

MODERNIZING C

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
A Vision for Child Care in Toronto	3
Child Care in Toronto	4
Consultation Process and Parent Survey	4
SERVICE SYSTEM ROLE	5
KEY AREAS OF THE DISCUSSION PAPER	7
Operating Funding Formula	7
Capital Funding Priorities	9
Quality Programs.....	11
Modernized Legislative and Regulatory Framework.....	12
Support for Accountability and Capacity-Building.....	15
FINAL COMMENTS	16

APPENDIX A – COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS

APPENDIX B – TORONTO CHILD CARE SERVICE PLAN 2010-2014

INTRODUCTION

Child Care in Toronto

The child care system in Toronto is the second largest in Canada (behind the Province of Quebec). The system includes over 53,000 licensed spaces located in over 900 child care centres, of which more than 600 have a service contract with the City of Toronto to provide child care to families in receipt of fee subsidy. Licensed home child care agencies manage approximately 3,400 spaces in 974 private homes. The 24,000 fee subsidies available in Toronto, however, only allow 28 per cent of families with the lowest incomes to access a child care fee subsidy, and there is a waiting list of over 21,000 for fee subsidy. Thirty-two per cent of children in Toronto live under Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO), compared to 19 per cent in the rest of the Greater Toronto Area, making affordability of child care a key issue.

Child care operators in Toronto, as in the rest of the province, are facing challenges as FDK implementation adversely impacts the financial viability of many centres. Recently announced one-time provincial investments will assist service system managers with capital and transitional resources required to transition the service system to one focused on caring for younger children. Additional policy and legislative resources are required to complete the transition and to ensure that the system remains stable and accessible in perpetuity.

Consultation Process and Parent Survey

In preparing this response, the City of Toronto has drawn on the significant expertise available through child care providers, registered early childhood educators, and child care advocates in Toronto.

Seven external consultation sessions were held with 142 participants. External sessions included meetings of District Child Care Advisory Groups and with the committees of the Toronto Child and Family Network (Early Learning and Care, Early Identification and Intervention, Family Support, Health, and Aboriginal and French-Language groups). An additional six sessions were held with Toronto Children's Services front-line and management staff, which were attended by 112 people and an additional 68 responses were received from municipal staff in directly operated child care centres. Findings from these discussions informed recommendations included in this submission.

Finally, Children's Services promoted an online survey that asked for parent input in key areas of interest. Responses were received from 352 parents, 90 per cent of which were from parents currently using child care. Parents identified a number of care arrangements that they used either currently or in the past, including before- and after-school programs, private nannies, parent co-ops, centre and home-based care, and the use of family members. In looking for child care, 82 per cent of respondents indicated that the cost of care was too high and 77 per cent indicated that the waiting list for a child care space was too long.

When asked for their thoughts on what would help parents find quality child care, a majority of parents indicated that they could use more information as many of the respondents relied on word of mouth to find care. Suggestions included information boards in hospitals, schools, and community centres, as well as lists of all the programs that are available and how to apply for them. Parents agreed that quality ratings should be publicly available.

Asked for suggestions that would improve the overall quality of child care, parents strongly responded that the cost of child care is unaffordable and that the lack of access to space and subsidies in Toronto are major barriers that are causing problems. Many parents had stories of long periods of time spent on waiting lists, and of struggling to pay the cost of care. With respect to costs, many parents recognized that child care operators are not sufficiently funded to provide affordable care. In terms of program quality, many parents clearly valued the staff in their child care centres and suggested that staff could be better paid and provided with more training opportunities in order to improve the quality of programs. Higher staff to child ratios were also preferred by some parents.

Findings from the consultation process have informed this submission. Parents' desires for information on all the programs available could be addressed by better co-ordination of all the early learning opportunities that exist. Parents' concerns with respect to affordability and access to spaces are important issues that require additional resources. However, these can also begin to be addressed by a base funding model and clearer capital planning roles as recommended in the body of this submission. Parental awareness and use of quality ratings confirms that the Toronto Operating Criteria is a useful tool that might be valued by parents in the rest of the province. A recommendation to this effect is also included. Finally, the City of Toronto agrees that training opportunities and requirements for registered early childhood educators should be formalized and improved.

SERVICE SYSTEM ROLE

Recommendations

- Clearly endorse the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) role as the service system manager, and as the stakeholder that can best balance a system-wide perspective with child care needs at the operational level. Embed this role in policy

In addition to service system planning, Toronto's role as CMSM for child care includes managing fee subsidies, service agreements and supports for children with special needs. Priorities and directions in these areas are outlined in the Council-approved Child Care Service Plan 2010-2014, attached as Appendix B

www.toronto.ca/children/pdf/serv_plan_2010/servplan_2010.pdf

Municipalities are also planners and managers of services for children other than child care, including parks and recreation, public health, library and other programs. With a single governance structure and the local authority to drive changes, municipalities are well-positioned to advance the integration of services at the local level. The modernization of child care, FDK, and other early learning opportunities should make full use of the funding, management and planning capacities that municipalities already possess.

Feedback from consultation sessions endorsed the City's role as service system manager for child care in Toronto, and recognized the City's expertise in the planning of child care services and in identifying and addressing needs at the local level. At the same time, creating a cohesive policy framework requires that partnerships with school boards and other community collaborators be maintained and strengthened with roles and responsibilities clearly established. The City regularly engages stakeholders, including the boards of education, in its service planning and implementation activities.

Specifically, the City of Toronto recommends that the CMSM role and accountability structure be embedded throughout all Ministry of Education school board memos and policy directives related to early learning and care. The role of the CMSM in the discussion paper could have been stronger as it relates to system planning, providing information to parents, collecting data, communicating with operators, and quality assurance. In addition, in order to effectively plan the development of the child care system at the local level, it is recommended that CMSMs be transferred control of child care licensing. Alternatively, the approval from CMSMs could be included as a required step in the licensing process, as is the case with other municipal departments (Planning, Building, Public Health) to ensure that growth in the system is directed to address access.

The Ministry of Education's priority should be on building CMSM capacity where it is needed. The recommendations contained in this response would strengthen the City's (and other CMSMs') ability to manage the child care system within provincial guidelines in a locally responsive way.

CMSMs also ensure that the needs of Aboriginal and Francophone communities are taken into account when planning services. These communities are recognized as unique in Toronto and as such dedicated committees have been established to seek advice on planning for their unique needs. Toronto encourages ongoing commitments to both of these communities.

Quality Programs

Recommendations

- Province-wide quality assurance guidelines should be in place. The City of Toronto's Operating Criteria, as a reliable and validated tool, could be the base for such a program. The application of the tool and reporting of results should remain a CMSM responsibility
- Explore mandatory early identification tools in child care settings
- Promote ELECT as a consistent curriculum guide across the province
- Allow programming, planning and professional development time for Registered Early Childhood Educators as a necessary input to high-quality programs.

Quality in child care has long been a priority for child care operators in Toronto. As the province looks to develop mandatory provincial program guidelines, it is encouraged to look to the practices already in use in Toronto.

The City of Toronto's quality assurance tool (Toronto's Operating Criteria) has been endorsed as a valid and reliable measure of quality in preschool child care settings and is currently being validated for infant and toddler age groups. It has also been found to be cost-efficient to administer, costing only five cents per day, per space. In fact, parts of the City of Toronto's quality assurance system are already being adopted in other Ontario jurisdictions such as Peel and Thunder Bay. Interest has also been received from jurisdictions outside of Ontario.

In response to the discussion paper question about what resources on program quality the government could develop, the Province is encouraged to work with Toronto to incorporate the Operating Criteria into a province-wide quality standard. The Criteria could contribute to better outcomes for children across Ontario. CMSMs would administer the quality assurance process within provincial guidelines. Assessments form only one part of a strategy to build capacity. Municipal staff follow up with programs to provide advice on how to meet the various quality requirements which, in Toronto, include criteria for all age groups, playgrounds, nutrition, administration, and financial management. Assessments inform training needs and help establish best practices. Scores related to a child care centre's activities, learning, health, safety, adult/child interactions and nutrition are posted online as a resource for parents and incentive for operators to improve.

In addition to the Operating Criteria, other quality improvement initiatives are being moved forward in Toronto. Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) is a quality framework being promoted in child care and broader early learning programs through the Toronto Child and Family Network. With respect to the discussion paper question about how provincial program guidelines can support program quality, with the development of ELECT as a province-wide framework, there is no need to create a new one. Participants in the consultation sessions supported ELECT as a valuable resource that programs can use to improve quality, but also advised that resources are needed to achieve higher levels of quality. For example, following the model in place for kindergarten teachers, Registered Early Childhood Educators need planning and professional development time to effectively administer high quality programming. There is a stated need for ongoing and accessible

training and professional development opportunities in French. Program quality and consistency between school and child care settings could also benefit from ongoing joint training opportunities for teachers and Registered Early Childhood Educators.

The Quality Programs section of the discussion paper also mentions reviewing elements of the special needs resourcing program. Many operators indicated that it is becoming increasingly difficult under the existing funding model to provide sufficient care to all children with special needs. Operators of both child care centres and home child care programs have identified that more resources are needed to support the unique needs of children with special needs, and that these resources are vital to maintaining quality programs.

As child care increasingly focuses on serving younger children, this is a good time to introduce mandatory early identification tools in child care. Toronto will continue to support a broad definition of special needs and provide support to a wide range of children. A review of Children's Services' Every Child Belongs policy is currently being conducted to reassess how the service is working, what the gaps are, how they can be met, and how the policy should be amended. Findings from this review could be used to inform special needs resourcing models across the province.

Modernized Legislative and Regulatory Framework

Recommendations

- Review the Day Nurseries Act and apply research and best practices for a modernized Act that better aligns child care with Full-Day Kindergarten, streamlines regulatory
- Work with municipalities and school boards to ensure provision of a nutritious lunch to

The goals of this review should be to align child care with FDK and facilitate the shift to serving younger children, normalize interpretations of certain parts of the DNA across the province, and streamline policy and procedure requirements. Toronto Children's Services has previously

The child care system is transitioning as a result of FDK to meet the needs of younger children, with a corresponding increase in the cost of care by upwards of 10 per cent. Efficiencies must be found within the system to help maintain affordability for those families not eligible for child care fee subsidies.

Guidelines governing the provision of before and after school care for those in FDK allow before- and after-school program operators to include the cost of a bagged lunch in their per diems, but children are intended to be the responsibility of the school and the board during the school day, which includes the lunch period. This is the type of policy issue that is forgotten without clearly defined roles. As a result, kindergarten aged students do not receive a hot lunch while older age groups continue to be supplied with one through their child care program. Instead the younger children are receiving five snacks per day; these resources should be rationalized to include a lunch.

Public entities should work together to find solutions to these issues as good nutrition is critical to children's learning. Over the next two years, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, CMSMs and school boards work together to ensure that a financial structure is in place to support proper nutrition for children of all ages. On an interim basis, the City is considering providing grants to support the costs of bagged lunches, to allow time for a permanent solution to be found.

With respect to the discussion paper question on how the government can foster quality in informal home-based child care, it is important that the informal/unlicensed sector not be promoted. Informal care exists primarily because the licensed system is under resourced. Respondents to the parent survey strongly indicated (77 per cent) that there is a long waiting list to get a child care space. While it is important to stabilize the existing child care system, the expansion of spaces and subsidies will need to be addressed in the future given the small number of children currently being served. Toronto's preference continues to be for licensed, high quality care.

The discussion paper proposal to create a registry of informal/unregulated caregivers could cause confusion for parents who might believe such caregivers have been endorsed by the government. Instead of approaching this issue through the child care system, Family Support programs currently provide this function. Family Support programs have experience engaging and providing advice to informal caregivers, and they form part of the integrated child care system. However, the success of these programs will require inter-ministerial cooperation, as Family Support programming remains under the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

Implementation of the City of Toronto's quality assessment tool, as discussed in the previous section, could result in significant efficiencies in the child care system, including fewer licensing visits. Quality assessments and supports can augment licensing and promote quality environments for all children in Ontario. In this scenario, the emphasis shifts from annual policy and procedure reviews to recognizing core requirements and focusing on staff-child

as a Community Integration Leader by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, this important work will continue. The further development of this concept is essential to ensure that families have the services they need, including potentially providing greater access to Family Support programs by informal caregivers. Better integration of the early learning sector may require that the responsibility for disparate programs (such as Ontario Early Years Centres; parenting supports; data analysis functions, and others) be transferred to the Ministry of Education and managed by service system managers. Funding should come to municipalities through a consolidated funding envelope.

The Province is also encouraged to consider how other provincial policy and program changes affect the child care system. For example, the Ministry of Community and Social Services/Ministry of Children and Youth Services has made a policy change related to the mandate of child protection agencies to help children avoid foster care and maintain family unification. The change has led to an increased number of requests for priority access to the subsidized child care system, placing additional pressure on the system in Toronto. This results in funding not being allocated to families who have been waiting on the first-come first-served waiting list. Options for alleviating this pressure on the child care system needs to be addressed.

Support for Accountability and Capacity-Building

Recommendations:

- Recognize and build on the extensive data available at the municipal level.
- Consolidate data collection functions that are currently housed outside of the City (i.e. Data Analysis Coordinators) to strengthen local data collection and decision-making. These resources should be used to build CMSM capacity where it is needed.
- Provide an Aboriginal data collection strategy.
- Mandate the school board role in local networks, such as the Toronto Child and Family Network, to promote planning and capacity-building processes that include boards, CMSMs, and the broader community. School board representation should involve senior board leaders.

The City of Toronto has a sophisticated information management system that informs resource allocation, ensures accountability and advances quality. Several accountability tools and processes are already in place at the local level. All of these are functions that require local data collection and analysis.

Toronto Children's Services works closely with other City divisions to share and analyze trends and display data. Local data collection should be strengthened by the consolidation of data collection functions within municipalities, including Data Analysis Coordinators (DACs) that are currently housed outside of the City. While DACs are valuable and a number of organizations would like to increase their data analysis capacity, it is preferable for this function to be with service system managers than housed with a single operator. Municipal staff already have local knowledge of services, and better data could help further the development of the Toronto Child and Family Outcomes Framework, which will help programs achieve agreed-on

outcomes. Transferring the DACs would also enable other CMSMs to build their capacity for gathering and assessing data.

With respect to data collection and questions about what information should be collected, there is a clear need for more and better data on Aboriginal children and families. Census data has proven to be inadequate, meaning that challenges exist in planning services for these families. A province-wide strategy and understanding of data requirements and collection methods should be developed.

Capacity-building activities include improving coordination among all the sectors involved in providing services to children and families through the Toronto Child and Family Network, and partnering with colleges to provide training opportunities. The Child and Family Network brings together leaders from government and the community to enhance community engagement, organize and integrate services, improve outcomes and align policies and programs. The province should continue to recognize local planning networks that include the CMSM, school boards, and other community partners.

FINAL COMMENTS

In conclusion, the City of Toronto thanks the Province for the chance to contribute to the important work of modernizing child care. There are a number of actions the Ministry of Education can take to modernize child care services in Ontario.

First and foremost, there is a need for a cohesive policy framework that includes all of the early learning opportunities available to children in the province. CMSMs, school boards, and community partners currently form a fragmented system that is cumbersome t

