

## **Expanding the Application of Operating Criteria for Child Care**

<b>Date:</b>	September 4, 2013
<b>To:</b>	Community Development and Recreation Committee
<b>From:</b>	General Manager, Children's Services
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	

### **SUMMARY**

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This report seeks authority for the General Manager, Children's Services to enter into agreements with other jurisdictions for the use of the Toronto Operating Criteria, which is Children's Services' quality assessment tool for licensed child care. The Operating Criteria is the only Canadian validated quality assessment tool for the preschool age group in child care. A number of jurisdictions have expressed interest in adopting the tool.

City of Toronto support activities are required to maintain the integrity of the Operating Criteria when it is used in other jurisdictions. With Council approval, Children's Services will recover associated costs from partner jurisdictions.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The General Manager, Children's Services recommends that:

- 1) City Council authorize the General Manager, Children's Services to:
  - a) negotiate and execute on behalf of the City, agreements with other municipalities which set out the terms and conditions under which those municipalities can use the Toronto Operating Criteria and access support services from City staff;
  - b) charge a fee to recover the full cost of services provided to other jurisdictions by City staff, including travel and testing, related to those jurisdictions' adoption of the Criteria; and

- c) provide quality assessments to Toronto child care centres that do not have a service contract for fee subsidy with the City, when an assessment is requested by the centre, on a cost-recovery basis.

## **Financial Impact**

Cost recoveries for service to providers without a fee-subsidy contract with the City will be determined individually, and will be dependent on the staff time required to provide assessment and guidance.

Recoveries for the use of Children's Services quality assessment tool that may take place in 2013 and future-year recoveries will be reported as part of the ongoing operating variance reporting process and will be available to help maintain the provision of subsidized child care programming.

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

## **DECISION HISTORY**

The Child Care Service Plan 2010-2014 was adopted by City Council in May 2010. The Service Plan includes direction to complete the validation of the Operating Criteria as an accurate measure of child care quality.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2010.CD32.3>

At its meeting of October 2, 3 and 4, 2012, City Council endorsed the City's response to the Modernizing Child Care in Ontario Discussion Paper. The response included a recommendation that "Province-wide quality assurance guidelines should be in place. The City of Toronto's Operating Criteria, as a reliable and validated tool, could be the base for such a program. The application of the tool and reporting of results should remain a CMSM (Consolidated Municipal Service Manager) responsibility."

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.CD15.7>

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

The City of Toronto's Operating Criteria is a quality assessment tool for child care. Annual assessments provide information about the child care environment and interactions that children are experiencing at the time of the assessment. The tool is currently administered to all licensed child care programs in Toronto with a service contract to care for children with fee subsidy. The criteria help ensure value for money as public funds are directed to quality programs which result in better outcomes for children. Assessment results are posted online as a resource for parents who are choosing or enrolled in child care (<http://www.toronto.ca/children/dmc/a2z/a2za.html>).

Children's Services has taken several steps to ensure that the Criteria is a valid and reliable tool for measuring quality. The Preschool section has been formally validated as a true measure of quality by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto and represents the only validated Canadian quality assessment tool for this age group. OISE is currently conducting a validation study of the Infant and Toddler sections of the criteria. The results of the first validation study indicated that the tool must be administered consistently to reliably assess quality. As a result, an inter-rater reliability process has been established to ensure that different assessors apply the tool in a fair and consistent manner. This process requires training and ongoing reliability testing.

The validation research has also shown that this tool is cost-effective to administer relative to other quality assessment tools. In the study, the criteria assessments took an average of 1.5 hours per room, while other assessment tools can take a full day per room.

These characteristics (validity, reliability and cost-effectiveness) have generated substantial interest in adopting the tool from other municipalities in Ontario and from out-of-province jurisdictions.

The recent release of the Children's Services Service Efficiency Study by Deloitte noted that while revenue-generating opportunities related to the tool were limited, the City may be able to share the cost of further development of the Criteria through collaborations and partnerships with other Ontario jurisdictions and those partnerships could improve the likelihood of broader adoption of the Criteria.

In addition to looking at other jurisdictions, there is an opportunity to expand the use of the Criteria to operators without a service contract for fee subsidy. This would be voluntary, at the operator's request and provided on a cost-recovery basis. The Toronto Child Care Service Plan 2010-2014, which has been adopted by City Council, includes as an action, "advocate for the use of the Operating Criteria in all child care programs in Toronto beginning with those that receive funding."

## **COMMENTS**

Toronto Children's Services owns the intellectual property and copyright of the Toronto Operating Criteria and has an interest in maintaining the integrity of the tool when it is being applied in other jurisdictions. While the tool is valid, if it is applied inconsistently it can not be said to definitively identify high- or low-quality programs. For this reason, there is a need to establish understanding of how the tool should be used and provide training and testing. An agreement with other jurisdictions applying the criteria would help ensure that other users apply the tool as intended, participate in inter-rater reliability testing, and credit the City of Toronto in materials that identify the Criteria. The recommendations in this report will permit Children's Services to recoup costs associated with providing other jurisdictions with access to the criteria.

Services for which there would be a charge include training for front line staff, reliability testing, "Gold Standard" reliability testing (for one assessor against whom all other assessors can be tested for reliability), and ongoing refresher training. Many remote municipalities have a travel budget, meaning that the most efficient way of providing these services would be determined on a case-by-case basis.

By offering quality assessments to interested centres in Toronto on cost-recovery basis, Children's Services can expand quality child care experiences across the system without additional funding. Centres would benefit from having their programs' quality validated and parents would have more information about their children's programs. This action is consistent with the Advancing Quality Direction in the Child Care Service Plan.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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