



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Progress on Master Lease Agreements and Update on the Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement

Date:	June 11, 2014
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	General Manager, Children's Services
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report responds to City Council's requests to report on the status of the master lease agreements between school boards and child care operators providing Full-Day Kindergarten before- and after-school programs. It also provides an update on the Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement (ELCAQI), the renamed child care quality assessment tool, and confirms that no new concerns have arisen with respect to the Province of Ontario's modernization of child care initiative since the division's last report on this matter.

Children's Services has met with the TDSB to provide recommendations on the draft lease agreement, which concentrate on creating seamless environments for children based on strong partnerships between the different program operators. The Division does not have authority to negotiate lease agreements on behalf of third-party child care operators with the school boards but will continue to encourage seamless experiences for children.

The ELCAQI has undergone recent revisions which support best practices. Some changes to the assessment process have also been implemented in response to operators' feedback. Specifically, a Corrected During Assessment (CDA) process has been introduced to allow operators to rectify certain items that were not initially observed during the assessment visit. The assessment tool continues to be informative and helpful to parents whom are choosing child care, for staff as a training tool and Boards of Directors in informing strategic directions and priority investments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Children's Services, recommends that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of May 22, 2014, the Community Development and Recreation Committee requested the General Manager, Children's Services to report to the June 25, 2014 meeting of the Community Development and Recreation Committee on progress made on the master lease agreements and identify any new areas of concern and inconsistency which have arisen since the City Council decisions in July 2013, including any issues arising from the updated Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement (ELCAQI) and curriculum tools.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.CD29.5>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

As service system manager for child care in Toronto, Toronto Children's Services works closely with families, child care operators, school boards, the Ministry of Education and many other partners to develop an accessible and stable system of early years services. Since 2010, this role has taken on more importance as the sector has experienced a period of profound change. Developments such as the implementation of Full Day Kindergarten (FDK), provincial efforts to modernize child care, and an increased focus on quality in child care have all required system-level responses.

City Council in July 2013 requested a report on the feasibility and impacts of continuing with wage subsidy payments; "hot spots" where the implementation of FDK was proving difficult for families; and requested that staff conduct a survey of operators to determine interest in operating supervised lunch programs for FDK students in before- and after-school programs. Children's Services reported to CDRC and City Council in late 2013 on each of these issues.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD25.3>

COMMENTS

Progress on Master Lease Agreements

In July 2013, Council asked Children's Services to negotiate a new master lease agreement for third party child care operators providing Full-Day Kindergarten before- and after-school programs. There is a recognized need to better align the main FDK school day with the FDK before- and after-school program, and to better reflect and promote the in-school partnerships that are critical to the success of this program. Some of these required alignments were addressed in recently proposed Provincial legislation. In its response to proposed legislative and regulatory changes affecting child care in Ontario, the City reiterated that, "there is an ongoing need for system managers and boards to work more effectively with other programs, especially in sharing space and resources with child care operators". In addition, there is a need to align provincial licensing requirements for school aged children with the Education Act.

As reported in May 2014, the City is not a party to agreements between the Boards of Education and community-based third party providers and does not have authority to negotiate on behalf of these providers. Still, Children's Services has met with the TDSB to provide recommendations on their draft lease agreement. The Division's recommendations concentrate on creating seamless environments for children based on strong partnerships between the different program operators. The lease is a local tool that can be developed to facilitate positive relationships between child care and schools. It is hoped that the new agreement will better articulate expectations of coordination and collaboration for both the school board and the child care provider. The TDSB is currently reviewing these recommendations. At this point, a revised draft agreement has not yet been received by Children's Services.

Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement

Since 1990, Children's Services has been assessing the quality in child care programs using a made-in-Toronto assessment tool that incorporates the Provincial standards for early childhood educators. The tool provides clear expectations, service standards and guidelines for all child care providers who have a service contract with the City and is used in a variety of ways: as a self assessment for service providers; as an identifier of training needs for Children's Services and other training partners; as an information source that helps families choose child care; and as a support to Board of Directors in setting strategic directions and priority investments for their child care centres. This tool has been updated a number of times over this period to address evolving best practices.

In January 2014, Toronto Children's Services embarked on another revision, which incorporates feedback from the child care community and new best practices. In recent months, there has been an increased interest in the tool from other municipalities, colleges and universities, and it has been referenced in provincial policy documents. Because of this increased interest, Children's Services Operating Criteria has been renamed as the *Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement (ELCAQI)*

measure. It is important to note that this is the only validated tool in Canada and that with Council's endorsement, it is now being implemented in Thunder Bay and Durham. Discussions are also underway with a number of other municipalities interested in adopting the measure.

The tool incorporates and supports the Early Childhood Education Program Standards set out by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, which include the requirements for providing quality child care experiences, observations and documentation to develop programs that are child focused and contribute to positive outcomes for children. It also reflects the professional expectations set up by the College of Early Childhood Educators, a professional body that oversees the standards for ECE practitioners and the Provincial Early Learning Framework and pedagogy. As such the quality measure reflects current professional standards and the quality in Toronto's child care centres is consistently high.

The tool has identified a number of inconsistencies between FDK programs operated by school boards and licensed child care providing the before and after program to FDK. These areas were highlighted in the City's response to the province's proposed legislation and regulatory changes. Some of these issues were rectified in the proposed legislative and regulatory changes. These discrepancies will continue until new legislation and regulations are tabled at the Province. Inconsistencies include the difference in group size as FDK has a 1 to 13 ratio whereas child care has 1 to 10 ratio for the same children; and requirements for toy washing in licensed child care and no requirement in the classrooms.

The quality assessments and the public reporting of results supports parents in making informed decisions related to their child care options. Over 1,600 parents of children ages 0-12 provided feedback to the City during the Let's Talk Childcare campaign. Parents described the City's published child quality assessment ratings as informative and helpful as they made choices about child care. The quality ratings on Children's Services website are very popular, consistently receiving over 10,000 unique visits each month. The following is a link to the web site:

<http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=30535e0076113410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextfmt=default>

Over time, service providers have been improving their scores on the assessment. In 2009, 67 per cent of providers met the minimum requirements prescribed by the assessment measure. With the evolution of the tool, by 2013 that number increased to 95 per cent of providers meeting minimum requirements.

The tool has moved from a four- to a five-point scale to help differentiate the higher end of quality. The revisions incorporate current high quality practices observed in Toronto child care centres and identified in consultation with Registered Early Childhood Educators across the system.

Table 1 below shows the number of centres assessed to-date in 2014 using the revised ELCAQI:

Age Group	Infant	Toddler	Preschool	FDK before- and after-school program	Schoolage
Number of Centres Assessed to date (2014)	68	96	111	10	47
Proportion with higher score than in 2013 (%)	88	82	97	100	77

Note: this data uses absolute scores and does not account for the fact that 2014 assessments were done on a five-point scale, whereas previous years used a four-point scale. A more comprehensive review of trends related to the revised tool will be completed when more data is available.

As a support to operators through this period of change, Children's Services held training sessions to assist child care providers in preparing for the revised ELCAQI assessment visits. Approximately 1,650 early learning professionals attended more than 20 information sessions related to the revised quality assessment measure. In addition, staff offered and conducted approximately 300 one-on-one visits to child care sites to support providers in the transition to the new assessment measure. All these sessions were completed 3 months prior to the implementation of the quality measure.

During training and in ongoing discussions with providers, Children's Services was asked to consider providing operators with opportunities to correct certain items that were identified during the assessment visit as not meeting expectation while the City assessor was still on site. In response, as of April 1, 2014, Children's Services implemented a Corrected During Assessment (CDA) process. While this process is available for many of the items, serious health and safety issues and items related to interactions with children are not able to be corrected during the assessment. Rectified items are reflected on the assessment report and published on the website.

The implementation of the ELCAQI and the new Corrected During Assessment process has been a great success. Child care providers who have gone through the process have expressed their satisfaction and provided Children's Services with positive feedback on the process. The child care centres that have not yet gone through the process are anxious but our experience to date is that centres that have gone through the exercise have found it to be a valuable and positive experience.

These revisions all support the ELCAQI's role in maintaining quality child care, providing guidance and clear expectations to operators, and generating useful information for parents.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS