



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

SUBJECT: Overview of Ontario Guidelines for Early Learning Program Implementation

RECOMMENDATION

That this Committee recommends to Regional Council that this report be received for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On October 27, 2009, the Premier followed through on an election promise made in the fall of 2007 to implement the first phase of Ontario's plan for a province-wide Early Learning Program (ELP) for four and five-year-olds.
- The commitment includes \$200M in 2010 to support the first year of full-day early learning for 15% of Ontario's four and five-year old population and \$300M in 2011-12 for moderate expansion, with a goal of full implementation by 2015-16.
- The ELP model consists of a core component offered each day during instructional hours staffed by a Teacher and Early Childhood Educator (ECE) with an average class size of 26 and the availability of an extended day component for before and after school where viable. This will be led by ECE's on a fee for service basis.
- School boards have been provided their allocation based on projected enrolments and implementation guidelines requiring that Phase 1 school sites are provided to the Ministry of Education by November 30th.
- For the 2010 school year, the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) and the Niagara Catholic District School Board (NCDSB) have been allocated 25 and 14 classrooms respectively.
- French language school boards have been given an allocation, although it is uncertain as to the allocated number for Niagara's French language schools.
- School boards are required to collaborate with key stakeholders, including municipalities, on the selection process for the ELP classrooms according to provincial criteria including space availability, community need, stability of child care and early years programs and readiness to implement.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As noted in COM-10 2009 and COM-40 2009, financial impacts may be significant to child care costs with the loss of revenue and spaces associated with serving the four and five-year old market. This is due to cost blending strategies used by operators to offset actual costs of serving the zero to four age group and due to addressing wage parity with board hired Early Childhood Educators in the Early Learning Program.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Committee and Council with an update of Ontario's plan for implementation of full day early learning for four and five-year-olds.

BACKGROUND

On October 27, 2009, the Premier followed through on an election promise made in the fall of 2007 to implement the first phase of Ontario's plan for a province-wide Early Learning Program (ELP) for four and five-year-olds. The ELP is the core component of Dr. Charles Pascal's report *With Our Best Future in Mind* but not the complete vision put forth under that report. The government has committed \$200M in 2010 to support the first year of full-day early learning for up to 35,000 four and five-year-olds (15% of Ontario's Junior and Senior Kindergarten (JK/SK) population). The investment will grow to \$300M in 2011-12 to expand the full-day program to approximately 20% of the JK/SK population with goal of having it fully implemented in all schools by 2015-16.

The Premier made clear that Ontario's economic constraints limit the initial implementation of the creation of full-day JK/SK programs. He also made it clear that the Province is committed to a long-term vision, as laid out by Dr. Pascal, which is to have a fully integrated, high quality system of early learning and care services for all children from birth to age 12. However, as noted in COM 10-2009 and COM 40-2009, implementing only full-day learning will have an impact on the stability of child care spaces in terms of sustaining child care spaces where the ELP will operate. There is also the risk for higher daily per diems (increased cost to parents) associated with providing child care to younger age groups. Having a good understanding of these risks was precisely the reason that Niagara demonstrated leadership over the last two years around full-day learning implications and took the bold position, supported by Committee and Council and endorsed by Early Years Niagara Planning Council, to position Niagara as a community to pilot the full report recommendations.

REPORT

Details of the Early Learning Program (ELP) implementation and model are as follows:

- Phased in approach targeting 15% of the four and five-year old population in the first year, expansion to 20% of the same population in the second year with full implementation by 2015-16.
- The general model will have roughly 26 students per classroom with both a full-time kindergarten teacher and a full-time ECE.
- The new program will only operate on the 10-month school year.
- The ELP consists of a core component offered each school day during the hours of the instruction program (e.g. 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.) led by an educator team consisting of a certified teacher and a registered ECE. An extended day component that will be available before and after school (e.g. 7:00-9:00 am and 3:30 to 6:00 pm) where a viable program can be offered led by the ECE's as a fee for service.
- Board-hired ECE's working in the ELP and extended-day program will be paid at a projected rate of \$19.48 and 24.42% benefits (equivalent to \$24.24 per hour).
- Specific schools to house the full-day programming will be determined by individual school boards, working in partnership with their municipalities. The program will initially be targeted to schools that do not require capital investments to build new facilities, areas without existing school-based child care programs, and neighbourhoods with a high percentage of at-risk students.

As the ELP is a school-based initiative, school boards have a lead role in achieving the Province's vision for early learning. Successful implementation of the ELP requires that school boards undertake a collaborative planning and implementation approach. Although there has been mention that stabilization dollars will be available to the child care sector to support the transition, no details have been provided to date.

Criteria for Selection

Boards of education have received preliminary information to assist with their plans for the ELP in 2010-11 including the number of classrooms, based on each board's projected enrolment that would be allocated to each board in the Province for phase 1, 2010-11 school year and phase 2, for the 2011-12 school year. Allocations for each of Niagara's four school boards are based on 15% of projected enrolment in 2010 as follows:

School Board	2010-11		2011-12**
	Classrooms	Projected Funding*	Classrooms
District School Board of Niagara	25	\$2,488,077	+11
Niagara Catholic District School Board	14	\$1,405,335	+7
CSD due Centre Sud-Ouest	8	\$ 803,048	+3
CSD catholique du Sud-Ouest	13	\$1,304,954	+6

Note : *Projected funding is based on projected enrollment ; actual funding will reflect actual enrollment as of September 2010. **2011-12 indicates *additional* classrooms.

In prioritizing schools for the ELP in 2010-11, boards are expected to meet two requirements:

- Selected schools should be where all JK/SK classes in 2010-11 can comply with the new ELP model. This will avoid situations where two or more JK/SK program models are offered by a single school.
- The ELP classroom opened in 2010-11 should be new full-day JK/SK classrooms. Boards that currently offer full day JK/SK program in some schools are expected to introduce the ELP in other schools.

In addition to the above criteria, the Ministry of Education set out the following guidelines:

- *Availability of Space:* Priority should be given to schools that have space for ELP in 2010 without requiring capital for construction or renovation. Recommended schools must remain open over the next five years.
- *Community Need:* For 2010, one of the goals of the ELP is to locate a portion of the ELP spaces in schools that serve low income neighbourhoods.
- *Minimal Impact on Existing Child Care and Early Years Services:* Boards should take into account local availability of licensed child care and determine how the community is best served by locating ELP's in schools with existing child care, near existing child care or where no child care is currently available for four and five year olds.
- *Student Achievement:* Identify schools where students would benefit significantly from increased learning afforded by the ELP. This may include schools where many families struggle with poverty, language issues or other challenges or where student achievement is static.

- *Readiness to Implement:* Boards should assess the level of community and school readiness to support ELP implementation.

As part of the process, the boards have been asked to consult with their school communities and other key partners including coterminous boards, Best Start networks, and Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM). Boards must report back to the Ministry of Education by completing a template *Early Learning – Phase 1 School Selection* by November 30, 2009. The template requires that the boards identify the consultation that has taken place to select the schools for the ELP. This template will list the schools chosen for ELP according to the allocation and must be approved by the school board's Chair and Director of Education. The Ministry of Education expects to announce publically the selected locations in January 2010 in advance of the regular JK/SK parent registration cycle.

Niagara

In Niagara, DSBN and NCDSB immediately contacted the Niagara Region CMSM to set early dates for data and planning approaches that would be shared with the broader early years' community through the Early Years Planning Council. A similar collaboration for DSBN's 4 Parent and Family Literacy Centres was undertaken as a planning process. A planning session hosted by the Ministry of Education on November 3rd brought together boards of education and municipalities to discuss implementation process. French school boards were not in attendance. Niagara proved once again to be a leader in best practices and collaborative approaches.

With the specific criteria in mind, it will be difficult for ELP classrooms to be chosen that will not directly impact child care. With nearly 54% of Niagara's child care located in schools and over 75% within 1 km of a school, it will be difficult in both phase 1 and phase 2 to not have a loss of child care spaces in the four and five-year-old age group, and further systemic impacts to other licensed spaces. The ability of child care operators to re-license for younger aged children is restricted by the available population of children zero to four years of age, competition for the same population, and capital investment to meet *Day Nurseries Act* requirements that can be significant in order to provide suitable space. As a result, child care spaces may be lost or rates to parents for younger aged children may increase.

At the same time, it is important to note that Niagara has over 3,000 school aged spaces (6-12 years of age) located in schools, many of which are where the provision of service is balanced with a half-day four and five-year-old program. In particular, the YMCA is the largest and most extensive provider of this exact model. It is also a model that was developed under Best Start leaving these programs particularly exposed with the implementation and expansion of ELP. More specifically, where a child care operator has been successful in operating a viable half-day program with before and after school care may, in fact, clearly identify the locations where the school boards would be successful with an ELP that includes the extended day. At the same time, where the extended day portion of the ELP would not be viable, it is safe to assume that an operator may have difficulty continuing to operate a before and after school program when the half-day

revenue associated with the half-day JK/SK traditional program is no longer available. As a result, before and after school, professional development day and holiday coverage may not be available, leaving families without an option for child care at their school location.

A proposed wage for board-hired ECE's working in the ELP is \$19.48 per hour plus 24.42% benefits (equal to \$24.24 per hour) which will put pressure on the low rates that current ECE's are paid. The average rate paid to ECE's in Niagara, including all subsidies, is approximately \$16.20 per hour (COM 50-2008). Therefore, the rate proposed for ELP ECE's is on average \$8.03 per hour more or an increase of 49.6%. Considering that the Province estimates that when ELP is fully implemented, it will employ upwards of 9,500 ECE's there will be recruitment and retention issues ahead for child care service providers. Wage parity is a critical component of operator stability and rates charged to parents as labour represents upwards of 80% of operator total expenditure.

It is important to note that Niagara fully recognizes the significant negative impact that implementation of full day learning for four and five-year-olds would have on child care without the benefit of creating new capacity through Best Start Child and Family Centres. Although it has been suggested that child care funding will be "freed up" with the migration of four and five-year olds to ELP, these funds are not easily identified or readily available, thereby making it difficult to consider them as sustainability funds. At the same time, considering the historical funding pressure that exists in child care today which continues to go unaddressed by the Province, the system is desperately in need of restoration funding.

Children's Services has worked closely with both the DSBN and the NCDSB on their process to select locations for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 ELP. Children's Services will be working on establishing a criteria and process to access any stabilization funding which becomes available and to determine the priority for allocating "freed up" funds. It is expected that priority will be given to maintaining high quality spaces where demand exists and which closely align with the vision of seamless service and parental choice. This will not be easy to achieve with the financial constraints that surround both child care and education as full day learning is implemented.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

Brian Hutchings
Commissioner, Community Services

Mike Trojan
Chief Administrative Officer