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PROVINCIAL EARLY LEARNING PLAN AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY IN YORK REGION

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated September 2, 2010, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides a summary of the overall provincial early learning vision and policy direction recommended in *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario* by Dr. Charles Pascal. It identifies actions taken to date and potential implications for York Region service planning.

3. BACKGROUND

The Pascal report recommends an integrated child and family service system in order to address the fragmented nature of early childhood services and support lifelong learning and success

In November 2007, Premier McGuinty appointed Dr. Charles Pascal as the government's Special Advisor on early learning and asked him to research and recommend the best way to implement full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds in Ontario.

In June 2009, Dr. Pascal released his report titled *With our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning Ontario* (the Pascal report). Report recommendations are built around the objective of transitioning from a patchwork of services to an integrated system of child care, special needs resources and comprehensive early learning services and supports. By building on recent initiatives aimed at reducing class sizes, focussing on literacy and numeracy, with ties to the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy and an established service base, Dr. Pascal aims to address what is seen as inequities in the delivery of early childhood services across the Province.

Key components of the recommended service system include full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds, extended day programs, the creation of a network of Best Start Child and Family Centres and enhanced parental leave

The Pascal report provides a bold and transformative vision that includes twenty specific recommendations aimed at creating a new integrated child and family service system to provide a continuum of services for children from birth to age 12. While the Province has begun to implement some recommendations, it has not yet provided specific information or timelines in relation to the realization of the full Pascal vision.

Full-day learning

The Pascal report highlights research findings confirming that full-day learning is associated with improved reading and numeracy, smoother transitions to grade 1, and increased secondary school graduation rates. It recommends that school boards should be mandated to offer a two-year, full-day early learning program prior to grade 1, available to all children who turn 4 by December 31.

On October 26, 2009, Premier McGuinty announced that, as a first step toward implementing the vision outlined by Dr. Pascal, the Province would begin phasing in full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds in September 2010 with full implementation by 2016. The full-day learning will be operated by Boards of Education utilizing a staffing model which includes both teachers and Early Childhood Educators working together.

While Dr. Pascal's report focuses on the full school day learning, parents are provided with the option to have their child participate for a half-day.

Extended day program

The program also provides parents with the option to enrol their child in a fee-based, extended day program delivered by Early Childhood Educators within the school setting where there is sufficient enrolment to make such a program viable.

The extended day program is designed to be offered before and after school (e.g. 7-9 a.m. and 3:30-6 p.m.) providing a seamless approach. This would also assist parents going to and from work while ensuring their children are in developmentally enriched programs to further enhance their academic success.

Boards of Education have been asked to offer extended day programming where their demand is 15 children or more. It is to be provided on a fee for service, cost recovery basis. Fee subsidies would be utilized by eligible families who need help with the cost of this extended day program.

The Pascal report also recommends that school boards look at delivering extended day programming options for 6- to 12-year-olds.

Best Start Child and Family Centres

Dr. Pascal recommends consolidating a range of existing child and family programs into a network of Best Start Child and Family Centres which are recommended to be operated by Consolidated Municipal Service Managers. The Centres are designed to be located in or partnered with schools, and provide:

- Flexible, licensed, part-time and full-time/full-year early learning and care options for children up to four years of age.
- Parenting programs and resources.
- Prenatal and post-natal information and supports.
- Parenting and family support programming.
- Nutrition and nutrition counselling.
- Early identification and intervention resources.
- Links to special needs treatment and community resources including healthcare, recreation and other services.

Enhanced Parental Leave

Another recommendation of the Pascal report is that enhancements be made to parental leave and benefits by 2020. These include extending parental leave to 400 days after the birth or adoption of a child, six weeks of leave for the non-birthing parent, coverage for self-employed parents, flexibility to return to work part-time and 10 days of annual leave for parents of children under 12.

Dr. Pascal's vision is seen as a positive one for child development in Ontario

Consensus has emerged across the Province that Dr. Pascal's vision is a good one and that in many cases the recommendations support what has been advocated for in the child care sector for some time. At the same time caution has been expressed that with such transformative change, managing the pace and progress, and ensuring adequate resourcing and communication will be vital to effective implementation and longer term success.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Changes are taking place within provincial ministries to support early learning

In his report Dr. Pascal highlights the need for a single ministry, specifically the Ministry of Education, to be responsible for leading the recommended transformation and creating the necessary policy framework for early learning in Ontario. This includes the development of service plan expectations, along with programming and operational requirements related to the report's key components.

The Province has acted on this recommendation and created a new Early Years Division within the Ministry of Education (EDU). In April, 2010 the Province announced that child care and special needs resourcing (for children 3.8 years of age and over) would be transferred from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) to the EDU to bring child care and education together under one ministry. The first phase of the transfer included policy and program responsibilities with funding and contract management responsibilities being transferred in the fall of 2010.

Implications of inter-ministerial change include development of new working relationships, contracting, and budget related processes

As a result of the EDU taking on responsibilities for policy, programming, funding and contracting related to child care and special needs resourcing (for children over 3.8 years of age) new working relationships have to be formed in a very short period of time. These working relationships are critical to ensuring effective and timely management of all phases of the business cycle. Community and Health Services staff have been active in meeting with MCYS and EDU representatives as these transitions have proceeded.

In segregating out certain services and functions that are moving over to EDU challenges have arisen in regard to budget and contracting requirements as well. This has occurred most significantly in relation to Early Intervention Services which has employed an integrated model of service to special needs children from 0-6 years of age in York Region. As a result of budget and service responsibilities for special needs resourcing for children 3.8 years and up moving to the EDU and services for special needs children from birth up to 3.8 remaining with the MCYS under the Infant Development Program, concern has arisen that this “split” will create an administrative barrier to the effective use of funding in each “pot” of funds to ensure a continuity of service and maximum service outcomes. Through active dialogue between Community and Health Services staff with MCYS and EDU staff it appears, at the point that this report is being written, that provincial staff understand the concerns and are working to ensure that no unintended negative impacts to service occur as a result of the structural changes. Staff will, however, need to continue to be vigilant as the changes continue to ensure overall service and system effectiveness.

In September 2010 approximately 15% of eligible four- and five-year-olds will be attending full-day learning programs across Ontario

As noted previously in this report, full-day learning for junior and senior kindergarten was one of the key recommendations of Dr. Pascal in his wide ranging review of Early Learning in Ontario. In phase one, which begins September 2010, approximately 35,000 eligible four- and five-year-olds will be attending full-day learning programs in nearly 600 schools across Ontario. The schools for phase one were recommended by the school boards with the expectation of stakeholder input and an assessment of available classroom space, existing local child care, and the various needs of the community. In phase two, to commence in September 2011, approximately 200 more schools will be

participating in full-day learning. The phased implementation will continue until its anticipated completion in 2016.

Offering full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds is mandated

To support the implementation of full-day early learning, the *Full-Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010* was passed in the legislature in April 2010. This Bill amends the *Education Act* by mandating school boards to offer full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds, including the extended day programs for before and after school where demand is sufficient. This means that school boards must themselves deliver the extended day programming in the future. Regulations have been introduced, however, to allow third party child care providers to continue to offer extended day programs in the schools on a short term transitional basis during the 2010/11 and 2011/12 school year.

The 2010 Provincial Budget announced support for early learning through capital funding for schools and a commitment to fill federal funding gaps to maintain child care spaces in Ontario

In the March 25, 2010 Ontario budget, the government announced a commitment of approximately \$245 million in capital funding over the next two years to assist schools with the implementation of full-day learning. This money is administered by the school boards.

The provincial government has also announced \$63.5 million annually to maintain approximately 8,500 child care spaces (by their estimate) across the province that would have been impacted by the end of federal child care funding.

Funding for child care stabilization is also being provided by the Province

In addition to the investments noted above, the Province has announced the provision of funding to help stabilize the child care system during this period of change. The Province is providing up to \$12 million over five years in new capital funding to assist non-profit child care centres to serve children 0-4 years of age with retrofits and renovations, such as installation of additional washroom facilities, upgrading playgrounds or installation of walls to create required interior play space. The Province has also announced up to \$51 million over five years in operating funding that, as we understand at this point, can be used to support fee subsidy for non-profit and commercial child care programs impacted by the implementation of full-day learning. On April 27, 2010, York Region was advised that as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (Service Manager), it would receive an allocation of \$542,000 for 2010/2011 to allocate to providers. This allocation is broken down into \$441,600 operating funding and \$100,400 minor capital funding. No specific information on future year allocations has been provided at this time.

Implications of implementation of full-day learning include system transition and stabilization concerns, funding and capacity issues, and coordination of supports to children with special needs

Dr. Pascal's vision of full-day learning is built around the concepts of a full care learning day and extended day programming. The Province has been clear that school boards will be expected to deliver both of these components directly. As the first phase of implementation rolls out in 2010, however, a combination of insufficient demand and the allowed use of existing third party delivered child care in the schools during the transition period means that no York Region schools are directly delivering the extended day services in the 2010-11 school year. While this will allow for a period of adjustment, it will make it difficult to initially gauge impacts on the child care system as a whole.

Significant concern exists amongst non-profit and commercial child care operators in regard to impacts to the viability of their agencies as a result of 4- and 5-year-olds leaving their care to be served through the schools. While the Province is aware of these concerns and has responded through the provision of operational and capital stabilization funding noted above, the adequacy of the funding is being questioned. Community and Health Services staff are currently working with child care agencies impacted by the phase one implementation to gain a better sense of the potential impacts as part of the stabilization funding planning and approval process.

Questions regarding funding go beyond stabilization funding to the fact that overall fee subsidy funding to support low income families in accessing child care is already an issue. York Region currently has over 4,000 children on the waitlist for fee subsidy and that number is growing. The Province has indicated that eligibility determination for families requiring subsidy will continue to be done by municipalities and continue to be done using the provincially mandated income test. The Province has already indicated the local municipal waitlist policy and procedure should apply to all families seeking to access fee subsidy to avoid "queue jumping" as it applies for subsidy for 4- and 5-year-olds using extended day programs in schools. This approach requires that Community and Health Services staff work closely with school boards to communicate funding realities and expectations to families to ensure equitable access for all families as this new system rolls out.

Questions are also arising in regard to continuity of care through the year. The EDU has determined that the full-day learning program and the extended programming be offered during regular instructional school days. This essentially means 188 days which does not include professional activity (PA) days, holidays, or summer. Opportunities exist for schools to work with child care providers to address the issue of care beyond instructional school days should they choose not to directly deliver themselves. At this point these issues are still being looked at both in York Region and throughout the Province. There is some indication that concern about care on non instructional days may be a contributing factor to the lack of uptake of school-delivered extended care for 4- and 5-year-olds during the phase one rollout. There are also concerns about ongoing program viability for

licensed child care operators who are facing the potential of only operating on non-instructional days.

In addition to the implications noted above, there is also concern throughout the early learning and child care system that there will not be enough registered Early Childhood Educators to staff licensed child care centres due to the recruitment of registered Early Childhood Educators by the school boards. Schools have been actively recruiting in order to be prepared for phase one implementation this fall. Recruiting will continue over the next four years as the system moves to full implementation.

As the new full-day learning phases in it is important that children with special needs receive a seamless continuum of resources and services through the year, including services provided by our Early Intervention Services program in conjunction with key community partners. Early Intervention Services staff currently work closely with child care agency staff to support special needs children. Early intervention also assists in transition to school, through work with schools across the Region. Questions have arisen as to how these and other critical support services will work in the classroom based environment. There is also an issue related to the fact that currently close to half of the children Early Intervention Services serve do not go to junior or senior kindergarten but continue to attend licensed child care through agencies, due to behavioural and other issues. While it is mandatory for schools to offer full-day learning, it is not mandatory that children attend. This will require staff to continue to be able to meet different service needs and requirements in different settings should these trends continue, further stretching service capacity where waitlists already exist.

In response to the implications and issues noted above, Community and Health Services staff are meeting regularly with school board, EDU and MCYS staff to ensure clear lines of understanding, information sharing and customer communication moving forward. Meetings and check-ins are also taking place with key stakeholders including the Best Start Network and child care operators groups to keep channels of communication open and support ongoing issue identification, monitoring and problem solving.

Municipal leadership and expertise seen as best positioned to create and manage a network of Best Start Child and Family Centres

In his report Dr. Pascal recommends that municipalities play a key leadership role in the development, support, and monitoring of what he proposed as a network of Best Start Child and Family Centres. This recommendation is rooted in municipal Service Manager expertise and leadership in managing children's services, services to special needs children, community planning, public health programming, and close and effective linkages to a range of community resources, stakeholders and partners. The report envisions that the Service Manager will work with Boards of Education and other community children's service partners to ensure local priorities and circumstances are considered in the development of an Early Years Service Plan in support of the establishment of Best Start Child and Family Centres.

Dr. Pascal's plan recommends for the development and expansion of early years services through combining and re-engineering the governance, resources and delivery of existing child care, family resource and early learning services. Services included in this approach could range from licensed centre based and home child care, family resource programs, Ontario Early Years Centres, parenting and family literacy centres, prenatal and postnatal information and supports, Healthy Babies, Healthy Children services, nutrition counselling, preschool speech and language services, child care special needs resourcing and family based literacy coordinators. Dr. Pascal's vision is that the Centres offer a one-stop point of access for parents to support a child's earliest development preferably in, or partnered with, a school.

Provincial funding for Best Start Child and Family Centres would be provided to municipalities to administer

In his report Dr. Pascal recommends that the Province transfer funding for Best Start Child and Family Centres in a single payment that consolidates existing transfers for children's programs and what he envisioned as savings that may be generated from the streamlining of services as a result of the implementation of the Early Learning Program.

It should again be noted, however, that while it is understood that the Province is continuing to study Dr. Pascal's full set of recommendations, no direction has been given pertaining to Child and Family Centres and initiatives other than the full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds which is currently being rolled out.

Child and Family Centre implementation will require confirmation of Regional role, collaborative planning and adequate funding

Dr. Pascal envisions Child and Family Centres being located in, or partnered with, schools, and providing licensed full-day/part-day, full year child care for children up to age four. They would be supported by parent fees and subsidies available for eligible families. The centres would encompass a one-stop opportunity for pre- and post-natal supports, parenting resources and programs, playgroups, linkages to health and community resources to support early identification and intervention for special needs children.

Should this recommendation move to implementation, the Region would require confirmation of its role in the creation of Child and Family Centres. The initiative would also require an integrated approach between Public Health Services, Social Services and other key regional services and support units, in conjunction with collaborative planning with key external stakeholders including school boards, the Best Start Network and service providers. These approaches would be critical given the objective of re-engineering a range of existing services into a network of centres and the capital and operational considerations and implications of such an approach.

Adequate provincial funding would also be a key factor, both from the standpoint of ensuring the overall internal capacity to manage what would be a large, transformative, change management process, and to ensure effective ongoing administration and monitoring. Factored into this would be a concern for adequate operational funding to address fee subsidy support both now, where resources are not adequate, and into the future where demand is expected to continue to grow. The Public Health Branch would also require additional funding to address delivery requirements at these sites, particularly since full implementation of the Pascal vision, including consistent developmental screening of 18-month-olds by primary care practitioners, would increase demand for Public Health Child and Family Health services. There are concerns that Dr. Pascal's report has not fully considered the funding pressures currently being experienced by regionally and community delivered child and child health related programs and continued advocacy will be necessary to address anticipated funding shortfalls in the immediate and future term.

In response to the issues noted above, the Community and Health Services Department is working closely with ministry partners and relevant associations and networks, such as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association to highlight the importance of the Municipal Service System Manager role and the need for adequate resources and capacity to manage this one-stop vision.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Pascal report indicates that capital and ongoing operational funding will be required to implement the vision. Estimates are not provided, however, for the whole vision, but do cite a need of approximately \$1.7 billion over 25 years in capital and \$790 million to \$990 million per year operationally for full day early learning. Local estimates and further operational estimates for the whole of the vision are not yet known.

The Community and Health Services Department currently delivers services for children and families through a range of programs under the Social Services and Public Health Branches. Funding for these programs is provided through a variety of funding formulas, processes and ministries. Staff will continue to closely monitor potential program changes, reporting back to Committee and Council as details unfold and approvals are required. However, if there are increased costs that impact the Region it would be expected that the Province would fund these.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The range of services that Dr. Pascal has identified in his overall early learning vision and policy direction play critical roles in promoting healthy childhood development and helping children throughout the Region arrive at school ready to achieve their greatest potential. These services also form essential supports for many parents, helping them to

balance the demands of family with participation in the workforce, or the pursuit of education and training. As a result, changes currently underway in full-day learning and other changes contemplated in Dr. Pascal's vision would impact children and families in all local municipalities. It must also be noted, however, that without additional funding, access to programs and services will continue to be limited at the local level.

7. CONCLUSION

Dr. Charles Pascal, in his report titled *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, has put forth a bold vision aimed at creating a new integrated child and family service system for children from birth to age 12. The key components of this recommended service system include initiatives currently being implemented, such as the creation of a new Early Years Division in the Ministry of Education, and full-day learning and extended day programming for four- and five-year-olds, as well as those that have not yet been implemented, but continue to be considered by the Province, including Best Start Child and Family Centres, and enhanced parental leaves and benefits.

These initiatives, both taken alone and collectively, are transformative in nature. Each step along the way, therefore, leads to both province-wide and local implications that need to be closely monitored and actively managed.

Dr. Pascal's vision and objectives have generally been regarded across the Province as both needed and positive for child development. The report also outlines what is happening now and what may be coming, and the steps being taken to effectively manage these issues.

For more information on this report, please contact David Rennie, General Manager, Social Services at Ext. 2013 or Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health at Ext. 4012.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.