



COMMUNITY SERVICES BRIEFING NOTE

Integration of Education, Child Care and Early Learning Systems

ISSUE/SUBJECT:

The Government of Ontario and the City of London share a vision for an integrated, cohesive system of early learning, child care and education that supports children, youth and families. As Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM), London has developed significant “on the ground” knowledge relating to implementing this vision. Our experience has identified two critical areas where incremental Provincial leadership would expedite the evolution of an integrated system:

1. **A Coordinated System Mandate** – Currently, service providers and school boards are typically funded only to deliver specific programs or services. While London’s experience clearly demonstrates that most partners are willing to explore program integration, this has not been made part of their operational mandate or funding, and so partners voluntarily explore collaboration as long as their resources and mandate allow. Similarly, no single entity such as the CMSM has been given the mandate or the resources to oversee the broader community integration process and to continuously move it forward. A clear integration mandate, and the stable financial resources necessary to implement it, should be made available to every partner involved in the early learning/child care/education continuum.
2. **Capital Funding**- Capital funding to support the development of Neighbourhood Family Centres located at schools will expedite the speed at which the integration of services and the improvement of outcomes for families can be accomplished. There are many reasons why Neighbourhood Family Centres should be located at schools. These include earlier child and family attachment to the education system; leveraging of existing capital assets; and the sharing of professional services and resources. The Provincial vision for Neighbourhood Family Centres clearly identifies the benefits of integrating neighbourhood access portals within schools. However, additional capital funding within the established capital allocation process is needed to support this vision.

KEY MESSAGES:

Recommended Action:

The Government of Ontario, via the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, must continue to develop the vision for an integrated early learning, child care and education system for children, youth and families. To expedite the implementation of this vision, the Government should:

1. Articulate a clear expectation to all organizations involved across the early learning, child care and education continuum that integration of services is a key outcome and/or deliverable;
2. Provide an overarching mandate and the on-going operational funding supports to one single entity, such as the CMSM, to oversee the integration of services within each jurisdiction; and
3. Facilitate the integration of early learning programs at the local level by providing District School Boards and the Municipality with the capital necessary to create purpose-built Neighbourhood Family Centres connected to both new and existing schools.

BACKGROUND:

In 2009, through his report *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, Dr. Charles Pascal described a system that seamlessly integrates all of the early learning and development supports necessary to provide children and families with a solid foundation for educational success. In 2010, the Government of Ontario began bringing this vision to life by including child care and early childhood education under the direction of the Ministry of Education, clearly communicating that early learning belongs within the larger “Learning Ministry”.

In September 2013 the implementation of Full Day Kindergarten will be entering its fourth year. The City of London has worked closely with local school boards and child care partners to facilitate implementation of the Province’s vision for a seamless day of learning. All indications are that outcomes for children in Senior Kindergarten and Grades 1 and 2 are improving; that parents appreciate the Ministry of Education’s investment; and that the child care and early learning community is adapting to the new reality. The City of London fully supports the integration of education and child care and acknowledges the leadership the Ministry of Education has shown. The City of London intends on continuing to play a leadership role in the “modernization” of child care across our Province.

In January 2013, the Ministry of Education released the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework discussion paper. This policy framework reinforces the value and vision of an integrated service delivery system; establishes guiding principles to support the vision; and sets the stage for discussions about each partner’s role in that integrated system. As such, it is a good starting point for future policy development.

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services has continued to explore other aspects of creating an integrated early learning system - how to bring together all of the other “non-school” programs and services on which parents rely. Through the Community Action Research project, communities across the Province have been developing approaches to integrating services and have been sharing their “best practices” with others. The City of London recognizes that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services’ support of London’s work has positioned the City as a leader in understanding the integration and delivery of services at the neighbourhood level.

London’s Neighbourhood Family Centres offer families in our community the opportunity to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of how services for children and families are delivered within local neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood Family Centres bring into reality the Provincial vision of a single-point-of-access integration of Education and Early Childhood Education, Public Health and Wellness, Parenting and Family Support programs and Recreation, Sports and Leisure programs at the local neighbourhood level. Neighbourhood Family Centres also connect families to the specialized service and functions they need that are available in the broader community, such as Housing and Settlement Services.