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DATE: March 15, 2010

REPORT TITLE: **IMPLEMENTING EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM**

FROM: Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services  
Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services  
David L. Mowat, MBChB, MPH, FRCPC, Medical Officer of Health

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the recommendations of the Early Learning Program be endorsed as set out in the report by the Commissioner of Human Services, Commissioner of Health Services and Medical Officer of Health, dated March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010, titled “Implementing Early Learning Program”;**

**And further, that the subject report be referred to the Inter Governmental Advisory Committee for development of an advocacy campaign for the Federal funding and adequate funding from the Province;**

**And further, that the Regional Chair write to the provincial Minister of Children and Youth Services (MCYS), commending the province on the announcement to fill the federal child care funding gap to help maintain current child care service levels.**

### **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- The provincial government’s Early Learning Advisor, Dr. Charles Pascal, has made transformational recommendations regarding early learning to the Premier.
- The Premier has decided that the implementation phase of the new Early Learning Program be initiated with the transfer of 4 and 5 year olds to the education system in September 2010.
- Over the next five years implementation of full day early learning through schools will result in a comprehensive re-tooling of services for children ages 0 – 3.8 years.
- The Ministry of Education is the lead on the Early Learning Program in schools and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) has responsibility for the early learning and child care service system.
- The Early Learning Program will require high level inter-departmental collaboration resulting in a complete transformation of the Early Learning and Child Care System. It will also directly impact service delivery for Health (Public Health) and Human Service Depts.
- As Service System Manager, the Region of Peel is committed to advocating for funding and resources required for the transformation of the Early Learning and Child Care System.
- The 2010-11 Provincial budget included reinstatement of \$63.5 million in annual child care funding to replace discontinued federal funding. Based on the approved 2010 budget, this will result in a year end surplus of \$2.2 million. Staff will bring back a separate report that will outline financial and service level strategies for 2010.

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### DISCUSSION

#### 1. Background

In November 2007, Premier McGuinty asked Dr. Charles Pascal, the government's Early Learning Advisor, to recommend the best way to implement full day learning for four and five year olds in Ontario. In June 2009, Dr. Pascal delivered his report titled "*With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*" outlining 20 recommendations on how to improve education for children up to age twelve.

On October 26, 2009, Premier Dalton McGuinty announced that as a first step toward implementing the full vision, Ontario would start phasing in full day early learning for four and five year olds beginning in September 2010 reaching full implementation by 2016. This initiative supports the province's plan to build a stronger school system, a well-educated workforce and supports Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The commitment includes an investment of \$500M over two years, with \$200M allocated in 2010 - 2011. Phase One represents fifteen per cent of eligible four and five year olds, (approximately 35,000 Ontario children), which will result in 3,978 four and five year olds attending a full day early learning program at 36 schools in Peel; 20 Peel District School Board and 16 Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board. There will be no Early Learning Programs in 2010 in Peel's French Language schools.

School boards were asked to work collaboratively, with Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) to recommend schools based on available space, impact on existing child care, and local demographics and needs. Phase One sites are now confirmed by the Ministry of Education, and boards are expected to submit their school sites for Phase Two by mid April 2010.

#### a) **Implementing Full Day Early Learning for Four and Five year olds**

Starting in September 2010, school boards will begin to provide four and five year olds with a full day early learning program consisting of a core program (for example, 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.), funded by the province and delivered during the instructional day by both an elementary teacher and a Registered Early Childhood Educator.

School sites will also offer an extended day program between the hours of 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. based on demand and viability. This program will be delivered by Registered Early Childhood Educators and operated on a cost recovery basis. Subsidies will be available for some families based on financial need. There is no information available at this time on the administration of the fee subsidy and how it will affect municipal delivery of child care fee subsidies.

#### b) **Impact of the Full Day Early Learning Program on the Early Learning and Child Care System**

The recent announcement through the 2010-11 Provincial budget, regarding the reinvestment of the Best Start funding will provide the continuation of existing service levels in the child care system. However, without MCYS funding to develop a transition plan to use new-found capacity to address unmet demand for 0-3 year olds, as four and five year olds exit the current early learning and child care system, there will be an immediate negative impact on service delivery and revenues. Immediate confirmation of adequate stabilization and capital funding from MCYS is

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essential to support the resulting transformation of the Early Learning and Child Care System for children 0 to 3.8 years.

In addition, there is also concern throughout the Early Learning and Child Care System that there will not be enough registered Early Childhood Educators to staff early learning centres due to recruitment of them by the school boards. It is estimated that a minimum 153 Registered Early Childhood Educators will be needed in Peel schools to support Phase One of the full day early learning program.

In response to these concerns, Regional staff initiated community consultations with early learning and child care service providers and continue to communicate regularly through the Success by 6 Peel, Best Start Network, ongoing meetings and e-bulletins. Staff also created a Cost Analysis Toolkit, an online workbook which allows service providers to assess the potential impact of full-day learning on their program. The toolkit provides an estimate of cost and revenue implications related to the potential replacement of their program for four and five year olds.

Currently there is a high level of concern among Early Learning and Child Care Service providers regarding lack of information and direction from MCYS. As a result, Regional staff and service providers are unable to move forward with re-engineering of the system. In response to these concerns, Regional staff is requesting that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services confirm:

- provision of adequate transitional capital and operating funds to increase service levels for children, 0 to age 3.8 years.
- reallocation of fee and wage subsidies from four and five year old programs to stabilize, operate and expand programs for children 0 to 3.8 years.
- that children with special needs receive a seamless continuum of resources and services, all year long.
- the municipality, as the administrator of the fee subsidy system including the four and five year olds.

## 2. Future Implementation of Best Start Child and Family Centres

As part of the vision of *"With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario"*, one of the 20 recommendations includes the consolidation of early learning and child care services into Best Start Child and Family Centres. These centres would be located in or partnered with schools and provide flexible full day, full year, and part-time child care for children up to age four. They would be supported by parent fees and subsidies available for low income families. The centres would be a one-stop opportunity for pre and post natal supports, parenting resources and programs, playgroups, linkages to community resources, help with early identification and intervention for children with special needs and other early learning services.

Should the Best Start Child and Family Centres recommendation become an implementation priority, the Region would require confirmation of its role in the creation of Best Start Child and Family Centres. This initiative would require an interdepartmental approach from Health and Human Services Departments in collaboration with the Best Start Network, school boards and service providers to re-engineer existing services into a network of Best Start Child and Family Centres.

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### 3. Next Steps

Staff recommends that council refer the recommendations of this report to the Inter Governmental Advisory Committee for development of an advocacy campaign for adequate transitional funding to support the stabilization of the Early Learning and Child Care System.

In addition, Regional staff anticipate the release of the Transition Planning framework from the Province in Spring 2010. Staff is working with community partners, including school boards, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, Success by 6 Peel and the Best Start Network, to develop a Transition Plan to stabilize early learning and child care services for children 0 to 3.8 years old.

The Region is committed to working collaboratively to respond to provincial recommendations. Interdepartmentally the Directors of Children's Services Operations, Public Health, Service System Management, and Strategic Planning, Policy and Partnerships will develop structures to ensure successful service integration.

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

On August, 2009, MCYS announced that the available Best Start federal funding of \$63.5 million would end March 31, 2010. MCYS announced that Peel's funding reduction will be \$4,067,619. To assist municipalities to cope with the funding loss, the MCYS announced one time, \$18 million bridge funding. Peel's allocation from the bridge funding was announced at \$1,153,026, subject to legislative approval. Therefore, the net funding loss for Peel from April, 2010 to March, 2011 was projected at \$2,914,593. This represented a loss of approximately \$2.2 million for calendar 2010 April to December. To sustain the current service level, Council approved a withdrawal of \$2.2 million from Best Start Reserve (R1258) as part of the 2010 budget.

The recently announced 2010-11 Provincial budget included reinstatement of \$63.5 million in annual child care funding to replace discontinued federal funding. This represents a bold move for the province consistent with the high priority that they have placed on early learning and child care. The draw from the Best Start Reserve is no longer necessary and based on the approved 2010 budget; this will result in a year end surplus of \$2.2 million. Staff will bring back a separate report that will outline financial and service level strategies for 2010 as this funding also presents Peel with an opportunity to address other service gaps. As well, any future service level recommendations will be brought forward as part of the annual budget process.

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**CONCLUSION**

The Region of Peel fully supports the implementation of the Province's Early Learning Program as it is a critical step towards improving the outcomes of our youngest learners.

Regional staff is committed to working with the Ministry of Education and Peel school boards in the transition of early learning to the education system for 4 and 5 year olds. As well, as the Service System manager for Early Learning and Child Care in Peel, staff is responsible for working with community partners including school boards, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, service providers, Success by 6 Peel and the Best Start Network to develop a Transition plan to stabilize early learning and child care services for children, 0 to 3.8 years old.

Regional staff will continue to advocate with the Ministry of Child and Youth Services in support of service providers as they experience the largest transformation of early learning in the history of the Province. This includes provisions of adequate transitional capital and operating funding to stabilize the system and maintain service delivery for children 0-3.8 years old. At the same time the province is to be commended for filling the funding void created by the federal withdrawal of support for early learning and child care, thereby maintaining existing service levels.



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Commissioner of Human Services



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**Approved for Submission:**



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