

Background

Since 2005, the City of Greater Sudbury (City) has been providing access to subsidized licensed child care to young children whose families are in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) in order to provide them with child development and school readiness opportunities. The program was developed with the recognition that living with socio-economic restraints puts these children at higher risk of developmental and learning challenges.

Through participation in quality early learning programs, children have had opportunities to develop social skills, participate in play-based learning activities, receive nutrition support and receive access to developmental screening and early intervention for developmental delays.

In September 2013, in response to provincial budget reductions to Children Services, the Community Services Committee approved a new Early Development/School Readiness (EDSR) Subsidy and Prioritized Wait List Policy, effective January 2014, that reduced the amount of care that children could access under this program, with the hope of more children benefiting from the program within the new reduced program budget. The new policy reduced the maximum amount of care provided per child from five full days per week to the equivalent of two and a half days of care per week. In 2015, this was further reduced to an annual maximum of 120 part days responding to potential further child care funding cuts.

Early Development and School Readiness Program Evaluation

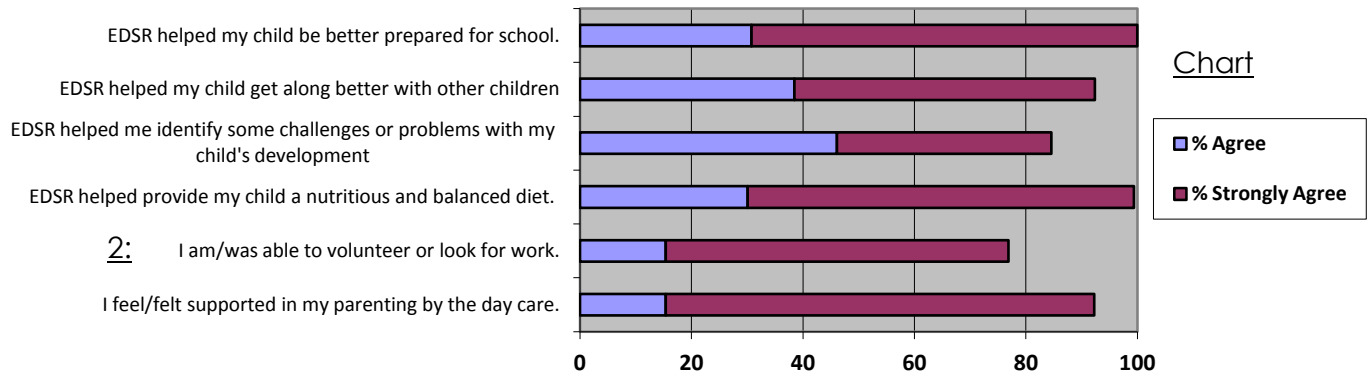
In the fall of 2017, Children Services conducted a review and evaluation of Early Development and School Readiness (EDSR) program, reaching out to the parents of children who have used the program and to the child care providers who serve these families to assess the strengths and challenges of the EDSR program and to recommend strategies to improve the program.

Benefits of the Program

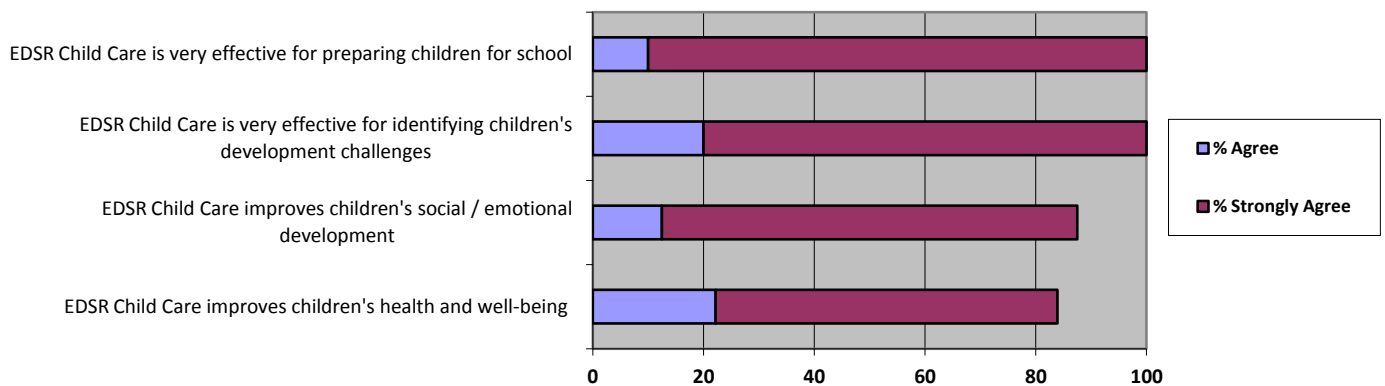
Parents and child care providers both recognize the significant benefits to vulnerable children attending licensed child care through the EDSR program.

The following charts outline parents and child care providers responses from the survey:

Chart 1: Parents Experiences Using EDSR (Survey November 2017)



Child Care Providers Experience With EDSR (Survey November 2017)



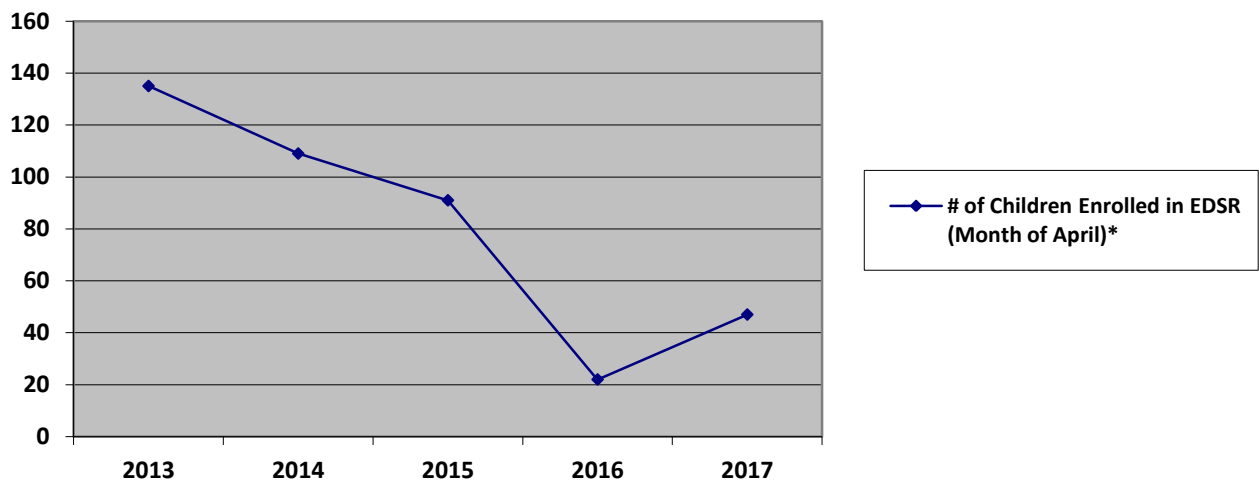
One parent comment stated: *"My son was socially awkward and at almost 3 years old was still not talking. EDSR made it possible for my child to attend day care where [his speech] has improved dramatically and [he] is now a social butterfly. I cannot thank this program enough!"*

The review found that the EDSR program is meeting the goals of supporting vulnerable children's social and physical development and preparing them for success in school, while supporting their parents' ability to support their children.

Challenges with the Program

Since the change to part time care was introduced in 2014, enrollment in the program has declined significantly. In April 2013, 135 children were enrolled and by April 2017, only 47 were participating.

The Number of Children Enrolled in EDSR in a Typical Month (2013 - 2017)



*A waitlist in late 2015 for EDSR resulted in particularly low numbers in early 2016

Families have found it more challenging to find spaces, and to use the program because of the varied, part-time schedule. In addition, the lack of consistent attendance has been challenging for children. In a survey conducted, one parent explained: *"my only disappointment was [that the program] only covered so many days.... I had to take him out... I was told I can re-apply in September but it doesn't mean I will get the same daycare and this will also take him out of routine that he had at daycare..."*

Many child care providers have found it difficult to accommodate families using the EDSR program because of the lower rates they receive for the part time child care they provide. The survey results indicate that 80% of providers agreed with the statement "part time schedule has been financially difficult for our centre."

Providers support that an increase in the program to full time child care would be beneficial to children, families and to the child care providers who work to provide a high quality, stable environment for these children.

Child Care Expansion Funding

In June 2017, the Ministry of Education made a commitment to increase licensed child care access for 100,000 more children across the Province with increases in provincial and federal funding for child care to local governments.

The City of Greater Sudbury has received provincial funding increases, along with targets to increase the number of children using licensed child care in the City of Greater Sudbury.

The resulting expansion plan being developed includes planning to increase the number of licensed child care spaces in the City of Greater Sudbury, as well as strategies to encourage more families to use licensed child care. This EDSR policy change will be one of several strategies to assist families across the City to access the benefits of licensed child care.

While for 2013 - 2016 Children Services responded to provincial funding cuts and the threat of future funding reductions, the current child care funding enhancements and new policy directions from the Ministry of Education suggest that the reductions made in 2014 can begin to reverse as the City plans for a more robust and accessible child care system.

Recommendation and Implementation Plan

Based on the results of the EDSR evaluation and the availability of funding, Children Services is recommending a change to the EDSR program to increase the amount of child care provided to up to five full days for children aged 18 months until they are eligible to start school.

The change to full time child care will enhance families' ability to find child care spaces, provide a more stable child care experience for children and increase the number of participating children.

Costs

With the policy change, Children Services expects to see an increase in spending for the program as many of the children enrolled will move to full time care and new children are able to find spaces and enroll.

Children Services is currently spending \$250,000 annually on the EDSR program. The additional costs incurred with the policy change will be funded within the

current and child care expansion budget. The increase in children enrolled will contribute towards Children Services expansion targets set by the Ministry of Education.

Managing Early Development School Readiness Program within the Child Care Subsidy Caseload

Children Services recognizes that there are some neighbourhoods where finding child care is difficult for families. Strategies have been developed to ensure that the increase in children using EDSR does not negatively impact on the ability of other families looking for care.

Age Grouping:

The age grouping where there is the highest demand and longest waiting lists is the infant age group (under 18 months). EDSR is not available for infants so it will not impact on availability of infant spaces.

Expansion of Licensed Child Care:

Children Services has recently approved the expansion of child care spaces in high demand areas and will be approving additional expansion and the development of several new sites in 2018/19. In neighbourhoods where there are a higher number of EDSR eligible children, targeted expansions of child care spaces are being planned.

Prioritized Child Care Wait List:

The Children Services budget for child care subsidy has been has always been sufficient to provide subsidy for families who apply and are deemed eligible. If the demand for subsidy increases, and the budget is not sufficient to cover all eligible applicants, Children Services has a Prioritized Child Care Wait List Policy, so that those who are most in need of subsidy are accepted first. With the expansion of EDSR, Children Services is recommending a revision to the Prioritized Child Care Wait List policy to add a new priority category for EDSR applicants (Priority #4), which places EDSR applicants after those who require child care for work, school or based on a referral (Priorities #2 and #3). The revised policy will come into effect on January 1, 2018 upon approval of the revised EDSR program.

Next Steps

With the approval of the policy change Children Services will take the following steps:

1. Promote the policy change to child care providers and to Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) delivery agents.
2. Advise current and potential EDSR clients of the policy change and adjust their enrollment schedule, based on availability of space.
3. Monitor utilization of the program and assess the financial and operational impact of the change.

References

[September 16, 2013 Community Services Committee Report](#)
[Early Development/School Readiness Subsidy and Priority Wait List Policy](#)