

Macaulay Child Development Centre Proposal to Ministry of Education on Modernizing the Child Care System

The Macaulay Child Development Centre was established as a day nursery in 1932. Today, Macaulay is a multi-service agency dedicated to promoting the optimal development of all children, including those with special needs. We deliver a broad continuum of services for children, youth, families and caregivers in Toronto with a particular focus on high need, at risk neighbourhoods.

Services include: licensed group and home-based child care; early identification and prevention programs; Ontario Early Years Centres; family support and parent education programs; special needs services and homework clubs. We draw on this experience to comment on the Ministry of Education's Consultation Paper, *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario*.

Overall Change Management

- **Create an Advisory Table.** The process of modernizing childcare and fully incorporating it into the province's educational system will be complex. The Minister should establish a special advisory table where diverse voices can contribute to problem-solving and effective change management. Recruiting representatives from academia, parents and not-for-profit service providers is essential to "getting it right".

Operating Funding

This is a critical area to address as part of transforming and modernizing childcare in Ontario. Parent Fees are an unstable and out-dated method of funding a service which, according to research, provides critically important learning opportunities with life-time benefits. This research (such as McCain Mustard report) elevates child care from a private concern that supports labour market participation, to an educational service worthy of public investment.

We recommend:

- Given the province's current financial pressures, current practices should be reviewed to **achieve greater efficiencies and the redirection of funds** to priority areas including stabilization of the sector and promoting quality. Reducing duplication, streamlined

oversight and a graduated licensing system (see below) are just two examples of how a reallocation of funds can be achieved.

- Short term **transitional funds** be used to avert closures and cover deficits associated with transitioning to younger children, etc
- Medium term, enable municipalities to **base fund not- for- profit** child care centres and home child care agencies. This will stabilize child care by providing predictable revenue and will keep licensed quality care an affordable option for families.
- **Formulas for base funding** should take into account: inflation rates; regional variations in the actual costs of operations; cost of providing equitable salaries and home child care provider rates; increased costs associated with serving infants and transient populations; changes in the DNA requirements that drive costs.
- **Increase investments.** As soon as possible, take steps to grow the not-for-profit child care sector so that more Ontario families have access to quality licensed childcare. Recognize the long term costs associated with children attending poor quality settings during critical early years.
- Increase Investments in **licensed home child care** so that this sector can thrive, attract qualified providers and be more a more accessible option for Ontario Families. This sector can grow with minimal capital investment as compared to centre-based care.
- **Eliminate accommodation fees for childcares located in schools** to increase affordability for parents and reinforce the integration of childcare and school as equally important elements of Ontario's educational system

Capital Funding

- Enable municipalities to **implement a service planning approach** so that capital funding is directed towards acknowledged community needs and priorities; these should be established through an inclusive and collaborative planning process that includes service system manager, school boards, not-for-profit child care agencies, service users.
- Ensure the success of a Schools-First policy by requiring each school board to **protect child care and early years services located in school facilities**, irrespective of school enrollment levels. Capital dollars invested in establishing school-based child care must be considered long-term investments.
- Direct a proportionate amount of capital dollars to **non-school based child care centres**. Due to space issues and parental choice, these centres will continue to play an important role in the overall system.

Enhancing Quality

- A **modernized funding approach** will enable the sector to employ fully qualified staff, provide robust professional development opportunities, and implement well-developed curriculum in adequate physical spaces etc.
- **Give priority to the non-profit sector.** Research consistently shows that commercial operations offer poorer quality childcare.
- Implement **one consistent and validated quality assurance measure** across the province. Every child should have equal access to quality care while allowing for regional and cultural diversity. Integrate this with the current licensing system, raising standards and avoiding duplication of oversight.
- Develop and conduct a **major parent/public education campaign** that helps parents understand what to look for in a quality child care program.
- Ensure **parental choice**. For example, kindergarten before and after programs should be available through child care centres and in licensed home child care.
- **Modernize the special needs framework embedded in the Day Nurseries Act.** Terminology needs to be updated to embrace a broader understanding of “special needs” i.e. to include those children “at risk” due to environmental factors. Special Needs Resource consultation for child care should be integrated with school supports so that the transition for these children into school does not disrupt any supports they may be receiving. The two systems (school and childcare) need to work in an integrated manner and from the perspective of the child and family’s needs.

Modernizing the DNA

- Foster quality by **requiring all home-based caregivers to meet basic government standards** including police checks, first aid, health and safety standards, and ratios. Unlicensed caregivers should not be allowed to serve more children than providers in the licensed sector whose homes and interactions are regularly monitored.
- Fund OEYCs or Licensed Home Child Care agencies to deliver **professional development** and networking opportunities for *all* caregivers.
- Review **DNA requirements for school-age and kindergarten child care programs** to provide greater flexibility and be more aligned with school standards.
- Based on research, consider **new age groupings** given that most infants enter childcare now at 12 months. The current infant ratios and age limits were developed when “maternity leave” was much shorter and children entered care at a younger age.

Accountability and Capacity -Building

- Build on the Ministry of Children and Youth's vision for **Best Start Child and Family Centres**. Connect child care and early year's services in the local community. Fund a lead agency to promote integration and provide administrative supports to a network of childcare programs/early years services (e.g. IT, accounting, human resources; Board governance; professional development, coordinated waiting lists etc.).
- Apply a **risk management framework** and develop a **graduated licensing system** so that well-established programs with excellent licensing history can be reviewed every 3 years. This would enable the ministry to focus its resources on those programs and organizations in need of greater monitoring and support.
- Achieve efficiencies by licensing or accrediting the agency's policies, governance and financial practices centrally; then visit sites only for program-specific standards. Hold the agency centrally accountable for core functions, hr practices etc.
- Adopt **the ELECT framework** and hold centres accountable for implementing curricula consistent with the framework. Implement province-wide professional development opportunities through already-existing community mechanisms including OEYCs, Child care organizations with training capacity.
- Work with the **College of Early Childhood Educators** to ensure RECE's engage in on-going professional development.
- Use research to develop standards that hold child care programs accountable for **child outcomes** and not only outputs e.g. days of care.