



Modernizing Child Care in Ontario

Response from:
NOSDA CHILDREN'S SERVICES NETWORKING COMMITTEE
September 2012

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Modernizing Child Care in Ontario

Prepared by: NOSDA Children's Services Networking Committee

Executive Summary

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input as the Ministry of Education works towards modernizing the delivery of child care services in Ontario. As the Service System Managers for child care, the DSSABs and CMSMs of Northern Ontario are well positioned to advise and assist the Ministry of Education in the design of solutions that will both stabilize and strengthen services for children, families and communities in Northern Ontario.

Northern Response

We believe that the child care system plays a vital role in supporting and developing communities, especially in Northern Ontario. The following principles are crucial as solutions are considered regarding the organization of child care and how it is funded in Ontario:

Northern Ontario communities are unique and need a service delivery model that can take the realities of Northern Ontario into consideration.

- Many of our communities are centered on resource-based economies and are subject to a boom and bust cycle where populations and families' circumstances change regularly.
- 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.
- In rural areas, local schools are one of the key factors in the viability of a community. In the North, we have the additional challenge of serving large Francophone/Aboriginal communities and working with multiple school boards. Using school facilities to serve local community needs around Early Learning is good for communities and will require a lot of flexibility and cooperation. The

system we build can support the viability of community schools with appropriate funding, that protects space.

- We need to be responsive to our Aboriginal communities, many of whom transition on and off first nation communities.

Northern CMSMs and DSSABs are skilled at meeting these challenges and can do so if given the resources and flexibility.

Child Care can only operate properly as an integrated part of a larger system of supports for children and families. We need:

- Consistency between schools, child care centres, family centres. All services should operate under one ministry as a high-quality, comprehensive education system.
- Any approach must be mindful of the social determinants of health, with a specific emphasis on mitigating the impact that poverty has on children's opportunities for a healthy and successful future.
- Quality licensed home and centre-based child care as well as schools are all vital to children's health now and in the future. Children and families need these systems to be functioning together to support them as they move between them.
- All environments must be equitable, inclusive and accessible for all children, avoiding segregation.
- Education and programming for physical activity and healthy eating must be incorporated into each of these environments to promote healthy lifestyles.
- All planning, funding and service delivery decisions must be based on the best evidence available and have evaluation strategies to ensure positive outcomes for children, families and communities. Funding and planning models must be flexible enough to respond to new evidence as it is available.

A New Approach to Funding

We recommend that the government develop a funding formula that allocates a block of funding to CMSMs/DSSABs and allows the Service System Managers the flexibility within broad funding streams to meet local needs.

The formula must allow Service System Managers to support quality child care to meet the needs of families and must take into account the following:

- The actual cost of operating quality, inclusive licensed child care. This must incorporate a reasonable pay grid for Registered Early Childhood Educators.
- Affordability for parents. UNICEF sets 10 to 15 per cent of net family income as an affordability benchmark for child care costs. For lower income families, even this is too high.
- Special consideration for socio-economic and demographic factors as well as the distinct needs of Northern Ontario. CMSMs and DSSABs impacted by small populations, distance and isolation, higher Francophone and Aboriginal populations, and economic factors need higher funding levels to ensure that licensed child care is available and accessible in every community.
- A commitment to provide cost of living increases to support the entire system moving forward.
- Current Municipal contributions are an important part of the existing model and promote good stewardship. Given the economic climate in Northern Ontario, municipal contributions should remain relatively stable.
- Outcome measures tracked by the government must demonstrate the larger picture of the delivery of services (e.g. indicators collected should not just count the number of children served by subsidy, or the cost per space funded, but should include indicators that demonstrate that the community is being adequately served).

Approach to capital funding and planning

Communities must be successful at locating and maintaining child care centres in publicly funded school buildings.

We recommend the following:

- Capital dollars be allocated to include construction of child care space into all new school construction.
- The government consolidates the funding and direction for Best Start Child and Family Centres into the Ministry of Education. This ensures that the capital

planning for the implementation of a community-based and integrated model of Early Learning falls within one Ministry and that available space can be maximized between child care and family centres.

- Selected schools should be funded to operate community-based early learning space, to increase affordability and accessibility for families. Child care centres operating in schools should be considered school partners – not simply tenants. This is even more important in rural, remote and isolated communities where funded space for community-based early learning may be enough to enable a local school to remain open.
- The Ministry of Education must enforce school boards' participation with Service System Managers around capital and service planning. For example, consultation with Service System Managers should be a mandatory part of all Accommodation Reviews and new school planning. Existing space needs to be protected and new building must maximize child care capacity. Service System Managers need to be involved, from the beginning, in any planning process that could result in new child care space being built or child care space being lost.
- A selection process needs to be developed for school boards to choose operators to deliver child care and must include participation from the Service System Manager. The government should adopt a firm policy that only public or non-profit child care operators should be chosen to operate in schools.
- Service System Managers should be directed to maximize school space first. Where school space is not available, the local Service System Manager should have flexibility to use minor capital funding to expand or build for non-profit in community space.
- There are existing buildings within the system, such as the "hub model" child care centres, where there has already been extensive investment. Programs offered in these locations are an integral part of the Early Years' continuum of services. Where these programs continue to meet community needs, Service System Managers need to have the flexibility to support them with renovations and ongoing maintenance, etc.

Advancement of program quality

Ensuring quality child care programs are an investment in the future.

In order to ensure program quality across Ontario, we recommend the following:

- In consultation with Service System Managers from across the province, the government should develop or designate an evidence-based quality assessment and improvement program to be used by Service System Managers. Participation in the program should be mandatory for all child care centres and Service System Managers should be adequately funded to deliver the program. Clear accountability and role definition between licensing and quality must be developed. Acceptable assessments should be built into funding agreements with the Service System Manager. A sign-off by the Service System Manager that the child care centre meets quality standards should be part of the licensing process. Best Start Hubs (family centres) should also be included in the program. The selected program needs the flexibility for Service System Managers to apply the tools based on local needs.
- A quality assessment and improvement program should provide support and mentoring to programs to get where they need to be. A “tiered” system may assist centres to strive for continuous quality improvement and ratings should be made available for parents. This will assist parents in making informed choices about quality licensed child care.
- Innovative program design or flexibility should allow Service System Managers to meet the logistical challenges around delivering the program in remote areas. For example, virtual visits, using cameras over the internet may allow Service System Managers to assess quality and provide support without having to travel to remote locations.
- The Province should implement a broad-based public education campaign promoting the importance of quality licensed child care.

To improve the quality of child care for children with special needs, we recommend the following:

- Enhanced training for all staff serving children with special needs. ECE programs should include extensive training on supporting the needs of children with special needs.

- Services should be tailored to meet the needs of the child. Service System Managers need the flexibility to support operators to provide a range of service delivery options to meet the varying needs of children with special needs. These should be offered in home, centre-based, inclusive and specialized settings.
- Families with vulnerable children may need enhanced support to find licensed child care and as the child transitions into school. Several northern Service System Managers have had success working with families, child care programs and schools to support children with special needs to have successful transitions. Service System Managers should be funded to support these transitions and school boards should be directed to participate.
- Service System Managers need flexibility to respond to changes in the education system. For example, several school boards in Sudbury have moved to provide specialized programs for autism in select schools. The licensed child care programs at these schools have been challenged to provide appropriate service to an increased number of children with autism, within their existing Special Needs Inclusion child care model.
- The government needs to continue to support early identification in home and centre-based child care settings. All partners must recognize that early identification means that more children will be identified. All systems, including child care, must be ready to serve more children at an earlier age.

Modernizing the current legislative framework

The Day Nurseries Act needs to be reviewed.

In order to modernize the legislative framework for child care, we recommend the following:

- Review and redesign the DNA, working from evidence based strategies and recommendations.
- Ensure that the new legislative framework can allow fire inspections, health inspections and others to be shared between school and licensed child care programs.
- A special licensing category for older children should be created. Programs for this age group should be licensed but should have regulations that are

harmonized with school regulations for children the same age. Staffing education requirements should not be limited to RECEs for this age group. Child and youth workers, recreation specialists, teachers and educational assistants may also be appropriate for staffing. Programs for school aged children should include physical activity but also arts, culture, music, clubs, dramas, cooking and technology. Wherever possible, programs for this age group should integrate with other programming (including after-school clubs, sports operated by the school) and existing non-fee based programs in targeted neighbourhoods (Boys and Girls Clubs, Better Beginnings Better Futures programs). The quality improvement program must be designed to work for these programs as well.

- The government work to create the conditions for Licensed Home Child Care Centres to flourish by:
 - (i) Investing in public education about the difference between licensed home child care and informal care. Best Start Hubs have a role to play educating parents and supporting informal providers to move to the licensed system. We do not believe that providing a registration service or quality improvement program for private homes will strengthen the system.
 - (ii) Allowing Service System Managers the flexibility to enhance supports and incentives to licensed home child care, through licensed home agencies.
 - (iii) Creating another category of licensing for one room multi-age centre-based programs in schools in small communities. Licensed home child care does not meet the need in many remote communities.
 - (iv) Considering changing the regulations to make running unlicensed child care less attractive (for example, including caregivers' own children in the number that legally can be cared for without a license or producing a public education campaign about reporting illegal private homes).

Accountability and capacity-building

We support and are willing to partner in efforts to use evaluative tools in licensed child care, including common registration and screening tools, as well as the Ontario Education Number.

Service System Managers are responsible for the delivery of licensed child care. To avoid confusion and possible duplication of reporting practices, we recommend that

the Ministry of Education respect our roles, and access information directly from CMSMs/DSSABs. Service System Managers in turn will request necessary information from child care service providers.

Conclusion

The comments in this paper reflect the coordinated voices and opinions of the Children's Services Managers for NOSDA. We have shared in conversations, strengthen our partnerships by responding in one paper, and are working together to meet the needs of our Northern communities. We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the discussion of the Modernization of Child Care in Ontario.

District of Parry Sound



Social Services
Administration Board

September 20, 2012

Child Care Modernization
c/o Early Learning Division
Ministry of Education
900 Bay Street
24th Floor Mowat Block
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

Re: Feedback on the *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario* discussion paper

Please find enclosed comments pertaining to the *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario* discussion paper. These comments have been submitted on behalf of the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA), Children's Services Managers.

Should you have any questions or require further information, please don't hesitate to contact the undersigned at (705) 746-7777 ext. 238.

Thank you for taking the time to review our feedback.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized loop followed by a horizontal line that ends in a small flourish.

Ms. Janet Patterson, CAO
On behalf of the Children's Services Managers for NOSDA