



**REPORT TO:** Co-Chairs and Members of  
Public Health and Social Services Committee

**SUBJECT:** Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Educators in  
Child Care - Staffing the Vision and Transition

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

That this Committee recommend to Regional Council that the Regional Chair be authorized to write a letter to the Honorable Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario, the Honorable Laurel Broten, Minister of Education and to the Niagara Members of Provincial Parliament requesting that:

In order to transition and sustain high quality regulated child care services in Ontario, the Province commit to providing the child care sector with competitive salaries, benefits and training opportunities as a foundation of a recruitment and retention strategy for qualified child care staff.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- Child care is facing a critical shortage of qualified staff that is expected to rise significantly with further implementation of Full Day Kindergarten (FDK).
- Niagara's child care system employs over 1,100 staff, equating to 765 Full Time Employees (FTE's) of which only 54% (415 FTE's) are Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE's).
- When FDK is fully implemented, the Province is expected to require 20,000 RECE's.
- Phase 3 of FDK, starting in September 2012, will require double the number of RECE's already employed by school boards for the first two phases, building to an estimated need for over 300 RECE's when FDK is fully implemented in Niagara.
- The human resource management challenges of child care administrators are immediate and are difficult to address due to historically low wages and the concurrent loss of revenue associated with 4 and 5 year olds leaving the system for FDK.
- Child care operators are already experiencing increased costs associated with recruitment of staff to fill vacant positions, training and re-training, maintaining legislative qualified staff-child ratios through approvals of "otherwise" approved and retention of staff in the absence of competitive compensation to those with school board FDK job offers.
- On average, the wage gap between qualified staff in child care as compared to those entering FDK classroom is at least 25% in Niagara.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications directly associated with this report.

## **PURPOSE**

This report has been prepared to update Committee and Council on the human resource management challenge predicted for child care with continued implementation of Ontario's full day kindergarten program in terms of recruitment and retention of qualified staff.

## **BACKGROUND**

Research shows that quality child care is based on a combination of: high adult to child ratios; stable and consistent caregiving; small group sizes; educational knowledge and experience of staff; adequate health, safety and physical environments; and decent wages and working conditions (including support and resources). Research also clearly establishes the link between high quality early learning and child care and the knowledge, skills and experience of early childhood educators. Preschool children should be free to imagine, explore and discover in an enriched, exciting, child-centred environment, both indoors and outdoors, where their interests (not the teacher's) are the foundation of the curriculum.<sup>1</sup>

Graduates of community colleges earning a diploma in Early Childhood Education (ECE) are knowledgeable in child development, skilled in guiding children's behavior and understand how to maximize learning outcomes through emergent curriculum approach established on play-based learning.

In 2008, the Province established the College of Early Childhood Educators, the first self-regulatory body for early childhood educators in North America. In early 2009, membership in the College became mandatory for qualified staff, now referred to as "Registered Early Childhood Educator" in licensed child care centres. In 2010, the College released Standards of Practice defining what a registered professional with the college is expected to do and the knowledge required to perform the job. At present, the College of Early Childhood Educators reports 27,875 RECE's registered in the province.

On average, 2,500 ECE students graduate from Ontario colleges each year. However, it has been reported that over 40 per cent of ECE's do not work in their field anymore as a result of historically low pay levels and sub-optimal working conditions (e.g. split shifts, part-time hours). In response to FDK implementation, new opportunities provided by colleges and universities through bridging programs and accelerated ECE programs are, for the first time ever, resulting in an increased number of students focused solely on working within the education sector rather than child care.

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<sup>1</sup> Manitoba Child Care Association, *Briefing Note Planning for the Future, Nursery and Full Day Kindergarten in Public Schools*,

About 20,000 early childhood educators are expected to be working with kindergarten teachers by 2015 when the province's full day learning initiative is fully implemented in Ontario. The need for RECEs in FDK classrooms has and will continue at an increased pace to create a workforce shortage for child care. A work place shortage typically results from one or more of the following three factors:

1. A situation where demand is greater than the supply of workers who are qualified, available and willing to work under the existing market conditions;
2. A skills gap that results from an under-skilled workforce such that recruitment of qualified persons is difficult, resulting in vacancies despite an adequate supply of workers; and/or
3. Low remuneration, poor working conditions (shift work, part-time hours, commute distance, lack of benefits, environment, work expectations).

While some attention has been given to recruitment of new students into ECE programs at colleges through such programs as Second Careers and increased cohorts, the predicted loss of qualified and experienced staff from child care is significant. As FDK is further implemented, it is expected that the most qualified and gifted RECE's in child care will continue to leave to work for school boards for better pay, benefits, and professional recognition associated with teaching FDK.

## **REPORT**

Based on the current model (1 RECE per staff team/per classroom) of FDK implemented in Niagara, it is estimated that local school boards will require, at minimum, 300 RECE's when the program is fully implemented in 2015. Phase 3 (2012/13 school year) alone will require double the number of RECE's already employed by school boards to support Phases 1 and 2. The ability of child care operators to manage its human resources into and beyond Phase 3 in terms of recruiting and retaining qualified staff will become increasingly difficult. Furthermore, should school boards move into the delivery of FDK extended day with board-hired staff, the demand for RECE's could double due to the staggered staffing requirements (two ECE's per FDK classroom split between morning and afternoon) per the model proposed for FDK school board delivered program.

Children's Services 2011 annual salary survey determined that Niagara's child care system employs over 1,110 people equating to approximately 765 FTE's. Of those staff employed in Niagara's child care system, only 54.2% or 415 FTE's are Registered Early Childhood Educators (not including Supervisors or Assistant Supervisors). The same survey also reveals that Niagara's RECE salaries range from \$11.00/hour to \$31.74/hour; however, nearly half of agencies (49%) pay ECE's less than \$16.00 per hour (including all wage subsidies).

In 2011, a local school board implementing FDK posted a rate of \$20.09 per hour (excluding benefits) to recruit RECE's. Compared to this benchmark approximately 45 out of 55 child care agencies (82%) reporting in the salary survey pay less (including all subsidies) than the posted school board rate. In terms of base pay alone (subsidies removed), 48 out of 55 agencies (87%) pay less than the school board advertised rate.

As depicted in the table, of those 48 agencies that do pay less, 78% (322.32 of 415.53 FTE's) of their qualified staff are paid at a level below the salary benchmark of \$20.09.

2011 Salary Survey: Comparator of Wages Paid			
Qualified Staff Position**	Total FTEs	# of FTEs paid < \$20.09 per hour	% of FTEs
Supervisor*	135.41	64.68	48%
Assistant Supervisor	47.72	39.92	84%
ECE*	415.53	322.32	78%
All qualified staff	597.66	426.92	42%

\*Registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators; \*\*includes "otherwise approved"

Better pay and benefits offered by school boards is prompting those staff employed in child care to leave their positions for the classroom, causing a shortage of qualified and experienced staff in child care centres. The gap between supply of, and demand for RECE's continues to be the most significant problem reported by child care centre administrators and represents major concern for the child care sector as FDK is further implemented. Challenges already identified include: higher cost and low response rates to job postings; low acceptance rates of job offers; higher costs associated with training and re-training new hires; reduced number of approvals with "otherwise" approved staff to meet legislative requirement; and, most importantly, operators inability to achieve wage parity as a means of retention with staff opting to leave for FDK classrooms.

Children's Services continues to work with child care programs to restructure operations and address the staffing challenge. Such initiatives include: working with Niagara College and child care operators to create an apprenticeship program as an alternate opportunity to fill the staffing gap; leveraging student placement opportunities; encouraging qualified individuals to apply to the College of ECE's for equivalency, particularly immigrants; and the promotion of an accelerated ECE program aimed at newly graduated teachers.

However, in the absence of adequately addressing the gap that exists between wages and benefits between child care and school board, where the demand for the same qualified staff is significant and immediate, the child care system will continue to experience the loss of its "brightest and best" human resources, the cornerstone of quality and with financial impacts that will influence their ability to transition and remain viable over the long term.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

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Katherine Chislett  
 Commissioner, Community Services

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Mike Trojan  
 Chief Administrative Officer

*This report was prepared by Kathryn O'Hagan-Todd, Director, Children's Services with input from Kathryn Ballantyne, Program Evaluator, Children's Services.*