



Submission to Ministry of Education, Early Learning Division

Response to: Modernizing Child Care in Ontario: Sharing Conversations, Strengthening Partnerships, Working Together

Submitted by: Niagara Child Care Sector

September 24, 2012

Niagara Child Care Sector serves as the voice of a higher standard of child care in Niagara. It assists those who work with children to continually improve the quality, value, and range of services they offer Niagara families, and keeps parents, policy-makers, and the public informed on issues related to standards of practice. Representation from the following agencies sit at the Niagara Child Care Executive table; The Rosalind Blauer Centre for Child Care, YMCA, MEDU, Regional Municipality of Niagara, Aboriginal Early Learning and Child Care Services, Francophone Early Learning and Child Care Services, ECCDC, A Child's World, Niagara College, Brock University and Niagara Nursery School.

Niagara Child Care Sector applauds the Ministry of Education with the release of the recent "Modernizing Child Care in Ontario" discussion paper and shares the government's long term vision for early learning and child care in Ontario. We agree the process of modernization is about stabilizing and transforming the early learning and child care system to enable higher-quality, consistent services that can support future growth. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the discussion paper. We are pleased to provide our response to the governments identified five key areas for action for the next three years.

1. Operating Funding Formula

Niagara Child Care Sector recommends that new funding formulas are created in order to ensure equitable distribution of funds across Ontario. Currently Niagara is in a waitlist situation for child care fee subsidy. Without child care subsidy parents are forced to stay at home with their children and are therefore not able to work or they must rely upon the unlicensed/unregulated system where care is more affordable. Child care viability depends on the ability to fill spaces especially now with the effects of full day kindergarten (FDK).

A new operating funding formula based on updated data such as demographic trends is required. Equitable funding distribution should be based on a community needs assessment which includes data specific to: demand for service, income levels (i.e. LICO), education, current market rates (per diems), etc. Common data elements for each community across Ontario would enable evidence-based decision making to create greater transparency of distribution. We also agree that streamlining funding would provide CMSMs/DSSABs with greater flexibility and improved efficiency of government resources.



2. Capital Funding Priorities

Niagara Child Care Sector supports a schools-first capital funding approach. In Niagara, our local Best Start Network (Early Years Niagara Planning Council) has school board, CMSM and early learning and child care representation at the table. In pursuing a capital funding approach, we ask that MEDU consider capital funding decisions to come from joint planning made through local Best Start Network meetings (We would also encourage that Best Start Networks include a parent representative). It would be helpful for MEDU to identify common guidelines for all communities to base their capital funding decision making. As a beginning approach to joint planning, Best Start Networks could work together to assist MEDU in developing the funding guideline criteria. Once determined, we believe it is essential to communicate the decisions to the public. Transparency is key in keeping the trust with all involved – as the decisions will present opportunities for some but not all child care centres.

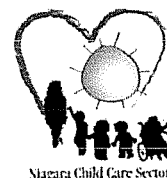
Moving forward with schools first approach, we believe that partnership policies between child care centres and schools are required. Templates from MEDU would be helpful for communities and could include: Memorandum of Understandings, shared space policies and guidelines, rent policies, etc to ensure that relationships are based upon collaboration, respect, and agreed upon terms so the child care organizations are considered as partners rather than tenants.

3. Quality Programs

Niagara Child Care Sector applauds MEDU's commitment to developing mandatory provincial program guidelines. However, we believe that careful consideration must be given to developing these quality guidelines. Across Ontario there are many different types of initiatives aimed at improving quality in licensed child care programs. In Niagara we are fortunate to have Quality Child Care Niagara (QCCN) - a standardized, research-based approach designed to enhance the quality of licensed child care programs and to support core school programming across Niagara. QCCN promotes the skill set of Registered Early Childhood Educators to be highly knowledgeable in child development, confident, and adaptable. Niagara also has a professional resource centre, the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC) which implements the training and support for QCCN along with a variety of other tools and resources for early learning and child care professionals.

As a first step in developing program quality guidelines, we recommend a provincial quality enhancement committee be formed. One of the first tasks should be to define quality. MEDU should take a leadership position, and with the enhancement committee, identify components of quality child care that everyone needs to abide by. We suggest this may be accomplished in part by identifying the similar components in the various quality initiatives used throughout Ontario communities. Furthermore, we have developed a list of suggestions we would like MEDU to consider when developing mandatory provincial program guidelines:

- Should be broad enough to allow each community to evaluate quality through the lens of their own quality initiative;



- A mix of overarching principals of program quality as well as mandatory core elements which are non-negotiable;
- All aspects of quality program guidelines need to be measurable;
- If a child care centre 'scores' low on quality, education and training will be available for quality improvement; and
- Having a 3rd party perform quality assessments (similar to playground inspections).

We strongly believe that parent education is needed to provide guidance and information regarding the components of quality child care. Many parents are unaware licensed child care exists whether it be centre-based or home child care. If parents are aware of licensed child care, many do not have the knowledge of what constitutes a quality program. We are aware there are several tools and checklists individual communities have created for parents when choosing child care, but these need to be better marketed so that parents know where to get this information.

All information contained in the program guidelines should be broad enough yet still relevant for everyone to utilize including urban and rural child care as well as Aboriginal and Francophone centres and home child care providers. We also request that all information be translated into French.

4. Modernized Legislative and Regulatory Framework

Regarding the government's modernization of the legislative and regulatory amendments, Niagara Child Care Sector recommends the following changes be made to the DNA:

- Allow centres to maintain financial sustainability without sacrificing program quality;
- Are aligned with the Education Act so that they are more equitable systems that are more easily integrated/implemented in communities (i.e. Serious Occurrence reporting in Education Act, eliminate non-essential requirements in DNA that exceed those in Education Act);
- Curriculum framework and quality indicators must be incorporated into DNA;
- Developmentally appropriate play-based guidelines are needed for children with special needs;
- RECE requirement needs to be articulated, along with First Aid & CPR and ongoing training requirements as per and through the College of Early Childhood Educators;
- All children upon entry into licensed child care should be screened with one consistent tool;
- Ratios should remain as they are in order to protect quality, safety and demands on staff;
- Education Act should comply with ratios of DNA;
- Age grouping categories could be shifted and more flexibility allowed;
- Child care facilities management should be more aligned with school requirements (i.e. water testing, room sizes, outdoor spaces and lighting);
- Increased flexibility in definitions surrounding sleeping arrangements and room design;
- Base funding to cover child care hard costs should be established;
- Review record keeping and documentation requirements in order to streamline forms and ensure commonality;



- Review and align health, nutrition, safety and building requirements to ensure consistency across regulations i.e. DNA and Education Act; and
- Standardize health and nutrition training requirements.

5. Support for Accountability and Capacity-Building

Niagara Child Care Sector supports MEDU's move towards enhancements in licensing compliance. Quality indicators should be included in licensing. High performing centres should be recognized in some capacity. Parents and the community should be made aware of high performance centres. Parents need more education about quality child care and what that entails.

One area that significant improvements could be made is in child care administration. MEDU could support enhanced administrative practices by sharing resources and tools for child care Supervisors. One common registration form could also be developed so that all child care centres are asking for all applicable information during the intake process. Developing common tools for Boards of Directors could also be beneficial in ensuring accountable and consistent practices.

In terms of evaluation tools, there are a variety of developmental tools currently used in Niagara which have been designed and/or introduced through QCCN (such as the Speech/Language Checklist, Diagnostic Inventory for Screening Children, Preschool Screen (DPS), Nipissing, Environmental Rating Scales, etc). We would be happy to share our developmental tools with MEDU to use. In Niagara we have ONELIST which is an online application for parents to put their name on a waitlist for all types of licensed child care and before-and-after school programs. ONELIST eliminates the need to contact multiple child care providers and complete multiple application forms.

The Niagara Child Care Sector is committed to helping child care centres, home child care providers, and formal and informal caregivers to improve outcomes for the children in their care and contribute to the well-being of the families they serve.

Submitted on behalf of Niagara Child Care Sector Executive.

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