

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

February 17, 2005

To: Community Services Committee
From: Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services
Subject: Implementation Planning for Best Start

Purpose:

This report provides an overview of the Draft Implementation Planning Guidelines for Best Start.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

This report has no immediate financial implications.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

Background:

On November 25, 2004, the Minister of Children and Youth Services announced the framework for the government's Best Start Plan. Best Start is a 10 to 15-year plan designed to give children in Ontario the best possible start in life and to help them to achieve success in school. The Department has previously outlined the components of the Best Start and identified some of the immediate implications for the City's child care system.

Although specific funding associated with Best Start has not been announced, it is expected that the child care component of the plan will be funded through the federal government's commitment of \$5 billion over the next five years for a national early learning and child care plan. Federal-provincial-territorial ministers responsible for social services have met twice regarding a national plan for early learning and child care and although progress has been made, no formal agreement has been reached. It is expected that the federal budget will contain provision for child care funding and that further federal provincial negotiations will follow.

Comments:

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services has released for consultation the draft Implementation Planning Guidelines for Best Start. Although currently in draft, the Guidelines are expected to be finalized in March.

The Ministry has designated that municipalities in their role as Consolidated Municipal Service Systems Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Service Assistance Boards (DSSABs) are to lead the establishment of Best Start Networks. The Best Start Network is responsible for planning and implementing Best Start in communities. Because Best Start is a strategy which integrates services funded by a number of ministries and provided by a variety of services providers, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services have specified the organizations that should be part of the Best Start Network. Key service areas such as school programs, early identification and intervention programs, health and specialized services, early learning programs, parenting programs, population-specific services, income and security programs and parents are to be included in the Best Start Network.

The Best Start Network, in Phase I of Best Start planning, is charged with the responsibility of completing three tasks by the end of 2005. The tasks include forming the Best Start Network and developing its terms of reference. The second deliverable is the development of a plan to increase licensed child care spaces for children in Junior and Senior Kindergarten. Clearly, the responsibility for this task rests with the municipality as Service System Manager for Child Care. The Best Start Network will provide valuable support in identifying opportunities to grow child care in existing community space. Finally, the Best Start Network will be asked to layout a longer-term plan to implement early learning and care hubs. The Department will seek Council approval of the terms of reference for the Best Start Network and the plan to increase licensed child care spaces for 4 and 5-year-old children.

In a previous report on Best Start, the Department outlined the implications of the Best Start initiative on the City's Child Care Service Plan. The draft Implementation Planning Guidelines for Best Start do not define the relationship between the City's current Service Plan for Child Care and the plan for increasing service for 4 and 5-year-old children. It is critical that the growth of child care service created under Best Start not result in the de-stabilization of the City's current child care system or prevent the City from realizing the goals of its Service Plan for Child Care. As the formal planning for Best Start begins the Department will review the impact of increasing child care service for children in Junior and Senior Kindergarten on the City's Service Plan for Child Care.

Conclusions:

This report outlines the initial planning process for the Best Start initiative and identifies the tasks in the first phase of planning for Best Start.

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