



Toronto
Together for our children
Tous ensemble pour nos enfants

**WORKING TOGETHER FOR TORONTO'S FAMILIES
GIVING EVERY CHILD THE BEST START**

TORONTO
Vision for Children

A plan to meet the early learning and care needs of Toronto's young children

2007-08

Best Start Community Plan:
Building on the Foundation – Moving Forward





Metro Hall, 10th Floor, 55 John Street, Toronto, ON M5V 3C6

June 29, 2007

Attention: Ministry of Children & Youth Services,

The Toronto Best Start Network is pleased to submit the attached 2007-08 Best Start Community Plan. This plan should be read as an accompanying document to the 2007-08 Child Care Service Plan and the 2007-08 (Toronto) Ontario Early Years Centres Service Plans.

The Community Plan highlights the progress we have made in implementation during 2006-07, and identifies strategies to continue the momentum during 2007-08. Section 3, identifies a range of challenges faced by the various sectors in moving forward.

While Toronto has been able to overcome some of the local barriers, and continues working on resolutions to these local challenges, policy and funding barriers at the Provincial level continue to impact on our ability to go further with implementation.

The reports of the Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources *Investing in Quality: Policies, Practitioners, Programs and Parents* (March, 2007), and the Expert Panel on Early Learning *Early Learning for Every Child Today: a framework for early childhood settings* (December, 2006), provide an invaluable platform for continued collaboration between early childhood services and will be key in supporting our work.

Toronto Best Start Network looks forward to continuing to work together to ensure the services we provide meet the needs of our diverse community.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Batterson".

Brenda Patterson
Co-chair, Toronto Best Start Network

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Graham Baldwin".

Graham Baldwin
Co-chair, Toronto Best Start Network

Attachment

2007 – 2008 Best Start Community Plan

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Introduction

This 2007-08 Best Start Community Plan builds on the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children and the Getting Started Year 1 report. The focus is on system integration and the Best Start Network has updated strategies to achieve our vision.

This report is organized into 4 sections as specified by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Best Start Community Plan guidelines.

Section 1: 2006-07 Progress Towards Achieving the Longer-term Vision for Best Start.

This section provides an overview of the Best Start Network and accomplishments. It does not include Phase 1 components of Best Start child care expansion as this information is available in the 2007 Best Start Update to the Child Care Service plan which is attached.

Section 2: Best Start Network Composition, Activities and Community Engagement Process

Section 3: 2007-08 Strategies to Move Forward with the Community Vision for Best Start

Section 4: Strategies to Move forward with System Integration.

To lead the planning process an Implementation Steering Committee was developed and undertook a review of the Getting Started Year 1 Implementation Guide. The committee developed a strategy to document which activities have been undertaken and achieved, and to provide the Best Start Network with documentation on systems barriers and challenges and successes, as we implement the Toronto Vision for Children. As a result, the Best Start Community Plan incorporates the activities of both the Best Start Network and the Implementation Steering Committee.

In updating the community vision and describing the progress to date there are components of the longer-term vision that are not yet fully developed and not included in this report; these are referenced in the appropriate sections of the report.

Background

Best Start Goals:

By 2016 Toronto Best Start will put the Toronto vision into action for young children and their families. It aims to:

- Create a comprehensive system of services that supports children and their families with specific plans to address the needs of Francophone and Aboriginal populations and children with special needs from birth to age twelve
- Establish access for all children and families to community/neighbourhood hubs that are located in, or linked to, elementary schools wherever possible
- Increase access to a continuum of early identification and intervention services
- Support parents to participate in their child's early learning and development as they pursue work, study, family, and community responsibilities
- Measure outcomes for children using the Early Development Instrument and other measurement tools to identify patterns, needs and future directions in programs and services for young children
- Identify policy, resource and systems issues, and gaps.

Implementing the Vision

Toronto's Best Start strategy is being implemented in two phases:

Phase 1 focuses on promoting collaborative behaviours between professionals working with young children, with a focus on two key elements:

- High quality early learning and care environments through consistent learning expectations, activities and routines throughout kindergarten, child care and family support programs
- Early years staff teams that include teachers, early childhood educators, family support practitioners, and teaching assistants working together toward common goals.



Phase 2 of Toronto's Best Start strategy will see the development of clusters of services, providing a broader range of options for families. Service clusters will reflect the unique needs of their neighbourhood or community, and may provide links to other services such as: nutrition, public health, mental health services, parks and recreation, speech and language resources, early identification, primary health care, supports for children with special needs, public libraries and more.



Section 1: Progress Towards Achieving the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children

The Best Start Network has made considerable progress towards achieving the goals of our Toronto Vision for Children. Our accomplishments and strategies to move forward are described in Sections 2 and 3 of the report. Some of the highlights include:

- Toronto Best Start Network Partnership Agreement
- 55 new or expanded child care programs with Best Start capital by the end of 2006 for children 0-6
- 4,447 new licensed child care spaces
- 2,000 new fee subsidies
- increased special needs resourcing by 33%
- Community Profile Survey measuring the depth of collaboration between Child Care, Kindergarten and Family Support
- Engagement of new community support partners
- Early Years policy development among community partners and all 4 school boards
- Increased collaboration with French Language Services
- Increased collaboration with Aboriginal Services
- Joint Professional Development

The 2007 Best Start Update to the Child Care Service Plan describes the expansion of child care activities, successes and challenges. The Plan is attached.

Although the Best Start Network has achieved many of its goals set out in the Getting Started Year 1 guide there is still lots more work to be done. The Network is working towards establishing itself as champions for system change in the delivery of early years programs in the City of Toronto and will further its efforts in identifying the linkages between the Best Start network and other children's planning bodies in the community.

Considerable time and effort in the future will also have to be dedicated to assess and analyze the strengths and needs of our community. Over the coming year we will work

towards achieving this goal by assessing the current data sources available. Some of the existing data sources include: census statistics, Early Development Instrument (EDI), Ontario Early Years Community Services Inventory, Toronto Report Card on Children which can be used to inform our planning and support our efforts to work towards an integrated planning strategy.

A key component for successful implementation is the capacity of our various partners to maintain services. The potential loss of 3,500 child care subsidies by the end of 2008 will have a direct impact on our ability to fulfill our Toronto Vision for Children. The loss of this number of spaces will erode the 2,000 fee subsidy spaces the City implemented through Best Start and threaten the continued operation of many child care centres that serve primarily a subsidized population.

The Network will continue to monitor its progress through the development of a work plan for Phase 2, at both the Best Start Network and Implementation Steering Committee.

Section 2: Best Start Network Composition, Activities and Community Engagement

Best Start Network

The Best Start Network is responsible for the planning and implementation at a systems level of the Toronto Vision for Children as described on our *Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children* and *Getting Started: Year 1 guide*.

The Network is a partnership of 36 members representing two provincial ministries, four school boards, the City of Toronto, Toronto Public Health, representatives from the Francophone and Aboriginal communities, special needs and community organizations, all of whom are committed to achieving Toronto's Best Start vision.

The Network has set forth terms of reference (Toronto Best Start Terms of Reference) and an overarching framework for planning and implementation at a systems level. The *Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children* envisions a redesign of services and supports for young children that will see in its first phase increased collaboration of kindergarten, child care and family support programs.

The Toronto Vision for Children provides a framework for local planning and includes the following core elements:

- Developing a **high quality learning and care environment** through innovation, best practices and collaborative approaches to curriculum, activities and routines
- Bringing together staff expertise at the local level to create an **early years staff team** including early childhood educators, teachers, educational assistants and family support who work collaboratively to achieve common goals
- Identifying obstacles and solutions and working towards **inclusive access** of children and their families in programs and services

- Developing a **continuum of supports and services** that makes the most of efficient use of resources in responding to the changing needs of families and children
- Encouraging and enabling the **participation of parents** in programs and services, planning, service delivery and governance
- Developing a **local governance structure** to support community/neighbourhood planning, service integration and local decision making
- Developing a community/neighbourhood **partnership agreement** reflecting the vision and goals of the Best Start Plan

The Best Start Network's Partnership Agreement outlines the shared accountabilities and commitments of its members. It sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of the partners at the service system level in creating the conditions for successful implementation of the plan.

The partners acknowledge and accept the shared values, guiding principles and framework set out in the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children. They agree to work together on a multi-year basis towards innovation, enhancement and integration of programs, services and supports for children and their families 0-12 in the City of Toronto. They acknowledge their interdependence in achieving the goals of the Best Start Plan and are committed to working in partnership including identifying areas where early partnership success is likely and identifying and lessening the barriers to working together.

To support the Best Start Network activities an Implementation Steering Committee was developed with representatives from various sectors:

- Aboriginal Services
- French Language Services
- Toronto Children's Services
- Home child care
- Education – all four school boards
- Children's Mental Health

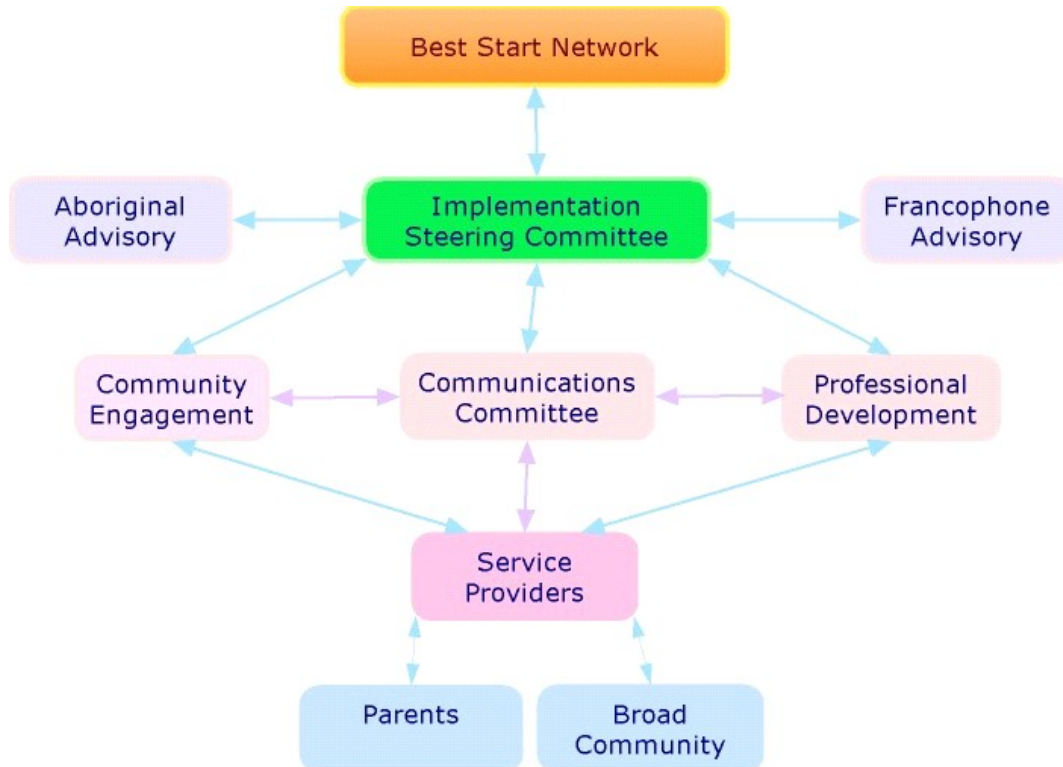
- Toronto Public Health
- Ontario Early Years Centres – Toronto Network
- Special Needs
- Preschool Speech and Language
- Family Resource programs
- Academe (universities and colleges)
- Child welfare (Community Development and Prevention Program)

The Implementation Steering Committee's role is to guide the implementation of the Toronto Vision for Children at the service delivery level and to provide advice to the Best Start Network.

In addition, a Professional Development, Community Engagement, and Communications Committee have been established with joint representation from the sectors.

The flowchart (Figure 1) shows how the responsibility for informing the planning and implementation of Toronto's Best Start Plan is being shared amongst the Network and its committees.

Figure 1



Activities

The activities for the Best Start Network in Phase 1 have been dedicated to community engagement strategies. The charts below describe progress towards achieving Toronto's vision, and strategies to move forward. The final column of the chart identifies future strategies to move forward from June 2007-2008. The Charts primarily address both sections 1 and 3 of the Community Plan. Description of emerging needs and challenges will be addressed in Section 3.

Chart A: Describes activities at a systems level towards achieving Toronto's vision from January 2006 to June 2007.

Chart B: Describes activities at a service delivery level.

Chart C: Describe activities at sector level.

Chart D: Describes activities within the French Language and Aboriginal Service Networks.

Chart A: Best Start Network: Achievements and future strategies

Best Start Network		Progress Towards Achieving Toronto's Vision for Children (2006-2007)	Strategies to move forward with Toronto's Vision for Children (2007-2008)
Task	Purpose		
<p>1. Disseminate information about the Toronto's Best Start Plan widely within the various sectors/ organizations & with key stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communicate with service providers within the sectors ▪ Communicate with parents and broad community involved with the sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed and maintained the web site for Best Start with all key information for members, service providers, key stakeholders and the broader community ▪ Distribution of Best Start brochures to service providers in all sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue to Disseminate Information about the Toronto Vision for Children to early childhood service providers ▪ Distribute Best Start Parent Brochures and posters ▪ Develop a workplan in Fall 2007 to move forward with Best Start at the community/ neighbourhood level based on information emerging from the Toronto's Best Start Survey and including strategies for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - professional development - communication and - community engagement
<p>2. Identify issues and work to secure broad support for the plan within the system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify policy, resource and systems issues that create barriers to collaboration/ integration at a site level ▪ Ensure all levels within individual sectors know and understand the <i>Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children</i>. ▪ Work toward broad support from all levels within the early childhood system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed an issues management tracking system for the Best Start Network ▪ Partnership Agreement Network sign off and commitment to broad sector support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuing to build on the formal commitment established through the Partnership Agreement to support implementation ▪ Continuing to work with ministerial partners, school boards, and local governments to address barriers and challenges ▪ Toronto's Best Start Network will work with the newly developed Regional French Language Network and the two French-language school boards to identify programs and services needed and to support their delivery in the Francophone community

Best Start Network		Progress Towards Achieving Toronto's Vision for Children (2006-2007)	Strategies to move forward with Toronto's Vision for Children (2007-2008)
Task	Purpose		
<p>3. Provide dedicated leadership and staff time for partnership and networking activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure adequate representation, knowledge, and decision making is dispersed appropriately throughout the sector/organization ▪ Promote knowledge-sharing and enhance cross-sectoral collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Network members have been actively broadening the involvement in Best Start in their sectors by identifying representatives for participation in the sub-committees ▪ Network members have championed Best Start in their own sectors and agencies through information sharing at meetings, in newsletters, at workshops, and through internal electronic communications. ▪ School boards are developing Early Years Policies that identify their commitment to the early years. ▪ Family support, childcare and education sectors have developed Working Together frameworks to provide systems direction for collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Network partners continue to be actively engaged in implementation and providing leadership within their sectors ▪ Continue to allocate staff time to participate in Best Start activities when feasible.

Chart B: Implementation Steering Committee: Achievements and Future Strategies

Implementation Steering Committee		Progress Towards Achieving Toronto's Vision for Children (2006-2007)	Strategies to move forward with Toronto's Vision for Children (2007-2008) Task
Task	Purpose		
1. Work collaboratively to develop implementation plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a multi-year plan to roll out Best Start in Toronto, beginning with collaborative /integrated service provision for kindergarten age children and followed by the development of community/ neighbourhood hubs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed an Implementation Steering Committee (ISC) to operationalize Toronto's Best Start Plan and outline its multi-year implementation strategies. Created a consolidated progress report from all the member sectors of the ISC (Chart C and D) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use information emerging from the Toronto's Best Start Survey and the ISC consolidated implementation plans to develop a collaborative implementation plan Continue to work on development of implementation strategies including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training/PD - Communication and - Community engagement Share tools to support the implementation of collaborative policies and practices being developed in child care, family support and school boards (i.e. Working Together framework)
2. Provide opportunities for professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the capacity of the early childhood system (government, funders, managers and frontline staff) to plan and deliver consistent, high-quality collaborative programming for children 0-6 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A workgroup for professional development was formed and it reports to the Implementation Steering Committee. Toronto's Professional Development (PD) strategy for Year 1 focuses on developing the capacity of the early childhood system to plan and deliver consistent high-quality collaborative programming. Strategy included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 workshops in each quadrant for program managers, supervisors, and Principals - Planning a conference in the fall of 2007 for teachers, ECE's and family support practitioners - Developed a train the trainer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall conference Realizing the Vision: Together for our Children, for teachers, ECE's, & family support practitioners Outreach and training to faculty of colleges and universities educating professionals who will work with families and young children using the newly developed Best Start Toronto presentation.

Implementation Steering Committee		Progress Towards Achieving Toronto's Vision for Children (2006-2007)	Strategies to move forward with Toronto's Vision for Children (2007-2008)
Task	Purpose		Task
		presentation for use by faculties who are educating professionals who will work with young children and families.	
3. Create a community profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess the status of the existing system. Identify the locations, and depth of collaboration throughout the City of early childhood development programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the initial implementation activities has been to assess the level of readiness and existing collaboration within the early years' sector using a survey to collect data from service providers in the education, family support and licensed child care sectors. A total of 1802 surveys were distributed, 853 surveys were returned - an overall return rate of 47% Surveys were distributed to 917 child care centres, 438 returned (48%), 580 schools, 232 returned (40%) and 305 family support programs, 183 returned (60%) Data will inform the creation of a community profile, providing baseline information as we begin moving the service system along the integration continuum The data is currently being analyzed for a report that will include next steps and benchmarks for collaboration to be released in the fall of 2007 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze data collected in the Toronto Best Start Survey Utilize survey results to determine current levels of collaboration and establish targets for action plans Identify communities/ neighbourhoods to fast-forward based on level of collaboration/ readiness Continue to use tools available (EDI, ward profiles, etc) to inform local programming and action plans Identify communities to pilot new shared confidentiality consent forms as specified in the Implementation Steering Committee work plan and Getting Started Year 1 guide.
4. Engage the community in Best Start planning and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a strategy for dialogue with the community (informing, discussion & consultation) Develop mechanisms to build strong effective partnerships with parents, service providers and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A working group was formed for Community Engagement reporting to the Implementation Steering Committee Activities in Year 1 have focused on informing service providers about the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children, and building the capacity of service providers. Service providers within all of the sectors are now working with their colleagues to help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to provide information sessions to build understanding and support capacity of service providers to implement Toronto's Vision for Children Use collaborative implementation plan (to be developed under No. 1 ISC strategy in this section) to identify next steps for community engagement Develop a strategy for dialogue with the

Implementation Steering Committee		Progress Towards Achieving Toronto's Vision for Children (2006-2007)	Strategies to move forward with Toronto's Vision for Children (2007-2008) Task
Task	Purpose		
	broad community	<p>them understand their role in implementing Best Start.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Service provider leaders were called on to champion Best Start in their networks at a Network Chairs Meeting held in March 2007 ▪ Presentations have been given by members of the Community Engagement workgroup to various network meetings of service providers across the city. These presentations provide information about Best Start and how it is beginning to work in Toronto giving service providers examples of partnerships and collaboration between schools, child care and family support programs. ▪ Informing service providers about Best Start through existing provider networks will enable Toronto's diverse community to be able to work in collaborative ways with parents and children from diverse cultural/linguistic backgrounds. 	<p>community, including the provision of materials in languages of choice for Toronto's diverse communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide opportunities for parents to learn about, discuss and provide input on the implementation of Toronto's vision.
5. Develop enabling mechanisms for the sharing of information about children and joint planning to meet their needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure service providers are able to share information about individual children to provide necessary supports while respecting privacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A cross-sectoral working group was established to review and revise protocols for sharing information. The forms will provide a platform for professionals working with children and families to share pertinent information, improving communication between the professionals, and providing a seamless experience for children and families between programs. ▪ The group has now developed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an introductory overview which provides general information on Confidentiality, Informed Consent, Legal Obligations and Government Policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pilot test the sharing information and confidentiality agreement in the community ▪ Continue partners' discussion on working collaboratively to meet children's needs, especially around the transition to school for children with special needs.

Implementation Steering Committee		Progress Towards Achieving Toronto's Vision for Children (2006-2007)	Strategies to move forward with Toronto's Vision for Children (2007-2008)
Task	Purpose		Task
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sample Confidentiality Agreement - sample Information Sharing Consent Form - sample Consent for Informal and Ongoing Sharing of Information, and - sample Notice with Respect to the Collection of Personal Information. - All sample forms include Informed Consent Guiding Principles for the information of professionals' and parents/guardians. 	
<p>6. Identify issues and work to secure broad support for the plan within the system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify policy, resource and systems issues that create barriers to collaboration/integration at a site level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Issues and challenges to implementation of Toronto's Best Start plan identified through initial implementation plans are included in Section 3 of this report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue to track barriers and challenges ▪ Continue to monitor policy developments at the service and systems level ▪ Utilize recommendations outlined in the Best Start Expert Panel Reports to overcome identified challenges
<p>7a. Develop a strategy for implementation of the Toronto Vision for Children in the Francophone Community</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Direct input of Francophone stakeholders and French language service providers in Best Start planning and implementation has been supported through a French language regional network representative, a local French language service representative, and participation of the two French language school boards at the Network ▪ Communication with Francophone stakeholders and services providers has been supported with translation of all Best Start printed materials. Additionally, French language school boards participate on Toronto's Best Start Communications Committee. ▪ A French language advisory group has been established for Toronto, and includes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue work on establishing a Regional French Language Network in Toronto. ▪ The Regional French Language Network and the two French-language school boards will continue to work with Toronto's ISC to identify programs and services needed to support their delivery. ▪ Obtain and analyze the results from the Toronto's Best Start Survey to develop an action plan to support Best Start vision. French Language Service specific results will be extracted for use by committee in planning next steps. ▪ Develop a French language communication plan. ▪ Create an information kit for all documents related to Best Start in French.

Implementation Steering Committee		Progress Towards Achieving Toronto's Vision for Children (2006-2007)	Strategies to move forward with Toronto's Vision for Children (2007-2008) Task
Task	Purpose		
		<p>participation of child care, education, and family support sectors. This group is developing a strategy for Best Start implementation that meets the needs of the Francophone community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A contract with the Centre Francophone for special needs resourcing was signed April 2006. Two resource consultants have been hired. ▪ Enhanced special needs training (June 2007) included a workshop offered in French 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Centralize all documents translated into French at a single location (e.g. the City's website). ▪ Develop an inventory of French language services for families with children 0-6 yrs. ▪ Translate and adapt the seasonal newsletter. ▪ Work with AFÉSEO in reaching out to Early Childhood Educators. ▪ Develop protocols for CSDCCS to share information as well as resources for children with special needs, intervention plans, etc. ▪ Implement the pilot project at the École George-Étienne Cartier, a before and after school program for Le Petit Chaperon Rouge day care centre (junior and senior kindergarten). The before and after school program will use the junior/senior kindergarten classroom in 2007-08. A memorandum of understanding is currently under review and will be completed by the end of the school year. ▪ Planned French language training on the new City of Toronto criteria for child care centres and school boards' educational counsellors – June 2007. ▪ Work with the PD group to include a workshop in French in the Fall Conference. ▪ Work with Collège Boréal on a strategy to train qualified early childhood educators.

Implementation Steering Committee		Progress Towards Achieving Toronto's Vision for Children (2006-2007)	Strategies to move forward with Toronto's Vision for Children (2007-2008) Task
Task	Purpose		
<p>7b. Develop a strategy for implementation of the Toronto Vision for Children in the Aboriginal Community</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A representative from the Aboriginal community is a member of Best Start Network. ▪ Best Start Year 1 activities have included consultation with stakeholders on site selection for an Aboriginal child care expansion site. ▪ An Aboriginal Advisory Group has been established and includes participation of the child care, education and family support sectors. This group is developing a strategy for Best Start implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The geographic mapping of the demographic distribution of Aboriginal children and their families and the services and resources available to them ▪ Collaborate with DAC's to adapt EDI tool from a culturally sensitive perspective for the Aboriginal community ▪ Develop a capacity building initiative in collaboration with Mothercraft to increase the number of trained Early Childhood Assistants within the Aboriginal community. ▪ Information gathered from the demographic mapping and the EDI tool will serve to inform the development of Aboriginal community/neighbourhood service clusters (Eagles' Nests) across Toronto.
<p>7c. Develop a strategy for implementation of the Toronto Vision for Children with special needs, including early identification and intervention</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Special Needs Advisory Group is continuing to provide leadership in areas of support for children with special needs, early identification and intervention ▪ Continue work on promoting equity of access to special needs resources for children across the City as part of the Every Child Belongs strategy ▪ Utilize additional funding for PSL services to reduce wait lists and wait times and for Infant Hearing (IH) to expand service delivery to school entry ▪ Continue working with BS partners to support seamless access to services for families and children including those with special needs ▪ Provide resources and training, including train-the-trainer for child care, OEYC's and family resource centres on the importance of the early years and the availability and use of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a framework to support a consistent city-wide approach to early identification, including special needs children ▪ Complete planning and implement the Blind/low Vision Program, ensuring its integration with other early years' programs. ▪ Continue work and explore expansion of Joint Early ID and TPSLS health promotion campaign: "Don't play wait and see with your child's development" ▪ Work with school boards to ensure protocols are in place to support a smooth transition to school for children receiving PSL and IH services ▪ Work with other Best Start partners to ensure protocols are in place to facilitate referrals and timely access to public health

Implementation Steering Committee		Progress Towards Achieving Toronto's Vision for Children (2006-2007)	Strategies to move forward with Toronto's Vision for Children (2007-2008) Task
Task	Purpose		
		screening tools	services e.g. HBHC, PSL, IH and Blind-low Vision services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement the Red Flags Screening Resource Guide for professionals ▪ Develop strategies to promote the use of all relevant early identification tools (e.g. The Nipissing District Developmental Screen (NDDS) and Preschool Speech and Language (PSL) communication checklist. ▪ Make every effort to distribute tools to parents and caregivers in the home language of parents where possible
7d. Develop a strategy for implementation of the Toronto Vision for Children with Toronto's culturally diverse communities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Toronto is one of the most diverse cities in the world and has gained an international reputation for the success of its diversity. The City's inclusive vision of society, which is equitable and built on the strength of its diversity, is embedded in its Toronto Vision for Children, Best Start Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parent brochure to be translated in various languages to support linguistically diverse communities ▪ Provide increasing opportunities for dissemination of Best Start plan and activities within broader community.

Chart C: Getting Started: Phase 1 Sector Activities

Tasks	Purpose	Activities School Boards (TDSB, TCDSB, CSDCSO, CSDCCS)	Activities Child Care (Children's Services and Home Child Care Association of Toronto)	Activities Family Support (MAFRP/OAFRP and OEYC's)	Activities Early ID (TPH/TPSL/IHP)
1. Provide opportunities for PD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop the capacity of the early childhood system (government, funders, managers and front-line staff) to plan and deliver consistent, high quality collaborative programming for children 0-6 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities for joint PD - Planning collaborative early learning environments for Kindergarten teachers and ECE professionals. - Best Start leadership meeting/workshops for Principals - BS Collaborative site meetings 	<p>Children's Services and Home Child Care Association of Toronto:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PD for staff, home visitors (meetings, info. sessions) - Distribute BS PD information to Children's Services staff, home visitors <p>Children's Services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information sessions about BS Survey for child care operators (Network meetings) - Training on the new section, "Working Together", in Operating Criteria for Children's Services Consultants & child care sector 	<p>MAFRP/OAFRP and OEYC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint BS PD workgroup has several representatives from the FS sector involved. - Information sessions have been provided for the FS sector. <p>MAFRP/OAFRP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PD opportunities to Family Support community at Conferences in Fall 2006/2008, 4 training days in planned for Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 - Membership drive and advertising for Board members for all practitioners working with families <p>OEYC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MCYS provided overview of family support in relation to BS at OEYC/OFRA conference, Fall 2006 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop train the trainer package/resources to promote parents access/use of Nipissing (www.ndds.ca) - Develop information sessions, with education, child care and family support partners, for promotion of parent screening of child's development. - BS Survey results to inform strategies.
2. Communication & engagement activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide sector orientation and development opportunities - Communicate with service providers within the sector. - Communicate with parents and involve broader community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of BS parent flyer for K registration - Information Updates (presentations, articles, displays) - New releases of new Early Learning and Care site openings - Distribution of school board information/materials to Early Learning & Care Sites - Rep. on BS Network, ISC, Community Engagement, PD and Communications workgroups 	<p>Children's Services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicating to child care sector about the BS Survey through Child Care Advisory Committee, and local child care network meetings - Attending monthly district meetings to update Children's Services staff on BS activities - Distributing BS brochures/materials/info tool kit to children's services consultants, directors and through Children's Services networks/coalitions, CCAC, team meetings and field offices - Representative on BS Network, ISC, Community Engagement, PD and 	<p>MAFRP/OAFRP and OEYC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Best Start Family Support Working group has been established, with reps from OEYC TDSB, FRP and CAP-C/CPNP for sector planning and discuss forum event for FS sector. - FS reps on BS Network, ISC, Community Engagement, PD and Communications workgroups - Communicated extensively within the sector to promote participation in BS Survey - Sector has distributed BS materials widely within. <p>MAFRP/OAFRP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop newsletter to a larger membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicate TPH role in promoting Early ID, through BS partners, to staff - Promote BS at Network meetings - Identify ways to connect TPH and health promotion to BS partners. - Rep. on BS Network, ISC

Tasks	Purpose	Activities School Boards (TDSB, TCDSB, CSDCSO, CSDCCS)	Activities Child Care (Children’s Services and Home Child Care Association of Toronto)	Activities Family Support (MAFRP/OAFRP and OEYC’s)	Activities Early ID (TPH/TPSL/IHP)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation and distribution of Principal Information Toolkit - Participation in BS Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications workgroups - Using intranet to communicate about BS and survey Home Child Care Association of Toronto: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and implement a communication strategy (Staff, providers, service users, public) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> network throughout Ontario - Establish Research Committee to create opportunities for collaboration around research initiatives across early learning and care programs 	
3. Development of policies/ procedures and/or revise existing policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop policies and procedures to promote coordination/ collaboration - Early Years Policy development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of new TCDSB Early Learning and Care Manual (ongoing) - Development of TCDSB Early Years Policy - Development of TDSB guide for school principles, <i>Working Together for Student’s Success</i> - Establishment of TCDSB Early Years Steering Committee - Establishment of TDSB Early Years Site Mgt. Committee, Early Years Staff Team & Early Years Steering Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children’s Services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The new section, “Working Together”, in Operating Criteria developed to support child care operators in the process of collaborating with schools and FSP’s - Develop “Working Together” practices guide for child care operators - Develop T.O. Operating Criteria info on how child care will work with schools, family support and other community partners. - Identify 4 consultants, 1 from each district, to act as BS Champions - Review staff roles and responsibilities (e.g. consultants) to promote integration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MAFRP/OAFRP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development into the Ontario Institute of Family Support with Toronto Chapter - Advocate for family friendly policy improvements or initiatives for children and families - FS Principles and Mission Statement to be included into further development of programs and services OEYC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - OEYC’s developed a BS position paper - OEYC rep. worked with information sharing workgroup (Confidentiality/ Information Sharing Documents) - Working group is preparing “Working Together” indicators /benchmarks for FS sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examine internal operating procedures and guidelines to ensure they support BS direction towards system integration. - Review partnership agreements, at system level, to include work with BS partners.
4. Other Best Start activities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of BS early leaders - Support BS early leaders through meetings, local needs focused PD - Development of planning and collaborative tools with BS early leaders - Ongoing facilities-related information Meetings - Current BS information on website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Current BS information on website - Dedicated staff time to support BS Network and BS Implementation Steering Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MAFRP/OAFRP and OEYC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family Support Programs are building on existing partnerships with community programs outreaching to schools and child care centres w/ invitations to participate in riding tables - Some Family Support programs are hosting healthy child screenings with TPH & PSL MAFRP/OAFRP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working towards building on research library of inclusive, Integrated Environments from across Canada - Promote research in Social Determinants of 	

Tasks	Purpose	Activities School Boards (TDSB, TCDSB, CSDCSO, CSDCCS)	Activities Child Care (Children’s Services and Home Child Care Association of Toronto)	Activities Family Support (MAFRP/OAFRP and OEYC’s)	Activities Early ID (TPH/TPSL/IHP)
				Health and their positive impact on families in communities in Ontario and Toronto OEYC: - OEYC Riding tables hosted EDI community meetings with schools and child care invited Established MOUs with TDSB and TPH	
5. Cross sector initiatives		“Confidentiality and Information Sharing Guidelines and Forms for Early Childhood Programs, 2007” developed by Working Group with representation from the School Boards, Toronto Children’s Services and Family Support Programs (OEYC’s)			

Chart D: Getting Started: Phase 1 French Language and Aboriginal Services

Tasks	Purpose	Activities French Language Services	Activities Aboriginal Services
1. Provide opportunities for PD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities for joint PD between French language service providers - Planning collaborative early learning environments for Kindergarten teachers and ECE professionals. - Best Start leadership meeting/workshops for Principals - BS Collaborative site meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PD for staff (meetings, info. sessions) - Information sessions about BS Survey for Francophone community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PD for staff (meetings, info. sessions) - Info sessions about BS Survey for Aboriginal staff
2. Communication & engagement activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advise the local Best Start Network regarding the unique needs of Francophone/Aboriginal communities - Advisory groups will provide recommendations to the ISC specific to the implementation of Toronto's vision for Toronto's French language/Aboriginal services - Act as a resource to community groups/clusters who are working locally on integration strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representation on and regular updates to/from Best Start Regional French Language Network for Central South-West - Translation of Best Start materials into French & distribution of such to French Language community - On-going communications/updates to Francophone community - Identification of key French language sectors and initial informal meetings with representatives - Formation of French Language Advisory Workgroup (involving child care, school board, Ministry, & Family Support reps) - Distribution BS brochures/materials/info tool kit to French Language BS reps - Representation on Best Start Network, ISC - Translation, distribution, & collection of Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicating to Aboriginal sector of BS (Network meetings) - Formation of Aboriginal Advisory Group for BS Toronto - Distributing BS brochures/materials/info tool kit to Aboriginal staff - Rep. on Best Start Network, ISC
3. Development of policies/ procedures and/or revise existing policies.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare for formation of new French Language Best Start Network for Toronto Region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of cultural perspective to guide future development - Create profile of services currently in existence for Aboriginal children and families.

Section 3: 2007-08 Strategies to Move Forward with the Community Vision for Best Start

Strategies to move forward are described in Charts A, B, C, D in Section 2. This section describes the challenges and barriers faced by the sectors at the Toronto Best Start Network in moving forward with implementing the Best Start vision. It is organized into Section A: Systemic Challenges, Section B Sector Challenges.

Much has been done to move forward with implementing the Toronto Vision for Children, Network partners have worked with some success at overcoming a number of barriers to effective collaboration, as outlined in Section 2.

A key component for the successful implementation of the strategy however is the capacity of our various partners to maintain services. Toronto's Best Start Plan was developed on the assumption that the various systems would remain constant. Since the development of the plan in January 2006, the health of some of the systems has been compromised. Stable funding that reflects the impact of inflationary costs is necessary to support the existing services and ensure Toronto has a stable foundation on which to build.

Many of the barriers highlighted within this section are consistent with those identified in the Report of the Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources Investing in Quality: Policies, Practitioners, Programs and Parents (March, 2007), and the Expert Panel on Early Learning Early Learning for Every Child Today: a framework for early childhood settings (December, 2006)

The Toronto Best Start Network supports the recommendations in *Investing in Quality: Policies, Practitioners, Programs and Parents* (2007), and looks forward to learning about how the Ministry of Children and Youth Services will implement the recommendations for the implementation of *Early Learning for Every Child Today: a framework for early childhood settings* (2006). Both reports provide strategies that will support the ongoing implementation of Best Start in Toronto.

A. Systemic Challenges: Phase 1

The following segment identifies key challenges and barriers that have been identified throughout the Best Start Network in moving forward with Phase 1 of Toronto's Best Start strategy. These include:

1. Funding Challenges
2. Policy Challenges
3. Institutional Challenges

1. Funding Challenges

Lack of funding to implement the community/neighbourhood hub delivery system

- In order to continue to move forward with the implementation of Best Start in Toronto, financial resources are required to provide the dedicated leadership, including staff time and commitment necessary to maintain the current momentum
- In addition to inadequate funding to expand the system the following specific funding barriers impact the Network's ability to realize its Best Start plan.

Availability of space in schools and occupancy costs

- While providing parenting supports and programs is a critical component of Best Start, use of classroom space for parenting support programs, drop-ins, or readiness programs is not an approved use of space in terms of the funding formula so such programs are always in jeopardy of being relocated
- Availability of space, and the increasing occupancy cost of child care space in Toronto schools restricts our ability to provide additional services in schools
- The capping of class sizes in the primary grades to 20 children has created challenges for some schools to accommodate existing child care, or to consider new centres. In some cases, child care centres may be displaced to enable schools to meet the 20:1 requirement.

- As Toronto schools are built and/or retrofitted, consideration is needed to provide space for family support and child care programs.

Unfunded community organizations required to assume management and administrative costs

- There remains a great deal of ongoing work within all the sectors to facilitate the collaborative/integrated changes articulated in the vision. While many activities have taken place over the past 1-2 years, with no additional resources to support the change process and no incentives to behave in a new way, faced with competing priorities, the capacity and commitment to continue with implementing the Best Start vision is compromised
- Staff release time has been recognized as a critical factor in moving the Best Start vision forward. Teachers, child care and parenting staff require significant release time from their regular obligations in order to meet as staff teams and participate in professional development opportunities.

Operating costs to accommodate coordination and facilitation activities

- With no designated staffing to facilitate the implementation process, sectors are required to draw on their existing staff complement who are often over-extended.

2. Policy Challenges

Fractured funding structure and lack of coordinated planning at the Provincial level

- Although "Best Start networks are to be the key driver of system integration", Networks have limited authority to leverage policy change, and can only rely on the good will of partners to move forward. This is a significant weakness that will have a negative impact on results. A coherent/coordinated framework for Best Start between the three ministries involved (Ministry of Health, Education and Children & Youth Services) is required to provide clear direction for all sectors, and to support

full implementation. A strong, clear commitment from all Ministries is needed to move forward with Best Start.

Combining universal and targeted programs for children 0-6 years is a primary barrier to integrating services

- Kindergarten is available with no fee to parents for all children, ages four and five
- Family support programs have no, or very low fees. Where they are available, programs are open to all pre-schoolers attending with their parents
- Limited availability and associated costs creates barriers for families in accessing child care.

Regulatory restrictions

- Inconsistent regulations in school/childcare regarding child/adult ratios, classroom space requirements, playground requirements and washroom expectations for JK/SK-aged children are issues where coordination is needed between Ministries.

Inconsistent pedagogy of early learning and care - creation of high quality early learning and care environments

- Additional barriers in creating collaborative/integrated high quality early learning and care environments are the lack of a consistent pedagogy.

3. Institutional Challenges

Service planning

- Service system management strategies would be enhanced by strengthening existing planning processes, including establishing closer collaboration with the Data Analysis Coordinators, the Ontario Early Years Centres, and the city, for an effective early years planning system. The Best Start Network is one vehicle to support the coordination of service planning efforts across the City.

- Toronto's family support sector partners (Ontario Early Years, Family Resource Programs, Parenting & Family Literacy Centres, Community Action Programs for Children & Canada Prenatal Nutrition Programs) are engaged in a process to begin working and planning together in a coordinated way. While local planning between these partners is valuable, further coordination and leadership are required by the funding partners at the municipal, provincial and federal levels to ensure a comprehensive family support system across Toronto.

Communication and community engagement

- Brochures, newsletters, and posters were developed; public training and events have been implemented to ensure the vision of Best Start is understood by service providers. As we move toward communicating and engaging parents in Toronto's diverse communities, the need for funding for translation into a number of languages increases.
- In addition, partners at a minimum need to be securely funded, and have the financial capacity to expand services as the potential interest and need for programming increases.

B. Sector-Specific Challenges: Phase 1

The subsequent segments identify the sector challenges in implementing Phase 1 of Toronto's Best Start strategy which include:

- Child Care
- Education
- Family Supports
- Special Needs, Early Identification and Intervention
- Toronto Public Health
- French Language Services
- Aboriginal Services

Child Care

The City's Child Care system is facing significant and growing funding pressures which, if not resolved will result in the loss of 3,500 child care subsidies by the end of 2008. The loss of this number of subsidy spaces will erode the 2,000 fee subsidy spaces that the City implemented through Best Start and threaten the continued operation of many child care centres that serve primarily a subsidized population.

Provincial funding has not increased to reflect inflationary pressures on the base funding levels of the service. Annual inflationary increases for child care operators, including pay equity obligations, have averaged 3% each year, thereby creating an operating budget pressure of \$8 million. With the introduction of new child care funding under the 2003 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, the City was able to return in 2004 to the practice of payment of actual costs of service as determined through the submission and analysis of operating budgets. This was an important step in bringing stability back to the City's child care system.

In 2005, the province announced the Best Start Strategy and allocated funds to support implementation from the 2005 Federal Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. Under Best Start the City would have received annually \$125 million in new child care funding by 2008. Under the City's Best Start Plan there was sufficient funding to support almost 6,000 new child care fee subsidies, but more importantly almost half of this funding was planned to support the base service by paying for actual costs, improved wages, absorbing the impact of income testing and providing for minor capital and health and safety needs.

In 2006, following the cancellation of the federal/provincial agreement, the City's plan was significantly adjusted to reflect the new funding reality. The City's revised allocation was reduced to \$27.5 million. In order to sustain the new child care centres built under Best Start, the majority of the reduced funding was directed to the creation of 2,000 new child care fee subsidies. Although the revised plan provided some additional funding for special needs resourcing and funds for Wage Improvement, no funds were available to support the

impact of inflationary pressures on the base and the City has returned to a shortfall in 2007. The Best Start funding was increased by \$6.8 million (annualized to \$9.1 million). These funds are being used to offset the impact of income testing and will not provide relief to base funding pressures.

The base funding shortfall is expected to grow to over \$20 million in 2008 and in order to ensure that the service level is fully funded when the reserve is exhausted, no new admissions will occur beginning September 2007. Additionally, the inability to complete Phase 2 of the Best Start Plan has left many communities without child care options.

For more information on pressures to Toronto's Child Care system please see the City of Toronto 2007 Best Start Update to the Child Care Service Plan (Children's Services Division, May 2007).

Education

Toronto's two English School Boards face significant financial challenges. While the impact at this point is unclear; managing significant deficits may have an effect on the school board's ability and willingness to venture into new initiatives, especially when expectations regarding required activities are unclear.

Funding Challenges

- The Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) provided funding for implementing the Early Development Instrument (EDI) in year 1. However there is no continuous funding guaranteed.
- The Ministry of Education (EDU) has not to date been engaged in funding the collection of EDI data, or in recognizing the benefits of its use for schools
- EDU does not provide funding to support implementation of Best Start - staff and resources are needed to demonstrate commitment and for successful implementation.

Institutional Challenges

- The Ministry of Children and Youth Service's *Addendum to the Implementation Planning Guidelines for Best Start Networks – System Integration* (November 15, 2006) makes minimal references to the role of education, and provides limited direction to school boards regarding their role in Best Start.
- MCYS is providing leadership and direction to municipalities in addition to funding child care expansion. The Ministry of Health is providing system direction to its service providers and some direct funding related to their services in the early years. EDU has provided no funding or support to promote school board involvement.
- Since Best Start is, to date, an initiative with no funding attached, EDU is relying on the good will of system leaders to move it forward. In the absence of Ministry commitment, direction and funding, it may be difficult to maintain the momentum required for such a large scale initiative to move forward. The Ministry of Education should be taking a key leadership role and work closely with MCYS to revise regulations to assist School Boards with implementation. School boards would benefit from specific direction and accountability requirements from EDU.

Family Support

- Family Support programs (including Ontario Early Years, Family Resource Programs, CAPC/CPNP)¹ face a range of systemic challenges to implementing Best Start. Fractured funding arrangements, with pockets of funding being provided through numerous funding agencies, and a variety of mandates and service expectations converge to fragment the sector. While planning for Best Start has begun city-wide to bring the various family support programs together, integrated planning at the systems/policy level is required to create coherence within the sector. Best Start will potentially assist in this process.

¹ Parenting & Family Literacy Centres operated through the Toronto District School Board are considered part of the family support program sector. However, as part of the TDSB, their funding and policy framework fall under the education sector, and so they have not been included within this section. They are however a significant provider of services to families, and make up an additional fragmentation of the family support sector in Toronto.

Funding Challenges

- Family support programs have traditionally partnered with other service providers, and often provide space, staffing and/or infrastructure for partner programs. Rising operational costs and negligible funding increases, is impacting on the capacity of the sector to maintain these valuable partnerships, and to continue providing infrastructure support to other community partners/initiatives.
- Additional funding is required for programs to expand partnerships and levels of collaboration, and to expand programs in new sites, in or around schools.
- Many family support programs are operating at full capacity. While there is much more that programs could be doing, resources limit their ability to do so.
- Family support programs have developed collaborative partnerships that bring services to under-served, high priority communities and families. However, to build on this momentum and further develop partnerships additional resources will be necessary.
- While family support programs are key to Toronto's Best Start strategy, limited staffing and infrastructure resources restrict what is possible.
- Funding for all CAPC and CPNP is currently under review at the Federal level, as are all Grants & Contributions. Current funding is only guaranteed until March 31st, 2008. This has created many barriers in running programs in the current year, most significantly the inability to extend partnerships or staff contracts past the date.

Policy Challenges

- As with the child care sector, staff training and retention is key to the provision of quality program delivery. Adequate compensation and training for staff in all early learning and care settings is essential to ensure all programs for children 0-6 and their families are high quality, accessible, and developmentally focused.
- Integrating the Guiding Principles of Family Support throughout all sectors working with children and families, including schools and childcare will serve to create a comprehensive family-centred system.

Service Planning

- Service system management strategies would be enhanced through the development of an integrated data collection system and integrated early years planning for the family support sector. Currently a wide range of information is collected by the differing levels of government. Agencies that provide a range of programs for families are responsible for multiple data collection systems, as well as funding and data reports.

For more information on Toronto's Ontario Early Years Centres, please see the OEYC 2007-08 Best Start Service Plans.

Special Needs, Early Identification and Intervention

Funding Challenges

- Toronto's four year plan to increase service growth to reflect the populations of children with special needs stalled after one year with cancellation of the federal/provincial agreement. Even with enhanced services developed under Best start, the adoption of inclusion policies and service provider expectations, there remain children who cannot access child care due to their extra support needs.
- Current financial pressures in Toronto's child care subsidy system has reduced the availability of subsidized child care spaces overall. Families with children with special needs experience more financial hardships, making them more reliant on subsidy to support their children's participation in early childhood programs. Children with special needs require access to child care to receive additional support and to promote interaction with their peers.
- Agencies providing support to children with special needs endured many years of inadequate funding. Only in the last two years, under Best Start, have they received funding that matches the actual cost of providing contracted service levels. 2007 is likely the last year that this will occur without further funding increases.

Service Implications

- Due to the 5 million dollars funding designated to special needs services under Best Start plan being lost with cancellation of agreements, children needing additional supports will continue to be excluded from child care programs
- Agencies will seek to reduce service targets as funding fails to meet inflationary costs, approx \$200,000-300,000 per year.

Policy Challenges

- As increases to child care spaces are planned and implemented, there is a corresponding increase to the number of children with special needs entering the system. As such, it is recommended that sufficient funding be available to provide resource educators to those children needing additional supports.

Institutional Challenges

- Children with special needs require the tri-Ministerial approach promised through Best Start due to their multiple and often complex medical and educational needs.
- The education system requires additional resources to support children with special needs. As resources have declined for special needs assistants, schools have become increasingly hesitant to accept children with special needs in regular Junior and Senior Kindergarten classes. If children are not able to function in regular classes, the choice for many parents is to put their child in a specialized program, or to remove them from the program. Many children not able to receive services in schools remain in child care programs excluding them from the school setting with their peers. The problem is then further compounded when the child enters grade 1.

Toronto Public Health

Funding Challenges

- Despite minor increases in funding in recent years for Toronto Public Health, funding levels for Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Preschool Speech and Language, and

the Infant Hearing Program are insufficient to address the growing cost of service delivery, to meet provincial service standards, or to fully cover direct and indirect operating costs.

- As a result of insufficient funds to provide HBHC services as described in program standards, Toronto Public Health has reduced service by prioritizing high risk clients and subsidizing HBHC resources with cost-shared prenatal, breastfeeding and parenting resources. It is estimated that an additional \$11,700,000 would be required in 2007 to fully meet HBHC program standards.
- There is a growing demand for parenting programs such as Making the Connection, Nobody's Perfect, Incredible Years, and the Peer Nutrition Program, but there is limited capacity to meet this demand, particularly in different languages. This reduced capacity results in wait lists for many programs.

Policy Challenges

- Provincial service guidelines and requirements for 100% funding programs that specify service delivery models can make it difficult to deliver programs in new and creative ways.

French Language Services

Funding Challenges

Limited Human Resources

- Difficulties in finding and retaining qualified francophone personnel due to the limited pool of staff

Lack of funding for staff release time

- While this is an issue for all service providers, it is exacerbated by the relatively small number of French language service providers available to attend meetings, training and to secure adequate staff coverage.

- Limited availability of Toronto Preschool Speech and Language Services for the francophone community
- Cancellation of Phase 2 of Best Start that was to create new child care spaces (103 francophone spaces at Saint-Noël-Chabanel and St-Jean-de-Lalande: related costs - \$180,900 - \$30,000 per space)
- The limited number of subsidized child care spaces available in Toronto given the current financial pressures being faced by the City's child care system will impact the availability of services to Francophone families.

Policy Challenges

- Ensuring the Francophone reality is adequately represented in a minority setting
- As the two French school boards have large geographic areas that expand far beyond Toronto's borders, there is a need for harmonization/consistency. The Conseil scolaire de district du Sud-Ouest and Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud are not able to do something radically different in their Toronto schools, than they are doing elsewhere.
- There is a need for a liaison officer position to work with the child care centres within the CSDSO (similar to the one that exists within the catholic board).

Aboriginal Services

The Aboriginal Advisory Group for Toronto was established formally in the spring, 2007, with the support of funding provided by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to hire a part-time Consultant. Initial challenges are now being overcome through the addition of this staffing resource. The community is now beginning to mobilize and create some momentum for Best Start within the Aboriginal community.

Funding Challenges

- Funding for the Consultant has only been made available on a temporary basis. If the Aboriginal community is to continue with implementation, ongoing support to facilitate this process is essential.

- Aboriginal families live in all areas of Toronto; many areas without access to culturally specific Aboriginal services. Transportation to Aboriginal programming has been highlighted as a key factor in facilitating access for families to the early childhood services they need (including, but not restricted to child care).
- Concerns also exist regarding the sustainability of an Aboriginal child care centre given the current financial pressures being faced by the city's child care system.

Institutional Challenges

- A link is needed between the Provincial and Toronto Aboriginal planning bodies for Best Start.

Policy Challenges

- Access for Aboriginal families to Aboriginal child care services is hindered by their living in different areas across the City, making it difficult for families to travel to the limited number of Aboriginal specific child care programs. This in turn makes it difficult for Aboriginal specific child care programs to remain financially viable, thus forcing many programs to open up and serve the general community.

Other

- The City of Toronto has offered to research and provide demographic information regarding where Aboriginal families are living in the City. Once this data is received, it will support the Aboriginal Advisory Group in moving forward and identifying the most appropriate site for a child care program, and in deciding on a strategy for the "Eagles' Nests" (community/neighbourhood hub delivery system for the Aboriginal community).

Section 4: Strategies for System Integration

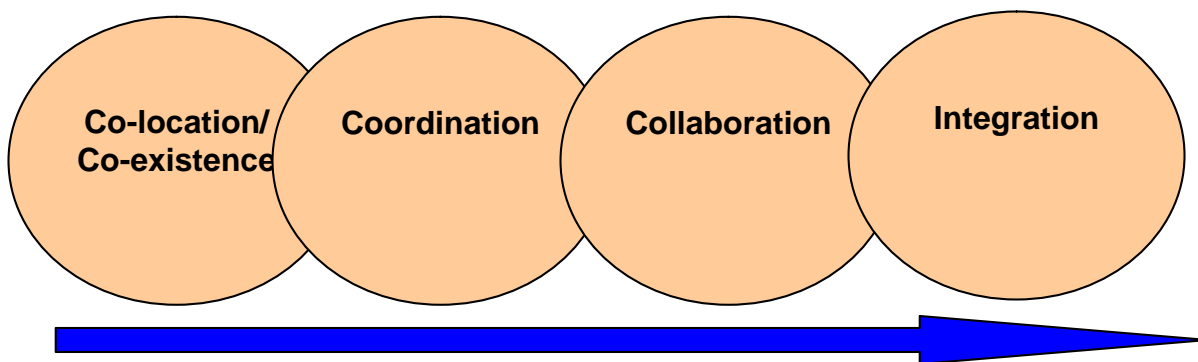
Part A: Strategies for System Integration

Part B: The Hub as a Venue for System Integration

Part C: Integrated Planning and Service Delivery Amongst the Best Start Network Partners

This section describes the overall strategies the Best Start Network is pursuing to move the community further along the continuum of system integration. Toronto's strategy for system integration is consistent with the System Integration guidelines provided by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services as an Addendum to the Implementation Planning Guidelines.

The Indicators of Change, a management tool developed by Toronto First Duty, was adopted by the Toronto Best Start Network as a tool to set goals and track progress at both the systems and service-delivery levels, along a continuum from co-existence/co-location to integration. The tool describes how the stakeholders engage in increasing levels of joint service activity to provide families with better access to services



Part A: Strategies for System Integration

Toronto's Best Start Network is the integration driver at the systems-level. Charts A & B (Section 2), describe Toronto's progress to date, and strategies for 2007-08 in integrating the service systems.

Initial activities toward system integration have included:

- Development of a joint communication strategy to support the dissemination of Best Start information throughout the sectors
- Establishment of Early Years Policies within sectors.
- Creation of enabling mechanisms for the sharing of information including joint confidentiality agreements and consents for the sharing of information between service providers.

Part B: Hubs as a Venue for System Integration

The Implementation Steering Committee is responsible for the development of an implementation strategy for the Community/Neighbourhood Hub Delivery System. Phase 1 of Toronto's Best Start implementation strategy has been to support collaboration between schools, child care and family support programs. Under Phase 1, strategies have involved a focus on engaging and developing the capacity of service providers; increasing their knowledge and understanding of Best Start, and providing them with tools to begin working together. The integration of the three core early childhood services will provide a system-wide platform to build the long term vision of Phase 2. The charts in Section 2 describe Toronto's progress to date and strategies for 2007-08 in promoting collaboration at the local level.

Initial activities toward integrating services have included a survey of all Toronto elementary schools, child care and family support programs to identify and provide a baseline of the depth of collaboration between early childhood programs in the city. The survey questions were developed to illustrate how staff are working together, how space is being shared, and how programs are planned and delivered. The survey reflects people's perceptions about their site's current level of collaboration. 1802 surveys were distributed across all elementary schools, licensed child care centres and family support programs in Toronto. The overall rate of return was extremely successful at 47% across all three sectors. The results of the survey will support the next steps in achieving the Toronto Vision for Children. The information from the survey will be used to create targets/benchmarks to further collaboration, and the development of a community profile. The Toronto Best Start

Survey has been used as a tool by other communities across Ontario to support their Best start implementation.

Professional development, communication and community engagement activities continue to develop the capacity of the community to work together. Collaboration between service providers is beginning to increase at the local level.

- Service providers are now beginning to identify opportunities and move forward with implementation with local strategies
- Challenges at the local level are now being identified and brought up to the Network through sectoral representatives
- Service providers have been involved in providing presentations and professional development.

Phase 2 of Toronto's Best Start strategy will build on this foundation to develop clusters of services: a community/neighbourhood hub delivery system, further developing collaboration between the core early learning and care programs, and other specialized services.

Examples of Phase 1 collaboration between child care programs, schools and/or family support programs

The following chart provides some examples of collaborative behaviour between child care programs, schools and/or family support programs (OEYC's, Family Resource Programs, TDSB Parenting and Family Literacy Programs, CAPC/CPNP) that currently exist across the City. Next steps will build on supporting collaborative behaviours established during the first year of implementation, as well as on resources and opportunities made available to support the vision at the community level.

Coordination	Collaboration	Integration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint family night, open-houses and field trips are being planned • Joint newsletters are being developed • School library books and other resource materials are accessible to staff from all programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint kindergarten registration for September 2007 • Family support program offering parent workshops; child care and school partners provide space, outreach etc. • Staff have opportunities to meet and discuss programming, curriculum and assessment • School Principal, child care supervisor & family support coordinator (site managers) meet regularly to plan and work through any challenges • Joint confidentiality agreements & consents to share information enable staff to work together to plan for children in a coordinated way • Pertinent information regarding children is shared, including developmental progress and behaviour • Staff teams jointly developing a transition plan for children starting kindergarten • Professional development opportunities being opened up to colleagues in other sectors • Policies & procedures being reviewed (where feasible) to more accurately reflect collaborative behaviour between sectors • Space is utilized in the child care centre (where available/feasible) to deliver parent workshops, early identification, health and intervention services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child care centre & kindergarten class share space • Kindergarten teachers deliver the kindergarten program in the child care space • Joint curriculum & pedagogical approach emerging • Joint program policies and practices are being established • Core staff team that includes ECE's, teachers, educational assistants and family support staff • Site managers work together as a team to plan.

Part C: Integrated Planning and Service Delivery Amongst the Best Start Network Partners

Section 1 describes the roles and structure for integrated planning and service delivery.

The Mandate of the Toronto Best Start Network is:

- To provide advice in planning and monitoring Best Start.
- To identify and monitor service, policy, resource and systems issues in the development of the Best Start Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan for families and their children from prenatal care to the transition to school.
- To build cross-sectoral linkages to increase integration and for the exchange and sharing of information.

The Toronto Best Start Network *Partnership Agreement* articulates the individual sectoral responsibilities and commitment to implementing the Toronto Vision for Children.

i) Integration of Child Care with schools

There is a strong history of child care located in schools in Toronto. Best Start provided an expansion of 55 new or expanded child care programs, providing additional opportunities for schools to work in collaboration with child care programs. There are over 900 licensed child care programs in Toronto, with 361 located in elementary schools.

The goal under the Toronto Vision for Children, is for all child care programs to work together with schools, and/or family support programs whether or not they are in a school or in the community.

Phase 1 of Toronto's Best Start implementation strategy focuses on developing the capacity of child care programs to work effectively with their partners in education and family support. The charts in Section 2 describe Toronto's progress to date and strategies for 2007-08 in promoting collaboration at the local level.

Initial activities toward integrating child care with schools have included:

- Professional development for managers & supervisors

- Development of a presentation for college and university faculty of Early Childhood Education programs, describing the Toronto Vision for Children and providing examples of collaboration with schools and/or family support programs
- Creation of a Working Together guide, and the inclusion of a Working Together section in the revised Toronto Operating Criteria. The section will require child care operators to work collaboratively with schools and/or family support programs

For further information regarding integration between child care and schools, please see *City of Toronto 2007 Best Start Update to the Child Care Service Plan*, Sections 1 and 2.

ii) Preschool Speech & Language (PSL) and Infant Hearing Programs (IHP)

The availability of enhanced funding for PSL and IHP programs provides an opportunity to integrate planning and strengthen partnerships at the network table and allow for enhanced coordination. The program is community-based, and provides information and services for children and families in child care programs, drop-in programs, family resource programs, hospitals and other neighbourhood centres.

The Implementation Steering Committee and the Toronto Early Identification Work Group continue to develop plans to enhance the coordination amongst the community partners. We will build on the current model of service delivery for Pre-school Speech and Language and Infant Hearing Programs.

Over the coming year some initial key strategies include:

- Develop the capacity of the early childhood system to plan and deliver consistent, high quality collaborative programming for children 0-5 years who are at risk for or who are experiencing communication, hearing and/or vision problems
- Increase early identification of children with individualized program needs in the areas of communication, hearing and vision, throughout all the early childhood program sites in the Best Start Network.

Chart B: Section 2 provides more detail on the specific activities to enhance coordination.

iii) Integration Amongst the Best Start Network Partners

Our Community Plan and activities to-date demonstrate our partner commitments and opportunities to coordinate our planning processes. Through increased coordination with all the service sectors and the defined roles and responsibilities embedded in the Partnership Agreement we will continue to facilitate collaborative service delivery amongst the Best Start Network partners.programs.

Conclusion

Our Community Plan highlights the progress we have made during 2006-07, and identifies strategies to continue the momentum during 2007-08. The Best Start Network will continue to work towards system integration over the coming years however funding and policy barriers at the Provincial level continue to impact our ability to fully implement our Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children.

Glossary of Terms

Developed by the Toronto First Duty project, the *Indicators of Change* benchmarks track progress along a continuum of co-existence to coordination, collaboration, and integration.

Coexistence describes practices in early childhood and family programs that are located in the same building or neighbourhood, but operate as separate and distinct services.

Coordination describes individual programs that share information with each other, and perhaps coordinate specific activities.

Collaboration indicates some specific joint First Duty activities that merge human resources, space, and/or materials to offer new program opportunities.

Advanced Collaboration describes an expansion of joint TFD activities and a clear influence on the operation of the original partner programs (kindergarten, child care and family support).

Integration/Consolidation describes full integration of existing and expanded programs into an integrated early learning and care program delivery system within a defined neighbourhood or community.

Child care/early childhood education – Child care centres, home child care, nursery schools, school readiness programs, and preschool programs, special needs resourcing, and preschool early intervention group programs. Children may attend without a parent or guardian.

Kindergarten – Junior & senior kindergarten offered to all children 3.8 to 6 years by school boards.

Family support programs – Parenting centres, family resource programs, Ontario Early Years Centres, prenatal/postnatal groups, family literacy, parenting groups, home visiting, community kitchens, and family health and nutrition programs. The focus is on parents and children. Parents may attend alone. Children are usually accompanied by a parent or caregiver.

Family support practitioner is the designation used for professionals working in family support programs.

Partner programs – Community-based child care and family support agencies, school boards, municipal children service managers, public health, recreation, public libraries etc., participating in a cross-sector partnership to form a community/neighbourhood hub delivery system.

Integrated learning environment – Combines the functions and elements of child care, kindergarten, and family support programs. Elements include combining space, pedagogical approach, daily routines and schedules, assessing children’s development and progress, and establishing and monitoring program quality.

Specialized services providers – Resource teachers for children with special needs, public health nurses, children’s mental health, and other intervention professionals.

Frontline staff – Those who provide direct service or programming to children and families, including Public Health nurses, children’s mental health, and other intervention professionals.

Early learning team – Those who provide the daily program, including early childhood educators, early childhood assistants, kindergarten teachers, educational assistants, family support practitioners, and may include special needs service professionals if they are part of the daily program delivery.

Early Learning and Care programs include child care, kindergarten and family support programs working collaboratively

Community/neighbourhood hubs/hub delivery system expand on Early Learning and Care programs and offer a range of early learning and care programs, and are the centre of a broader web of services

Early identification and intervention services include specialized services for children 0 – 6 and their families offered by child welfare agencies, child treatment centres, infant hearing, infant development, children’s mental health centres, developmental services, preschool speech and language and Healthy Babies, Healthy Children.

Sector defines the service systems: Child care, family support, education, health

Organization defines the service provider and/or network or coalition

Early Childhood Service System refers to all services involved with young children and families with children 0-6 years

Nutrition Programs include (but are not limited to): student nutrition programs (lunch, snack and breakfast programs), community nutrition programs (community kitchens, food banks), Toronto Public Health programs (Peer Nutrition, Healthiest Babies Possible)

MAFRP – Metro Association of Family Resource Programs

OAFRP – Ontario Association of Family Resource Programs

OEYC – Ontario Early Years Centres

TDSB – Toronto District School Board

TCDSB – Toronto Catholic District School Board

PD – Professional Development

ISC – Implementation Steering Committee

PSL – Preschool Speech and Language

IHP – Infant Hearing Program

TPH – Toronto Public Health

MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

EDI – Early Development Instrument

CCAC – Child Care Advisory Committee

DAC's – Data Analysis Coordinators

Appendix 1: Best Start Network and Sub-Committee Composition:

Toronto's **Best Start Network** is made up of members from the following sectors/organizations:

- Consolidated Municipal Service Manager, Children's Services
- Ministry of Children & Youth Services, Toronto Region
- Education, School Boards, Toronto District School Board
- Education, School Boards, Toronto Catholic District School Board
- Education, School Boards, Conseil scolaire de district du centre Sud-Ouest
- Education, School Boards, Conseil Scolaire Catholique Centre-sud
- Ministry of Education, Regional Office
- Toronto Public Health
- Toronto Parks, Forestry, and Recreation Division
- Toronto Public Library Board
- Toronto Community Housing Corporation
- Child Welfare, Children's Aid Societies of Toronto
- Children's Mental Health
- Ontario Early Years Centres - Toronto Network
- French Language Service
- Community Health Centres
- Child Care Advisory Committee
- Canada Prenatal Nutrition Programs/ Community Action Program for Children (CPNP/CAPC)
- Toronto Family Resource Programs
- Home Child Care Association
- Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care
- Special Needs Advisory
- Aboriginal Services
- United Way of Greater Toronto

Implementation Steering Committee

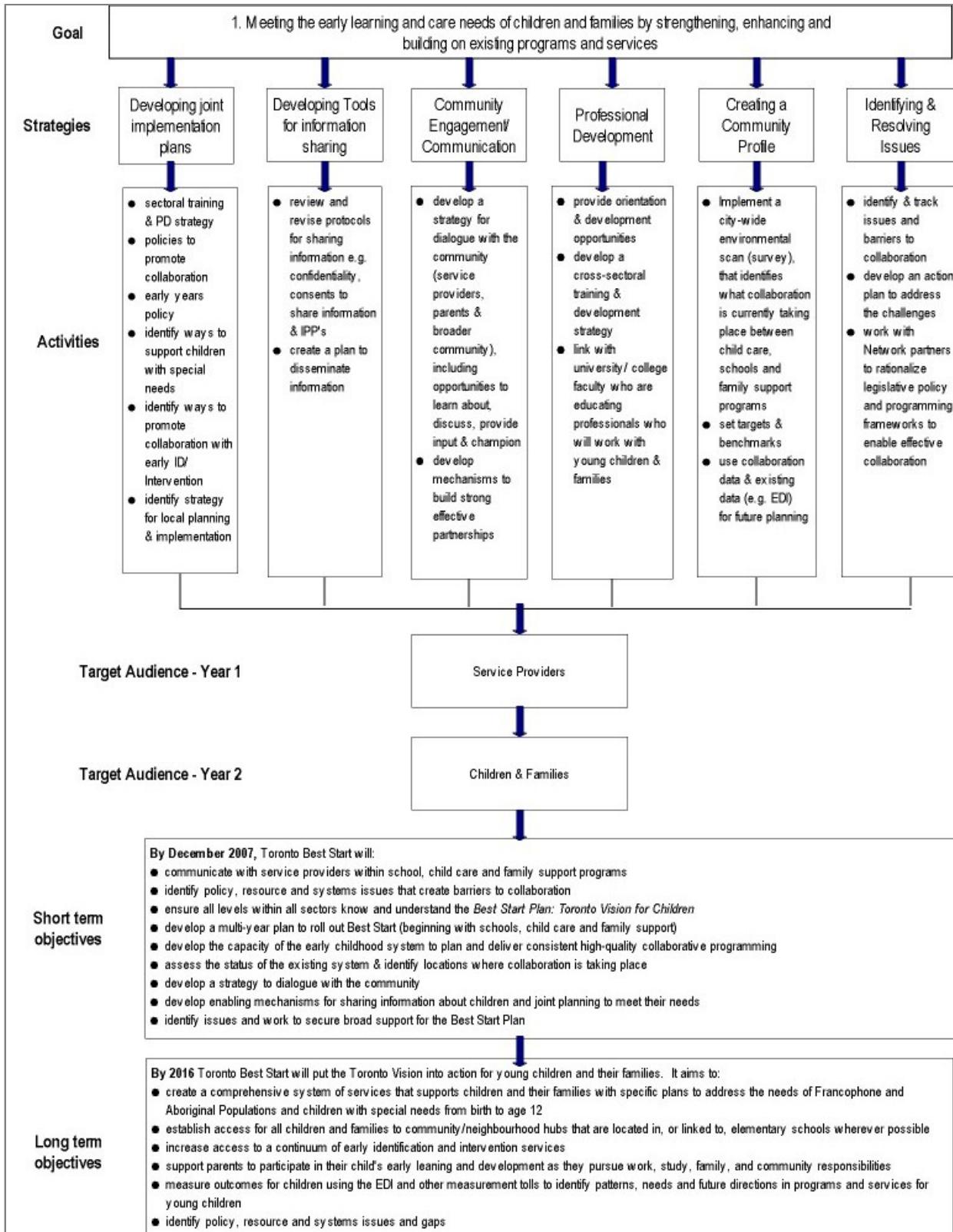
The Implementation Steering Committee is a fluid group made up of representatives from the various sectors. The original ²Signatory Group constitutes the core members, with other representatives invited to participate as required, in order to reflect the expertise required to address issues arising throughout the multi-year roll out. Year 1 membership reflects the service sectors involved in delivering and/or supporting child care, school, and family support programs listed below:

1 Representative from each sector/organization:

- Aboriginal Services
- Children's Mental Health (0 – 6)
- City of Toronto, Children's Services
- Education – 4 School boards & School Authority
- French Language Services
- Home Child Care
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services – Toronto Region
- Ministry of Education - Toronto Region
- Ontario Early Years Centres – Toronto Network
- Special Needs
- Child care
- Family Resource Programs
- Toronto Public Health
- Toronto First Duty
- Academe (colleges & universities)

² Signatory Group includes: four school boards, Public Health, Ministry of Children & Youth Services, Ministry of Education, and Toronto Children's Services

Appendix 2: Getting Started Year 1 Logic Model



Appendix 3: Survey Example

A. Working with Child Care Centres We do not work with child care centres

Name **all** of the **on-site** child care centre(s) you work with:

Name **all** of the **off-site** child care centres(s) you work with:

How do you work with Child Care Centres ?	on-site			off-site		
	<i>always</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>never</i>	<i>always</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>never</i>
1. Family support practitioner(s) speak with child care staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Staff from family support program have the opportunity to use the child care staff room.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Family support staff attend child care professional development opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. We share space and/or resources with each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. We attend staff meetings together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. We organize events and/or trips together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. We plan and/or run programs together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. We discuss individual children's progress and/or development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. We produce communication materials together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. We share policies & procedures with each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B. Working with Schools We do not work with schools

Name **all** of the **on-site** elementary school(s) you work with:

Name **all** of the **off-site** elementary school(s) you work with:

How do you work with Schools ?	on-site			off-site		
	<i>always</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>never</i>	<i>always</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>never</i>
1. Family support practitioner(s) speak with Kindergarten teacher(s).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Staff from family support program have the opportunity to use the elementary school staff room.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Family support staff attend elementary school professional development opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. We share space and/or resources with each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. We attend staff meetings together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. We organize events and/or trips together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. We plan and/or run programs together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. We discuss individual children's progress and/or development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. We produce communication materials together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. We share policies & procedures with each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C - Working with Other Services		<input type="checkbox"/> We do not work with other services
Please check off the other services you work with:		
a) <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	b) <input type="checkbox"/> Francophone	c) <input type="checkbox"/> Public Health
d) <input type="checkbox"/> CAPC - Community Action Program for Children	e) <input type="checkbox"/> CPNP - Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program	f) <input type="checkbox"/> PSL- Preschool Speech & Language
g) <input type="checkbox"/> Children's mental health	h) <input type="checkbox"/> Library	i) <input type="checkbox"/> HBHC - Healthy Babies/Healthy Children
j) <input type="checkbox"/> Child welfare	k) <input type="checkbox"/> Pre/post Natal	l) <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation
m) <input type="checkbox"/> Ethno-cultural organizations	n) <input type="checkbox"/> Housing support	o) <input type="checkbox"/> School-age child care
p) <input type="checkbox"/> Faith-based organizations	q) <input type="checkbox"/> Primary Health	r) <input type="checkbox"/> Special needs resources
s) <input type="checkbox"/> Other (explain)		

Please include any additional comments:



Appendix 4: Partnership Agreement



PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Of The

TORONTO BEST START NETWORK

Between

CITY OF TORONTO, CHILDREN'S SERVICES
As Consolidated Municipal Services Manager

And

District School Boards:
TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
TORONTO CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
CONSEIL SCOLAIRE DE DISTRICT DU CENTRE-SUD-OUEST
CONSEIL SCOLAIRE DE DISTRICT CATHOLIQUE CENTRE-SUD

And

TORONTO PUBLIC HEALTH

And

Provincial Ministries:
MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES (Toronto Region)
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (Toronto Region)

Background:

Best Start is a multi-year Province of Ontario strategy bringing together different ministries, levels of government, communities and service providers to “address the factors that put young children at risk, and to create communities that support healthy child development and learning” (*Provincial Implementation Guidelines*). The Toronto Best Start Network is a partnership of 36 members representing two provincial ministries, four school boards, the City of Toronto, Toronto Public Health, representatives from the Francophone and Aboriginal communities, various networks, coalitions, organizations, and the United Way, all of whom are committed to achieving the Best Start vision in Toronto.

The Network has set forth terms of reference (*Toronto Best Start Network Terms of Reference*) and an overarching framework for planning and implementation at a systems level entitled, “**Best Start Plan – Toronto Vision for Children.**” The *Best Start Plan* envisions a major redesign of services and supports for young children that will see in its first phase increased coordination and integration of kindergarten, child care and family support programs around community/neighbourhood hubs.

Building upon the Toronto First Duty demonstration project, the *Best Start Plan* provides a framework for local planning of community/neighbourhood hubs organized where possible, around schools, with a focus on the following core elements:

- ◆ Developing a **high quality learning and care environment** through innovation, best practices and collaborative approaches to curriculum, activities and routines
- ◆ Bringing together staff expertise at the local level to create an **early years staff team** including early childhood educators, teachers, educational assistants and family support staff who work collaboratively to achieve common goals
- ◆ Identifying obstacles and solutions and working towards **inclusive access** of children and their families in programs and services
- ◆ Developing a **continuum of supports and services** that makes the most efficient use of resources in responding to the changing needs of families and children
- ◆ Encouraging and enabling the **participation of parents** in programs and services, planning, service delivery and governance
- ◆ Developing a **local governance structure** to support community/neighbourhood planning, service integration and local decision making
- ◆ Developing a community/neighbourhood **partnership agreement** reflecting the vision and goals of the *Best Start Plan*

Purpose:

This Partnership Agreement outlines shared accountabilities and commitments, of the signatory parties in working together and within the Best Start Network to implement the *Best Start Plan – Toronto Vision for Children*. It sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of the partners at the service systems level in creating the conditions for successful implementation of the plan. It is anticipated that local partnership agreements will eventually be drawn up for individual community/neighbourhood hubs.

For purposes of this Partnership Agreement, the core service providers and their associated ministries named above will be referred to as signatory partners. Insofar as the larger partnership of the Network has shared accountability for integrating services and supports to achieve the Best Start

vision, other organizations/partners are eventually expected to sign on to an amended version of the Partnership Agreement.

Statement of Commitment:

The partners acknowledge and accept the shared values, guiding principles and framework set out in the *Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children*. They agree to work together on a multi-year basis towards innovation, enhancement and integration of programs, services and supports for young children and their families in the City of Toronto. They acknowledge their interdependence in achieving the goals of the *Best Start Plan* and are committed to working in partnership including identifying areas where early partnership success is most likely and identifying and lessening barriers to working together.

The partners also recognize and accept each other's areas of exclusive jurisdiction. They acknowledge that some goals in specific areas may be best accomplished by working independently of each other.

In addition, the partners agree to specific roles and responsibilities held in common or uniquely as set out below.

Common Roles and Responsibilities of the Partners:

All of the partners agree to:

- ◆ Champion the *Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children* and work collaboratively towards its implementation
- ◆ Identify opportunities for developing linkages between kindergarten, child care and family support programs
- ◆ Support joint planning of schools, child care, family support and other community organizations
- ◆ Champion the development of community/neighbourhood hubs involving kindergarten, child care and family support programs*
- ◆ Provide dedicated leadership and staff time for partnership and networking activities
- ◆ Support sharing of program and curriculum information
- ◆ Sponsor joint professional development of teachers, child care and family support staff
- ◆ Work together to develop enabling mechanisms to allow sharing of information about children and joint planning to meet their needs
- ◆ Work together to identify service gaps and to develop appropriate strategies for addressing the gaps
- ◆ Work collaboratively to develop an evaluation framework that will employ a range of strategies to evaluate Best Start service outcomes

* The term "hub" denotes a service delivery system with a central point of activity or focus that relates to all of the other activities. In the Best Start vision, the central point of activity or focus is provided by the coordination or integration of kindergarten, child care and family support programs that may or may not be situated at the same location.

- ◆ Work collaboratively to develop annual implementation plans
- ◆ Plan and advocate for sufficient financial resources to meet one's responsibilities as outlined in this memorandum

Unique Roles and Responsibilities of the Partners:

As service system manager for the municipally-funded child care system, the **City of Toronto Children's Services** agrees to:

- ◆ Disseminate information about the *Best Start Plan* widely within the child care service system
- ◆ Identify issues and work to secure broad support for the plan from within this system
- ◆ If necessary, amend contractual arrangements with municipally-funded child care organizations to require participation in the plan
- ◆ Provide leadership and identify ways to link other municipally funded services such as special needs resources, recreation and public libraries with the community/neighbourhood hubs
- ◆ Disseminate best practices regarding enhanced early learning programs
- ◆ Disseminate best practices about working in partnership
- ◆ Ensure that the implementation of the *Best Start Plan* is consistent with *The Best Start Service and Transition Infrastructure Plan* and *updated Child Care Service Plan*

The **District School Boards** agree to:

- ◆ Disseminate information about the *Best Start Plan* widely within their organizations
- ◆ Identify issues and work towards building broad support for the plan from all levels of their organizations
- ◆ Champion the development of community/neighbourhood hubs for all JK and SK programs including encouraging linkages between schools and child care or family support programs that may be off-site
- ◆ In accordance with the Schools First Policy (*Best Start Provincial Implementation Guidelines*), provide sites/space for community/neighbourhood hubs wherever possible
- ◆ Develop an Early Years policy to provide directions and a framework for developing, coordinating and delivering early years programs
- ◆ Identify an Early Years staff team to coordinate and review early years initiatives and support the implementation of the *Best Start Plan*

The **Toronto Region of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS)**, agrees to:

- ◆ Disseminate information about the *Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children* widely among MCYS-funded organizations serving young children and their families in Toronto
- ◆ Provide leadership and support for linkages between MCYS-funded organizations including the Ontario Early Years Centres and the community/neighbourhood hubs
- ◆ Interpret Ministry policy regarding the Best Start strategy (*Provincial Implementation Guidelines*) for the partners
- ◆ Approve plans and monitor implementation of the *Best Start Plan*
- ◆ Engage in coordinated implementation of early years policy and liaise with other children's ministries at the regional level to ensure consistency

- ◆ Commit to the use of the Best Start Network planning table as the vehicle for overarching early years planning activities
- ◆ Within the application of child care licensing standards, provide innovation and flexibility to enable implementation of the Best Start strategy
- ◆ Identify and track issues and barriers to implementation of the Toronto *Best Start Plan* and work with the corporate office of the Ministry to try to resolve them
- ◆ Maintain a commitment to funding the Early Development Instrument (EDI) to be administered every three years as a key measure of outcomes of the Best Start strategy, within provincial funding allocations

The **Toronto Region of the Ministry of Education** agrees to:

- ◆ Promote ownership of the Best Start vision within the education sector and provide leadership and support to school boards in implementing the *Best Start Plan*
- ◆ Engage in coordinated implementation of early years policy and liaise with other children's ministries at the regional level to ensure consistency
- ◆ Interpret Ministry policy for the partners especially in regard to early years curriculum development
- ◆ Identify and track issues and barriers to implementation of the Toronto *Best Start Plan* and work with the corporate office of the Ministry of Education and other ministries to try to resolve them
- ◆ Within provincial funding allocations, plan and maintain a commitment of sufficient financial resources to support early years initiatives by school boards

Toronto Public Health agrees to:

- ◆ Disseminate information about the *Best Start Plan* widely among early years providers and organizations operated or funded by Toronto Public Health
- ◆ Identify issues and work towards building broad support for the plan among these providers
- ◆ Identify ways to coordinate public health programs for children with the community/neighbourhood hub system of delivery
- ◆ Identify ways to develop linkages between early identification and intervention programs and the community/neighbourhood hubs
- ◆ Provide information on child and family population health and well-being that can be used in planning and monitoring the community/neighbourhood hub system

Problem Solving Mechanism

By signing, the signatories agree the terms outlined in this Partnership Agreement and commit to holding themselves and each other accountable for fulfilling their respective roles and responsibilities as detailed in this Agreement. The signatories agree to a joint problem solving approach to resolve, in an expeditious manner, any issues that may arise in the course of implementing the Best Start Plan.

Time frame, review periods and term of this agreement

This Partnership Agreement has a three year term. By signing, the signatories agree to the terms outlined in this Partnership Agreement and commit to holding themselves and each other accountable for fulfilling their respective roles and responsibilities as detailed in this Agreement. It will be reviewed by the signatories on an annual basis. It is understood that the Agreement may be amended at an earlier date by agreement of the partners to allow additional Network members to sign on as signatory partners.

Signature: *B Patterson*

Print Name: Brenda Patterson

General Manager
Children's Services, City of Toronto

Signature: *Gerry Connelly*

Print Name: Gerry Connelly

Director of Education
Toronto District School Board

Signature: *Marilyn Penwick*

Print Name: Marilyn Penwick

Regional Director, Toronto Region
Ministry of Children and Youth Services

Signature: *Kevin Kobus*

Print Name: KEVIN KOBUS

Director of Education
Toronto Catholic District School Board

Signature: *Jean-Luc Bernard*

Print Name: JEAN-LUC BERNARD

Regional Director, Toronto Region
Ministry of Education

Signature: *Michelle Boucher* MICHELLE BOUCHER

Print Name: JEAN-LUC BERNARD

Director of Education
Conseil Scolaire de District du Centre-Sud Ouest

Signature: *Dr. David McKeown*

Print Name: Dr. DAVID McKeown

Medical Officer of Health
Toronto Public Health

Signature: *Bernard Lavallée*

Print Name: BERNARD LAVALLÉE

Director of Education
Conseil Scolaire de District Catholique Centre-Sud

This Partnership Agreement is effective October 23, 2006.



Addendum

Dated February 15, 2007

To The

Partnership Agreement

Of The

Toronto Best Start Network

To Include

All Members

Of The

Toronto Best Start Network

Addendum

Purpose: this Addendum outlines shared accountabilities and commitments of the Network partners in working together to implement the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children. It sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of the partners in creating the conditions for successful implementation of the plan.

Common Roles and Responsibilities of the Toronto Best Start Network Members

Best Start Network Members agree to:

- ◆ Champion the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children, and work collaboratively towards implementation
- ◆ Disseminate information about the Toronto Best Start Plan widely within their own sectors/organizations
- ◆ Communicate with service providers, parents and community within their sector about implementing the Toronto Vision for Children
- ◆ Identify opportunities for developing linkages between their own sector and schools, child care and family support programs
- ◆ Identify issues in their sectors that create barriers to collaboration, and work within the Best Start Network structure to address issues and barriers
- ◆ Provide dedicated leadership and staff time for partnership and networking activities to move their sectors forward in implementing the Toronto Vision for Children
- ◆ Work collaboratively to develop strategies/implementation plans for their sector to move forward on working together
- ◆ Work towards ensuring that their sector/organization has policies and strategies in place to ensure their capacity to take the next steps to implement Toronto Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children.

Time frame, review periods and term of this agreement

This Addendum (dated February 15, 2007) to the Partnership Agreement of the Toronto Best Start Network is in effect until October 23, 2009. By signing, the Network partners agree to the terms outlined in this Partnership Agreement and commit to holding themselves and each other accountable for fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as detailed in this Agreement. It will be reviewed by the Best Start Network on an annual basis.

Signature: Anne Bailey

Print Name: ANNE BAILEY

Title: DIRECTOR, BRANCH LIBRARIES

Toronto Public Library Board

Signature: Sue Bartleman ^{as per} Brenda Librecz

Print Name: Brenda Librecz

Title: General Manager Parks, Forestry
Recreation

Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation

Signature: Anne McGregor

Print Name: Anne McGregor

Title: Manager - Recreation Programs

Toronto Community Housing Corporation

Signature: Gerald McNeely

Print Name: Gerald McNeely

Title: Manager - CCAS of Toronto

Children's Aid Societies of Toronto

Signature: Betty Kashima

Print Name: Betty Kashima

Title: Executive Director - Aisling
Discouraries Child & Family Centre
Children's Mental Health

Signature: Jean-Gilles Peccetier

Print Name: JEAN-GILLES PECCETIER

Title: ED - CENTRE FRANCOPHONE DE TORONTO

French Language Services

Signature: Patricia Hunt

Print Name: Patricia Hunt

Title: Chair - Metro Assoc. of Family
Resource Programmes

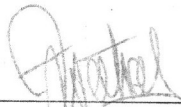
Toronto Family Resource Programs

Signature: Pat Miller


Print Name: PAT MILLER

Title: CO-CHAIR

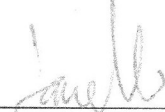
Ontario Early Years Centres, Toronto Network

Signature: 
Print Name: JIM TSATSOS
Title: CHAIR


Child Care Advisory Committee

Signature: 
Print Name: JEAN-GILLES BELLETIER
Title: ED, CENTRE FRANCOPHONE - CHC DE TORONTO REP.

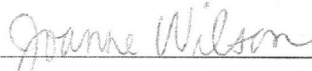
Toronto Community Health Centres

Signature: 
Print Name: JANE MERCER
Title: EXECUTIVE CO-ORDINATOR

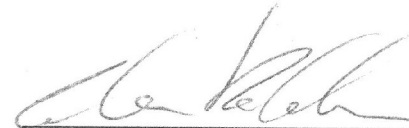
Toronto Coalition for Better Childcare

Signature: 
Print Name: Sharon Filger
Title: Executive Director, member agency

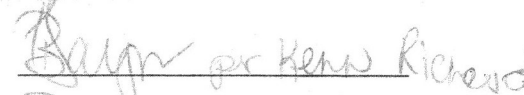
Home Child Care Association

Signature: 
Print Name: Joanne Wilson
Title: Project Coordinator

**Canada Prenatal Nutrition Programs/
Community Action Program for Children
(CPNP/CAPC)**

Signature: 
Print Name: Graham Baldwin
Title: _____

Special Needs Advisory

Signature: 
Print Name: Bernadette Gallagher
Title: Director of Support Services

Aboriginal

Appendix 5: Best Start Network Terms of Reference

Approved: June 21, 2007

Toronto Best Start Network Terms of Reference

VISION

Ontario's Vision for Children

An Ontario where all children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential.

Best Start Vision

Children in Ontario will be ready and eager to achieve success in school by the time they start Grade 1.

Regardless of the socio-economic status of his/her family and community, every child has the right to childhood experiences which promote the chances of developing into a healthy, well-adjusted and productive adult. (Adopted by Toronto City Council, November, 1999)

SCOPE

The Network will inform the creation of an integrated, comprehensive system of services that supports families and their children including provisions for children with special needs from birth to age 12. The scope of the initiative is intended to be as broad as possible for this age range, covering the spectrum of health, education, social supports and children's services. Essential elements of planning include equity of access, location of services, affordability, age appropriateness and flexibility regarding hours of operation.

MANDATE

- To provide advice in planning and monitoring Best Start.
- To identify and monitor service, policy, resource and systems issues in the development of the Best Start Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan for families and their children from prenatal care to the transition to school.
- To build cross-sectoral linkages to increase integration and for the exchange and sharing of information.

This will be achieved through;

- A recognition of each partners roles and responsibilities
- Open and clear communication
- Ongoing expression of expectations, concerns and conflicts of interest
- Mutual accountability
- Service coordination protocols and agreement

In order to fulfill the Best Start Network mandate, the Network will:

- Link to/build on related existing structures and/or planning bodies;
- Involve key service systems in the community;
- Involve parents, caregivers and the community in meaningful ways;
- Identify mechanisms at the community level to support the planning and implementation of the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children.
- Develop outreach strategies to ensure participation of communities that are isolated and/or who have not traditionally been involved in this kind of planning or service provision/utilization;
- Ensure sub-committees have balanced representation among all stakeholders, including, but not limited to parents/caregivers, government-funded service providers, the business sector, and charitable, service and voluntary organizations; and
- Recognize and work within the legislative mandates of each sector.

PRINCIPLES

The following principles will guide the implementation of the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children.

The Plan:

1. Will reflect collaboration with the municipality, local school boards, parents, and community and service providers to deliver effective, coordinated programs to children and their families.
2. Will be community based and meet identified community needs.
3. Will recognize the diversity of children, families and their needs, and as such will ensure a broad community based network of services and supports are available to meet those needs in neighbourhoods in a timely way.
4. Will promote both equity of access and responsive service approaches to children through integrated service planning at the neighbourhood level.
5. Will build on the strengths, capacity and expertise of existing services (e.g., by establishing linkages, collaborating, and sharing resources with and among early years providers at the local level) and will address service gaps.

KEY ACTIVITIES

By 2016 Toronto Best Start will put the Toronto vision into action for young children and their families. It aims to:

- Identify policy, resource and systems issues and gaps
- Create a comprehensive system of services that supports children and their families with specific plans to address the needs of Francophone and Aboriginal populations and children with special needs from birth to 12
- Establish access for all children and families to community/neighbourhood hubs that are located in, or linked to, elementary schools wherever possible
- Increase access to a continuum of early identification and intervention services
- Support parent to participate in their child's early learning and development as they pursue work, study, family, and community responsibilities
- Measure outcomes for children using the Early Development Instrument and other measurement tools to identify patterns, needs and future directions in programs and services for young children

Source: Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children (January 2006)

MEMBERSHIP

The Best Start Network will reflect the service sectors listed below:

1 Representative + 1 alternate from each sector

- Aboriginal Services
- Canada Prenatal Nutrition Programs/Community Action Program for Children
- Child Care Advisory
- Child Welfare (1 representative for the 4 Child Welfare Agencies)
- Children's Mental Health (0 – 6)
- Consolidated Municipal Service Manager Children's Services Division
- Education – 4 School boards
 - Toronto District School Board
 - Toronto Catholic District School Board
 - Conseil scolaire de district du centre-sud-ouest
 - Conseil scolaire de district catholique centre-sud
- French Language Services
- Home Child Care Association
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services – Toronto Region
- Ministry of Education - Regional Office
- Special Needs Advisory
- Ontario Early Years Centres – Toronto Network
- Toronto Coalition for Better Childcare
- Toronto Community Health Centres
- Toronto Family Resource Programs
- Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division
- Toronto Public Health
- Toronto Public Library Board
- Toronto Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division
- United Way
- Parents: Network will provide a variety of opportunities to reach out to parents for consultation and advise

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Network members are responsible for ensuring a designated representative or alternate attends Network meetings to ensure the sector is represented at the Network table, and to facilitate an ongoing flow of information between the Network and the sector.

Further roles and responsibilities of sectors represented at the Network are outlined in the Partnership Agreement of the Best Start Network, signed by the signatory Partners October 23, 2006, and by the general Network Membership Spring 2007.

STRUCTURE OF THE NETWORK

1. Frequency

Meetings will be held every two months, or as determined by the work plan. In addition to regular meetings, special meetings may be called by the Chairperson to address other items

2. Quorum

Membership of the Network is by sector. Each sector will be represented by 1 member or 1 alternate only. Quorum will be a majority of all sectors.

3. Decision Making

Members will work towards consensus in decision-making.

4. Chair

The Network will be co-chaired by the CMSM, General Manager, Children's Services and a community representative. Community representatives will be elected for a two year term by the members of the Network, and may serve in that position for two consecutive terms.

5. Dispute Resolution

Network members will endeavor to resolve conflicts through the Committee's normal governance procedures and through the Chairperson. Should a dispute arise that is not solvable, the Chairperson may ask the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to mediate to settle the dispute.

AD HOC COMMITTEES

Sub-committees and task forces may be established on an ad hoc basis as the need arises. Network members may provide recommendations regarding potential members.

Appendix 6: Early Learning Expert Panel Submission letter to Minister of Children & Youth Services

December 19, 2006

Minister Mary Anne Chambers
Ministry of Children and Youth Services
56 Wellesley Street West, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON M5S 2S3

Dear Minister Chambers,

On behalf of the Expert Panel on Early Learning, I am pleased to submit our final report - Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario's Early Childhood Settings. Our mandate was to establish an early learning framework for formal preschool settings that would link with the Junior/Senior Kindergarten program and, ultimately, to develop a single integrated early learning framework for children ages two-and-a-half- to six-years.

The Expert Panel attracted a strong and enthusiastic group that represents expertise in early childhood education, family policy, postsecondary education, education and early intervention. We enjoyed a collaborative relationship with the Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources. We also had good participation and support from the Best Start Demonstration Sites, representatives from provincial organizations, the Ministry of Education and the Best Start Team in the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Together we have created a curriculum framework for early childhood settings in Ontario, and a series of recommendations to implement it.

The November 2005 Ontario Auditor-General report on Child Care Activity³ included a review of the quality of child care services. The report recommends that "the Ministry should develop a child-care curriculum framework and implement more detailed and helpful guidance to assist child-care staff in providing consistently high quality developmental opportunities". The Ministry response is "An Expert Panel on Early Learning established in May 2005 will develop an integrated early learning framework and recommend an early learning program....These recommendations will form the basis of guidance to operators and will facilitate the provision of high-quality developmental opportunities for children."

Early Learning for Every Child Today establishes a provincial standard for quality programs for young children and their families. It is applicable in Best Start programs and can be used to support the Kindergarten Program in Junior and Senior Kindergarten. Our recommendations and strategy for implementation will provide a curriculum framework and guidance for early childhood settings to facilitate high quality early learning environments. We recommend that the Government of Ontario adopt Early Learning for Every Child Today for use in all early childhood settings as part of a Best Start system for young children and their families.

³ Office of the Auditor General of Ontario (2005) 3.05 Child Care Activity.

The implementation of Early Learning for Every Child Today is beyond the mandate of your ministry, and will require the collaboration and commitment of all partners. We recommend that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services allocate appropriate resources and work together with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. We also recommend that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Education establish an implementation group made up of individuals with expertise in early childhood education, education, family support programs, early identification and intervention and adult education and with representation from Ontario Francophone and Aboriginal communities.

To realize a Best Start system and assure quality programs, the province must also establish the supporting framework of policy, funding, legislation, standards, monitoring, education, and governance. This will require additional investment from the provincial government.

We urge you to take a step towards the Best Start vision by releasing Early Learning for Every Child Today in early 2007 and supporting its implementation, further development and evaluation.

On behalf of the Panel, I thank you for your support of our work. We look forward to receiving your response to Early Learning for Every Child Today and our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Jane Bertrand
Atkinson Centre, OISE/UT
jbertrand@acscd.ca

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Further background information can be found at: www.toronto.ca/children/bs_network.htm

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