



# Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

## Bulletin #4: “With Our Best Future in Mind”

“With Our Best Future in Mind” - What Is a Best Start Child and Family Centre?

### What Is a Best Start Child and Family Centre?

In the last provincial election, Dalton McGuinty promised \$200 million in 2010 and \$300 million in 2011 for a new program of full-day learning for 4 and 5 year olds. He appointed Charles Pascal to write a report on how the program could be implemented. “With Our Future in Mind” was released on June 15.

It’s a long quote, but this is what the report says about Best Start Child and Family Centres:

“With the appropriate resources required, municipal authorities would be responsible for the creation and systems management of a community network of Best Start Child and Family Centres. These new centres would be developed and expanded by consolidating and re-engineering the resources, governance, and mandates of existing child care, family resource, and early intervention services. This includes regulated group and home child care, family resource programs, Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Preschool Speech and Language, Child Care Special Needs Resourcing and family literacy coordinators. Bringing the various early childhood services under a single system management was urged by a number of submissions and was a scenario identified in the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal And Service Delivery Review.

By merging program functions under a single administration, Best Start Child and Family Centres will be able to offer a one-stop opportunity for parents and caregivers to support children’s earliest development. All families will be welcome to participate. As now, there will be no charge for many child and family programs, and parent fees will continue to apply to child care” (page 20).

Best Start Child and Family Centres will change the funding and governance structures for early learning and child care programs that are part of the combined administration of the Best Start Child and Family Centre.

Bulletin #3 addressing the question of “What does the report say about funding for infants to four year olds” notes that funding for Best Start Child and Family Centres will largely come from the re-engineering and consolidation of existing programs and resources.

An example of costs savings with the Best Start Child and Family Centres may include administration (what is currently several organizations combining human resources, administration of subsidies and other admin work etc), training (a large organization could have a full-time position for training) and savings to the Province and Municipalities who would have fewer agencies and programs to deal with individually. Those costs savings could be re-invested back into making early learning and child care more affordable for parents, increasing staff wages and expanding services and programs.

## **Who Will Operate a Best Start Child and Family Centre?**

“Best Start Child and Family Centres could be operated by municipal authorities, school boards, postsecondary institutions, or non-profit agencies” (page 20). In this quote, you can see that there is flexibility about who operates a Best Start Child and Family Centre. But it’s clear – they must provide “one-stop opportunity” for parents and they must truly integrate services all the services for children and families. Those services do not have to be physically in the same place, but they need to be a part of one organization that recognizes the many multi-faceted needs of children and families.

The report does not specifically spell out a single governance model or funding model for our current programs. Best Start Child and Family Centres could be an opportunity for the early learning and child care community to be creative about the governance and funding of our programs.

While Best Start Child and Family Centres may be in schools, a paragraph in the report argues it is essential to protect ALL space currently used by child care and other providers in schools:

“Space in schools used by Parenting and Family Literacy Centres or purpose-built, renovated or leased space not used by child care or other family programs is not included in the calculations [of capital costs]. It is essential that this space be protected for the continued operation of early years programming and the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres” (page 43)

One of the most common questions is what happens to child care programs in schools. While the services or the age groups may change, we will be reminding school boards across the Province that ALL current space must be preserved.

The report does recommend schools as a preferred location for Best Start Child and Family Centres:

“To support the service continuum and support the children’s transitions to the Early Learning Program, the preferred location for Best Start Child and Family Centres is schools. Non-school locations would be partnered with a school or family of schools” (page 14).

## **Do child care centres have to become part of a Best Start Child and Family Centre?**

No. The report states:

“Non-profit and commercial providers may continue to operate licensed child care in accordance with current program standards. All service expansion, however, should take place through Best Start Child and Family Centres” (page 20).

## **What Does the Report Say About Legislation and the Day Nurseries Act?**

“Many community practitioners and local public servants noted the problems associated with multiple pieces of legislation that are either outdated or incompatible in enabling the kind of consistent support for children and families that is necessary. In the short run, as implementation rolls out, short-term legislative tools should be used. For example, certain aspects of the Day Nurseries Act and the Education Act may need to be addressed to enable implementation of this new initiative.

Beginning in 2012-13, the Province should undertake the process of developing a new Education and Family Supports Act. I anticipate that the consultative process to write new legislation would coincide with the third year of the implementation of the child and family service system so that the “doing” and implementation experience can provide some excellent ideas for developing and refining the legislation” (page 51)

The report also states that within three years (by the end of in 2012-13) the Province should:

“Mandate municipal authorities to consolidate and re-engineer child/family programs and child care for children up to the age of 4 into Best Start Child and Family Centres.

The report also states that within five years (by the end of in 2014-15) the Province should:

“Re-engineer and consolidate special needs resources under Best Start Child and Family Centres, consolidating the school as a community hub concept” (page 52)

### **Questions from the Early Learning and Child Care Sector**

- Can the parents of a 4 year old still choose to have their child enrolled in my child care program or do they have to send their child to a school setting? Will subsidies still be available in this case?
- What will happen to local child care centres with the possibility of more than half of their kids leaving for full-day kindergarten at the age of four?
- What will happen in the summer months when schools are closed? If there is care provided to the 4 to 12 year olds during the summer would both the school board teacher and ECE be working or would parents need to find alternative care during the summer months?

### **What Are Your Questions?**

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care is collecting your questions. Your questions will help us focus on your issues and help us identify areas of concern. Email your questions to [andrea@childcareontario.org](mailto:andrea@childcareontario.org)

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Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care Bulletins on “With Our Future in Mind”

Bulletin#1: Background and Context; Information to Get You Started

Bulletin #2: What Does the Early Learning Advisor’s Report say about Early Childhood Educators?

Bulletin #3: What Does the Report Say about the Role of Municipalities? What Does the Early Learning Advisor’s Report say about funding for infants to four year olds?

Bulletin #4: What Is a Best Start Child and Family Centre?

Upcoming:

How Much Will the Full Implementation of the Report Cost? How Much Funding is Committed today?