

## Beyond Pilot Projects:

### Sustaining Toronto First Duty: Integrating Early Learning, Child Care and Family Supports



TORONTO  
FIRST  
DUTY

#### *Purpose*

Toronto First Duty (TFD) is demonstrating how existing early childhood and family programs can be transformed from the current patchwork into a single service meeting the needs of children and families prenatal to age 6. Service integration would provide the foundation for new public investments to build a system of early learning, child care and family supports available to every child. By piloting service integration and resolving its challenges, Toronto First Duty will provide governments with a detailed policy tool.

#### *What is Toronto First Duty?*

TFD combines the three core early years silos -- kindergarten, licensed child care and family supports -- into a comprehensive single program for young children and their families. Staff teams of professionals including kindergarten teachers, early childhood educators, parenting workers and teaching assistants jointly plan and deliver the program while meeting the requirements of both the Education and the Day Nurseries Acts. The program provides educational and developmental opportunities for children as it helps parents to take part in their children's early learning. At the same time, non-parental care allows parents to work, study, care for other family members or take part in their community.

#### **What parents are saying about Toronto First Duty**

*When my father died I had to return home. My husband didn't need to miss work because the children were all able to stay at the centre for the extended day.*

*We just moved here. The centre has become my Toronto family.*

*At home all day with the children I was stressed and depressed. Here the children spend time doing things they love, and I have the support of other parents and the professional advice of the staff.*

*Here I can relax and breastfeed the baby. [My toddler]is too busy with his friends and activities to mind. The staff have advised me how to deal with his anger and I can see how much his self-esteem has improved.*

*Background*

Toronto First Duty (TFD) was established in 1999 by the City of Toronto, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) with the support of participating community agencies. It is designed to inform public policy by answering the following questions:

- How would a universal early learning and care system look to parents and communities?
- What kind of learning environment would it provide for children?
- What professional skills does it require?
- How can existing community resources be organized to create a strong foundation for the new investments necessary to build a universal system?
- What accountability mechanisms would support the best use of public funds while demonstrating improved outcomes for families and children?

TFD is now in the third year. Five Toronto TDSB elementary schools (see below) are TFD sites, serving as the access points for early childhood and family support services.

At the community level, TFD is driven by five lead agencies. These are non-profit, community-based organizations with extensive experience in the provision of a wide range of early years' services. Their experience in building and maintaining community partnerships is pivotal to each site's success in achieving a seamless continuum of services. In their leadership role, they have served as a catalyst for change and played a critical role in sustaining the local governance structures. Their management and administration of the project ensures appropriate accountability to the funders.

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TDF School Sites are: Bruce Public School; Corvette Public School; JR Wilcox Community School; Queen Victoria Public School; Secord Public School.

**What parents are saying about Toronto First Duty**

*My daughter has really blossomed since coming to the centre. She used to be so shy and clingy. Now she has friends and is willing to let me out of her sight without being anxious.*

*Mealtimes at our home used to be bedlam. Now my sons have table manners. They take turns talking and are so much more enjoyable.*

*Having all the programs in the school makes it so easy. I knew the community centre had parenting classes, but never attended. It was just one more thing to fit in. Here participating in a program is a natural part of my day.*

*Toronto First Duty Design*

The design objectives are consistent with early childhood research findings in Canada and internationally. Organizations such as UNICEF, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank have made strong arguments for investment in programs promoting quality early childhood education and care.

Research indicates the most successful early years strategies provide service within a universal context. Programs implemented for all children with provisions to include those with special needs due to income, race, language or disability promote inclusion by providing equitable opportunity.

Investment in early childhood initiatives also yields a cost:benefit. In the United States, the Perry Preschool Project estimated that each \$1 invested in its early childhood education programs for children in low-income families yielded an avoidance of over \$7 in later special education, justice and welfare spending. In Canada, economists Cleveland and Krashinsky modeled a cost:benefit study for non-targeted service provision concluding that for every dollar invested in high quality child care, there is a two dollar benefit to children, parents and society.

The policy lessons from the Organization for Economic Development and Co-operation review of early learning and child care services recommends integrating early learning and care programs and concludes that accessible, high quality programs can only exist in the presence of a strong public policy framework. New funding alone will not produce the desired outcomes in the absence of an adequate infrastructure and accountability mechanisms.

As the chart on the following page outlines, Toronto First Duty differs from traditional service provision for families with young children in a number of ways.

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UNICEF (2001) *The State of the World's Children, 2001: Early Childhood*. [www.unicdf.org/sowco1/short-version/page3htm](http://www.unicdf.org/sowco1/short-version/page3htm).  
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Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004) *Early Childhood Education and Care Policy: Canada Country Note*. Paris.  
<http://www11.sdc.gc.ca/en/cs/sp/socpol/publications/reports/2004-002619/page00.shtml>

**What parents are saying about Toronto First Duty**

*We moved into this neighbourhood to take advantage of the centre.*

*My work schedule fluctuates. At this centre my son attends both full and part days. I couldn't find this flexibility at an ordinary child care centre.*

*I like the high child:staff ratios. My son's little friend is in a kindergarten with 24 kids and one teacher.*

	Now	Toronto First Duty	Advantage
<b>Accountable</b>	Three different early years silos – kindergarten, child care, parenting supports – with different locations, mandates, eligibility criteria, funding and philosophies.	Funding, resources and governance are combined to operate a single program providing quality non-parental care, early childhood education and parenting support.	A single entity is answerable for child/parent well being. It is anticipated that delivering care, parent supports and early education simultaneously is more cost effective than the current silos.
<b>Availability</b>	Kindergarten is provided in neighbourhood schools but child care programs are not widely available and often have long wait lists. Parenting and public health programs are sporadically delivered in a variety of settings.	The neighbourhood school is the single access point for the full continuum of early learning, care and parent support services. Partnerships bring additional community resources into the school to complement the program. Staff link families requiring additional social, health or developmental services to the appropriate providers.	Builds on the school as an established community asset and the neighbourhood centre for all children –taking the guesswork out of where parents go to find needed supports.
<b>Access</b>	Kindergarten is available at no cost for 2.5 hrs/day for 4 & 5 year olds. Child care operates 10-12 hrs/daily serving children 0-12 but high fees and restricted subsidies limit access to 23% of children under 6. Public health and other parenting programs have no or nominal fees but are not consistently offered.	As a result of project funding children can participate in full, part or extended day program or drop in occasionally. Any parent/caregiver may attend with their child for no cost. If the child attends alone registration is necessary and an affordable fee is charged. Funding limitations prevent TFD from providing full year care for children 0-6 years.	The program is flexible responding to the changing needs of the family as their children grow. Participation is open to all families with young children and is not based on the income or work status of the parents. Cost is not a barrier to participation.
<b>Learning Environment</b>	Each silo develops and delivers its own curriculum. There is no formal communication required between the silos or the professionals working in them.	A staff team comprised of kindergarten teachers, early childhood educators, parenting workers and teaching assistants plan and deliver the program meeting the requirements of both the Education and Day Nurseries Act. Space and resources are combined.	Blends the strengths of the three early years silos. Reduces child:staff ratios throughout the day. Team approach provides consistency for the child and facilitates peer learning of staff.
<b>Parent Participation</b>	Kindergarten, child care and parenting programs do not have a consistent framework for parental involvement.	The program is designed to encourage the participation of parents and provide support when specialized health or intervention services are required. Parents take classes, join in their children’s activities and take home prepared early learning activities.	Encouraging parent involvement establishes a known factor in school success. The convenience of a single site for parent and child resources facilitates participation.

### *Challenges to Sustainability*

Toronto First Duty, even before completion, provides valuable information for planning the expansion of early years services. The partners have worked with some success at overcoming a number of barriers to effective integration. Many barriers however remain wholly or partially unresolved.

Toronto First Duty was developed on the assumption that both education and child care would remain constant. Over the life of the project the health of both systems has been compromised. This compounds the challenges encountered:

#### **Funding Barriers:**

- **Time-limited funding:** Funding to start and maintain TFD was made available by the City of Toronto and the Atkinson Charitable Foundation. The Toronto District School Board provides services in-kind. This arrangement is unsuitable for widespread replication.
- **Inability to base-fund the participating programs:** Base funding would direct public money to the TFD program rather than tying it to the family (child care subsidies) or service silo (kindergarten, parenting program). This would provide more staffing flexibility and allow sites to pool funds to extend services. This is not possible under current cost-sharing regulations where provincial child care transfers to the municipality are restricted to needs-tested child care subsidies or when kindergarten and parenting funding and staff are confined to the ‘school’ part of the day.
- **Availability of space in schools:** It would be difficult to incorporate the TFD model in schools operating over capacity.
- **Reduced funding for schools:** The provincial funding formula threatens parenting programs and teaching assistant positions; and has discouraged the expansion of TFD program hours or establishing the program at other sites.
- **Uncertainty regarding amount and flexibility of federal/provincial child care funding:** Increased provincial funding via the federal Multi-lateral Framework Agreement on Early

#### **What staff are saying about Toronto First Duty**

*ECE, teachers and parenting workers share the same goals and achieve the same outcomes, although our methods differ. It has been a wonderful experience to learn from one another as we incorporate the best from each discipline into a single practice.*

*ECE*

*We have witnessed behaviour improvements as the children respond to a more structured day and become familiar with the routines. They really enjoy coming to the centre.*

*Kindergarten Teacher*

*When parents are supported to participate in the workforce, their own education or in their community, they are better able to support their child’s early learning. Parents and staff working in partnership for the child is a winning combination for school success.*

*School Principal*

Learning and Child Care resolved the child care shortfall in 2004. Toronto will require funding to recognize annual inflation costs experienced in the system. In the absence of predictable funding support for inflationary costs the City will continue to have difficulty to sustain the current service levels. Funding to enhance and increase integrated services to children and their families must be in addition to the funding to support and stabilize the current system.

- **Unfunded community agencies:** Agencies are assuming management and administrative costs.

**Policy Barriers:**

- **Integrating the policies, funding and legislation** of provincial ministries (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services), the City of Toronto and the Toronto District School Board plus community agencies and a charitable foundation provides many challenges including issues of liability.
- **Combining universal and targeted programs** for children ages 0-6 is a primary barrier. Kindergarten is available with no fee to parents for all children 4 and 5 year-olds. Parenting centres and other programs such as the provincial Early Years Centres, have no or very low fees and, where they are available, are open to all pre-schoolers attending with their parents. Child care serve 23% of Toronto’s 0-6 child population. Families that cannot afford the full fees and are ineligible for fee assistance face affordability barriers. This fractured funding structure is a primary barrier to integration. It locks the partners into their silos and prevents sites from offering parents the full and flexible range of services.
- **Some provisions of Ontario’s Day Nurseries Act** limit program flexibility including the sole recognition of the Early Childhood Educator credential in ratios and restrictions of age groupings.
- **Integrating the three early childhood professions**, including kindergarten teachers, early childhood educators and parenting staff, is currently accomplished on a site-by-site basis

**What staff are saying about Toronto First Duty**

*A single program -- delivered by a consistent set of adults, with the same expectations – eliminates the many disruptions that children this age normally experience as they move from a caregiver to kindergarten and onto the next caregiver. We would recognize that so many changes would be unsettling to a child in grade 4, but until First Duty, this was a typical day for a 4 year old.*

*ECE*

*Program planning by the team allows us to reinforce the curriculum throughout the day and extend learning opportunities into the home.*

*Kindergarten Teacher*

*Toronto First Duty is premised on parents being active participants in their child’s early education. All our programs are open to parents – all the time.*

*School Principal*

*It is really rewarding to be part of a team. Knowing the whole child and family makes our individual work more effective.*

*Parenting Worker*

through good will despite the disparity in remuneration and working conditions among the three professions.

Resolving the implementation challenges cited above in a piecemeal manner will not achieve integrated early years services. Required is wholesale policy, legislative and funding reform.

It is important to stress that the Toronto First Duty partners are not pursuing integration for its own sake. Our collective experiences indicate that integrating services is an essential step in realizing a high quality early years system available to all families with young children.

#### *Next Steps*

Expanding the TFD model beyond pilots requires the support of all levels of government. Fortunately the opportunities have never been better. The Prime Minister has promised Canadian families a system of early learning and child care backed by \$5-billion in funding over 5 years, in addition to the \$1.05-billion already allocated.

This represents an unprecedented opportunity for Ontario to reconsider the delivery of its early years services to ensure new investments create the universally accessible, quality, developmental program the Prime Minister outlined. New funding, layered on top of the current disjointed service patchwork, will not produce a quality early learning and care system nor the benefits it promises.

The Premier has already set the stage with his government's *Best Start Plan* which sees schools as 'community hubs' and calls for "high-quality early years education and support as a seamless extension of our public education system". The creation of a ministry devoted to children and

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Liberal Party of Canada, *Moving Canada Forward : Foundations - An Early Learning and Child Care Program*, June 3, 2004. [http://www.liberal.ca/news\\_e.aspx?site=news&news=596](http://www.liberal.ca/news_e.aspx?site=news&news=596)

The Prime Minister outlined "QUAD" the principles to guide a new pan-Canadian child care strategy:

QUALITY – each facility must be provincially or territorially regulated to ensure safety and an appropriate complement of qualified child development staff; UNIVERSALITY – the program will be open, without discrimination, to preschool children, including children with special needs; ACCESSIBILITY – the program will be affordable for parents; DEVELOPMENTAL – the program must include a component of development/learning integrated with the care component.

#### **What the experts are saying about Toronto First Duty**

*Toronto First Duty are the child development and parenting centres The Early Years Study recommended be available for every child.*

*Margaret McCain  
Co-chair Early Years Study*

*Today if a government wants to invest in the early years, it decides between child care, kindergarten or parenting programs. It's a Hobson's choice because the child who benefits from improvements in her kindergarten may be short-changed when she arrives at day-care.*

*With integration also comes accountability. When Johnny is in grade five and can't read, we expect the school system to respond. Yet, when a child in grade one is disruptive and unable to participate what institution do we hold responsible but more importantly where do we intervene?*

*Professor Daniel Keating  
TFD Research Team*

youth and mandated to work “with school boards to support educational innovation” and “make high quality child care and education available for the youngest learners” means the stage is set for action.

The City of Toronto and the Toronto District School Board are also prepared. The TDSB with its Early Years policy now in development provides a strong framework to establish schools as community hubs, building links between education, child care and parenting programs. Mayor Miller’s innovative and representative Roundtable on Children, Youth and Education is instructed to report on the next steps to “developing integrated children’s services in Toronto”.

Never have the three levels of government been so in line with the needs of Canadian families.

**As a first step**, the TFD partners and relevant provincial ministries should work to resolve operational issues that create barriers to integration, including:

- The clarification of responsibilities for children’s well being and accompanying liability in integrated settings;
- Strategies for resolving the challenges of integrated staff including differences in regulations and qualifications.

The partners will continue to work with the Mayor’s Roundtable on Children, Youth and Education and the Early Years Policy Work Group of the Toronto District School Board and other vehicles to develop governance and funding models supporting the integration of early learning and care.

The City of Toronto plays a key role as systems manager of child care and family resource programs. As opportunities and funding permit, the city should act to integrate these services at a neighbourhood level.

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Best Start is outlined in the Liberal Party of Ontario. *Excellence for All, The Ontario Liberal Plan for Education*. (2003) [www.ontarioliberal.com](http://www.ontarioliberal.com)

Liberal Party of Ontario, Newsrelease. *McGuinty Government Creates Two New Ministries, Secretariat*. October 23, 2003. [/www.premier.gov.on.ca/english/news/Newteam102303\\_bd1.asp](http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/english/news/Newteam102303_bd1.asp).

July 5, 2004, Memo from David Miller to Policy and Finance Committee. Re: Recommended Members for the Roundtable on Children, Youth and Education.

**What the experts are saying about Toronto First Duty**

*We intend to use our on-the-ground expertise to provide senior governments with a blueprint of how to provide early years services effectively.*

*Olivia Chow  
Councillor and Children’s Advocate*

Action is also required by the Government of Ontario to:

- Stabilize existing child care, kindergarten and parenting services to create a foundation for service integration, including but not limited to changing the school space allocation and school funding formula to include early learning, care and parenting centres as a legitimate use of school space and permit the affordable community use of schools;
- Require the inclusion of space for TFD model early learning and care programs when building and renovating schools;
- As part of its own policy development, join the TFD project as a funding partner. Provincial funding could provide opportunities to take TFD beyond its current confines to:
  - Experiment with new types of funding models including combining current funding envelopes for child care, kindergarten and family support programs.
  - Expand to new types of sites including to communities with no or few existing services; to rural and smaller communities; and, to new types of central locations, for example community centres or child care centres to demonstrate the model in circumstances where limited school space precludes a TFD program on site.

The Government of Canada can also benefit by:

- Continuing to fund research into Toronto First Duty and provide opportunities to discuss the TFD findings for its own policy development and to share best practices in the establishment of a Canadian child care strategy.
- Directing Understanding Early Years funding to the level of government that is planning children's services on the condition that it integrates services.
- As the first phase in the development of a Canadian child care strategy, provide incentives to provinces/territories to integrate kindergarten, child care and family support services, including directly-funded federal programs such as the Community Action Plan for Children and the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program.

**What the experts are saying about Toronto First Duty**

*It is not the job of business or foundations to fund essential services. Only senior governments have the resources and the responsibility to make universal early learning and care a reality. We are doing our part, we expect the compelling example of Toronto First Duty, will prompt them to do theirs.*

*Charles Pascal  
Atkinson Charitable Foundation*

*Toronto First Duty has got it right when it comes to child development and parenting supports.*

*Dr. Fraser Mustard  
Founders Network*

**These initial steps would provide the foundation for new investments and a new service infrastructure within the next two to five years:**

The Government of Canada should:

- Increase its contribution to child care funding to \$4.5-billion annually to enhance access to high quality early learning, child care and parenting supports.

The Government of Ontario should:

- In cooperation with municipal child care service managers, school boards and family support services including public health develop a governance and funding model supporting the integration of early learning, care and family supports.
- Begin to financially contribute to the expansion of a system of early learning, care and parenting support with the goals of matching federal funding.

**In addition Canada should join other nations in building a high quality early years system by establishing targets and a timetable to guarantee a high quality early learning, child care and family support program to every child by the year 2014.**

This requires the commitment of all levels of government, including substantial public funding and legislated standards to provide Canadians with a means to hold their governments accountable for the amount and quality of the services received.

**What the experts are saying about Toronto First Duty**

*Meaningful parental involvement in the education system can benefit children. But the level of parent participation in school councils has been disappointing.*

*Early learning and child care programs that engage parents may change this. Already the TFD research is finding that parents in TFD sites are more engaged than their counterparts in school settings with traditional early childhood programs.*

*Carl Corter  
Principal Investigator, TFD*

## Supporting the Early Years Workforce

An integrated early years service requires a qualified workforce. Current pre- and in service training of the early years professions has not kept pace with modern pedagogical demands, nor does it sufficiently equip staff to respond to the social, economic and cultural challenges facing today's families with young children. We would therefore recommend the provincial government take steps to:

- Recognize a continuum of qualifications that facilitate a career path for an early childhood workforce that reflect differentiated education and levels of responsibilities;
- Support the capacity of current ECE university degree programs to offer an integrated teacher education/early childhood education university degree-level credential that combines responsibilities and skills required to take lead role in Toronto First Duty settings;
- Support the capacity of postsecondary education institutions to provide professional development and continuing education that enables early childhood educators, family support staff and kindergarten teachers to acquire additional course work necessary to attain the integrated early childhood credential.

### ***What the experts are saying about Toronto First Duty***

*The daily interactions with staff shape the quality of children's experiences. In the same way that it is counterproductive to run parallel service silos, it is equally limiting to have unconnected professional education streams.*

*Linking the professions would provide training programs more responsive to the needs of children and families and help retain qualified staff by providing viable career paths.*

*Jane Bertrand  
Atkinson Centre for Society and  
Child Development*

## Appendix A

Toronto First Duty sites are required to:

- Create a high quality learning environment that combines learning expectations, activities and routines from existing kindergarten, early childhood education/child care and parenting programs.
- Develop an early childhood staff team that works together to deliver and achieve program goals.
- Form a local governance structure to determine the allocation of resources, service planning and monitoring, and program policies.
- Provide seamless access to an expanded and comprehensive early learning and care program providing a continuum of supports and services to all families and children.
- Increase parent participation in their children's early learning and development through direct involvement in programs, planning and decision-making.

## Appendix B

### **Toronto First Duty Partners**

City of Toronto  
Toronto District Board of Education  
Atkinson Charitable Foundation  
Canadian Autoworkers Child Care Fund  
Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development  
Child Development Institute  
East York East Toronto Family Resources  
Macaulay Child Development Centre  
N.Y.A.D. (Community Inc.)  
Woodgreen Community Centre  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario  
Elementary Teachers of Toronto

## Appendix C

### **Funding and Research**

Toronto First Duty funding is based on the use of existing financial resources. The City of Toronto provides the usual child care funding such as fee subsidies, wage enhancement grants, family resource operating and also funds the child care occupancy costs. The Toronto District School Board funds the salaries of kindergarten teachers and the regular classroom resources as well as the staff, space and other operating costs of the school-based parenting centres.

These resources have leveraged project funding of \$3 million from the City of Toronto and \$1.4 million from the Atkinson Foundation and its partners as well as approximately \$.5-million in additional in-kind services such as supervisory, resource development and administrative assistance and use of extra space from the Toronto District School Board. The lead agencies provide additional resources in facilitation, day-to-day management, co-ordination of resources, community development and financial management. TFD sites have also attracted other child and family programs such as Health Babies/Healthy Children. Stakeholders, including the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, take part in the steering committee.

The combined resources of all partners now support 30 different early years activities serving children in the five sites. The activities and number of children served continue to increase.

The evaluation of Toronto First Duty provides ongoing information on the progress of integrated learning and care. The research team is composed of faculty of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, Ryerson University and the Institute of Child Study. The evaluation framework consists of three broad streams: policy and program, child and family and community outreach. Data points include intake and tracking of children and families, surveys of staff and parents, focus groups of parents and children, scan of policy impact, economic analysis, environmental observation, organizational change and direct child observation.

Human Resources Development Canada supports with funding for research and development.