



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

SUBJECT: Implementation of Full Day Early Learning Report

RECOMMENDATION

That this Committee recommend to Regional Council that the Regional Chairman be authorized to write a letter to the Premier in support of the Early Learning Advisor's *With our Best Future in Mind* report and recommendations with copies to the local Members of Provincial Parliament, Ministers of Education, Children and Youth Services and local school Board Chairs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In the fall of 2007 the Province of Ontario announced its commitment to full day early learning for four and five year old children to begin in 2010 and appointed Dr. Charles Pascal, Early Learning Advisor to the Premier, to report on a strategy for implementation.
- His report, "With Our Best Future in Mind Implementing Early Learning in Ontario", was released June 15, 2009 and outlines a vision for Ontario's children and recommends sweeping changes to the system of services for children 0 to 12 years of age that extends beyond full day early learning for 4 and 5 year olds.
- Core to the new system proposed is a new Early Learning Division within the Ministry of Education that would be directly accountable for the delivery of early learning and care programs and a division of responsibility between local municipal service managers and boards of education.
- For children 4 to 12 years of age, school boards would directly operate 3 types of programs: a new early learning program (full day for 4 and 5 year olds); an extended day primary program (6 to 8 years of age); and an after-school program (children 9 to 12 years).
- Municipal service system managers would provide systems management for a network of *Best Start Child and Family Centres* for children age 0 to 4 to be created through consolidating and re-engineering of resources, governance and mandates of existing child care, family resource and early intervention services.
- In a move to demonstrate leadership, Niagara is moving forward with a proposal to Dr. Pascal and the Province to request that Niagara be identified as a pilot community to introduce the system of changes proposed.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications present at this time but the impact to Niagara's child care system would be significant dependant on the extent of the Early Learning Advisor's recommendations.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Committee and Council with an update on the full day early learning report "With Our Best Future in Mind, Implementing Full Day Learning in Ontario" written by Dr. Charles Pascal, Special Advisor on Early Learning released June 15, 2009.

BACKGROUND

Dr. Pascal's report on the implementation of full day learning for 4 and 5 year olds "With Our Best Future in Mind" was released June 15, 2009. The report proposes sweeping changes for the system of services for children 0-12 years of age, including child care. It identifies that Ontario has many good early childhood services but that they are fragmented and disconnected to the degree that they are failing to provide for the best interest of children and families. The report recommendations clearly place children first and suggests the "silo's" of programs from post-natal, parenting, child care through to education, need to re-engineered to better service children and families while at the same time make better use of current and new resources, including funding, to drive outcomes. At the same time, a focus on outcomes for children, namely school readiness needs to be integral to the system and that by doing so early learning can provide a strong foundation on which to build and drive future social and economic prosperity.

REPORT

The report "With Our Best Future in Mind, Implementing Early Learning in Ontario" recommends a new, comprehensive and transformational early learning plan for Ontario that extends beyond full day learning for 4 and 5 year olds. The report is based on four key components of early learning and recommends the better use of available resources to create a cohesive and integrated system of services for children and families from the prenatal period to age 12. The key components are described as follows:

1. Full Day Learning for 4 and 5 year olds: School Boards would begin offering full day learning in September 2010 and be province-wide in three years. Parents would have a choice about their child's participation, including the option of a full day or half-day attendance. Before and after school and summer time care

would be available through and managed by the school board on a fee-for-service basis at the request of 15 families or more. Of further significance, it is recommended that the programs be staffed by a well-trained team of teachers and early childhood educators working with an established curriculum and approach to learning. As a first phase, implementation would include lower-income neighbourhoods as part of the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

2. Before and After School and Summer Programs for School-Age Children: Based on research that indicates quality before and after school programs bolster academic success, particularly for disadvantaged children, the report recommends that a reorganization of existing resources be undertaken to allow schools to offer extended day and year-round programs for school aged children (6 to 12 years of age) at the request of 15 or more families. The programs would be staffed by appropriately trained school board employees to offer homework help, recreational and other activities to enhance children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. For children 9 to 12 years of age, school boards may contract with municipal recreation programs or community agencies for the provision of similar activities.

Fees for before and after school and summer care would be funded by parent fees with subsidies available for low-income families. It is expected that this fee for service would be less of a financial burden for parents compared to the cost of traditional licensed child care for 4 to 12 year olds.

3. Quality Programs for Younger Children: In order to support children and families in the earliest years of development, the report is far reaching and recommends that many of the existing child and family programs be consolidated into a network of Best Start Child and Family Centres under the services systems management of Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM). This recommendation is based on the leadership and knowledge of local planning as was demonstrated with the Best Start initiative. Furthermore, the proposed centres are to be located in or partnered with schools and provide flexible, full-day, full-year and part-time child care for children up to age 4. Parent fees and subsidies for low income families would continue to support the system and may open up participation to more children.

Best Start Child and Family centres would be a "one-stop" opportunity for pre- and post-natal supports, parenting resources and programs, playgroups, linkages to community resources, early identification and intervention services for children with special needs and other early learning services.

4. Enhanced Parental Leave by 2020: The report also recommends an improved parental leave and benefits program be established by 2020 that would include paid parental leave of 400 days after the birth or adoption of a child; six weeks of leave designated exclusively for the father or non-birthing parent; expanded coverage for self employed parents; flexibility for parents on leave to return to

work full or part-time; 10 days of legislated job-protected leave annually for parents of children under age 12.

The division of responsibility between municipalities and school boards based on age of children represents a significant system shift and authority (see *Governance Model for a Child and Family System Birth to 12 Years* - Appendix 1). Municipalities would have authority for the services, including child care, for children age 0 to 4 whereas the Ministry of Education would have responsibility for service and authority for children age 4 to 12. The report recommends the establishment of an Early Learning Division under the Ministry of Education that would guide the transformation of programming for children and provide the necessary resources and framework to municipalities to plan, develop, support and monitor an integrated network of Best Start Child and Family Centres. This Early Learning division would provide the policy framework to coordinate with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services who would retain special needs services, child welfare, Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Ontario Child Benefit.

The delineation of authority for managing services for children 0 to 4 years of age to municipalities and 4 to 12 years of age to education would result in a very different system of services. The report suggests that it is possible to create the Best Start Child and Family Centres within current funding envelopes with some re-engineering to develop the integrated service model but to do so without additional funding. The loss of staff and revenue associated with child care for 4 and 5 year olds and school aged programs, which tend to be lower cost to operate and therefore off-set higher cost daily rates for younger children, will inevitably increase child care rates. In Niagara's initial full day early learning report, a 12-15% increase in daily per diem rates was estimated for child care with the loss of just the 4 and 5 year olds. The collateral impact of losing school aged programs would further increase costs of child care for children age 0 to 4.

Education taking on responsibility for staff for full day learning and before and after school care for children aged 6-9 years will introduce a completely new experience for schools particularly the need to collect parent fees. Considering that the report indicates that school boards will have to offer before and after school care and summer time care for 15 or more families, requesting the service does not give consideration to the additional costs that may be inherent in this commitment. Where families will access services if the threshold of 15 families is not met is not identified and it is unlikely that child care would be able to absorb this need in light of the magnitude of the system change proposed. Costs associated with staffing before and after school programs, namely recruitment and retention of qualified staff for the limited hours of operation will introduce further operational complexities for school boards to address. Currently, these programs operated by child care utilize the same staff in programs for younger children - an option that may not be available with full early learning programs.

The report makes it clear that the vision, recommendations and expectation is that a systemic change is required to do what is best for children and families and to better utilize the resources invested in early childhood services. Dr. Pascal goes onto say that "to invest in more improved coordination would be the enemy of the real change

required” (See Appendix 1 *Creating Coherence from a Chaotic Mix*). The report also identifies that under Best Start and the planning tables created to improve service coordination has in some cases resulted in “significant improvement, but progress has been hobbled by the partners’ different governance, funding, and legislative mandates, as well as the voluntary nature of the process”. As a result, this report sets out a vision that puts children first and is of public interest.

The degree of change required is aptly described in the report’s reference to the use of schools as a community asset. Dr. Pascal notes that schools need to make a transformation from a “school board asset” to a community asset. At the same time, school boards and municipalities need to understand they serve the same taxpayer, same citizens and same families and as such the school “asset” must be used as a community resource where a range of complementary services can take place. Emphasis is placed on systemic change with universal application with a targeted approach that would include utilizing existing school space and some attention to low income neighbourhoods. In this respect, Niagara is well positioned due to declining enrolments and the recent Prosperity Project neighbourhood mapping that includes socio-economic, health and early learning indicators to identify best locations for limited resources as a means to drive the best outcomes for disadvantaged children.

To date, the Province has not formally responded to the report. Due to the comprehensive nature of the recommendation proposed in this report, Niagara is proposing to put forward to the Province, specifically Minister Kathleen Wynne and Minister Deb Matthews, a recommendation to select Niagara as a host community for piloting the full implementation of this plan. With the endorsement of Early Years Niagara Planning Council, key stakeholders directly identified in this plan as the responsible authorities, namely Boards of Education and the Municipality will put forward a proposal that outlines Niagara’s unique position and interest in being a leader on this initiative. Niagara has already undertaken significant collaborative work specifically on the implementation of full day learning and as such is well equipped to start to work quickly and efficiently.

Submitted by:

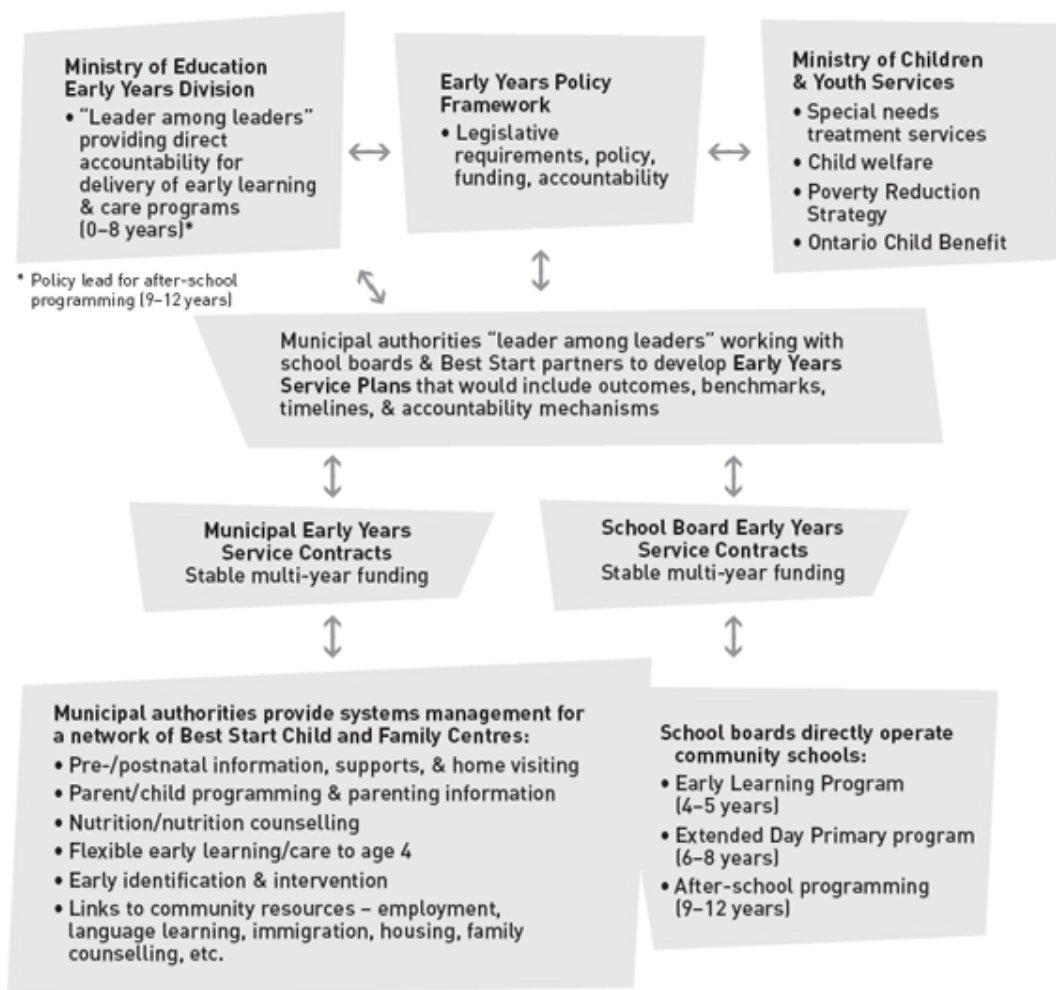
Approved by:

Brian Hutchings
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Mike Trojan
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared by Kathryn O’Hagan-Todd, Director, Children’s Services.

Governance Model for a Child and Family Service System Birth to 12 Years



Creating Coherence from a Chaotic Mix

The Best Start strategy, launched in 2004, was aimed at improving service coordination in Ontario's communities through the creation of "tables" with representation from municipalities, school boards, parents, and community agencies. Through their efforts, significant improvement occurred in many communities, but progress has been hobbled by the partners' different governance, funding, and legislative mandates, as well as the voluntary nature of the process.

Best Start laid the groundwork for what I am proposing, but real systemic change needs more than resources and goodwill. Without fundamentally changing the approach to delivery and doing the re-engineering required to integrate services into something new, Ontario will be stalled at the level of "improving coordination". To invest in more improved coordination would be the enemy of the real change required.