



Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

Implementing Early Learning - Bulletin #1

* Site Selection

* Concerns about Early Learning and Child Care Programs

* How Municipalities Can Ensure Child Care Programs Stay Viable

Background and Context

In the last provincial election, Dalton McGuinty promised a new program of full-day learning for 4 and 5 year olds. Premier McGuinty appointed Charles Pascal to write a report on how the program could be implemented. "With Our Future in Mind" was released on June 15th and laid out an early learning vision for all children from infants to 12 years old and provided a comprehensive plan of action.

On October 27, Premier McGuinty and the Ministers of Education and Children and Youth Services held a press conference to announce that the Government will support and implement the report starting with \$500 million for full-day learning for four and five year olds.

Over the summer, we produced a series of information bulletins for the early learning and child care sector. It is important that we are all familiar with the report so that we can ensure what is implemented today fits in to the longer term vision of full implementation of "With Our Best Future in Mind".

Our Bulletins will continue - now that we are implementing a program of early learning, we will do regular updates on issues, concerns, and best practices with the goal of creating a stronger system of early learning and child care in Ontario.

Information You NEED to Know – Some Key Recommendations to Get You Started

- "With Our Best Future in Mind" – the report of the Early Learning Advisor, will be phased in: starting with full-day learning for 4 and 5 year olds
- the GOAL: is to have all 4's and 5's enrolled by 2015-2016 (program will always be optional)
- the COST: \$200 million in 2010-11 and another \$300 million in 2011-12 has been committed
- a new Early Learning Division is created at the Ministry of Education

The Long Term

On September 22, over 100 groups and individuals signed an open letter to urge the McGuinty government to implement the whole report – With Our Best Future in Mind. On the eve of his announcement, Premier McGuinty sent an email response (for a copy of the letter, list of supporters and Premier McGuinty's email, please go to: <http://www.childcareontario.org/?p=2026>).

"In acting on another of Dr. Pascal's recommendations, the Ministry of Education will establish an Early Years Division, mandating it to develop a planning and policy framework that articulates a coherent vision for education of, and supports for, children from zero to 12 years of age".

Over the long term, the Early Years Division of the Ministry of Education, working with municipalities, will be responsible for early learning and child care for children up to 12 years of age.

The New Early Years Division – Instructions on Implementation of Early Learning for 4 and 5 year olds:

On October 27, the Deputy Minister of Education issued instructions to school boards on the implementing the program.

The Program Model is described as:

“The Early Learning Program will include a school day of learning for four-and-five year olds and a fee-based extended day for those same children. A blended staffing model comprised of one teacher and one Early Childhood Educator (ECE), working side by side, will deliver the program during the school day with an average class size of 26 students. The before-and after-school programs will be led by ECE staff, and funded by parent fees set on a full cost-recovery basis. Some subsidies will be available for low income families...”

(Memo, Deputy Minister of Education Kevin Costante to Directors of Boards of Education, Page 2, if you would like to read the memos, please go to www.childcareontario.org and search for B Memos - we have links there).

Important to Note:

Respectful language: The language used to describe the program is in keeping with the report “With Our Best Future in Mind”; and notes a “blended staffing model” and “working side by side” to describe the staffing of the new program.

Confirmation of the role of Registered ECE’s in the classroom: There have been many rumours about the participation of ECE’s in the program. The language of the Program Model is clear – Registered ECE’s will work in the new early learning program.

Selection of Early Learning Schools

“Boards will be asked to submit a list of proposed schools for September 2010 implementation after consultation with coterminous boards, local Best Start networks, Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Service Administration Boards”

(Memo, Assistant Deputy Minister of Education Nancy Naylor to Directors of Boards of Education, Page 5, if you would like to read the memos, please go to www.childcareontario.org and search for B Memos - we have links there).

Important to Note:

The Municipal Role: Municipalities are responsible for delivering early learning and child care services in local communities across Ontario. Municipalities know our programs best.

Municipalities will be the consulted and effectively represent the concerns of the early learning and child care community in implementing full-day learning programs.

Concerns about impact of full-day learning on early learning and child care programs

There are two main areas of concern from early learning and child care programs.

1) Younger children are more expensive to take care of, because they require a larger ratio of adults to children. If those programs currently with 4 and 5 year olds are asked to serve the same number of younger children, fees could rise dramatically or centres could close.

2) If Municipalities are not given the capacity to re-organize existing early learning programs, including licensed child care, home child care, OEYC's, Parent and Family Literacy Programs, Family Resource Programs, service fragmentation will continue.

3) Community-based child care centres could see a flight of staff to higher paying positions within a local board of education.

Everyone is aware these are very real consequences. It will be up to municipalities to ensure these issues are dealt with in a way that both preserves existing child care programs and over time strengthens Ontario's fragile and fragmented early learning and child care programs.

How Can Municipalities Ensure that Child Care Programs Remain Viable?

Ontario currently spends about \$1 billion dollars on early learning and child care programs for children from infants to 12 years old:

- \$700 million to provide fee subsidies to parents
- \$300 million for various wage grants to increase the wages of staff.

Re-invest Savings: Municipalities will keep the \$300 million, some of which is now supporting children from 4 to 12 years old. Every child who moves into the new publicly funded program should mean that money is left with municipal service managers to invest in children from infants to 4 years old.

New Provincial Transitional Fund: Because only 15% of Ontario's 4 and 5 year old children will be enrolled in the new full-day learning program in year 1, and savings for municipalities will grow over the years as more children move to a public system, the government has identified a transition fund to mitigate negative impacts in the first few years and enable child care centres to access capital funding to renovate their child care centres for younger children.

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care supports the following spending priorities aimed at stabilization over expansion for early learning and child care programs:

- 1) Limit Increases to Parent Fees: Direct operating grants to child care programs to limit increases to fees as a result of the loss of 4 and 5 year old children and because younger children are most expensive to care for. Other Provinces fund child care centres directly in order to limit fees. Parent fees are limited to \$7 / a day in Quebec and \$18.80 / a day in Manitoba.
- 2) Raise wages: Direct operating grants to ensure decent wages for all Registered ECE's and establish a province-wide pension plan like in Quebec and Manitoba.
- 3) Expand spaces: Once existing child care centres are stabilized, we can then turn to expanding our services to meet the high demand of children on waiting lists.

A Great Example of Good Communication and Willingness to Adapt to Changes

The Director of a Best Start program for 4 and 5 year olds was approached by the Principal. She said the school was under consideration as a phase 1 school for full-day learning. She wanted to talk to the Director of the child care program. If the Director of the child care program said it would be too destabilizing, the school would not participate in phase one.

What did the Director of the child care program do? It's tempting to say "get back to me in five years when you have this figured out". However, she realized that this is an opportunity to show that we can strengthen our existing child care programs. We will be working to ensure:

- current space used by the child care program and parenting program is protected
- she has access to capital funding to renovate her centre for younger years
- she continues to have a viable child care program, with younger children, perhaps not the same number as with older children
- her centre is well-placed to become part of a Best Start Child and Family Centre – bringing together services for the benefit of one-stop information for parents.

Next Steps: I'm a child care program and I'm worried about the impact of full-day learning on my program. What should I do?

Most early learning and child care programs will not be affected over the next two years. Next year full-day learning will be available to just 15% of Ontario's 4 and 5 year old children. The year after that will add an additional 5% of children.

Criteria for selecting sites are:

- 1) Availability of space (no capital funding in the first year)
- 2) Community need
- 3) Minimal impact on existing child care and early years programs
- 4) Student Achievement
- 5) Readiness to Implement

In terms of existing child care and early years programs the directive states "*boards should take into account the local availability of licensed child care. Boards will need to consider whether the community will be best served by selecting schools with existing child care programs, schools near existing licensed child care, or schools in neighbourhoods where no child care is currently available for four and five year olds*".

(Memo, Assistant Deputy Minister of Education Nancy Naylor to Directors of Boards of Education, Page 5, if you would like to read the memos, please go to www.childcareontario.org and search for B Memos - we have links there).

After the Board of Education and Ministry of Education have selected sites, you should talk to your municipality. They know the ages you serve in your program. They will be able to work with you to assess the financial vulnerability for your program over the short term.

If your program is not immediately affected, you need to work with your municipal service managers to identify savings in future years and start setting priorities to re-investing those savings.

We also need to support the children's services department municipal child care managers. We want them to ensure that our interests are protected, but they report to city councillors, mayors, reeve's, town

councilors. We need to make sure those politicians understand how important it is to stabilize our programs through limiting increases to parent fees and raising wages in the community based child care sector.

Keep in touch with your local councilors. Invite them into your centre to meet parents. Add your local councilor to your newsletter list. Meet the staff and call to check in. The support of politicians at all levels is important for our whole sector.

Questions People Are Asking

- What are working parents to do in the Summer, March Break, Winter break?
- Will there be a Parent Engagement strategy? How will parents be welcomed into the classroom?
- What is a “reasonable fee” for parents?
- What will the Registered ECE salary be and how will we ensure that Registered ECE’s in ALL sectors are paid a FAIR salary?

What Are Your Questions?

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care is collecting your questions. From big questions to small questions, send your question to andrea@childcarontario.org

For most questions, there are not answers yet. Your questions will help focus us on key issues that affect your early learning and child care program as well as make sure a broad range issues are part of decision-making.

For more information about the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care please visit www.childcareontario.org

These are times of great change and advocacy is needed more than ever.

If you are an individual Registered ECE, you should be a member of the AECEO.

If you are a child care centre you should be a member of the OCBCC.

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care is funded by our members including child care centres, family resource programs, OEYC’s, individuals and provincial groups with a mandate for universal, publicly funded, high quality, not-for-profit early learning and child care programs. For membership information, please visit our website. Thanks!