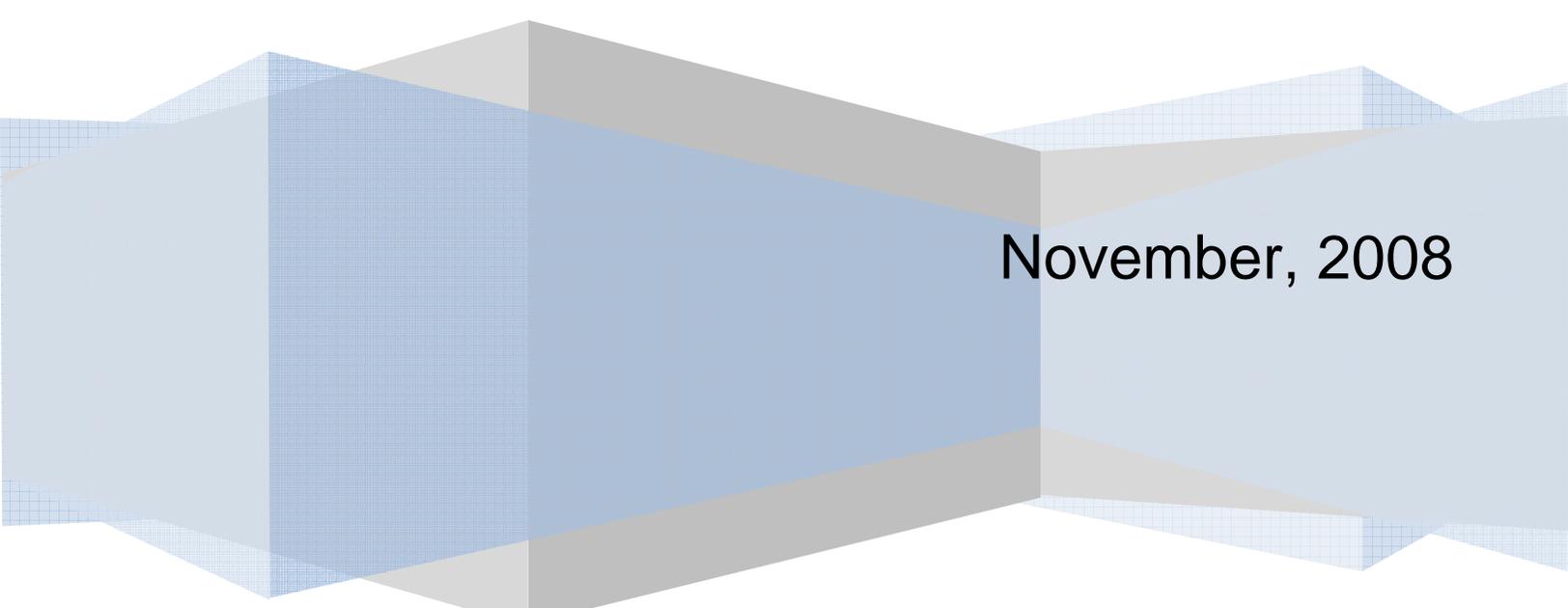


# IMPLICATIONS OF FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING: MOVING FORWARD

Quality Early Childhood Network

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## The Context

*“I’m of the view this is no longer a luxury in a society that lays claim to being progressive and availing itself of all of the best pedagogical advice that we can get our hands on,” Mr. McGuinty tells reporters. “If we want our kids to be at their very best, and I think all parents want us to work toward that end, and I can tell you business people want us to do that same thing as well ... then we’ve got to start in the early years.”*  
*Ontario Seeks Plan for Full Day Kindergarten, Globe and Mail, November 28, 2007*

The **Quality Early Childhood Network** applauds the McGuinty government’s announcement to introduce full day early learning for 4 and 5 year olds in Ontario. This announcement conveys the importance of the early years and the value of providing quality early learning and care programs for all children.

As service providers, we recognize that successful implementation of this initiative will require Ontario to address a complex range of factors in the current system. These include:

### **1. THE INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN EDUCATION, CHILD CARE AND FAMILY SUPPORT.**

Today, in Ontario, young children and their families are served by multiple service streams. At an operational level, all of these are connected and a change in one impacts the financial, service and human resource status of the others. Each of these structures plays a critical role for children and families and will be affected by the implementation of full day early learning.

In particular, the licensed child care system serves 229,875 (2005/06) children and their families throughout the province. In addition to helping children develop important skills, child care is critical to the welfare of our families, community and the economy.

*Therefore, full day early learning for 3.8 to 5 year olds needs to be implemented in a manner that builds on and strengthens existing programs and thoroughly addresses the potential impacts on each of these inter-connected components.*

### **2. THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.**

The full day early learning initiative must address the real needs of children and their families. With 66% of women in the workforce, many parents require care for their children 261 days per year for approximately 10 hours a day. Existing full day kindergarten programs operate 45% of this day for 50% of the year. *The proposed model of full day early learning must be sensitive to the needs and realities of*

*Ontario's families and directly address this need for extended hours 12 months a year.*

An estimated 10-12% of children in this age group have a special need which could interfere with their ability to participate in a full day program unless the model is flexible, well resourced and accessible.

### **3. THE BEST START POLICY ENVIRONMENT.**

Best Start provides an important policy context for the development of full day early learning. Its promotion of collaboration and integration of services, with a focus on education, child care and family support, provides an important foundation for moving forward. As a consequence of Best Start, two documents were developed, each of which have a great deal to contribute to moving forward with a high quality system of early learning and care for children from 0 to 12 whether the programs are delivered by the children's services system or the education system:

- 1) *Early Learning for Every Child Today* outlines a play based curriculum model that should form the basis of a high quality full day early learning program.
- 2) *Investing in Quality: Policies, Practitioners, Programs and Parents* describes the importance of highly trained early childhood specialists in developing and implementing effective, high quality early learning experiences for young children.

The **Quality Early Childhood Network** is committed to the cause of supporting young children to develop to their fullest potential. To this end, we offer this paper which:

1. Identifies the principles that must underpin all programs and services for young children.
2. Makes specific recommendations about how to move forward.

## Who We Are

The **Quality Early Childhood Network** (formerly the Multi-Site Early Learning and Care Group) represents a group of agencies providing not-for-profit early learning and care services within the City of Toronto.

Collectively, our organizations provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for more than **17,000** children and their families in **344 centres and 528 homes**. Together, we employ more than **1,600** early childhood educators. We are deeply committed to the provision of high quality early childhood experiences for children ranging from infancy through age twelve.

Membership:

- Canadian Mothercraft Society
- Child Development Institute
- Family Day Care Services
- George Brown College
- The Learning Enrichment Foundation
- Macaulay Child Development Centre
- Network Child Care Services
- Woodgreen Community Services
- YMCA of Greater Toronto

## Our Vision

*All Ontario children have access to high quality, affordable early learning and care delivered by trained educators, in the context of a comprehensive, integrated, fully funded system that builds on the strengths of existing programs.*

## **Our Principles**

We believe that:

1. Above all else – quality matters – all programs for children 0 to 12 must be based on sound research and build on best practices for children.
2. The development and implementation of universal full day early learning for children 4.8 and older must build on the strengths of the current child care and education systems recognizing and acknowledging that both systems provide essential services for children and their families.
3. All programs and services must be child and family centred and flexible enough to address the diverse needs of children and their families.
4. Healthy communities share the responsibility of meeting the diverse needs of children. When parents, the education system and community based organizations (Child care, OEYCs, Public Health, Libraries, Parks and Recreation, Children’s Mental Health etc.) collaborate as equals, children and their families are provided with the best possible environments in which to grow and prosper.
5. The contributions of all early learning and care practitioners must be respected.
6. Both the children’s services and education systems must be appropriately and adequately funded to meet the diverse needs of children and their families.
7. Government funding must be targeted to the not-for-profit and/or public system.

# Moving Forward



As service providers the QECN have applied their immediate experience in the early learning and related fields to the challenge of developing an effective full day learning model. We recommend the following directions.

## RECOMMENDED DIRECTIONS

### A. Developmentally Appropriate Programs

#### The Challenge:

Quality full day early learning for 4 and 5 year olds must be developmentally appropriate, providing a flexible range of services that can accommodate children of different abilities and needs. The needs of 3.8-4.8 year olds are significantly different than 4.8 plus and this understanding should inform such critical program factors as staff-child ratios, curriculum; daily routines, etc.

Therefore we urge Ontario to:

**1. DELIVER ALL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN 0 TO 4.8 THROUGH THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT AND/OR PUBLIC LICENSED CHILD CARE SYSTEM.**

**2. FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN 4.8 AND OLDER WOULD BE MANAGED THROUGH THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.**

This arrangement has various benefits including:

- Addresses need for developmentally appropriate programming
- Builds on strengths of existing systems that are responsive to local community needs including, but not limited to:
  - Licensed group and home child care for children 0 to 4.8
  - Resources for children with special needs for children 0 to 4.8

- Ontario Early Years Centres
- Family Resources Centres
- Family Literacy Centres
- Preschool Speech and Language services
- Parents of Better Beginnings
- Healthy Babies/Healthy Children
- Clarifies roles among ministries, school boards, regionally based service system managers (CMSMs/DSSABs) and community based agencies.
- Mitigates potentially negative outcomes that could impact the early learning and care system.

## B. Service Levels and Funding

The full day early learning initiative must address the real needs of children and their families. With 66% of women in the workforce, many parents require care for their children 261 days per year for approximately 10 hours a day. Existing full day kindergarten programs operate 45% of this day for 50% of the year.

*The proposed model of full day early learning must be sensitive to the needs and realities of Ontario's families and directly address this need for extended hours 12 months a year.*

### The challenge:

Access to quality licensed early learning and care options is inadequate with significant waiting lists across the province. At the same time, there are serious problems posed by the current funding system for child care:

- Its reliance on parent fees reduces access.
- Funding is enrolment –based; this mechanism does not provide the financial stability needed to support quality programming.
  - Targeted and multiple funding streams are costly to administer and reduce the flexibility of service providers to respond to emerging needs.
- The cost of child care for full fee parents is turning into a growing accessibility issue.

In addition, early analysis indicates that per diem rates for children remaining in the licensed child care system will increase by an average of 25% if the model for early learning results in children 3.8 to 5 leaving the licensed child care system to attend full day kindergarten in the school system.

Therefore we urge Ontario to:

#### 1. DISENTANGLE AND SIMPLIFY THE CURRENT COMPLEX FUNDING STRUCTURE.

The implementation of the full day early learning initiative provides an ideal opportunity to revisit the entire funding structure for licensed child care. The existing system of targeted funding streams is inefficient, not responsive to local diversity, insufficient, and needlessly costly in that its complexity drives up administrative costs. We would urge Ontario to take advantage of this opportunity and to create a more streamlined, **based funded child care system**.

#### 2. MAINTAIN CURRENT LEVELS OF SERVICE IN THE EARLY LEARNING AND CARE SYSTEM.

Current levels of service in the child care system, for both subsidized and full fee families must be maintained regardless of how full day early learning is implemented.

#### 3. MAINTAIN ALL EXISTING FUNDING IN THE CHILD CARE SYSTEM.

All funding that currently supports the child care system (fee subsidy, wage subsidies, special needs resourcing and all funding directed to supporting the administration of the system) must remain in the child care system.

4. OFF-SET HIGHER PARENT FEES AND PER DIEM RATES BY INJECTING A 25% FUNDING INCREASE TO THE SYSTEM TO INITIATE BASE-FUNDING FOR EARLY LEARNING AND CARE.

Base funding grants would ensure child care fees do not increase and affordability and access are not negatively affected by the introduction of full day early learning.



## C. Human Resources and Curriculum

### The challenge:

There are broad variations in the way that individual children develop during the early years. Children with special needs pose even more significant challenges to programs striving to meet their needs in a group context. Programs must be built on a solid curriculum that is play-based and developmentally appropriate. Program curriculum must be based on a flexible framework that can be adapted to address the diverse needs of children and communities. Professionally trained staff are needed to ensure consistent high quality across all streams of the system. Resources must be dedicated to support significant and meaningful collaboration and integration among the three streams: education, child care and family support.

Therefore we urge Ontario to:

1. **IMPLEMENT THE EARLY LEARNING FOR EVERY CHILD TODAY (ELECT) CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK.**

A common framework used by all three streams would ensure developmentally appropriate programming across the system and facilitate efforts to create seamless transitions for children. Such a framework is available in *Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT)*, recommended by the Best Start expert panel and broadly supported by educators across the system.

2. **ADDRESS THE SHORTAGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE HUMAN RESOURCE STRATEGY FOR THE EARLY YEARS.**

A longer term Human Resources strategy for the early years is required to recruit, retain and develop early childhood professionals. *Investing in Quality: Policies, Practitioners, Programs and Parents*, a document completed by a Best Start Expert Panel, provides a comprehensive strategy to address issues of recruitment, training and qualifications and compensation.

3. **DEVELOP A NEW DEGREE LEVEL CREDENTIAL TO SUPPORT THE CAPACITY TO CREATE A TRULY INTEGRATED SYSTEM.**

For those coming into the field a new degree level credential that focuses broadly on the key concepts of both early learning AND care would be a positive step forward towards building the capacity for a truly integrated system, staffed by equals.

## D. Space and Physical Plant

### The Challenge:

The current child and family support programs rely heavily on the availability of school space. In the city of Toronto alone, 366 of 920 licensed child care centres are located within school buildings. The use of school space for community programs that meet the needs of neighbourhood children and families is fundamental to realizing the Best Start vision of community focal points or hubs.

Therefore, we urge Ontario to:

1. PROTECT AND SECURE EXISTING SPACE WHERE CHILD CARE AND FAMILY SUPPORT ARE DELIVERED.

Quality child care requires appropriate, quality, affordable and secure space. As the early learning and care system evolves, it is critical to the well being of the entire system that existing space be protected and new physical plant be added to the system.

2. OPEN SCHOOLS TO THE BROADER COMMUNITY.

Schools have the capacity to serve as community hubs in many neighbourhoods. When schools open their doors to the broader community, the ability to move towards to a time where the education system and the early learning and care system are truly integrated is made ever more likely. Multi-site providers who have a proven history of providing multiple programs and services in numerous sites are well placed to provide expertise and support. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services has developed a strategic plan that describes the importance of supporting children achieve academic success. Opening schools to the broader community is one effective means of increasing the comfort level that children (and their families) have with the formal education system.

## E. Timing

### **The Challenge:**

“Getting it right” will require the Ontario government to address a complex array of inter-connected challenges. The strategy must be comprehensive in order to “do no harm” as the transition is advanced.

Therefore, we urge Ontario to:

1. **PHASE IN FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING BEGINNING WITH CHILDREN 4.8 YEARS OLD.**

It is important to take enough time to plan thoughtfully and to do this right, the first time. To this end, Ontario should phase in this fundamental change. This would allow for time to adapt curricula, create mechanism for collaboration between sectors and mitigate negative financial impacts for the licensed child care sector.