kindergarten education

FACT:

- Implementation of the election commitments will have a significant impact but more remains to be done. Workforce development, industry development and planning have yet to occur on a statewide basis. A Workforce Plan is required that includes additional professional development, mentoring programs and incentives to attract teachers to rural and remote locations.
- An emphasis on continuous improvement is a characteristic of highly effective children's programs just as participation in professional development activities is a key indicator of quality teaching. It needs to be underpinned by a system of accreditation and a curriculum framework that provides guidance and accountability for professional staff in their practice; promotes an even level of quality in the diverse service types; and facilitates communication between staff and parents.
- National Child Care Quality Assurance has successfully raised the standard of childcare in Australia and guides parent understanding and expectations of quality practice and service provision. There is currently neither a system of accreditation for kindergarten services nor a curriculum framework in early childhood education.
- In addition to children at risk of anaphylaxis there has been an increasing number of vulnerable children with significant needs attending children's services.

FUTURE:

Develop sustainable system of kindergarten education including workforce plan, quality accreditation and curriculum framework \$6.4 million.

- Develop and implement, in collaboration with KPV, a Workforce Plan to address key recruitment and retention strategies. (Funding of \$0.5 million)
- Increase the Kindergarten Price Index in future years, above the agreed funding growth to cover MECA 2005, to move towards meeting the full costs of statutory compliance, staff salaries, including wage on costs, through government funding.
- Introduce a funded quality accreditation system for all kindergarten program types at \$950 per program plus infrastructure. (Funding of \$1.9 million)
- Resource the development of an early childhood curriculum framework (Funding of \$4 million)

Curricula seem to work best when their value base commands widespread consent, and key goals have been defined with a wide range of stakeholders including staff, parents, funding and other members of the community (Lindberg and Valimaki, 2004)

10. Rectify portability of leave crisis

FACT:

- The Kirby and Harper Preschool Review (2001) commissioned by the State Government recommended, “that the Department of Human Services take immediate steps to identify and cost the options for safeguarding the long service leave and sick leave entitlements of preschool centre staff.” The failure to implement this recommendation is an increasing administrative burden and financial risk for kindergartens.
- Kindergartens retain provisions for all former employees until there is confirmation that they are no longer employed within the kindergarten sector. A consequence of this is large amounts of money held in reserve that could be put to better use improving kindergarten services. The current alternative is that kindergartens hold provisions for current employees and risk an unfunded and unknown liability for former employees.
- The establishment of a Central Leave Records Bank would address critical governance and management issues facing kindergartens and also enable DHS to accurately quantify their remaining pre-1994 liabilities.

FUTURE:

- Invest in the establishment of a Central Leave Records Bank \$0.5 million.
- Immediate steps should be taken to establish a central long service leave and sick leave records bank in partnership with KPV to ensure that the extent of these liabilities is known and quantifiable.
 - This must be followed by a second stage that will establish a centralised leave provisions fund.

Responsive and flexible

– programs are adaptive to contemporary needs

The Government principle says:

"Investment in children should ensure activities and services that are responsive to diverse local needs, promote community collaboration and give local communities a significant say in planning and delivering services".

The KPV Vision 2011 is that:

Families have access to flexible early childhood settings that deliver quality early education programs. Government capital works funding updates ageing community buildings and supports flexible programs."

11. Capital works improvement

ELECTION OUTCOME:

Contribute \$20 million towards new children's centres where kindergarten and other family support services are co-located.

Invest \$15 million to upgrade and better equip existing not-for-profit kindergartens and childcare centres and reduce the pressure on fees and fundraising.

FACT:

- Kindergartens are suffering from ageing facilities that inhibit their ability to offer flexible children's programs and additional services to complement kindergarten education.
- Committees and local governments have recognised that kindergartens are a valuable community facility that can have broader use.
- Infrastructure needs to meet the changing needs of families and the community, with service buildings being more flexible and providing multi uses to meet community needs.

FUTURE:

Commit to a permanent and rotational capital works program.

- The election initiatives will greatly facilitate both the development of new buildings as well as alterations and renovations to existing kindergarten infrastructure to facilitate more flexible and multi uses of community facilities.
- To ensure the roll out of these initiatives in a systematic manner that best meets the needs of the sector these initiatives should be underpinned by a permanent and rotational capital works program that would allow appropriate development or renovation of all infrastructure for funded kindergarten programs over a 20-year period.





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