



City of  
**Peterborough**

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**TO:** Members of the Joint Services Steering Committee

**FROM:** Ken Doherty, Director of Community Services

**MEETING DATE:** April 8, 2010

**SUBJECT:** Report CSSSJSSC10-004  
Early Learning and Best Start Update

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## **PURPOSE**

A report to inform the Joint Services Steering Committee on the status of the implementation of Early Learning in Peterborough and the transition of Best Start programs.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Joint Services Steering Committee endorse the recommendation outlined in Report CSSSJSSC10-004 dated April 8, 2010, of the Director of Community Services, as follows:

That the Early Learning and Best Start Update Report be received.

## **BUDGET AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no additional financial implications to the City or County of Peterborough related to this report.

## BACKGROUND

### Best Start

In 2005, the Government of Canada entered into the Early Learning and Child Care Agreement with the Province of Ontario and the Best Start Program was established to help give children the best start in life and to help them achieve success in school. In 2006, the Federal government terminated the Early Learning and Child Care agreement with the province. Consequently, the province informed the municipalities that it could only continue 100% provincial funding for Best Start funding until March 31, 2010. Last year, the province announced that it would provide some additional funding (\$151,227 for Peterborough) to help mitigate the impact on child care of the short-fall in Federal funding. The additional Ministry funding supported operations until June 2010.

Over the last five years in Peterborough, Best Start resulted in 197 new child care spaces and the corresponding wage subsidies for child care staff to help support the new child care spaces. The following chart lists the actual Best Start expansion that occurred in the City and County of Peterborough:

Site	# of Spaces developed
Ecole Monseigneur-Jamot	46
Northern Lights - Keene	20
Trent CCC - Immaculate Conception	16
Trent CCC - Monsignor O'Donoghue	24
Trent CCC - Bridgenorth	8
Nursery Two - St. Alphonsus	23
Nursery Two – St. John	30
Hucklebug - Norwood	12
KCCS – Shamrock - Ennismore	15
KCCS – St. Martin - Ennismore	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>197</b>

In addition to creating new child care spaces, Best Start provided fee subsidy funding to low-income families to assist with the cost of child care. In 2009, 542 children from 454 families were supported in subsidized child care spaces. Over 4 years, Best Start provided \$8,594,553 in funding for capital, start up costs, planning, administration, wage subsidy, fee subsidy for low income children and special needs supports.

The funding was paid as follows:

2006	\$1,604,595
2007	\$1,969,602
2008	\$2,495,101
2009	<u>\$2,525,255</u>
Total	\$8,594,553

In the 2010 budget, \$1,353,285 has been allotted to cover operating costs to March 31, 2010, fee subsidy to June 30<sup>th</sup>, and wage subsidy and a quality assurance program to December 31<sup>st</sup>. In addition to the ongoing funding, Best Start provided an unconditional grant of which approximately \$556,000 remains and has been allocated to assist in the transition as Best Start Funding comes to an end.

## **Early Learning**

As Best Start funding comes to an end, the Early Learning Program is starting. As indicated in the Best Start Update Report CSSJSSC09-014 in 2009, the Province of Ontario released Dr. Charles Pascal's report "With Our Best Future in Mind – Implementing Early Learning in Ontario". This report builds on the initial goals of Best Start to create a vision of an integrated system of services for children, from pre-natal to 12 years of age, covering the spectrum of health, education, social and family supports and children's services

The Early Learning Program proposes four key components. The first component is full day learning for four and five year olds, including the availability of extended day programming from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. This component will be implemented in five local schools in September 2010 and will be available in all school by 2015. The five schools in the first phase of implementation for full day learning are:

- ❖ Apsley Central Replacement School
- ❖ Havelock Public School
- ❖ Otonabee Valley Public School
- ❖ Prince of Wales Public School
- ❖ St Paul's School Peterborough

Additional components of the Early Learning Program, including before and after school and summer programs for school age children, and child and family centres for younger children are proposed for the future.

The Ministry of Education has been given the leadership role for the implementation of full day learning for four and five year olds and municipalities, as service system managers, continue to play a key role in the transformation of the service delivery for children with an emphasis on birth to four years of age.

## **The Challenges and Opportunities**

Across the province, there is support for the vision of Early Learning in Ontario. The system is designed to center around the child and provides an integrated approach to the delivery of children's services. This program will help lay the foundation for a healthy, productive life and, in turn, will contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of community.

Any transformational change is not without its challenges. The Boards of Education are busy planning for full day learning, recruiting Early Child Educators (ECEs) and preparing for extended day options.

The child care community is also planning for the future. A number of concerns related to Early Learning and the impact on the existing childcare system have been identified. These concerns include:

- ❖ As four and five year olds move to the education system, there may be a loss of revenue for child care programs;
- ❖ That younger children are more expensive to care for because they require more adult supervision and therefore fees may rise;
- ❖ Boards of Education may be more appealing employers for Early Childhood Educators and therefore child care centres may lose well-trained staff;
- ❖ Difficulties in planning their operation given the lack of specific information pertaining to the level of funding available for the child care system in 2010 and beyond.

There are 16 child care centres within 2 km of a school implementing the Early Learning Program and these centres are most at risk of losing four and five year olds to the new system this September. The City of Peterborough's directly operated daycares, Peterborough Daycare and Pearson Daycare, are both likely to be losing children to the schools implementing Early Learning this September. Early estimates indicate that Peterborough and Pearson daycare may lose approximately 10% of their revenue in the first year of Early Learning implementation.

The transformational change to Early Learning would be a challenge in itself but it is coupled with the end of the Best Start funding which makes some of the financial struggles even more acute. As child care providers will be losing revenue because children are shifting to the education system, they will also be losing revenue due to the end of Best Start wage and fee subsidy. In addition, the child care system will be providing services to the youngest and most expensive to care for children. Eventually, the education and child care systems will merge to one Early Learning system for children, but the transformation will take time. During the transformation, though the focus is on the goal of an integrated Early Learning system, the Division will remain attentive to the impacts on the quality of service for children.

The Social Services Division continues to plan for this transition and monitor the impact of the loss of Best Start funding on families and children. As of March 15, 2010, all families that had been on a child care subsidy waitlist in 2009 had been contacted and offered subsidy. Effective January 31, 2010, there were 152 children receiving subsidy under Best Start and it is anticipated that these children will be transitioned to other funding streams without a disruption to their child care arrangements. While children currently receiving subsidy are a priority, this may result in waitlists for families applying for subsidy as, overall, there will be less subsidy funding available. Effective March 18<sup>th</sup>, there were 130 children waiting for available fee subsidy.

The Division is also supporting the community planning process for the move to an Early Learning System. An Early Learning Forum was hosted this spring with participants attending from of the Best Start Network, child care agencies, education, children's mental health, public health and child welfare sectors. This Forum provided an opportunity to share information, consult and develop a planning process. This was one of the first steps of many towards an Early Learning System in Peterborough.

Staff will continue to inform the Ministry of Youth and Children's Services (MCYS) of the local impacts of these changes and will monitor the Ministry's responsiveness to local pressures. Further update reports will be provided as needed.

## **SUMMARY**

The Best Start program has provided additional supports for the development and maintenance of child care spaces in Peterborough over the last 5 years. As Best Start funding ends, the Early Learning system is being initiated to transform childcare and education into a seamless integrated system to support the healthy development of children from pre-natal to 12 years of age. This transformational change provides wonderful opportunities for the children but the transition to the new system will require extensive planning and coordination among the stakeholders. The Social Services Division is committed supporting the community planning process and to monitor and report on local pressures.

Submitted by,

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