



## **Moving Forward, Hand in Hand**

**Examining the impact that Full Day Kindergarten has had on the Early Learning and Child Care System in Ontario**

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## Introduction

OMSSA<sup>1</sup> believes that an integrated early learning and child care system is necessary and that it should build on, strengthen, and enhance the existing system of services for young children in Ontario's communities. The implementation of Full Day Kindergarten is a step in this direction. This step and the alignment of child care and education to the Ministry of Education helps move the system toward having a comprehensive policy orientation and shows the commitment by the provincial government to an integrated service system for all children – and one that establishes child care as a service of equal value to education in supporting the early childhood development and care needs of all children.

In March of 2009, OMSSA published a discussion paper called, "*Hand in hand: How the province and municipalities can create the best early learning and child care service system for Ontario*"<sup>2</sup>. This paper presented a blueprint for a quality early learning and child care service system that reflects the strengths and meets the needs of local communities across Ontario.

Since 2009 much has changed in the area of early learning and child care. We entered a period of transformation which started with the Provincial government receiving the June 2009 report "*With Our Best Future in Mind; Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*" submitted by the Special Advisor on Early Learning. This report provided a comprehensive action plan for developing a seamless and integrated system to support children from prenatal to 12 years and their families. The plan included Full Day Kindergarten, with a corresponding comprehensive child and family service system with child care as the foundation.

Building on the vision and principles presented in "*Hand in Hand*" OMSSA's new paper examines the impact that Full Day Kindergarten has had on the Early Learning and Child Care System in Ontario and identifies various "Quick Wins" that will stabilize and help keep the current system viable during this time of transition and change. In addition, it sets out longer term recommendations to address the needs of Ontario's Early Learning and Child Care System, in a spirit of collaboration between the provincial government and Ontario's municipal service managers.

While OMSSA supports the transition to Full Day Kindergarten across Ontario by 2014, the current implementation process is putting pressure and unsustainable strain on child care providers and creating uncertainty for parents. Services provided in the licensed early learning and child care sector are impacted by this tremendous change. Without the necessary resources, Ontario runs the risk of losing significant service levels at a time when families need the service to address the pressures faced by a larger provincial economic downturn. This would be a difficult blow to a service that already only provides licensed spaces to approximately 20% of all children under 12 whose mothers are in the workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) is the professional organization representing human and housing services staff at the municipal level in Ontario. The association's purpose is to enhance its members' capacity to plan, manage, and deliver quality human services to best meet the needs of their communities.

<sup>2</sup> OMSSA and its members have developed a series of resources for our members and partners in the early learning and child care sector for Ontario (see Appendix A for more details).

Change of this magnitude cannot happen in isolation; all partners must work together to ensure the system remains viable. Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) are eager to work in partnership with the provincial government to implement solutions and next steps that improve early learning experiences for children and their families in Ontario and support families who are currently contributing or want to contribute to the future economic success of the province.

## **Governance and the Service Manager Role**

The Ontario government has recognized municipalities as an order of government with demonstrated knowledge and experience with integrated socioeconomic planning and in building stronger communities. In 1998, municipalities were given the planning authority for Ontario Works, and child care services in Ontario. In 2006, municipalities were charged with the responsibility to implement Best Start, which consisted of an unconditional grant to address access to child care. And, more recently, the 2008 Provincial Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review (PMFSDR) acknowledged the role municipalities play in the funding and planning for shared-services delivered at the local level. PMFSDR further set out expectations for an accountability framework stating, “The framework will apply to services for which the two orders of government share accountability.” The funding model developed under the Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy is an example of a shared accountability framework that allows for this local planning and delivery of services.

It should be noted, as well, that child care was not part of the PMFSDR discussions as the results of the work then being done on the Premier’s Early Learning Advisor on the vision of a full day learning program were being awaited. Now then is the time to address child care with the same lens as the other services improved by PMFSDR if we are to truly modernize and transform the service and the sector.

CMSMs and DSSABs are responsible for the leadership and management of a broader children’s service system beyond the mandated responsibilities of the child care system. They are accountable for over half of the services provided to families and children prenatal to 12 years of age. These services include: child care, providing financial assistance, family resource programs, supports to children with special needs, some are responsible for the Ontario Early Years Centres, early intervention programs, parks and recreation, public health, preschool speech and language, library services, and summer camps. Many CMSMs and DSSABs also allocate one hundred per cent municipal dollars to the provision of services provided to children and families in their communities, either through direct delivery or through supplementing funding received from the provincial government.

What is required now is a mechanism to plan and integrate full day learning for 4 and 5 years olds into the current early learning and child care system. CMSMs and DSSABs, in their current role as service system managers, are well positioned to facilitate the integration of full day learning within a larger human services plan. PMFSDR, with its emphasis on shared accountability for shared services delivered at the local level, has clearly articulated this expectation.

With a common early learning and child care framework, CMSMs and DSSABs have the expertise to plan a system that is accountable, transparent and, as importantly, able to respond to the workforce needs in Ontario by supporting families. CMSMs and DSSABs are prepared to work with the provincial government to ensure that the early learning and child care system is of high quality and meets the needs of children and families across Ontario.

## **Vision for Ontario’s Early Learning and Child Care System**

OMSSA’s vision for Ontario’s early learning and child care system is built on four key foundations:

- Accessibility
- Quality
- Accountability
- Sustainability

This system is a group of interacting, interrelated, interdependent elements forming a complex whole. Each of these foundational elements of the system is interdependent and the recommendations associated with them must be implemented in conjunction with each other.



## **Accessibility**

Children and families in Ontario can access an integrated and inclusive continuum of early learning and child care services they need when they need them.

Ontario's overall prosperity is directly dependent on access to a sustainable, affordable, quality early learning and child care system, managed and responsive to local needs by CMSMs and DSSABs and based on an accountability framework developed in collaboration with the provincial government.

Children in every community across Ontario deserve opportunities to grow, learn, and develop in a safe and healthy environment. As such, children are the shared responsibility of families, communities, and governments. In this time of transformation, the emphasis needs to be on investing in the early learning and child care system, while stabilizing it in the short-term.

Accessibility to the early learning and child care system is the result of affordability. If the system is affordable, more children and families will be able to access services and programs.

One of the key aspects of affordability of the system is the age mix. As a non-profit sector, the system relies on public funding for capital. In the absence of a provincial framework and sufficient resources, child care programs are unable to reconfigure to focus their care on the younger more vulnerable children as the 4 and 5 year olds move from child care to Full Day Kindergarten. As a result, the immediate impact is an increase in fees in order to sustain the status quo. Enrolment in Full Day Kindergarten results in a loss of revenue from the less expensive care for older children, which currently offsets the cost of the more expensive care for younger children. This makes child care more expensive and less accessible for all families. The current business and funding practices are not effective in maintaining child care as a viable option for families.

The entire community benefits when children and their families can access the services they need when they need them. Access to an integrated and inclusive continuum of early learning and child care leads to:

- An increase in social and economic benefits, such as increased participation in the workforce of parents, higher income and resulting spending capacity
- A reduction in poverty, by strengthening individuals and families, helping our schools and businesses, and giving more people the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to our society
- An increase in local economic competitiveness, by employing workers and attracting other businesses to the area
- An increase in “social capital”, as people can participate meaningfully in their community
- An increase in healthy children, as they grow up in healthy environments and have stimulating, challenging, and nurturing experiences in their earliest years

The Ministries of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and Education (EDU) have responsibilities in funding for the provision of services to children with special needs through the Infant Development Program (MCYS) and Special Needs Resourcing (EDU). These programs are part of the local early learning and child care system. These programs provide service to families with children with special needs in a variety of settings based on local planning and needs. Both programs may serve the children in family homes, licensed child care programs, community programs and school settings. Both programs provide service coordination and support transition from home or child care into school.

Many children with special needs have confirmed diagnoses and many have deficits in functional development without the benefit of a formal diagnosis. Both need equal access to a continuum of care.

Any local early learning and child care system needs to include planning for effective access and continuation of care for children with special needs across a variety of service locations.

OMSSA’s quick wins and longer-term recommendations to the Province in regards to increasing the affordability and inclusivity and, therefore, the accessibility of the early learning and child care system include:

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b>Quick Wins:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide CMSMs and DSSABs with the discretion to enter into agreements for recreation based programs for extended day and school breaks for older children beyond the current guidelines</li> <li>▪ Create the mandate and provide funding to offer extended day programs that meet local workforce circumstances of parents, including providing flexibility in the hours of operation of third party operators.</li> <li>▪ Provide a consistent definition of supervision of children 4 to 12 years of age while in schools regardless of whether the program is school operated (apply the school board definition), including an alignment of the supervision requirements of before and after school care of third party operators with school operators</li> <li>▪ While waiting for a longer term funding model, in the interim, provide CMSMs and DSSABs with the flexibility to align wage subsidy allocations to address affordability of the system</li> <li>▪ Expand what is eligible for school capital funding provided to CMSMs and DSSABS to include child care in schools in order to increase access and move closer to an integrated system</li> <li>▪ Provide CMSMs and DSSABs with an ongoing funding envelope to address ongoing facilities and material issues</li> </ul>
<b>Longer-Term Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to implement a plan for multi-year investments (capital and ongoing operational) for a phased approach to a fully funded early learning and child care system</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rationalize and maximize supports for children with special needs using an integrated, child focused approach, recognizing that school boards provide support during the school day and early learning and child care operators provide support through the Extended Day Program and in the child care system</li> <li>▪ Look at areas of Ministry discretion under the Day Nurseries Act and the Education Act that provide for system equity between child care and education</li> <li>▪ Work with CMSMs and DSSABs to determine timing and realignment of other services identified in the original vision as outlined in <i>With our Best Future in Mind</i></li> <li>▪ Promote and market the benefits of licensed child care as a provincial strategy, making families more aware of the benefits to children, including school readiness and developmental benefits similar to the provincial promotion of Full Day Kindergarten</li> </ul>
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## Quality

A range of early learning and child care services are provided which demonstrate exemplary standards through evidence-informed, age appropriate practices, and services delivered by knowledgeable, skilled, and committed educators working in supportive and rewarding environments.

Children deserve to receive quality services based on established best practices. The Province defined quality through the 2007 report of the Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources. There, the Panel described the four critical “building blocks” for creating a province-wide system of quality early learning and child care services for children. These include:

1. Effective policies, sustained funding, and appropriate infrastructure
2. Properly paid, registered, and committed educators
3. Evidence-informed, age appropriate programs and practices
4. Parents who are partners in their children’s early learning

The Ministry of Education took an important first step in uniting the concepts of quality assurance and licencing when it assumed the role of licencing from MCYS. OMSSA members agree that licencing can be a key tool in quality assurance. Other important tools include an outcomes-based provincial quality assurance framework supported by locally-driven community-based quality initiatives that allow service managers to work with their child care providers to best meet quality standards. Working in partnership, the province and CMSMs and DSSABs can raise the bar on minimum quality standards and OMSSA looks forward to further discussions on developing a shared approach.



Another important development in supporting quality is the establishment of the College of Early Childhood Educators and recognition of this group’s expertise in early learning and their importance in the implementation of Full Day Kindergarten. In an integrated early learning and child care system, it is imperative that Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) are equally valued and compensated from a human resources perspective, regardless of their employer. Without this, RECEs first choice of employment is the school system, resulting in a retention issue in the early learning and child care system. This may impact the quality and stability of the early learning and child care system.

The child care system has embraced Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT). Without being embedded in a robust policy and funding framework, the onus has been on communities to determine how they will implement it. Due to this, it is at various stages of implementation across the province. CMSMs and DSSABs recommend that, in order to further quality in the early learning and child care system across the province, resources need to be enhanced.

OMSSA’s quick wins and longer-term recommendations to the Province in regards to quality include:

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b>Quick Wins</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commit to ELECT as the common framework for early learning and child care, including incorporating ELECT as the approach taught in early childhood related studies and supporting CMSMs and DSSABs in operationalizing ELECT at the local level</li> <li>▪ Ensure ELECT and quality are embedded in the provincial policy framework for an early learning and child care system</li> <li>▪ Provide fiscal investments in order to further quality initiatives in local communities, including the provision of resources to CMSMs and DSSABs so that they can continue to address quality and identify progress in the early learning and child care system</li> </ul>
<b>Longer-Term Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commit to work towards equitable wages for RECEs. RECEs and teachers are equally valued and integral to positive child outcomes in an early learning and child care system</li> <li>▪ Provide CMSMs and DSSABS with the resources and a mechanism to offer an incentive to attract and keep trained RECE staff</li> <li>▪ Support full-time employment opportunities for RECEs by creating a more truly integrated approach that employs human resources across the early learning and child care continuum (for example: build a full week of employment for RECEs by using hours in third party operated child care in the Extended Day Program, hours in Full Day Kindergarten and in the child care centres)</li> <li>▪ Ensure the Day Nurseries Act and other relevant legislation reflects the new early learning and child care system in Ontario</li> </ul>



## **Accountability**

A partnership between orders of government where leadership and responsibility are shared, while working toward common goals for children and families.

The service system manager role conferred on CMSMs and DSSABs by the Province and the PMFSDR make it clear that CMSMs and DSSABs have responsibility for funding and planning for shared-services delivered at the local level. CMSMs and DSSABs have a wide range of skills, expertise and experience and provide a single governance structure necessary to ensure consistent implementation of the early learning and child care system. As a local level of government they have the authority to— *they are mandated to*—give priority to the basic needs of communities and to promote the social and economic development of the community. CMSMs and DSSABs know the needs of the families in their communities, and the scope, complexity, and often fragmentation of local services. They are the order of government closest to the people and are well positioned to continue to lead and facilitate the development of an early learning and child care system at the local level.

An early learning and child care system cannot function in isolation from other human services. To support this, OMSSA set out a vision of a system that emphasizes human services integration, in which early learning and child care is linked to and integrated with other human service needs, including employment, housing, education, and recreation. As partners in creating an early learning and child care system for children, the Province and CMSMs and DSSABs have a shared responsibility to deliver high quality programs and services effectively and efficiently.

OMSSA’s quick wins and longer-term recommendations to the Province in regards to accountability include:

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b>Quick Wins</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Embed the role of CMSMs and DSSABs as the human service manager responsible for service system management of the full Best Start Child and Family System vision, by providing the necessary authority (in service contracts in short term) and resources to plan successfully for an integrated early learning and child care system with their stakeholders</li><li>▪ Recognizing the CMSM and DSSAB leadership role, develop clear expectations for all relevant stakeholders to be represented and participate at the planning tables, including CMSMs and DSSABs, Boards of Education, public health, Ministry of Children and Youth Services funded programs, etc.</li><li>▪ As fee subsidy managers, consult with CMSMs and DSSABs regarding proposed policies that may impact the availability of fee subsidy and consequently the viability of child care operators</li><li>▪ Streamline existing data requirements (for example: report by type of service)</li></ul>

<p><b>Longer-Term Recommendations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In collaboration with CMSMs and DSSABs, identify the key system elements to create a policy framework and timelines, which recognizes child care as an equal partner and contributor to education</li> <li>▪ Develop data sets that are relevant and inform provincial policy development and support local service system planning</li> <li>▪ Ensure the Day Nurseries Act and other relevant legislation, and supporting regulations reflect the new early learning and child care system in Ontario, with CMSMs and DSSABs as service system managers</li> </ul>
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## **Sustainability**

An adequately resourced, publicly funded, organized early learning and child care system that delivers on accessibility, quality and accountability.

Ontario’s fiscal situation and the government’s commitment to restraint is clear in the 2012-2013 provincial budget, which itself answered the articulation of the deficit-reduction mandate outlined in the report by the Drummond Commission. The benefits of early learning and care programs, including full-day kindergarten, to the early childhood development outcomes of our youngest learners is also clear. It is for this reason that the Province’s decision to maintain support for the implementation of full-day learning, despite the recommendation by Drummond to stop its roll, was the right one.

An important aspect of modernizing the early learning and child care system in Ontario, however, is to ensure that it also receives the investments required to be sustainable over the long-term. These investments must be linked to the recognition that success is directly tied to sustainable levels of funding for early learning and child care services, as well as for other human services such as housing, homelessness services, and employment and income supports.

The combination of changing demographics, a long history of insufficient funding, and the more recent introduction of Full Day Kindergarten has put stress on the early learning and child care system in Ontario. CMSMs and DSSABs require a transparent, outcome-focused and integrated funding system for prenatal to 12 that allows for services to be delivered in an equitable way across the province and provides opportunity for long-term planning and sustainability.

Sustainable funding means stable and predictable core funding that is not tied to specific, short-term initiatives. It means that the Province and CMSMs and DSSABs agree upon a set of policy outcomes for children and families—and then fund the system to achieve those outcomes.

OMSSA’s quick wins and longer-term recommendations to the Province in regards to sustainability include:

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b>Quick Wins</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Index child care funding to CMSMs and DSSABs</li> <li>▪ While waiting for a longer term funding model, in the interim, allow CMSMs and DSSABs flexibility within their funding envelope to address sustainability, quality and accessibility of the system (for example: release CMSMs and DSSABs from the current health and safety formula)</li> <li>▪ For all service providers in the early learning and child care system, waive the rental fees for spaces in schools and only charge for occupancy costs that will then be reflected in the cost to parents</li> </ul>
<b>Longer-Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a long-term framework for early learning and child care that includes a new funding model and recognizes its societal value to <i>both</i> early childhood <i>and</i> workforce development.</li> <li>▪ Provide CMSMs and DSSABs with the mechanism to provide base operational funding for early learning and child care. There are basic costs to running a program regardless of the number of children enrolled. Programs require a degree of stable operational funding to ensure they are viable, and should not be forced to rely solely on parent enrolment fees to operate</li> <li>▪ Provide block funding to CMSMs and DSSABs that enables them to administer and manage resources to support a system that meets local community needs, agreed upon outcomes and core services</li> <li>▪ Commit to a rolling 5 year capital plan for early learning and child care that is informed by CMSMs and DSSABs in partnership with boards of education</li> <li>▪ Continue to collaborate with CMSMs and DSSABs in the “modernization” of the early learning and child care system</li> <li>▪ Ensure the Day Nurseries Act and other relevant legislation reflects the new early learning and child care system in Ontario</li> </ul>

### **Critical Changes to the Day Nurseries Act**

In addition to the quick wins and longer term recommendations contained in this paper there are also a number of critical changes that need to be made to the Day Nurseries Act to create a high quality early learning and child care system in Ontario. Some examples of areas in which these changes are required include:

- Inclusion of provider’s children in ratio
- Mixed/Family Groupings
- Blended Age Groupings
- Age Groupings
- Home-Based Care Age Groupings
- Supervision of Children
- Playground Fencing

- Playground Inspection Requirements
- Classroom Size/Square Footage Requirements

OMSSA and its members are reviewing this legislation and will be submitting their recommendations to the Ministry of Education upon their completion.

## **Final Thoughts**

This discussion paper lays out a vision for Ontario's early learning and child care system and identifies some of the quick wins, longer-term actions and changes to the Day Nurseries Act that must be taken to make this vision a reality. The need for investment in the early learning and child care system is clear. OMSSA's May 2011 report, *On the teeter-totter: The challenges and opportunities for licensed child care in rural, northern and remote Ontario*, provides concrete evidence of the challenges facing Ontario's rural, northern and remote child care system. Some of these challenges include: child care centres and home child care providers have or are at risk of closing their doors, many children are at risk of losing their child care and many towns and villages across rural and northern Ontario will be left with no local licensed child care options. OMSSA is in the process of documenting these challenges in the urban areas and taking a closer look at special needs resourcing as well.

CMSMs and DSSABs are passionate about creating an integrated service system that meets the needs of children and families in their communities. We are equal partners in this process and must be at the table with the provincial government, building on this momentum of change together.

## Appendix A

1. *Full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-old children: Building a stronger early learning and child care system in Ontario* (October 2008)  
<http://www.omssa.com/lib/db2file.asp?file=35384>
2. *Hand in hand: How the province and municipalities can create the best early learning and child care service system for Ontario* (March 2009)  
<http://www.omssa.com/singlepage.asp?itemcode=OMSSA-HANDINHAND>
3. Response to the report, *With our Best Future in Mind* (July 2009)  
<http://www.omssa.com/lib/db2file.asp?fileid=36177>
4. *Report on the Joint Forum on Best Start Child and Family Centres* (March 2010)  
<http://www.omssa.com/lib/db2file.asp?file=37043>
5. *Tools for Integrated Early Years Service Planning* (June 2010)  
<http://www.omssa.com/singlepage.asp?itemcode=EARLY-YEARS-PLANNING>
6. An Early Years Capacity-building project for CMSMs and DSSABs (Spring 2011)  
<http://www.omssa.com/lib/db2file.asp?file=36961>
7. *OMSSA's vision for the Best Start Child and Family System* (April 2011)  
<http://www.omssa.com/lib/db2file.asp?fileid=37046>
8. *On the teeter-totter: The challenges and opportunities for licensed child care in rural, Northern and remote Ontario* (May 2011)  
<http://www.omssa.com/lib/db2file.asp?fileid=37092>