

## For Information Only

### Update on the Implementation of Full Day Kindergarten

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### Recommendation

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## Background

On October 26, 2009 the Premier of Ontario announced that Ontario would start phasing in the Early Learning Kindergarten program (ELK), a full-day kindergarten for four-and five year-olds. The program was scheduled to begin a phased implementation in September 2010 and be fully implemented in all schools by 2015-2016

The ELK model introduced included blended staffing, with a teacher and an early childhood educator (ECE) working in partnership in each classroom with an average of 26 children per classroom, providing more overall attention over a full day than children receive now in most schools.

The program design included a fee for service extended day portion where sufficient demand exists to offer a seamless day for children. The extended day program, operated by the school boards, was to offer before and after school programming for a fee, with subsidies available for families that need help with the cost of the program.

The Province committed to collaborating with school boards and municipalities to develop and implement full day learning for four-and five-year-olds.

When the program was introduced licensed child care operators and municipalities raised several concerns:

1. That the loss of kindergarten age children from licensed child care programs would impact their viability.
2. That school boards, at the time, had very little experience to assist them in delivering the fee-based extended day component of the program.

#### Signed By

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3. That if a separate subsidy system was developed for the extended day program, it would create duplication and confusion for families and would require the school boards to develop new expertise and infrastructure.

As the Service Manager for child care, the Children's Services section agreed to monitor the impact of the introduction of full day kindergarten on their operations and to assist the school boards with planning for the implementation of the extended day program.

## **Full Day Kindergarten Implementation in Greater Sudbury**

Since the introduction of the full day kindergarten the following progress has been made:

- All four school boards implemented the Early Learning Kindergarten program. The program started in 11 schools in 2010, in 5 more schools in 2011, and a further 11 schools in 2012. This represents approximately 50% of 4 and 5 year olds in Greater Sudbury.
  - The two English boards of education passed motions to extend full day Junior Kindergarten programming to the schools which were not selected to provide the Early Learning Kindergarten program in the first round, starting in September 2010. The two French boards of education had already been offering full day programs for four and five year olds for more than ten years. This has resulted in consistency for parents and ensured that there has not been competition for a limited number of full day spots.
  - School boards worked with Children's Services staff to assist in selecting schools to pilot the ELK program and to try to minimize the impact of the program on child care operators.
  - School boards created a new employment category for Early Childhood Educators and started hiring them to teach in the Early Learning Kindergarten. As the number ECE's hired to work in ELK classrooms has increased each year, it has exacerbated the shortage of ECE's in licensed child care, especially in francophone programs.
  - The Ministry of Education relaxed the requirement that Boards of Education were required to directly operate the extended day program.
- o As a result, three of the four school boards opted to work with third-party licensed child care providers already operating in their schools to deliver the extended day program. This has helped to support the viability of these child care operators.
- o In contrast, the Conseil scolaire publique du Grand nord de l'Ontario (French public school board) decided to take on the operation of all of the before and after school programs in their schools. This has had a significant impact on one child care operator, which provided all of the child care programs in that school board.
- Municipal child care subsidy programs were funded by the Ministry of Education to deliver the subsidy for programs operated by School Boards, ensuring that there was no service interruption or duplication for families.
  - The curriculum for the Early Learning Kindergarten was released as well as a framework document for the delivery of all early learning programs starting from birth. These documents have created opportunities for child care, Best Start Hubs and kindergarten programs to develop more consistent and seamless learning environments for children and shared training opportunities for professionals.

## **Challenges and Opportunities**

Overall, the implementation of Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten in Greater Sudbury has been positive for children and families, and has not had the negative impacts on the child care system that many feared. This is due mostly to the Ministry of Education's decision to allow school boards to partner with child care providers to deliver before and after school programs for kindergarten and school age children.

The most pressing issue at this time is a shortage of qualified early childhood educators to provide the quality education and care required in licensed child care, Best Start Hub and Early Learning Kindergarten programs. The City, through the Best Start Network, has identified this issue and is working with education, post secondary, child care and economic development partners to develop strategies to attract, recruit, train and retain Early Childhood Educators in our community.

At the same time, the Best Start Network and its partner agencies are advocating to the Ministry of Education to develop a funding model that will ensure that ECE's working in licensed child care can be paid more competitive wages to achieve parity with ECE's now working in the education system.

The Children's Services section will continue to work in partnership with education, child care and children's services partners to support the successful implementation of full day kindergarten.