

District of Parry Sound

SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

October 28, 2011

Ms. Jill Vienneau, Director
Early Learning and Child Care Policy Program,
Ministry of Education
Mowat Block, 24th Floor
900 Bay Street
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

Dear Ms. Vienneau,

I am writing on behalf of the Children's Services Managers group from the Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs and DSSABs) in Northern Ontario. This group is collectively responsible for the child care service system management under the direction of their respective DSSABs. During this past year, the Managers of Children's Services have continued to meet and review the ongoing impact of changes on the municipal child care service system in Northern Ontario as a result of the implementation of Full-Day Early Learning and the development of the Best Start Child and Family System.

We appreciate your keen interest and efforts in keeping abreast of the issues through your participation at events such as the OMSSA forum this past year and the Ministry of Education Northern Rural Remote Child Care Reference group, however we continue to be concerned about the impact of Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten on the stability of the child care system in our communities.

In this regard, I have attached a discussion paper that has been developed by our Child Care managers that highlights our concerns for your review. It is our hope that as the transformation of Early Learning unfolds, access to services for children of all ages will be protected and enhanced in our communities in a manner that is equitable throughout Ontario.

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Administration Offices
1 Beechwood Drive
Parry Sound, Ontario
P2A 1J2
Telephone: (705) 746-7777
Fax: (705) 746-7783

Thank you for your ongoing work in building a great system of Early Learning and Child Care for families and children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large loop followed by a horizontal line that extends to the right.

Janet Patterson, CAO
District of Parry Sound Social Services

- cc. NOSDA Children's Services Managers
Ms. Renee Brouillette, Education Officer, Early Learning and Child Care Implementation Branch, Sudbury Regional Office
Ms. Heather Exley, Education Officer, Early Learning and Child Care Implementation Branch, Thunder Bay Regional Office

District of Parry Sound

SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

October 28, 2011

Ms. Pam Musson, Director
Early Learning and Child Care Implementation Branch,
Ministry of Education
Mowat Block, 24th Floor
900 Bay Street
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

Dear Ms. Musson,

I am writing on behalf of the Children's Services Managers group from the Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs and DSSABs) in Northern Ontario. This group is collectively responsible for the child care service system management under the direction of their respective DSSABs. During this past year, the Managers of Children's Services have continued to meet and review the ongoing impact of changes on the municipal child care service system in Northern Ontario as a result of the implementation of Full-Day Early Learning and the development of the Best Start Child and Family System.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a horizontal line, positioned above the printed name.

Janet Patterson, CAO
District of Parry Sound Social Services

cc. NOSDA Children's Services Managers
Ms. Renee Brouillette, Education Officer, Early Learning and Child Care Implementation
Branch, Sudbury Regional Office
Ms. Heather Exley, Education Officer, Early Learning and Child Care Implementation
Branch, Thunder Bay Regional Office

NORTHERN ONTARIO SERVICE DELIVERERS' ASSOCIATION

Early Learning and Moving Forward with Best Start Child and Family Centres in Northern Ontario

DISCUSSION PAPER

[September, 2011]

This Discussion Paper identifies a number of concerns regarding the planning and implementation for Best Start Child and Family Centres and makes recommendations for the inclusion of Municipal Service Managers as full partners in the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres in line with Early Learning Advisor Dr. Charles Pascal's vision.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers' Association (NOSDA) is an incorporated body that brings together 10 of Northern Ontario's 11 Municipal Service Managers. All eleven are responsible for the local planning, coordination and delivery of a range of community health and social services that the Province of Ontario divested to them to locally manage. These services represent a significant portion of the social infrastructure of all Northern Ontario's municipalities and also account for a good share of the property taxes that Northern Ontario municipalities dedicate to the social support infrastructure of their municipalities.

NOSDA is primarily composed of nine District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) that are unique to Northern Ontario; and one municipality (also known as a Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) – the City of Greater Sudbury.

Northern Ontario's municipal service managers collectively have annual expenditures in excess of \$650,000,000 and together employ over 1,000 people. We thus represent a significant component of Northern Ontario's economy and labour force.

We plan and coordinate the Northern Ontario delivery of public services and infrastructure programs that result in measurable gains to the quality of life of Northerners through:

- the provision of financial and other supports to persons having difficulty entering or re-entering the labour force;
- the creation, maintenance and provision of affordable, social housing;
- the provision of quality early learning and child care services that reassure parents that their children are in safe, nurturing environments while they attend work or upgrade their skills;
- the provision of emergency medical services in times of medical crisis

2.0 BACKGROUND

As outlined in the Early Learning Advisor Dr. Charles Pascal's report, *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, "Municipal authorities are in a good position to build the necessary links between and among public health, school boards, and specialized agencies to ensure that parents take advantage of the one-stop service model in the Best Start Child and Family Centres". Dr. Charles Pascal's plan makes good sense - we urge you to proceed.

Northern Ontario CMSM/DSSABs are experienced service managers who understand the unique circumstances of Northern communities and the needs of their citizens. We have established strong collaborative relationships with local partners in health, education and social services. We have clear and transparent accountability, and have invested in early years services through our ongoing 20% funding contributions. As leaders in developing and

sustaining Best Start Networks and as Service Managers of Child Care in our communities, we see great opportunities to integrate child care with the services of the Best Start Child and Family Centres.

Furthermore, this discussion paper is in support of and in reference to the analysis and recommendations outlined in the March 2011 OMSSA position on the Best Start Child and Family System.

Northern Ontario CMSMs and DSSABs are ready and willing to accept a transfer of the management of funding and responsibility for Best Start Child and Family Centres. We are ready to work with MCYS as true partners.

We appreciate that MCYS is seeking input in the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres from stakeholders and using the perspective of children and families across our communities to develop a service model. Our members are actively participating in this exercise and submitting responses from their communities' perspectives. However, the current consultations are not appropriate for seeking input from CMSM/DSSABs into the full transformation of these services as recommended by the Early Learning Advisor. We are ready to be consulted as full partners in planning and delivering child and family services.

3.0 MOVING FORWARD AS PARTNERS

In order to ensure that the Child and Family Centre model works for all of our communities, CMSMs and DSSABs must participate in developing the funding model. We have had good experiences working with the Ministry of Education to develop the Full Day Learning Program. We're waiting for the opportunity to consult with MCYS to develop the model that will guide the transition, funding and service guidelines.

3.1 Ensuring that planning and framework take into account Northern realities

Northern Ontario has a distinct set of issues and challenges that we have experience responding to. The issues vary across the North but include the following:

- Many of our communities are centred around resource-based economies and are subject to a boom and bust cycle that means the populations and families' circumstances change quickly.
- Small and isolated population centres are a reality in the North. Transportation challenges related to long distances between communities mean that seeking services outside of local communities is often impossible.

- As in other rural areas, we recognize community schools as one of the key factors in the viability of a community. In the North, we have the additional challenge of serving large Francophone communities and working with multiple school boards, which means that even if a small community has a school it may not be able to serve a large segment of the school age population. Using school facilities to serve local community needs around Early Learning is good for communities and will require a lot of flexibility and cooperation.
- We have a responsibility to be responsive to our significant Aboriginal communities, many of whom shift between on reserve and off reserve services.

3.2 Child and Family Centre funding and program guidelines can respond to these realities

We ask that you keep in the mind the following:

- We need recognition that there is a base cost to providing services for children and families in small communities regardless of the number of children who use them and the services cost more to provide in northern and remote communities., Funding models based on population or service guidelines that need to meet viability based on parent demand and/or ability to pay are inherently unfair to children in small communities. We want children in small communities to have the same access to services like child care, Extended Day Learning and specialized services that are close to home.
- A funding model that mandates Child and Family Centres to coordinate the delivery of specialized services for children of all ages (0-18) would benefit small communities to ensure that services could be provided to support children in their own community. For example, in a very small community with two schools and Child and Family centre providing child care and parent/child services, there may be enough demand for a Speech and Language Provider(SLP) to spend one day / week in the community but only if that SLP is funded to provide treatment and assessment to all of the children in that community. In the current service system, two school boards and the families of preschool children would access three different SLPs and none would be able to justify travelling to that community.
- A community school is integral to community viability in small and remote communities. The system we build can support the viability of community schools with appropriate funding, that funds and protects space in community

schools. When local schools close because school enrolment is low, this disrupts a community's ability to provide other services as well. When populations fluctuate as in resource towns, it is even more important that community schools are open for boom times when the population increases again.

3.3 Examples of flexible program delivery in the North

In Greater Sudbury, the CMSM has been successful at managing the transition of FRP and OEYC's to a coordinated system of school-based Best Start Hubs, with the support and goodwill of local agencies. This provides a made-in-the-North example of how CMSMs can manage the transition to something similar to Dr. Charles Pascal's model of Best Start Child and Family Centres.

However, in very small towns or remote areas of the north, the one-stop shop system may not be feasible. This is where CMSM/DSSAB's knowledge of their local communities can be an asset. For example, Temiskaming has developed the "virtual hub" concept, which was deemed the best approach to provide quality service to a diverse population spread over a large geographical distance. Virtual Hubs are a collection of programs and services connected through a referral mechanism, shared phone number, website and supported by Community Liaison Workers, who are the public face of Best Start in Temiskaming. They are the organization's advocates and are responsible for creating and maintaining sustainable partnerships and linkages with community agencies and stakeholders involved in Early Childhood Learning and Care in order to help link families with the services they need

CMSMs and DSSAB's in the North need the flexibility to collaborate with their agency partners to plan what's best for our Northern communities.

3.4 Working towards a single ministry to lead all early learning services

CMSMs and DSSAB's in Northern Ontario recognize the challenge of having two different ministries managing child care and Child and Family Centres. We see the interconnected nature of these two types of services as both community agencies and children and families are involved in both.

In Dr. Charles Pascal's vision of Child and Family Centres, licensed child care was integrated into the operation of the centres, promoting good planning and a rationalization of a chaotic child care system. Keeping child care in separate ministries will create challenges for integrated planning, Ministry reporting and program funding consistency. It will also stifle efforts to reorganize and rationalize the planning and delivery of child care in our communities. As Service Managers of both programs we

would welcome any discussion about bringing Child and Family Centre services into the Ministry of Education.

If there are no plans to combine both services under one Ministry, we would like to work with you to develop a framework that will encourage integrated planning and will not burden service managers with separate planning and reporting requirements. We will be looking to the Ministry of Education to present a plan to bring focus and funding to the child care system for families and their children aged 0-4 in concert with the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres across Ontario.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The CMSMs and DSSABs of Northern Ontario are eager to work in partnership with the office of the Early Learning Advisor, your colleagues in the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and Ministry of Education to build a better system of early learning and care and early intervention for families in Northern Ontario. Our recommendations are as follows;

- 4.1 Provide a clear plan that outlines specific opportunities for Northern CMSM/DSSABs to be consulted as municipal partners in developing the funding, governance and program guidelines for Best Start Child and Family Centres.**
- 4.2 Confirm that the responsibility to manage Best Start Child and Family Centres will be transferred to CMSM/DSSABs and provide an expected timeline for the transition.**
- 4.3 Ensure that the development of an enhanced funding and support plan for child care for 0-4 year olds be part of the roll out of Best Start Child and Family Centres , as indicated in Pascal's report "With Our Best Future in Mind".**
- 4.4 Consider consolidating the funding and direction for Best Start Child and Family Centres.**

5.0 CONCLUSION

We look forward to continuing this dialogue with you and would welcome the opportunity to explore these issues further as we move forward to build a cohesive and responsive early learning system for children and families in Northern Ontario and across our province.