

Child care modernization feedback: Approaches for funding and quality^[1]

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Source: University of Toronto

Format: Report

Publication Date: 24 Sep 2012

AVAILABILITY

Full document in pdf^[2]

Excerpts:

INTRODUCTION

The provincial discussion document *Modernizing Child Care* presents five topic areas for comment as separate, isolated entities. The presented directions seem to suggest that activities in any of the topic areas could be implemented on their own without a substantive impact on the rest.

In contrast, our approach in this submission is centered on the core assumption that any substantial transformation (or modernization, if you will) in any one area of child care is not possible without a comprehensive Ontario child care policy framework. An Ontario child care policy framework is particularly needed to strengthen the areas of funding and quality in child care services.

The funding discussion in *Modernizing Child Care*, is focused on how to allocate and deliver child care funding to the service system managers; however, it does not address how CMSMs/DSSABs manage the funding envelope or, equally important, how individual child care operations are funded. It is important that any discussion of provincial funding allocations be placed within a strong policy framework accompanied by clear implementation and accountability guidelines if the provincial child care modernization strategy is to achieve the expectations of licensed child care system re-engineering described in *With Our Best Future in Mind*.

We support the considerable attention that is being given to the development of formulae for allocations of funding at the provincial level; however, clarity with respect to the purpose of public funding for child care must be established first. At the very least, we recommend that Ontario's child care funding regime should aspire to:

- Make equitable levels of service across the various regions of Ontario.
- Make equitable levels of access for all children, including children with special needs.
- Improve affordability of child care for all types of families, including those paying "full fee."
- Elevate and sustain provincially defined standards for quality of child care.

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DEVELOPING THE FUNDING MODEL

The funding model for child care must be based on the principle of supply management. This means that services are planned and licensed in accordance with a province-wide policy and service management framework. Issuance of new licenses should be tied to local service plans and either managed directly or approved by CMSMs/DSSABs. Child care programs that are not connected to this system - in other words, are not meeting the objectives of the policy framework would not participate in this mechanism of public funding. In practical terms this means that there must be a strategic approach to creating new licensed capacity in areas that are below a provincial standard; and, conversely, this also means that there must be a process for refusal to issue new licenses for spaces in areas where the introduction of additional spaces would jeopardize the stability of the existing system.

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TAKE THE MARKET OUT OF THE QUALITY EQUATION

Child care modernization holds great potential for diminishing the deleterious impact of the market on the quality of children's early childhood education and care. All three of the Early Years Reports and Pascal's *With Our Best Future in Mind* make practical recommendations for moving early childhood education and care out of the tenuous frontier of the market, into a more stable delivery system within the public frontier. Ultimately, this is the surest way to address the social stratification of the child care market that we see in Ontario - which currently results in the "best" child care services and the highest proportion of available spaces delivered in areas where families have the highest incomes. We confidently endorse the Moss and Bennett² premise that early childhood education and care be viewed a public entitlement, and access to early childhood education and care be recognized as a public good by extending the values and

principles of public education systems to all early childhood education and care services; yet, we also recognize that the magnitude of this change does not fit within the 3 year time frame proposed by the government in the Modernizing Child Care document. We do suggest, however, that there are approaches that can be adopted within the present market model of child care that borrow from a public service delivery model, while allowing for public opinion and educational bureaucracy to take the time needed to shift their thinking.

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ENVIRONMENT

Appropriate space is essential to program quality; how we view children is reflected in the space provided for them.⁵ In many jurisdictions across Ontario, space in the schools is not readily available. However, locating child care programs in school and church basements, industrial malls and other-purposed facilities not only presents potential health and safety hazards for children and employees, it also makes it difficult to deliver high quality programs. Dedicated early childhood education and care space is an important component of the child care modernization process. Space issues for child care programs located in schools will not be resolved just by setting aside a room or two for child care; instead, the child care program has to be viewed as an essential component of community schools and be fully integrated into the overall space planning process. This, by necessity, is likely to lead to changes in school boundaries or ages served when no space exists to expand the existing facilities - overall, this is a reasonable compromise when viewed alongside the benefits that the integration of early childhood education and education will bring.

Considerations given to outdoor programming space should also be high: Often, the first casualty resulting from locating in inappropriate space is the outdoor programming. Current practices in Ontario neglect the potential richness of outdoor curricula that are emphasized in (often, much colder) nations where approaches to early childhood education are built on an inherent view that children have a right to healthy environments that support their play and learning. Appropriate space for early childhood education staff also needs to be emphasized in the modernization process as spaces for staff rooms, meeting spaces and indoor gross motor activities are often sacrificed to maximize operating capacity.

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PEDAGOGY

Effective early childhood education demands practitioners who understand that children's learning involves far more than "a check-list" knowledge of childhood development. Well trained educators are able to develop curriculum from a process that includes observation, analysis, and reflection; and that depends on confidence in their own abilities, as well as confidence in the capacities of children. An early childhood education framework at the provincial level should focus on "supporting children's learning dispositions and attitudes to learning."⁶ Such high expectations for early childhood education practitioners imply that there is a concurrent process of modernization of the ECE training curriculum at Community Colleges. In addition, the expected qualifications for child care program supervisors should better reflect their role as education leaders and program managers, and therefore be raised to a required BA or higher in an early childhood education related field, along with management qualifications. In other jurisdictions, implementing expectations for supervisor qualifications involved a limited-time grandfathering process.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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