

# Child Care Modernization Feedback

## Approaches for Funding and Quality

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### INTRODUCTION

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

In contrast, our approach in this submission is centered on the core assumption that any substantial transformation (or modernization, if you will) in any one area of child care

The process of re-allocating existing funds stifles much needed progress in the child care delivery system, diminishing the potential of the new model of a child care system in Ontario to simply being a perpetuation of status quo. Shifting existing funding inevitably increases costs for some parents, while reducing them for others. Child care modernization demands a re-engineering of funding at its foundation, with re-allocation and new investments as a two-fold commitment to meeting the aspirations of child care system change. Our concerns are related the following:

- Growth in the supply of licensed spaces without a corresponding increase in funding is premature. Dilution in funding at this stage of system development will diminish quality levels and interfere with the hoped for changes to the system of child care.
- Inflationary c( a)-5( t)-4(w)4(o)JTJi4.

## DEVELOPING THE FUNDING MODEL

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

individual programs will provide them with a signfica

losses resulting from a consistently or seasonally low population base thereby allowing efforts to improve viability and child care quality to gain traction.

- In the existing market-based system the majority of middle class families find it difficult to access high quality child care programs. Although research shows<sup>3</sup> that generally, markets with large child populations deliver higher quality care - this is usually accompanied by competition for limited spaces that only serves to push the prices

- To provide information regarding how sector-wide training, professional development and funding can be specifically applied in order to address the areas identified as needing improvement at the program and the system levels.
- To include a strategy for public reporting not for the purpose of placing the responsibility of choosing quality on parents; but to enhance operator motivation to deliver high quality programming.
- To be supported by a corps of well qualified program evaluation staff with expertise and advanced university degrees with qualifications in early childhood education.<sup>4</sup>

## SUPPORTING QUALITY

### ENVIRONMENT

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

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

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<sup>4</sup> OECD (2006). [Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care](#). Paris, France: OECD, Page 16.

<sup>5</sup> Brooker, L. & Woodhead, M. (2012). [Healthy Environments: Early Childhood Education in Focus 8](#). Milton Keynes, UK: The Open University.

## STAFFING

Traditional wisdom identifies three major components of a quality program: staff- child ratios, staff educational qualifications and group size. Recent research findings identify the need for ongoing training of all staff, including staff with formal ECE credentials and those without. Ontario is lagging behind other jurisdictions by not enforcing a minimum level of post-secondary t





child care; the processes for child care modernization related to home child care need to also be evidence-based. The research evidence shows that home child care providers who stay in the field have higher levels of commitment and intentionality in their role of supporting children and families than do early childhood educators in centre-based child care and these provider characteristics are associated with higher quality care environments; however, the research also shows that as a group, home child care providers are predominantly untrained in early childhood education.<sup>7</sup> A preliminary strategy to strengthen