

For Information

DATE: October 22, 2009

REPORT TITLE: **EARLY LEARNING AND CARE IN ONTARIO**

FROM: Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services

OBJECTIVE

To provide Regional Council with an update on the Report to the Premier by the Special Advisor on Early Learning Dr. Charles E. Pascal, "*With Our Best Future in Mind; Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*".

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Establishing a strong foundation in the early years, and building on it, is the single-most powerful key to Ontario's social and economic future.
- The Region of Peel, Human Services Department is well positioned and ready to lead the transformation of service delivery for our youngest learners, in partnership with local boards of education and community Best Start partners.
- The Premier is expected to announce his plan for implementation in October 2009, with gradual implementation projected to begin in September 2010.
- Jim Grieve, Director, Peel District School Board, has been appointed Assistant Deputy Minister with responsibility for planning and implementing full-day learning for four and five year-olds, as recommended by early learning adviser Charles Pascal.

DISCUSSION**1. Background**

In November 2007, Premier Dalton McGuinty announced that the Ontario government will implement and invest in full day learning for four and five year olds. Dr. Charles Pascal was appointed as the Early Learning Advisor by the Premier to advise him and his government on how best to implement full day learning for this age group; how to reinvest and redirect resources from this initiative; and how to build on the success of Ontario's Best Start strategy. On June 15, 2009, Dr. Charles Pascal submitted his report, "*With Our Best Future in Mind; Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*", which recommends a new child and family service system for Ontario. This system is to be implemented over the next three years and when fully implemented, it will bridge the gap between the education system and child care, provide a wider range of options and choices and make early years education more accessible to all families in Ontario.

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This new, comprehensive and transformational early learning plan contains 20 recommendations, which if implemented would be phased-in over the next three years to enhance the services available to families and children in Ontario. The report identifies two significant partners, Municipal authorities and the Ministry of Education as “leaders among leaders” responsible for the governance of the whole child and family service system. The main elements of this new system are:

- A new system for children birth to 12 that would be coordinated in a new *Early Years Division* led by the Ministry of Education. This new division would be directly accountable for the delivery of early learning and care programs and after-school programming; responsible for a new *Early Years Policy Framework*, which includes legislative requirements, policy, funding and accountability.
- Children birth to three years and eight months of age would continue to be served in the municipality managed system (Region) through a network of Best Start Child and Family Centres, which would include prenatal service, child care, family resource and early intervention services. Municipalities will have a significant role working with school boards and Best Start partners in developing Early Years Service Plans by bringing together existing providers for multi-service hubs.
- School boards would directly operate programs for children aged four to twelve years: a new Early Learning Program (the new full day for four and five year olds); the Extended Day Primary program (six to eight years) and after-school programming (nine to twelve years), see Appendix I.
- Enhanced parental leave by 2020 to include 400 days of paid parental leave after the birth or adoption of a child, six weeks of leave designated for the father or non-birthing parent, expanded coverage for self-employed parents, flexibility for parents to return to work part-time and ten days of job-protected annual leave for parents of children under twelve.

The report recommends that the province invest resources equitably across all regions and school boards. Funding for Best Start Child and Family Centres would largely be found in the re-engineering and consolidation of existing programs and resources. Provincial funds should be transferred to municipal authorities in a single, consolidated envelop and include all existing transfers. Federal funding that now supports Best Start child care spaces is scheduled to end in early 2010. The report recommends that the Province should secure continued support from the federal government for the original Best Start funding base or replace federal funding with provincial resources to ensure stability. The province reports that there will be a \$63.5 million shortfall in federal funding beginning in 2010 to 2011. As a result, Peel would lose \$4,067,619 on an ongoing basis. To mitigate this impact, Peel will receive a one-time allocation of \$1,153,026 provincial funding for 2010 to 2011.

The report recognizes that Ontario children deserve the best future and recommends that every child be entitled to attend two years of a full day Early Learning program. This program would provide a single early learning program where children’s participation would be by parental choice, with parents having the option of a half, full (schools hours), or fee-based extended day of programming. Parents who choose an extended day program would be charged a fee, with subsidies available to families who qualify.

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The report recommends that the Province modify child care fee subsidy eligibility to offer flexible enrolment options and remove parents' work requirement for eligibility so that more children can benefit. The full day learning program would be a year round program and would be delivered by a blended staffing model including Early Childhood Educators, school board Kindergarten teachers and Educational Assistants.

2. Regional Position

Staff supports the report's recommendation that Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) be responsible for local service planning for a child and family system for children, from birth to age 12, acknowledging the expertise and experience CMSMs bring to the table. The Region of Peel has demonstrated its success in engaging the community, planning, implementing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating programs within budget.

Current roles and responsibilities of the Human Services Department include: service system manager, multi-site operator and special services provider. Therefore, staff has a unique perspective on the upcoming changes. The Premier has stated his intent to begin the implementation of full day learning to approximately 250,000 four and five year old children in 2010. This initiative may have a significant impact on the Region's 12 Learn.Play.Care (LPC) Child Care Centres, as close to 25 percent of the LPC enrolment is in the kindergarten age group.

The potential impact to the entire early learning and child care service system is dependent on the Premier's plan. In anticipation of this plan, Regional staff have formed an internal Impact Planning Team, which is actively engaging the community in discussions about the report and what it means to Peel. This team has formed a Cost Analysis Working Group to examine the impact of changes to the service delivery models for Regional Learn.Play.Care Centres and community based child care programs.

In response to the report the Human Services Department has proactively engaged community feedback, which informed Peel's response to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) Central West Regional office. This feedback reflected a community view of opportunities and challenges, key success factors and overall implementation recommendations. Peel has also responded to the report through the development of a Peel Partnership led by David Szwarc and Jim Grieve, Director Peel District School Board bringing together the Region and many Best Start Network partners including school boards, early learning, child care and service providers to plan for the gradual implementation of the recommendations across Peel in 2010.

The report does recommend schools as a preferred location for Best Start Child and Family Centres; however, states it is essential to protect all space currently used by child care and other providers in schools. It is essential that this space be protected for the continued operation of early years programming and the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres. Currently there is not enough space in Peel's public schools.

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3. Next Steps

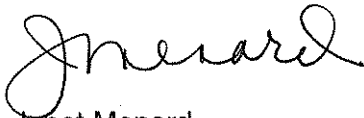
The Region of Peel is well positioned to act on the recommendation for Full Day Learning as our Peel Best Start Research and Evaluation Project provides an excellent starting point for the implementation and monitoring of *"With Our Best Future in Mind; Implementing Early Learning in Ontario."*

A Visioning Day held on October 20th, co-hosted by David Szwarc and Jim Grieve, will provide an opportunity to reflect on the announced implementation plan, envision the end state in Peel and begin to structure the work that will be required.

In anticipation of this new future of early learning, Peel will showcase the Best Start sites at the November 2, 2009, Peel Best Start Research and Evaluation Project Presentation by Dr. Janette Pelletier. Dr. Pelletier will provide an overview of research results and offer valuable reflections on Peel's move towards integration and the impact on children, parents and blended early learning teams. This research is sure to act as a catalyst as Peel moves forward with the vision of Full Day Learning locally.

CONCLUSION

The Region of Peel Human Services Department anticipates the Premier's direction and is excited about this report because it fully supports a transformation of the province's early learning and care system. Work is underway with the broader community to develop and implement this new model of child and family service system that meets the needs of Peel families while strengthening the current system of early learning and care.



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Commissioner of Human Services

Approved for Submission:



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c. Legislative Services

APPENDIX I

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE IN ONTARIO

Background – Lead Roles

Child Age	System Model	Lead
0 to 3.8 years	Best Start Child and Family Centres	Region
4 to 5 years	Early Learning Program	School Boards
6 to 8 years	Extended Day Primary Program	School Boards
9 to 12 years	After-school Program	School Boards