

Section Four: Community Consultation

Since June 2009, Regional staff have engaged early learning and child care service providers and partners in conversations about the Early Learning Advisor's report, *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario* and the implementation of the Early Learning Program.

Full-day kindergarten and the overall vision for early learning continues to be on the agenda of professional networking meetings and supported by the delivery of specially designed focus groups. Peel's early learning and child care service providers continue to receive ongoing communication through a variety of professional associations, meetings and information and feedback sessions.

With the release of the May 2010 *Child Care Stabilization Funding Guidelines: Addendum to 2010 Child Care Service System Guidelines*, Regional staff launched a number of community consultation sessions to inform the plan (Appendix I). The report was further informed by parents via an info-line based survey and Francophone child care service providers, community colleges and Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) through individual consultations and discussions. Detailed below is an executive summary of the consultation process results.

Pressures and Issues

Licensed Child Care Consultation

The consultation process produced common themes highlighted by clearly articulated reflections on the pressures and issues related to ELP implementation. Throughout the community consultation process, participants voiced a strong need to advocate for the stabilization of the child care system. Ongoing and adequate funding is required in order to re-engineer the 0-3.8 year-old child care system as the four- and five-year olds transition to the school boards.

The following provides a high level summary of the community consultation feedback according to MCYS' five guiding principles related to community planning.

1. Base planning first and foremost on the needs of families in the community.

Peel's vision for family-centered services remained at the core of each community consultation, as service providers expressed a commitment to deliver a range of high quality, inclusive and accessible child care options for children and families.

2. Support the transition of child care programs to a 0-4 focus.

Peel's early learning and child care service providers expressed a unified commitment to re-engineering existing services to better serve children and families. Participants agreed that a healthy child care system will ensure that children 0-3.8 years are developmentally prepared to successfully enter full-day kindergarten programs. However, the ability to successfully re-engineer the system presents complex challenges which require timely and sustainable resources. Full impact of

phase one full-day kindergarten remains unknown as occupancy rates evolve as the uptake of the program is realized over the coming months. Early estimates report centres may experience a 25-50% revenue loss due to the exit of four- and five-year olds. The ability to re-invent child care spaces is dependent on adequate operating and transitional funding including fee and wage subsidies.

- 3. Focus planning on solutions that do not require funding from the government.** Stabilization of the child care system is solely dependent on adequate transitional and operating funding. Lack of funding will result in decreased accessibility and availability of licensed child care for children and families.

To successfully re-engineer existing four- and five-year old spaces, adequate funding is required in order to mitigate fee increases. Increased fees coupled with an upward trend in low-income rates will dramatically impact the availability of subsidized child care spaces. Early learning and child care service providers will continue to advocate for adequate base funding to support the child care system.

Partnerships continue to play an important role in the ability of the child care system to mitigate the impact of ELP. Two of Peel's four school boards continue to build upon strong partnerships by committing to a third party service delivery model for the extended day program during the transitional period. This partnership illustrates a commitment to ensuring continuity for children and families.

- 4. Maintain accessibility and availability of licensed child care for children and families.**

Licensed child care service providers voiced a strong commitment to ensuring families have access to high quality early learning child care programs. This commitment will be strengthened by continued provincial investment to ensure service providers can deliver high quality, developmentally-appropriate programs. Accessibility remains a priority and service providers continue to offer choice through both centre-based and home child care programs.

Support for families of children with special needs was highlighted throughout the community consultation process. Service providers are extremely concerned that lack of adequate funding will result in diminished capacity. Reduction in services equates to less choice, access and opportunities for children with special needs. Less access and choice will further impact existing pressures and stressors on both the child and family. Children currently on waitlists may "age out" prior to receiving services thus missing a window of opportunity during key developmental periods. Future implementation of Child and Family Centres will help to alleviate such pressures as early identification and referral become a primary focus.

- 5. As much as possible, maintain parental choice in the child care system.**

Peel's licensed child care system offers an extensive range of programs for families and children. Peel's system of 440 licensed child care centres and 10 licensed home child care agencies ensure a high degree of parental choice. Home child care

offers increased flexibility to families and the impact on providers is significant and complex. As independent contractors, providers will experience financial loss as well as reduced capacity due to the limits under the Day Nurseries Act (DNA) that govern the number of children in each age group that a provider can serve.

Re-engineering of the system without adequate funding will result in diminished service capacity and significantly reduce parental choice. In order to maintain a flexible and responsive service system Peel's providers will continue to advocate for ongoing stabilization funding. With the loss of four- and five-year olds and associated revenue, programs will no longer be able to offset the costs of operating programs for infant and toddlers.

Statistics clearly demonstrate the need to increase investment in programs and services for children 0-4 years old. In 2006, Peel was reported to have 75,580 children under the age of 4.

Children in Peel: Population by Age (2006 census)

Age	Brampton	Caledon	Mississauga	Peel
Under 1 year	6,340	660	7,835	14,835
1 year	6,445	715	7,920	15,080
2 years	6,590	715	8,100	15,400
3 years	6,355	795	7,915	15,070
4 years	6,470	775	7,960	15,205
5 years	6,435	805	8,225	15,465
6 years	6,750	885	8,635	16,265
7 years	6,490	845	8,595	15,925
8 years	6,695	865	9,055	16,615
9 years	6,775	885	9,330	16,985
10 years	7,075	920	9,700	17,695
11 years	6,820	855	9,855	17,535
12 years	6,795	910	9,935	17,640

Parent Consultation

Through this consultation process, parents expressed their greatest barrier in obtaining programs and services for their families includes:

- Accessibility (i.e. centre hours, location and transportation)
- Fees
- Program vacancies
- Subsidy waitlist
- Language barriers (i.e. limited French programming)

Parents stated that they would like to see increased service provision in the following areas:

- Licensed child care spaces for infants
- Decreased wait lists
- Reduced fees
- Special needs resourcing (i.e. occupational and speech therapy and autism supports)
- Summer programs
- Newcomer programs

Families of children with special needs indicated that they require:

- Increased funding for special needs supports and care
- Increased service capacity for special needs resourcing

Special Needs Resourcing Agencies Consultation

As of May 31, 2010, the Special Needs Resourcing Agencies in Peel reported that they currently serve 500 children with special needs (Appendix H). Agencies indicated that there are pressures and issues related to the Early Learning Program implementation, specifically around the families' ability to make choices and access family-centered services to meet their needs (i.e. location and hours). Early identification and accessible service coordination is imperative for successful transitions and integration for children and families. Therefore, the Special Needs Resourcing Agencies require continual support in the areas of funding, staffing and increased service capacity for special needs resourcing.

Community Solutions

Phase One implementation of full-day kindergarten presents significant challenges. Peel's ability to respond to these challenges will be strengthened by the existing network of local partnerships with boards of education, early learning and care service providers and community support agencies.

Local solutions were realized in the community consultations and include:

Working Together

- *Key Stakeholders Meetings*

Collaborative partnerships among the Peel District School Board, Dufferin-Peel Catholic School Board, the Region of Peel and early learning and child care service providers continue to be enhanced through networking and dialogue. Both school boards have demonstrated a commitment to working with early learning and child care service providers in delivery of the extended day program.

- *Connecting with Local Community Colleges*

To mitigate concerns regarding a lack of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), Humber and Sheridan Colleges will be engaged in ongoing communication with school boards and the early learning and child care system regarding Early Childhood Education program enrolment and placement opportunities.

Together the colleges anticipate an annual enrolment of 885 students, with an anticipated graduation rate of about 70%. Recruitment and retention of ECEs will remain an ongoing agenda item at monthly community meetings.

Service providers report that retention of ECEs will become a compounded pressure over the next five years as many operators anticipate a reduced staffing complement as experienced ECEs transition to school board positions. Service providers anticipate that parent fees will increase in order to offer attractive salary and benefit packages to ECEs. Community colleges report that current enrolment levels will support the recruitment of Early Childhood Educators.

- *Connecting with Parks and Recreation Departments*

A working group has been formed and includes Parks and Recreation staff from the City of Brampton, Town of Caledon and City of Mississauga. In consultation with Regional staff, this group is collaborating and discussing opportunities to enhance programs and services for children with special needs and summer program opportunities for four- and five-year olds.

Supporting Children with Special Needs

Special Needs Resource Agencies report a continued willingness to provide support to children within the school system. Continued conversations between school boards and special needs resource agencies will be solution-focused as children transition into the full-day kindergarten program. The child care system will continue to build partnerships and share information between teachers and administrators prior to children transitioning into kindergarten.

Building on Best Start Research

Two years of research is currently being correlated and will be presented to the early learning community in the fall of 2010. This research will report on the integrated sites' movement towards integration and a look forward to how the research will help inform full-day kindergarten and the full vision of *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*. A proposal to extend the research and evaluation project is being discussed, as it provides two years of invaluable data on staff teams, parents and children.

Strengthening Services for Children and Families

Based on a strong history of collaborative partnerships and innovative services, Peel is well positioned to pilot the implementation of Child and Family Centres. Success of this initiative would be ensured if plans build upon the existing local resources and expertise, including the wide range of programs and services that are clearly connected in communities both locally and provincially. Leadership will be provided by the Region's Human and Health Services Departments in collaboration with the Best Start Network, school boards and early learning and child care service providers in the re-engineering of existing services into a network of Child and Family Centres.

Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) will play an integral role in the planning and implementation of Child and Family Centres. The centres will focus on the development and co-ordination of services for children and families as currently being delivered in communities across Ontario.

The OEYC programs are a gateway to community supports and social service programs. Over the past seven years, OEYCs have developed a strong identity and presence in local communities. They have successfully established multi-generational client relationships and are well-known for educating parents and other service consumers on the value of early learning. The network of centres are flexible and responsive across a wide range of communities from rural to urban and deliver universal services tailored to meet the needs of specific populations.