

ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

DISCUSSION PAPER

ON

FULL-TIME EARLY LEARNING



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The Ontario Public School Boards' Association communicated with the Premier's Office on December 4, 2007, following the appointment of Dr. Charles Pascal as the Premier's Early Learning Advisor. This communication noted:

"At our most recent meeting, OPSBA adopted a resolution to "support the implementation of full-time Early Learning for kindergarten-age students, administered by school boards, with full funding for staffing, operating costs, capital and transportation. We realize that Dr. Pascal has a tremendous job ahead of him. There are very significant accommodation, staffing and programming implications in this initiative. OPSBA can bring valuable experience and knowledge to the process Dr. Pascal will undertake in bringing a comprehensive plan forward on the implementation of Early Learning and we respectfully request full participation in the planning process."

In anticipation of a consultation meeting with Dr. Pascal (now set for June, 2008), OPSBA has canvassed its member boards for input on this initiative and requested in particular information with respect to the following areas:

- 1. PROGRAM, e.g. comments on program delivery benefits and challenges for any current full-time kindergarten programs, and seamless Child Care/Kindergarten programs.**
- 2. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, e.g. relationships with municipalities, child care providers, links to before and after school programs**
- 3. STAFFING, e.g., comments on models currently in place, roles of Teachers, Early Childhood Educators and Educational Assistants**
- 4. CAPITAL PLANNING, e.g. implications for per pupil places, accommodation reviews, school building/renovation projects; considerations could include changes to how schools are configured, e.g. non-traditional school organizations to optimize existing space in schools.**

The response from member boards has been rich and comprehensive and overwhelmingly supportive of Full-time Early Learning. The paper that follows outlines the philosophical support boards have for this initiative and goes on to express both the diversity and commonality of issues boards have identified in preparation for this welcome initiative. While all member boards have, through OPSBA meetings, contributed input, a list of boards that have formally contributed to this paper is attached as Appendix A.

INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association believes that the Full-time Early Learning Initiative should offer high quality, integrated early learning and care environments (Kindergarten, Child Care and Parenting Programs) that provide play-based, experiential learning opportunities aligned to the developmental stages of early learners while supporting a strong foundation in Literacy and Language that will establish a foundation for student achievement and success for all children.

The Philosophical Context Supporting Full-time Early Learning

The fundamental and most important consideration for the implementation of the initiative on Full-time Early Learning is the needs of the children. The filter for every decision must be “is this the best solution for children?” The nature of the program should be decided early in the planning process, well in advance of decisions about capital planning, staffing, learning materials or mode of delivery. While these areas are important they are dependent upon the core decision of meeting the developmental needs of the children in the most effective, research-based way. Is the full-time early learning program about care? About an early start on academic learning? About early identification of special needs and supports? About play-based learning that is attuned to age-appropriate development? (These terms are described in Ontario's *Kindergarten Program – Revised 2006, p. 2, p.14*)

In Ontario, the opportunity is before us to forge new cultures for educating 3, 4 and 5 year olds, new pathways that should serve children and their families in a seamless manner, will provide equity of opportunity for all children to acquire experiences of learning critical to future success, and will accelerate the learning of young children in unprecedented ways. The early years community including early childhood educators, day care and preschool operators, and elementary teachers recognize the benefits of full-time learning. The intent of any expansion of programs of early learning is that it will provide quality experiences for children.

There is much in the literature to suggest that the well-known long-term benefits of early learning only accrue if the programs themselves have well and suitably qualified staff, adequate staffing ratios, positive inter-actions with children, rich and nurturing programs and suitable physical environments. Evidence supports the seamless day of school and day care and a range of community services as the best way to accommodate family needs. A multi-skilled team of professionals and an environment that is appropriate for learning through play are essential considerations. Because gaps in learning are found in all socio-economic groups, full time early learning should be available to all students, fully funded and universally accessible. Effective programs are those that are linked to communities and provide the best from the traditions of kindergarten and licensed child-care programs.

A concerted effort is required to re-conceptualize current programs in ways that will coordinate services for our youngest and most vulnerable learners; unite care with education and education with care; and to educate and train staff to provide quality programs that go beyond school readiness and lay the foundation for creative, and critical thinking. In recent years, Kindergarten programs have been folded into initiatives focussing on strengthening primary education

particularly literacy and numeracy. However, the nature of child development and the related instructional techniques raises the issue of the need to differentiate between school-based Early Years (JK/SK) and Primary (grades 1-3) programming. An undesirable and unintended result of not dealing with this issue would be to have the Full-time Early Learning initiative result in having inappropriate instructional expectations and instructional techniques imposed on our youngest learners.

A number of school boards in the province have already made provision for full-time kindergarten in some or all of their schools and, in the process, made tough decisions to find funding within their budgets to make this happen. Educators with direct experience of full-time kindergarten programs clearly support the benefits they offer early learners. The full-time program gives children of all socio-economic backgrounds the opportunity to develop critical early language skills which will affect later literacy and numeracy success, as well. There is extensive opportunity to play and interact with other children which provides a base for positive social and problem solving skills. A full day of learning offers social, emotional and intellectual benefits to three-, four-, and five-year olds. They have more time to focus on activities, to reflect on activities and to transition between activities. Full-day kindergarten provides a bridge between pre-kindergarten programs and the early elementary years. It enables teachers to observe and assess student's needs, abilities, strengths and interests more effectively, leading to individualized approaches and, where necessary, early intervention. Teachers are able to develop a richer understanding of the students' needs and, in turn, to develop activities and lessons to meet those needs.

The Premier's announcement concerning full-day learning for kindergarten children is a commitment to the children of the province to provide a solid foundation for student success throughout their school years. It is the right service to provide for children. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association supports this important initiative and believes that school districts need to work together and in partnership with the relevant ministries, the early childhood education community and municipalities in the planning process to ensure that the program delivery model and implementation strategy are responsive to the diverse needs of children and families and take into account the range of circumstances in school districts across the province. Any model developed should begin with discussions with the experts in education and day care together. That partnership from the outset can best support the development of models or differentiated models which may need to be applied in different areas or to accommodate local needs.

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association recommends the following set of *Guiding Principles* to support the development of the Full-time Early Learning Initiative in Ontario.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Full-day early learning programs should be as innovative and flexible as possible in terms of the models offered in order to best meet the diverse needs of children and their families in today's society

2. Full-day early learning in Ontario should guarantee the option of universal access to high quality early learning programs for all 4- and 5-year olds through provision of a minimum of six hours of publicly-funded opportunities daily
3. Full-day early learning programs should be delivered in schools wherever possible, allowing for other options as circumstances so require
4. Programs should build on the successes and lessons learned from existing models of full day early learning in the province including Best Start, Kindergarten/school-based Child Care programs, and Kindergarten/school-based Early Years or Parenting Centres
5. Programs should be delivered by well qualified early childhood specialists, which could include Ontario certified teachers, early childhood educators and educational assistants, with an adult-child ratio that is cognizant of the need to find balance between the requirements of the Day Nurseries Act and practice in school kindergarten classes
6. The curriculum should be based on *The Kindergarten Program* (Ministry of Education) and on *Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) - Framework for Early Childhood Settings* (Best Start Early Learning Expert Panel) to provide a common framework for an emergent curriculum, using play as an intentional vehicle for rich learning experiences*
7. Programs should meet the unique needs of every child through provision of stimulating resources, access to nutrition as needed, through involvement of school board and community support staff as appropriate and through a seamless coordination of services supported by all relevant Ministries
8. The success of full day early learning programs should be measured in the context of the whole child and his/her family, taking into account diverse cultural and linguistic realities, and through multiple domains including cognitive, language, physical, social and emotional development, rather than through single measures such as improved academic outcomes alone
9. Programs should be offered in safe, clean and healthy environments that support developmentally appropriate early childhood programming and promote the integration of early years programs
10. Where full day early learning programs are delivered through integration of Kindergarten with childcare or other early years programs, partnerships should be established, wherever possible, with non-profit organizations
11. Appropriate infrastructure and budget should be provided to implement programs consistent with the above principles; resources should include provision for professional development, planning and dedicated staff to oversee the programs at the system level
12. The implementation plan should include an evaluation component focussed on continuous improvement.

**Teachers, early childhood educators, members of the community and families should work together to provide challenging and engaging learning experiences that will build children's confidence, encourage them to continue to see learning as both enjoyable and useful, and provide a strong foundation for their future intellectual, physical and social development."*

(Ontario's *Kindergarten Program* – Revised 2006, p. 15)

PROGRAM

The input from OPSBA's member boards with regard to Program considerations for the Full-time Early Learning initiative is organized by key themes. How the program is organized will be the key to the effectiveness of full-time early learning.

Seamless Day for Children and Parents

Children need to experience a "seamless" delivery of service with programming that is appropriate for their stage of development. This will have the benefits of reductions in transitions for children; integration of services working on behalf of the child and family; consistency in everyday learning for children. Services for young children should ideally, and wherever possible, be integrated within the school setting thus maximizing participation and minimizing barriers for parents. The experience of "seamlessness" is best supported by having consistent staff delivering the program.

Within this goal of a seamless day, the school building, as a community resource, should ideally be available to support community and family needs outside of the instructional day. There are large numbers of schools that currently have space to accommodate before and after school child care. In some schools there are areas available and suitable for dedicated space. In other schools before and after child care services are provided in libraries or gyms.

The seamless day helps with the challenges parents face in providing for the care, supervision and safety of children outside of school hours. The potential reduction in childcare costs for families through Full-time Early Learning appears to have positive implications for families' improved economic and social situations, potentially resulting in better nutrition, reduced parental stress levels, increased parent availability, and improved home environment and learning. These are all likely to be conducive to improved school achievement.

The seamless-day program offers new challenges for many schools in the form of making provision for supervised lunch hours for this age group that includes an emphasis on healthy eating while meeting public health standards and nurturing appropriate social skills. There are, however, models in place in a number of schools that currently deal successfully with these challenges. Best Start pilots offer kindergarten and child care programs which are at various stages of integrated service delivery, ranging from initial coordination to integration, resulting in relatively few transitions throughout the day. The Toronto First Duty is an integrated program in which teachers, child care and parenting staff work together to deliver a full day, seamless early learning program in the same physical space, working with a common curriculum throughout the day. Some schools have kindergarten programs operating out of licensed child care space in school buildings, resulting in a seamless day for children as the adults move but the children remain in the same room all day. More common are the schools with licensed child care space in school buildings where children move back and forth from child care to kindergarten within the security of the school.

Play-based Program

Whatever the final design will be for a full-day learning experience for children, it is critical that it be founded on sound research-based principles that are clearly identified. Programs must be child-focused and provide what is best for children in all of the developmental domains, recognizing that social, emotional and creative development needs to be addressed as well as cognitive, language and physical development. Learning theory and developmentally appropriate practices must guide the development and implementation of the early learning programs.

In recent years, Kindergarten programs have been simply folded into initiatives focussing on strengthening primary education – particularly literacy and numeracy. However, the nature of child development and the related instructional techniques raises the issue of the need to differentiate between school-based Early Years (JK/SK) and Primary (grades 1-3) programming. This needs to be borne in mind in the development of the Full-day Early Learning initiative so that it does not result in having inappropriate instructional expectations and instructional techniques imposed on our youngest learners. The positive flow-through from kindergarten to primary grades is best realized when kindergarten and primary teachers share information about children with a view to tailoring instruction to children's individual needs. Full day programming, no matter what it looks like, is not about increasing what students need to know when entering grade one. It is about making sure that the majority of students have achieved the existing curriculum expectations and have the required social skills to do well in school by the time they get to grade one. If increasing the day for children is about increasing time for academic programming at the expense of responsiveness to individual children's different development stages along the continuum of literacy, numeracy and thinking skills, it is not in the best interests of the vast majority of children.

Programming needs to be based on best practices for young children. Young children learn best when they are in a play based program which emphasizes hands on activities where exploration is encouraged. This means giving consideration to the rhythm and flow of the day. The extra time should be spent on play, social skills development, oral language development, exploration, fine and gross motor development, music, drama, etc. The emphasis should be on emergent literacy with early literacy for those who are ready. Programs should also have a balance of teacher-initiated and child-initiated activities and incorporate small group, large group and individual instruction based on the needs of young students, including their emotional and physical needs.

OPSBA believes this approach to early learning is supported by existing curriculum documents (ELECT and Kindergarten) which would benefit from greater integration. Other information resources are *Kindergarten years: Learning through play 2000* (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario) and : *Sand in the Kindergarten Program 2006* (TDSB). Overall, the full time early learning program should have a strong play-based curriculum with an emphasis on language acquisition.

Equity

The Full-time Early Learning initiative must have a focus on equity—of access, of service and of programming for children and families. It cannot be limited to students who need the extra time to close the gap in their learning. **All** children – regardless of family income and other socio-economic factors should have the same opportunities and equal universal access to early learning experiences.

Connection to Ontario Curriculum and Assessment

The current Ontario kindergarten program already provides a roadmap for effective learning outcomes for students; however, the implementation of a full time program requires a re-examination of the learning outcomes expected. The academic focus of the program will need to continue to be on the development of oral communication, literacy and numeracy skills while integrated into a full-day, play-based program. Clarification should be provided on the definition of play based learning to ensure that all program aspects are clearly understood by the full-day learning team.

The program needs to address the academic expectations of JK/K programming and how they support children in appropriate transition to the Grade 1 curriculum – this is necessary to address concerns about curriculum being "pushed down", thereby making kindergarten inappropriately "academic". This kind of clarification should encompass the social, emotional, physical and kinesthetic needs of Early Learners. The program should provide a consistency of expectation on a daily basis as opposed to kindergarten one day and day care the next, all within the same building/room.

Thought should be given to developing some recommended monitoring of progress using assessment information that ideally could be common among boards to judge the effectiveness of the program and of overall achievement. While most boards are now heading towards some form of common assessment at the kindergarten level, the effectiveness of this initiative must be accountable to the overall goal of high literacy outcomes for students. Waiting for EQAO signposts at the end of grade 3 is too long to wait.

The program must have a level of accountability to parents/guardians which is aligned with assessment and evaluation for all children/students. Assuming a unified curriculum, specific expectations, and benchmarks, there should be consistency built into the reporting process for the Full-day Early Learning program.

JK and SK Together

Many schools offer a combined Junior Kindergarten/Senior Kindergarten program (in some boards most, if not all, kindergarten age children are in combined classes) and are convinced of the benefits to students of this configuration: *“JK/SK students work well together and that daily exposure to a stimulating learning environment has provided an equal opportunity for all students to develop to their fullest potential.”* If the Full-time Early Learning Initiative were to undo this arrangement, it would not be seen as a positive move for children; it would remove great opportunities for differentiated programming, remove from children the benefit of coming back to the same teacher for the second year and take away the opportunity SK students currently have to build early leadership skills.

Advantages of full-day for students

Boards that currently offer full-time kindergarten programs noted the benefits they have for students: *“We are able to build daily on concepts, strategies, knowledge and skills presented. There is a greater opportunity to review, practice, apply learning, and extend experiences. Classroom and school routines are established more quickly thus facilitating a regular pattern of learning behaviours and skills. The familiarity of the daily routine of coming to school has built security and stability, especially for the students who more keenly feel separation anxiety, are hesitant by nature, or who have experienced less structured out-of-school experiences.”*

There is increased opportunity to focus on one set of students - seeing, living and learning with them each day - has made a positive difference in how the teacher knows each child, their strengths, needs and interests. The extra time spent with students for observation, interaction, listening and assessment has made it possible to design activities, provide review, and set challenges as needed to promote further learning. Most importantly, it is possible to identify and work intensively with students at risk.

A study in one board showed a 29% higher improvement in knowledge of Language Elements and nearly double the results in mathematics readiness for students in full time programs thereby confirming the gains to be made in literacy and numeracy. Surveys showed that this can be accomplished without sacrificing age appropriate activities in the full time program.

Teachers have identified other benefits such as more time for student exploration and hands on learning greater opportunities for ESL students, more time for social talk, social skills, music, science, gym and more opportunities and time for out of school excursions.

With the prospect of Kindergarten and ECE staff working together as colleagues children would receive more individual support through a smaller child to staff ratio.

Advantages of Full-Day for Teachers

Feedback from teachers currently working in full-time kindergarten or who are viewing this initiative as leading to full-time kindergarten programs describes a range of benefits such as the opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding of where their students are, especially those at risk and then having the additional time to support students to succeed. Other points raised include:

- More time for teacher and students to cover the curriculum
- Ability to create learning blocks of time
- Time for individualized programming and assessment
- Greater depth of program
- Able to diagnose students' needs earlier
- Improved attendance and readiness
- Greater opportunity to get to know students
- No need to put things away for the next group of students coming in
- More seamless day

Literacy Focus

Many boards noted that a Full-time Early Learning program gives children of all socio-economic backgrounds the opportunity to develop critical early language skills which will have an impact on later literacy and numeracy success. Frequent reference was made to the CAPE (Consultants/Coordinators Association of Primary Educators) ***Position Paper on Full-Day Kindergarten in Ontario:***

“In an Ontario report on exemplary Kindergarten programs, studies indicate that when staff engage in extensive verbal interactions with children, there are measurable improvements in the average level of children's language competence.”

A number of boards in Northern Ontario with Oral Literacy programs in full-time kindergarten classes addressed the enormous benefits for students, including Aboriginal students, of experiencing this approach in a full-day setting.

Other boards have emphasized the value of creating centres that link to and support the literacy program, address oral language as a foundation of all learning and provide literacy-rich learning environments. In many school districts, full-time Early Learning will need to incorporate a focus on emerging English Language Learning (ELL) communities and ELL learners.

Program Resources

In an early childhood learning environment the materials and resources are critically important. High quality creative learning resources that are varied and activity-based and respond to the developing learning abilities of young learners are directly linked to the effectiveness of early years programming. In a school board environment, central selection and purchase of common learning resources is an extremely cost effective means by which classrooms can be equipped. A planned and systematic process needs to be in place to periodically assess the quality and quantity of learning resources in kindergarten classrooms, replace specific elements on a regular and cyclical basis and invigorate the program with the periodic system-wide infusion of new materials. Programs will need more toys for gross motor development, as well as more puzzles, games, books for a full day program.

The full-time program needs to be accommodated in adequate space to effectively provide for activity-based learning in child-friendly rooms. Ideally space should be similar to that of the current kindergarten rooms - approximately 1000 sq feet. A full-day program will also entail requirements for nap areas. With the assumption that lunch will be provided, there will be a need for space and equipment to make this possible.

The requirements for outdoor play in expanded outdoor play areas, including outdoor toy/equipment storage, should be a significant consideration especially in light of the reality that some children have few safe places to play outside in their home neighbourhoods. Opportunity for more active play is important for the development of physical well-being and lifelong healthy habits.

Special Education

A number of boards identified the scope provided by Full-time Early Learning programs to offer increased opportunities for children with special needs. Thoughtful implementation of the initiative that includes assessment services will allow for students with special needs to have access to programs earlier and help decrease the gap in learning before students enter grade one. Consideration will also be necessary for children who may struggle with a full day of organized school/child care.

Boards that currently offer full-time kindergarten every day or every other day have commented on the need to consider relationships with agencies that provide support to families and students with special needs, and how to best integrate those services when the child is in school.

In some cases, there will also be a need to provide additional support, e.g., an educational assistant, for children with special needs.

Parental Involvement

Early childhood education research emphasizes the importance of parent participation in the development of both cognitive and social skills in the child. A structured orientation to kindergarten programs has been developed in many boards and received much positive feedback from parents. A consideration for Full-time Early Learning will be the need for orientation programs for parents and in-service for parent volunteers.

In a number of boards regular conferencing and observation by parents has allowed for increased parent involvement and understanding of the skills to be developed. Enhanced home-school partnerships including shared expectations of home support of specific skills has been another positive outcome and would be further increased in a Full-time Early Learning environment. Yet another is the “spin-off” benefit for newcomer parents as they become involved in education and language acquisition through their children’s experiences in school.

While most parents are excited by the prospect of Full-time Early Learning, there are also parents who will want their children to attend a kindergarten program that has a distinct beginning and end to the day.

Flexibility

In general, school boards are emphasizing the need for flexibility. Programs may need flexible starting dates for children and/or allow parents to decide whether their children should come full day or half day. Questions raised include: Will there be pressure for all parents to enrol their children? Is all day “kindergarten” or “early learning” the best solution for all JK age children? Should there be “wrap around” child care on or near school sites? What about children who are bussed? This is still a long day for this age group even if they are in a daycare situation for part of the time. There will need to be quiet time and/or nap time built into the day.

Suggestions from individual boards have included staggered entry, implementing pilots in 2008-2009, retaining a half-day option, having a process for transition to a full-day, keeping half-day for Year 1 and moving to full-day for year 2.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Relationships between school boards, preschools, healthcare services and municipalities as well as between Ministries will be the key to the successful implementation of full-time early learning for kindergarten age children.

School boards indicate a rich range of community partnerships. While there are many common joint early years programs, there is great diversity in existing models and a call from boards to have the flexibility to honour local relationships that have developed over a considerable period of time and to provide for development that builds on the existing community capacity.

Appendix B provides a sampling of the range of school board-community-municipality partnerships currently in place.

Best Start/Early Years Centres

Many boards have successful experience with Best Start programs and with Early Years Centres and see this as a valuable model for Full-time Early Learning where a JK/SK program, child care, and a parenting program are integrated. In Northern Ontario, there is experience as well in partnering with the federally funded Aboriginal *Headstart* program.

Boards highlight the opportunities for partnership between child care professionals and school staff on common student-centred strategies and note the benefits of consistent and high quality early child care in the school setting.

A number of boards have been able to benefit from extended partnerships in their regions that involve school board representatives, municipal staff, public health, child care providers and local child services agencies. This level of collaboration among the community partners allows for a ‘mini-hub’ service model, whereby *Healthy Baby* screening, speech and language support and other community services for children and their families can be centralized in school settings. Some boards have a high degree of regional coordination in this regard.

There is widespread support for the concept of a “hub” or “early years centre” in or near a school so that all programs and supports (social services, daycare, libraries, recreational programs, etc.) would be available for parents in their own neighbourhoods. This concept is seen as an approach that was incorporated into the *Best Start* initiative.

Boards have raised as an issue that, when they give up school space to facilitate provision of services with partners, the Ministry of Education does not recognize this in funding for on the ground capacity. An added pressure is the assumption at times on the part of partners that the school board will cover the greater share of operating costs.

Partnerships with municipalities for daycare and before and after care

Many boards report strong relationships with municipalities in the coordination of child care and before and after school programs in their districts. They emphasize the need to recognize and value the knowledge and experience of the local early childhood education community, health

care service providers and agencies, and to seek out the advice and input of individuals and groups whose focus has been working with pre-school children and their families.

The experience of municipal support through *Best Start* has underscored the crucial value of this sector as a partner in creating a continuum of early learning and care service across diverse communities.

Health and Special Education Services

Implicit in the concept of partnerships is providing for the needs of the whole child. This includes building in availability of services such as *Healthy Baby* screening, health care, speech, audiology. The result is a focus on early identification and accessing appropriate services (speech and language, special education, occupational therapy, ESL). One Southern Ontario school board provides the example of its successful *Early Words* initiative, which provides an accessible and integrated service for speech and language services for young children in the district. This has been built on speech pathology services already available in a variety of settings. In Northern Ontario, the *Northwords* pre-school speech & language program works to support students to ensure a smooth transition to school. The partnership serves JK students particularly in the area of Oral Language.

The need for this level of consistent, seamless coordination is emphasized by boards that currently have a situation where JK students go off site after school for service while SK children are seen on site during the school day: *“It would be better for all speech and language service to be on the school site and during the school day. In a “hub” type model this would be easy to put in place.”*

Services for Parents

In support of partnerships working together in a “hub” model, school boards note that it is important to be able to support parents and assist them in finding suitable additional services for their children, as well as providing for children with special needs. Programs for the working parent should wrap around the full time early learning. Community partnerships are vital for all this to be achieved. Parents are more likely to access services when they are in or near their own neighbourhoods.

Having child care programs located in school sites as well as the before and after school programs provides continuity of service to parents and communities. Caution is offered in relation to being aware of how government policies can have an impact on partnerships. One example is the recent capping of primary class size and how it led, in cases to more stringent application of school boundaries to ensure that the hard cap could be achieved. This resulted in a situation where families who may have selected a child care setting closer to their workplace, but out of their home school area, may be forced to return to their home school area when their child enters Kindergarten.

Consideration will be needed also to respond to the fact that in many “pockets” in the province structured child care centres are not the norm and child care continues to be mainly provided in homes.

Integration of Services/Jurisdiction Issues

It will be important to continue to engage in planning discussions for full time early learning as there will be jurisdictional issues related to expanding this program. Local partners want to make this work and they have spent considerable time, energy and resources already in aligning their respective ministry directives. Partners are dealing with two or more ministries, sets of legislation, funding sources, unions (or non-union) and variable directives. If the focus is to be about children and supporting their learning, the ideal scenario would see the "partners" amalgamating under one umbrella, dismantling "silos", and focussing on building a model wrapped around children.

The intent of all services to children and families should be one of integration so that services across sectors link naturally together, are easy to use and to access, and respond to families' needs. With respect to providing full-time quality early learning, neither existing school programs, nor child-care agencies can do this alone.

On a cautionary note, there needs to be awareness that Full-time Early Learning may result in less revenue for child cares and an inability to continue to operate in schools. It may also result in increased demand for before and after school programs from child care centres in order to increase their revenues. There may be a need to pursue partnerships with off-site child care programs, community agencies and community centres in order to deliver full day programs off site, since it is unlikely that there will be sufficient space in many schools.

An additional note of caution arises from the cyclical nature of partnerships resulting in either the pressures of change-overs if a partner has to withdraw or the board left with unfunded space when an agency moves.

Flexibility

Any Full-time Early Learning model should recognize the value of community partnerships and the potential for flexibility in program delivery. Communities are at different stages of development in the early learning area, and to be successful, all partners must build on existing relationships, with an emphasis on service to families and young children. There is no need to create further silos in children's services. Hence the important role of the Province is to articulate expectations and standards, rather than to impose structures and forms.

The centre of action should be at the neighbourhood level. Full-time Early Learning programs/centres, as they are developed, should continue to feed into this integrated and neighbourhood-centred approach.

STAFFING

When making staffing decisions, the purpose of implementing Full-time Early Learning programs needs to be considered as well as the philosophy of learning in early childhood. Flexible and innovative ideas may need to be considered. Young children need to feel safe and secure. This means limiting the number of changes the students will encounter throughout the day and throughout the week, including the number of adults working with each child. If children do need to change caregivers or environments, the rules need to be the same. The day should appear seamless for the children.

Those who are working with young children must have the necessary training and background to provide appropriate programming, and existing expertise should be respected. School Boards recognize the training and expertise offered by both qualified teachers and Early Childhood Educators. Comments in this section offer views on various possible models of delivery.

Program Delivery by Certified Teacher Option - Comments

Kindergarten teachers have expertise in delivering the kindergarten curriculum and programming for all students. They have well developed skills in supporting students in both academic and social learning. They have a knowledge base that includes a general understanding of instructional strategies, assessment, supports for students with special needs, and reporting to parents. Maximum gains are likely to be seen through a program in which a consistent teacher develops programming for students on a daily basis. In this model, Educational Assistant and/or ECE staff would provide additional support for students under the direction of a teacher.

In Northern Ontario, some school boards are currently engaged in an Oral Language project of some significance for at-risk JK and SK students. A major portion of this population is Aboriginal. In order to ensure quality, targeted instructional strategies that level the playing field during the early years, it is believed that qualified teachers are necessary to deliver such an intensive program. The teacher must understand how to move from assessment data to precision teaching for groups of at-risk students.

Boards have expressed the importance that adequate funding reflecting actual salary and benefits costs for teachers be provided if this model of delivery is selected.

Another concern was expressed in relation to schools that have French Immersion in kindergarten: “*How will the staffing of lengthened French Immersion programs be accomplished with the growing competition among school boards for FSL qualified teachers?*”

Program Delivery by Teacher-ECE/EA Option - Comments

There is support for the concept of a staff team supporting full-day learning. Everyone on the team has a skill, level of expertise and/or program aspect to offer. Roles for the teacher and ECE could be developed with educational assistants playing a support role to the program. The key element to manage will be the role of "teacher" and "ECE". Given paper qualifications, there will be the inevitable perception that the "teacher" is the lead staff member. ECEs will not see themselves as "support workers" to the teacher as they are currently teaching and designing

programs in their setting. The issue of role definition will have to be handled with thoughtfulness and sensitivity and a high degree of co-operation between schools and child care with an emphasis on how teachers and ECEs can work together effectively to provide the best program. In school boards such as Greater Essex County that have experience with a teacher/ECE team, the partnership is viewed as bringing a very effective combination of skills to the program.

There is a strong view that “Academic” programs need to be taught by qualified teachers and reporting should be done by qualified teachers. If a mixture of staff is to be used, there need to be clear boundaries set out around “child care” and “school”. There needs to be open communication between child care and classroom staff. There will also need to be role clarification for ECEs and Educational Assistants.

As partnering roles are defined, it is likely there will be issues around inequities in pay scale between teachers and ECEs. All costs for addressing inequities as well as all costs for any additional staff need to be provided for in the provincial funding formula.

Some boards have specifically expressed support for the Consultant’s/Coordinators Association of Primary Educators (CAPE) Position Paper 2008, particularly in their recommendations to:

- *Ensure that all staff who interact with young children in the full time early learning program have the knowledge and skills required to promote language competence*
- *Provide ratios of no less than 1 adult to 10 children, and no more than 20 children per class.*

Examples of programs with a “partner model” are to be found in a number of boards. One such example is Peel DSB’s “Hubs” and Readiness Centres designed to help children become better prepared for entry into kindergarten. The Readiness Centres are staffed with a kindergarten teacher and a teaching assistant, while the Hubs have additional staff, including a secretary, .5 social worker, a .5 speech & language pathologist and full-time community outreach worker.

Professional Development

Strong Professional development and training support is needed for teachers and or ECEs who will deliver these programs. The nature of this support should include regular direct in-service sessions on program development and child skill assessment, play-based differentiated instruction, program support documents, and time for professional learning community meetings, and mentoring or coaching. If the programs are provided by both early childhood educators and teachers, models of collaboration also need to be researched and developed where necessary. It will be instructive to look at experiences with differentiated staffing models elsewhere, e.g., New Brunswick. Increased funding for both program resources and staff training will need to be a priority.

The Full-time Early Learning initiative must engage all those who will affect the nature and delivery of the program – front line staff, administration and those who affect or are affected by the program. Discussion for specific training for full-day learning team members should be tailored and provided for the team. If it is determined that teachers will be the lead team

member, then understanding the curriculum, the role of other team members, the expertise they deliver, how to manage the team etc., needs to be part of their training, as offered by current institutions. Perhaps the roles become team leader, team support and auxiliary support based on the training pathway.

Experience has shown that relationships amongst ECE staff and school teaching and support staff are still largely driven by the attitude of principals. This implies that training of principals should include an emphasis on the importance and training of those working in the early education field, and the need to respect and work with those early learning partners towards the common goal of reaching all students' potential.

A final note is to include consideration of specific program issues such as impact on SK French Immersion.

Roles and Responsibilities

While models of collaboration and seamless delivery already exist between education and daycare, it is imperative that the ownership of the program and its delivery be clearly determined. If the day is seamless to children but broken up among different providers operating under different rules and statutory obligations, a great deal of coordination will be necessary to determine how blended reporting will take place and who will ultimately bear responsibility for communications with parents, requisite report writing and supervision of staff. In initiating *Best Start*, there were many conversations regarding who should deliver this program, and there was much discussion about a shared ownership and/or a seamless blend between teachers and early childhood educators. This poses some significant challenges given the differences in pay/compensation, training, and union representation.

Where boards already offer a full-day (every other day) kindergarten program, some of the challenges that have been faced include: impact on supervision in schools (because JK/SK students are there for both nutrition breaks and are supervised within the regular teaching complement in the school); accommodation (some schools use Kindergarten areas on playgrounds because of the geography of the school, for safety purposes, and this adds additional supervision, and physical plant accommodations); adjustments to teaching practice/program delivery.

One model cited describes having kindergarten students in early education for one-half of the day, and in kindergarten for the second half of the instructional day. The teacher and the early childhood educator work hand in hand, but with a clear delineation of who is responsible for which aspect of program delivery. Clearly a model like this can work, but it involves a lot of dialogue and mutual agreement among the stakeholders including resolving differing philosophies (between Kindergarten teachers and ECEs) and understandings around early literacy and developmentally appropriate instruction/practice. There is a real need to provide time for relationship building between Kindergarten teachers and ECEs.

Labour Relations

The staffing for the Full-time Early Learning program is a complex area as it affects such matters as job security, professional status, qualification validation, union membership. Collaborative planning would be necessary to ensure that factors such as the ownership of space, sharing of resources and supervision of staff are all considered. There is a need to continue to work closely with ETFO, CUPE, and other unions that would have staff involved in order to ensure that potential collective agreement and labour related issues regarding a Full-time Early Learning program are addressed.

New staffing models might be created through the extended service delivery. A negative feature might be that if Early Childhood Educators are employed, rather than teachers in an Early Learning Model to complement the Kindergarten program, conflict with ETFO might ensue if the model involves non-teaching staff.

The question as to who should employ the early childhood education staff when they are not teachers is difficult. Do respect, ownership, and understanding go hand in hand with sharing the same employer? There is some evidence that staff who are employed directly by the school board appear to be viewed with more respect than if they are hired by another agency. This may be mitigated through the involvement of schools from the start of a new project.

At least one school board suggested that roles be delineated at a provincial level and not left to the discretion of individual boards of education. If the province chooses a model that uses early childhood educators for a portion of the day's learning, then ETFO will need to work with the government to reach understandings about how those relationships affect local teacher contracts.

Special Education

Given the importance of the early years for growth and development, supporting children with the resources they may need at this time will provide a solid foundation to later learning. Specifically, children with exceptional needs (physical, social, emotional) need to have the support and resources available to assist them in meeting their identified learning outcomes. Consideration for Speech and Language support should also be given in order to assist children in their acquisition of language from a very early start.

Additional staff support is currently essential in many kindergarten classes to support the ever increasing numbers of special needs children. This will need to be provided for particularly when children are participating in a full day program.

Qualifications

If Early Learning is going to have a school-based delivery model, the issue of qualifications and training become very important. The current model for teacher pre-service education in the Province of Ontario does not provide specialized programming in the area of early childhood education. The superior knowledge of child development provided through college training should be expanded to those who come through teacher's college. Existing training through teacher pre-service or ECE training should be expanded, building bridges to both strands. Models such as those at Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Charles Sturt and Brock Universities, where a BA/Bed two year program is possible after a 2 year college program, could be expanded to other

universities. All this will need to be accomplished with dialogue with union, federations and professional groups. Faculties and Community Colleges will need to ensure the full range of staff required are available and trained to support new program models.

It may be necessary to establish a new category of qualification for the Ontario College of Teachers – that of Early childhood Education Specialist (Schedule B: Additional Basic Qualifications – Early Childhood). Such additional Qualifications courses in kindergarten (which include learning in early childhood education and development) should be required for those moving to kindergarten from upper elementary grades. Existing staff will need training on what a developmentally appropriate all day kindergarten program would look like: oral language, techniques for speech delays, etc.

If it is determined that the program would be a Kindergarten Program with teaching staff, and only teachers are involved, more qualified kindergarten teachers with expertise in early childhood education will be required.

Legislative Concerns

Combining the expectations of the *Day Nurseries Act* and the expectations from the Ministry of Education is a significant issue. Boards have commented on the requirements of the Day Nurseries Act which establishes maximum group sizes and staff to child ratios for those providing regulated child care services in the Province of Ontario. These ratios currently stand at 8:1 with a maximum group size of sixteen. The Ministry of Education does not differentiate staffing levels for children in this way. There is no effort to view pupil to adult ratios or class/group size differently in programs serving four-year-olds from those serving eight-year-olds. The supervision of children aged four and five varies greatly from those in grades 1 through 3.

It is noted that a play based program does run better with more adults in the room. The student teacher ratio needs to be small enough for teachers to be able to work with individuals and small groups daily.

Off-site Programs

The most cost effective solution from an infrastructure perspective is to locate the four and five-year old full day learning programs in schools – whenever and wherever possible. While it may be necessary in some communities and neighbourhoods in Ontario to locate the program outside of schools, at least for the short term, the long term aspiration should be to provide the service in schools as space and funding become available.

If Kindergartens are placed off-site in places currently without other staff present, the presence of a second staff member for student safety and staff security reason will likely be required, at additional expense. If Kindergartens are off-site then the current model of combined grades (K-1) will no longer be possible, impacting on the school's ability to comply with JK-Gr 3 class size 'caps', without hiring more teachers at additional cost.

If the program occurs offsite or relies on the partnerships between school boards and childcare providers, will there be provincially developed guidelines for human resource protocols,

procedures and policies, or will this be left up to individual boards? If early childhood educators are expected to provide the same service as certified teachers, this will surely impact on pay equity and costs.

If Kindergartens and early learning programs are on school site all day every day, K-1 combined classes could easily be established, presumably at no extra costs, as long as a qualified primary teacher is present all day.

It is noted, however, that there are boards that will not have the space to accommodate all full-time programs at school sites. While there are successful examples of off-site kindergartens, they are not common and many issues including those identified above will have to be considered.

CAPITAL PLANNING

School boards are unanimously supportive of the Full-time Early Learning initiative and are keenly interested in the opportunities it offers to expand the potential of schools as community hubs. Overall, there are some lessons to be gleaned from the Best Start experience. At its inception, Best Start imposed significant challenging timelines, as start dates for new programs were tied to sometimes unreasonable capital expansion project timelines. Often, the regulatory approval process in and of itself made the start dates unattainable, not to mention the capital acquisition process. It is important that the full time early learning programs be assessed from a capital needs perspective, that the accommodation concept and standards be well defined, and that the capital acquisition, conversion or construction programs be provided with reasonable resources and timelines.

The responses that OPSBA received in the area of Capital Planning for the Full-time Early Learning initiative fall into a range of themes that are set out below.

Current full-time JK/SK Programs

A number of school boards, particularly in Northern Ontario, already offer full-time Junior and Senior Kindergarten and are confident they can accommodate the Full-time Early Learning initiative. The issue for these boards currently is that only half of the program is funded and boards have to take funding from other budget lines to support the additional half-day of programming. Since the principle of Full-time Early Learning has been established, these boards seek the earliest possible relief from this funding pressure.

Some school boards in other parts of Ontario offer full-time kindergarten in high needs schools only and not all of these boards would be able to find space for board-wide implementation of Full-time Early Learning.

School Space Accommodates Full-time Program

Some boards are experiencing significant levels of declining enrolment and, by and large, would be able to accommodate Full-time Early Learning in existing schools. In some cases, they are incorporating prospective full-time kindergarten in their plans for accommodation reviews and staffing allotment.

Even in this category, it is noted that some renovations and revisions will be required in some buildings but, with adequate funding, this can be accommodated. Where school populations provide no available space, the initiative could be managed by displacing older students to portable classrooms in order to accommodate the full time early learning. In some cases, where the long term enrolment projections support such expenditures, it may be necessary to build an addition to house the program.

Substantial School Space Available

Boards that project moderate levels of declining enrolment for the foreseeable future in elementary schools indicate that they have some schools with space for full time kindergarten programs, with few modifications needed. In some schools, however, additional classroom

space would be needed to accommodate this program. Where schools requiring additional classrooms for the program may be forced to move other students into portables in order to accommodate full time kindergarten there is a concern that this is not popular with parents and it is advised that regular building space be considered wherever possible.

Overall the impact on accommodation planning will be site specific as well as dependent upon whether current kindergarten classes are removed from school sites, or whether the other half of the day students are added to existing school sites. In each of the boards in this category a small percentage of schools would have to consider portables or other solutions such as building additional classrooms.

Since the impact of declining enrolment is not uniform across a board's schools, there are situations where no space is available in any schools within a specific area. In such cases, the solution could require substantial capital funding to accommodate increased enrolment if the full day model is required to be located in schools.

Limited to No School Space Available

Several boards do not have excess physical space/student capacity to accommodate any significant increase in the number of kindergarten (JK/SK) classrooms. Even schools that have been recently built are in many cases already experiencing severe growth pressure since they tend to be located in high-growth areas. Board responses have included projections of up to 400 additional classrooms to accommodate the Full-time Early Learning initiative in schools. As Halton DSB puts it: *"The board would require approximately 4000 additional pupil places or approximately the equivalent of 8 new elementary schools to accommodate full time attendance for 3-4 year olds. This volume of construction would cause great strain on the board's ability to manage construction as several schools are already being built each year. The board would welcome a 3-5 year implementation window to manage the growth"*. It is essential that sufficient funding and time be provided to accommodate the construction of potential new space. It is noted that the cost of constructing a classroom under the Ministry funding model is \$368,368 per room; this does not include the special provisions, such as attached washrooms, that pertain to kindergarten classrooms.

While York Region DSB and a few other boards continue to experience enrolment growth especially in large parts of their boards, the most acute example of accommodation pressure is found in Peel DSB which is currently operating at above 100% accommodation capacity in both the elementary and secondary panels. The board is in the process of adding significant classroom space due to growth and the primary class size cap. A school by school analysis of current kindergarten classroom space and the board's projected (2010) kindergarten enrolment of 20,022 students, identifies a need for 394 additional kindergarten classrooms as a result of full-day learning for four and five-year olds. This need could be fulfilled through a combination of the conversion of existing regular classrooms and the construction of new classroom space. Some schools are not able to accept further school additions and so the board will need to find alternate means to accommodate the full-day program. The board may need to consider kindergarten centres and other non-traditional school organizations in instances where local school facilities cannot be modified to deal with a full-day program. Given the extensive

building/renovation program that is currently underway, as well as at least one Accommodation Review Committee that is in progress, the introduction of a full-day program and the resulting accommodation requirements would have a significant impact on both of these initiatives. As such, it is felt imperative that the Ministry of Education provide at least some basic guidelines with respect to a full-day program so the board can retain as many options as possible in terms of future planning for a full-day program.

Child Care and Wrap Around Facilities

The most cost effective solution from an infrastructure perspective is to locate the four and five-year old full day learning programs in schools – whenever and wherever possible. While it may be necessary in some communities and neighbourhoods in Ontario to locate the program outside of schools, at least for the short term, the long term aspiration should be to provide the service in schools as space and funding become available.

Capital planning should also consider the availability of daycare and before and after school care. Where schools already have child care programs attached to, or within, their walls, the matter of improved washroom facilities, fencing, etc. is already addressed. The wraparound partnership allows for young children to move seamlessly from their classroom setting to their daycare programs, both before/after school and currently for their ‘non-school’ days.

In terms of full-day programming, some other considerations include: shared use of school resources such as library, technology, gym, secretarial time; sharing rooms among kindergarten and before and after daycare programs raises issues such as purchasing of resources; legislative building requirements that are different for school and preschool programs; need to increase staff resource, parking, washroom, and outdoor play area facilities.

Particular cautions include: addressing the fact that requirements of municipal by-laws for parking spaces can hinder the development of programs especially in dense urban areas; specialized programs such as music, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres and French may lose dedicated space, and tenants may be required to relocate (such as pre-school child care, family support programs, mental health services). Schools with dedicated space for School Aged and Before/After School programs may have to move to a different shared space model which could present a further challenge.

Space Design and Space Modification Issues

The need for retrofitting regular classrooms into kindergarten learning environments and the need for portables and/or permanent additions would be a very real challenge, as well as ancillary issues such as site restrictions and traffic management. School yards are in many instances smaller than is preferable, and adding more permanent classrooms will make the playgrounds even smaller. Parking and drop off locations would need to be added at many of the older schools. Entry and exit from schools needs to be taken into consideration for larger numbers of children and their parents and, for security reasons, it has also been suggested to adopt card entry systems. At a minimum, renovations would be required to make available space suitable for early years programs, including converting regular classrooms into kindergarten

areas with implications such as lowering coat hooks and washrooms retrofits, new smaller furniture.

Available space in some old schools is not always physically accessible for those with buggies, lacks amenities such as wash rooms close by, is hot in summer, far from outdoor space and is not always attractive. These problems with the physical surroundings have an impact on the program quality, as staff may have to walk all children to washrooms abandoning program time, and take large amounts of time to get them to outdoor play areas. It is equally true that some community space, such as church halls, may also suffer from the same issues described in old schools.

Kindergarten classrooms are larger than regular classrooms by approximately 400 sq.ft. and include storage area, washrooms, coat and cubbie area and separate entrance. This space may not be available in all existing schools without major renovations or additions. Separate fenced play yards are also desirable; while interaction between younger and older children is important, young children need a separate play area, especially if 2 year olds are also part of the preschool environment. The combination of these requirements has an impact on capital costs.

It is important then that physical surroundings be compatible for providing quality early learning experiences. Purpose built for kindergarten or child-care is the best solution where feasible, as these spaces have adequate natural light, washrooms, water and space and access to outdoor play.

Creative Use of Space

Due to the high cost of adding space to existing buildings, options for schools to develop programs in which larger numbers of students might share classroom space with two teachers might be considered. This option has been made available in the current primary class size parameters. Leaving some room for creativity in the space needs should be considered for this implementation. Although not highly desirable, the option of flexible boundaries may also assist some school boards

Some boards have expressed support for establishing school organizations which are non-traditional and best meet the needs of the students and the community. An example might be a combination of K-6 and 7-12 schools. Having kindergarten pods might be a way of providing space in schools.

If the program is located in schools, the entire program can benefit from access to the multiple resources a school can provide e.g. library, gymnasium, wide range of professional staff.

Transportation

There will be some challenges in adding buses to meet the increased need and reorganizing bus routes to optimize efficiency.

Where a solution to implementing other aspects of the Full-time Early Learning initiative might involve flexible school boundaries, transportation issues will make this solution less feasible or even impossible especially in the rural context.

Impact for Accommodation Reviews

On the assumption that the best space for the Full-time Early Learning initiative is schools, boards will need to have direction on how to best plan for their current pupil places. Given that majority of Boards in the province are currently in a declining enrolment situation, they may be in a position, in many schools, to provide a location for full-day learning including before and after school care. However, as budgets correspondingly decline with enrolment, Boards are also in the position of consolidating pupil places. Boards may need to consider whether they should place a hold on future school closures. However, it must be recognized that this has financial implications. While the decisions are made for full-day learning, Boards would have to maintain pupil places for which they are receiving fewer dollars. And, if a future decision on full-time learning does not support the use of school space, Boards will have lost 1-2 years in moving forward on school closures to reduce excess pupil places. It is arguable that some compensation should be considered as an interim measure while the decision on how to implement full-day learning is being considered.

In growth boards, accommodation reviews will not likely be necessary to simply build additional classrooms for kindergarten. The main challenge for these boards will be the need for more classroom space where there is no unused or under-utilized space available to optimize.

If, on the other hand, some or all Kindergarten classes are moved offsite, this will also have a significant impact on school closure and consolidation issues under consideration in school accommodation review processes. There is a need for clarification of the potential grant implications of school-age children offsite or students in a daycare component in a school classroom.

Flexibility

Because of the importance and diversity of community, especially with the complexity of pockets of growth in the midst of enrolment decline, planning for full time early learning should be at a neighbourhood level rather than a school district level.

A multitude of implementation strategies are possible for varying communities, since many strategies need to be individually tailored to specific community needs. Some accommodation challenges may require several years for full implementation. ‘Capital’ focussed strategies range from short-term addition of portables to longer term additions to primary division facilities. Program-based strategies may range from boundary modifications to ‘over flow’ primary sites. All of the factors in this section point to the need of providing school boards with flexibility on implementation based on capacity and that there be consideration of some type of phased-in approach.

CONCLUSION

Ontario's public school boards wholeheartedly embrace the fundamental importance of Full-time Early Learning. Investing in our youngest children in the early years represents the most far-reaching and responsible investment we can make in Ontario's future. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to give our children the kind of start that assures their readiness to succeed in school and in life.

The research is overwhelming, consistent and irrefutable. A child's readiness to learn at the start of grade one is the single strongest predictor of how well the child will do in every grade, whether they will graduate successfully, what their earning potential will be, how positive their contribution to society will be and even how healthy they will be. Every child deserves the best possible start.

Findings from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth suggest that as many as one-quarter of Canada's young children may be developmentally vulnerable at school entry. The Survey reports indicate that access to quality child care and developmental programs and services, both those that include parents and those that do not, can and do provide important developmental benefits for children.

In this paper, school boards have examined the many considerations to be addressed in preparing an implementation plan for the Full-time Early Learning initiative. The issues are complex and flexibility in options and timing of implementation is essential. We are a province of diverse communities with a broad range of demographic factors and socio-economic pressures. What we have in common is a commitment to opportunities for children. Full-time Early Learning is a foundation that will give children opportunities not just in their early years but throughout their life cycle.

RESPONSE FROM MEMBER BOARDS RE FULL-TIME EARLY LEARNING

Responding School Boards

**Bluewater DSB
DSB of Niagara
DSB Ontario North East
Halton DSB
Hamilton-Wentworth DSB
Hastings & Prince Edward DSB
Greater Essex County DSB
Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB
Keewatin-Patricia DSB
Lakehead DSB
Limestone DSB
Near North DSB
Ottawa-Carleton DSB
Peel DSB
Rainbow DSB
Rainy River DSB
Renfrew County DSB
Thames Valley DSB
Toronto DSB
Trillium Lakelands DSB
Upper Grand DSB
Waterloo Region DSB
York Region DSB**

Responding School Authorities

**Bloorview School Authority
Caramat DSA**

APPENDIX B

SAMPLING OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MODELS IN PLACE IN SCHOOL BOARDS

Bloorview School Authority offers a Primary Integrated Education and Therapy (IET) program for students in JK/SK and Grade 1. It is a unique, full-day, head start program for students with physical disabilities.

Bluewater DSB has the following community partnerships related to Early Learning: *Let's Learn*; Before and After (15); Day Care (9); Birth to Six *WRAP* Program; Outreach Playgroups (4); Early Years Centres (2)

DSB of Niagara has worked successfully to develop positive and productive relationships with all stakeholder groups within the Niagara Region. The Early Learning Planning Council, which includes all organizations tied to the *Best Start* and *Child Care* programs, Niagara Region Public Health, the thirty-eight public library facilities in the region, and other boards.

Greater Essex County DSB has a steering and an implementation committee consisting of school board representatives, municipal staff, child care providers and local child services agencies, to implement the *Best Start* strategy for child care. Additional areas were also developed and funded with local *Best Start* capital funds for a 'mini-hub' service model, whereby *Healthy Baby* screening, speech and language support and other community services for children and their families could be centralized in school settings.

Hastings & Prince Edward County has experienced some degree of success with *Best Start* programs.

Halton DSB has a strong relationship with all the district's municipalities. "*Our Kids Network*" involves social planning, CAS, Community care providers and police. This is a long and strong organization that helps to support all children from pre-school to graduation

Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB: has partnerships with municipalities, Day Care Operators, *Best Start* networks and *Early Years* partners.

Lakehead DSB: has private day care centres in a number of schools running a parallel program, and other community partners share school space, including the Urban Aboriginal Education Project and Lakehead University Faculty of Education classes.

Limestone DSB has experience with *Best Start*, Early Years Centres, Kingston and Area Early Years Coalition. Partnerships currently in place include Community Care Access Committee, Pathways for Children and Youth, Kairos, Lennox and Addington Community Mental Health, Community Living, *Best Start*, Early Years Centres, LARC, Kingston, Frontenac Lennox and Addington Public Health, Early Learning and Childcare Network, Hotel Dieu Child Development Centre, OEYC, Northern Frontenac Community Services, Community Living

Kingston, Katarokwi Native Friendship Centre, Kingston and Area Early Years Coalition, *Better Beginnings for Kingston Children*, City of Kingston, Children's Services.

Ottawa-Carleton DSB has 54 childcare programs in a variety of purpose-built space and converted space. The board also has a successful all-day learning program at a local business park and is in the process of developing a second early learning program with a local community college in which half of the day is led by a certified teacher, half by early childhood educators who also provide the bookends of before- and after-school care.

Peel DSB is a leading partner in the *Success by 6 Peel* initiatives across the region of Peel. *Success by 6 Peel* coordinates all of the programs for preschool children and their parents in Peel. As well, *Success by 6 Peel* serves as the *Best Start* Network for this region. Notwithstanding the accommodation limitations, the Peel District School Board is well positioned with significant established partnerships to support early learning. The Board does accommodate a number of child care programs in its facilities, but due to the board's own accommodation needs, opportunities are limited. The board has extensive links to before and after school programs which operate in over 50% of elementary schools. They are offered in Peel schools by third party providers such as Peel Lunch and After School Programs and YMCA. While the long established relationship with providers offers opportunity for co-operation for a full-day kindergarten program, such a partnership would not provide any relief in terms of the board's accommodation situation.

Rainbow DSB: *Best Start* Hubs have been established in four Rainbow schools (12 sites in the area). In elementary schools there are 20 day care offerings at different elementary sites including alternative day programs for 4 year olds and under. Before and after schools options are offered in 23 schools.

Rainy River DSB: Successful partnerships include the Aboriginal *Headstart* program; *Northwords* – pre-school speech & language program to support students to ensure a smooth transition, serves JK students particularly in the area of Oral Language; *Best Start*; Child Care centre in school

Renfrew County DSB is an active member of the county Best Start Network and participates in regional Best Start hubs currently established in three of the planning regions. Childcare providers are located in three of twenty-three elementary schools and a non-school site; Early Years satellites are located in three sites.

Toronto DSB has established many community partnerships which focus on coordination of early learning: 330 child care centres, 58 Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, and many Ontario Early Years and Family Resource programs already located in TDSB schools. (*Toronto First Duty*, *Best Start* programs, on-site child care; kindergarten off-site in child care; inner-city full-day kindergarten/childcare/parenting models) Through these programs, TDSB has established a strong partnership with the City of Toronto and local community agencies such as the YMCA.

Waterloo Region DSB currently has 19 child care centres in the board's 99 elementary schools, and two new schools with child care centres opening in September 2008. There is a unique partnership at Lexington Public School with the *Butterfly Learning Centre* where the children are in kindergarten half-day and then in child care for the other half-day. The children remain in the same portable all day and the teacher and the early childhood educator move. There are many before and after school programs arranged with different service providers. Most of these are in schools where child care already exists, although there are some examples where a service provider uses the school only for before and after school programs.

York Region DSB: over 35 schools are host to early child development & parenting programs delivered by early learning and care partners (Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC), *All Our Kids* (AOK), Community Action Program for Children (CAP C) etc. in shared space; 9 *Best Start* Hubs in schools, developing along the integration index, most with site based management committees including: child care supervisor, parenting supervisor, kindergarten teachers, principal, Early Learning Coordinator, *Best Start* Project Coordinator (Region of York), parents. 50 child care centres serving a maximum of 2,000 children 0-6 years including 1,000 spaces serving 4 and 5 year olds; 30 not for profit child care operators. YRDSB has representation on the following Early Years community committees: Planning Forum on Children, Youth & Families; Prenatal to Six; Child Care Committee of York Region; Enhanced Funding for Special Needs in Child Care; Child Care Quality Assurance; *Best Start* Network; Early Learning and Care Hub Steering; Family and Children's Services, Region of York; EDI Implementation; CAP C Management; *Healthy Babies, Healthy Children* - Early Identification; Understanding the Early Years in Georgina. The Board also participates in the Simcoe-York Children's Treatment Network that provides integrated services for children with disabilities.