April 30, 2008

Dear School Administrator:

**FRIENDS For Life in BC** – recognized by the World Health Organization as a “first in the world” universal school-based program targeting anxiety and resilience.

British Columbia is the only place in the world offering FRIENDS universally to such a large-scale population, free of charge, to improve the mental health outcomes for children.

I am pleased to advise you that the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and school districts, is close to completing its fourth year of implementation of the FRIENDS For Life (FRIENDS) program with grade 4 and 5 students. We are well into our planning for the 2008-09 school year and would like to provide you with some important information regarding the current status of the program and our plans for expansion. Your school district is once again invited to participate.

Since our official launch in 2004, the BC FRIENDS program has delivered over 150 FRIENDS trainings to teachers province-wide and 95% of school districts and many independent schools have participated in the program to date. The interest continues to grow and as a result of the number of student workbooks we have sent to teachers, we estimate that approximately 90,000 grade 4 and 5 students have received the 10-week evidence-based program to date.

Many teachers and school personnel have been eagerly awaiting the outcome of the FRIENDS For Youth research study conducted in BC schools that included approximately 700 students. The results of this research indicate a positive effect on anxiety levels of grade 7 students and therefore, a decision has been made to begin to make the FRIENDS For Youth program available to grade 7 students in BC, in September 2008.

MCFD will continue to provide the certified FRIENDS trainers for the required one-day training for school personnel as well as FRIENDS manuals and workbooks for delivery of both the child and youth programs in classrooms. School districts will continue to be responsible for providing the training venue and the release time for school personnel.

As you may know, there is a designated district FRIENDS liaison associated with every school district in the province and we keep in close contact with them throughout each school year. Our liaisons have been key to the success of FRIENDS as they promote the
program district-wide, and assist with workbook ordering and distribution, and the
coordination of local FRIENDS training events. Much thanks to you for supporting their
very important role with FRIENDS!

Implementation of the FRIENDS program represents an important partnership between
the mental health and education sectors. I welcome the opportunity to work together on
this initiative and invite you to join our efforts to promote mental health, build resilience
and reduce risks of mental disorders in children and youth.

If you have any questions or would like more information about FRIENDS in BC, please
call me directly or email: MCF.CYMHFRIENDS@gov.bc.ca

Kind regards,

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