

## **Results of the Assessment for Quality Improvement Implementation Review**

**Date:** June 25, 2018

**To:** Community Development and Recreation Committee

**From:** General Manager, Children's Services

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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This report provides an update on the Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI) implementation review being conducted collaboratively with Children's Services staff and the Community Quality Advisory Committee. The report addresses three main areas; customer service, parent education and how the AQI is implemented.

This report responds to a request from the Community Development and Recreation Committee's September 11, 2017 meeting, for the General Manager, Children's Services to report to the Committee at the end of the implementation review, expected by the second quarter 2018.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The General Manager, Children's Services recommends that:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Children's Services to include the Assessment for Quality Improvement review on the agenda for upcoming roundtable with non-profit child care service providers, and to report back on this engagement as part of the 2020-2024 Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan, expected at the end of 2019.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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This report has no financial implications.

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

## DECISION HISTORY

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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 produced by the Ministry of Education. The response included a recommendation that Province-wide quality assurance guidelines be in place with the City of Toronto's quality assessment process, as a reliable and validated tool, used as the base for such a program. The report reinforced that the application of the tool and reporting of results should remain a Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) responsibility."

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

At its meeting on October 8, 9, 10 and 11, 2013, City Council adopted the following: City Council authorize the General Manager, Children's Services to 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 Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI) and access support services from City staff on a full cost recovery basis; and 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.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD23.2>

At its meeting on February 15 and 16, 2017, City Council adopted the following: City Council request the City Manager to review the overlapping of services provided by the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario as a result of the Child Care and Early Years Act and report back in the third quarter of 2017. The review should include consultation with the relevant City divisions and child care providers, including City-operated child care centres and independent and/or non-profit child care providers.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.EX22.2>

At its meeting of September 11, 2017, Community Development and Recreation Committee adopted the following: The Community Development and Recreation Committee requested the General Manager, Children's Services to report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee at the end of the implementation review, expected by the second quarter 2018.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.CD22.2>

## COMMENTS

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### Background

Children's Services has had a mechanism for evaluating and supporting quality in the licensed child care sector for over 30 years. Evaluation of child care quality started in the 1980s, when quality of preschool programs was first assessed. Today, Toronto Children's Services assessment has grown to a validated assessment of quality.

As the service system manager in Toronto, Children's Services has a mandate to ensure and improve the quality of early learning programs across Toronto. In 2015, City

Council endorsed Children's Services' 2015-2019 Service Plan which includes a strategic direction of ensuring access to high-quality child care. Children's Services' role in enhancing quality is also supported by the Ministry of Education through the Ontario Child Care Service Management and Funding Guideline.

The Guideline states that:

"The ability to strengthen the quality of child care and early years experiences and enhance system integration requires the strategic leadership of CMSMs and DSSABs to initiate, sustain and monitor local planning and development to achieve Ontario's vision for the early years."

The Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI) tool is the City's approach for evaluating child care program quality, informing professional learning across the sector, and ensuring accountable use of public funds. It is used to assess child care programs delivered by agencies with a Service Agreement with the City as well as the City's directly-operated child care centres and home child care agencies. Each year, the results of the AQI are analyzed to identify trends and areas for improvement. In conjunction with a survey, conversations with providers and the Community Quality Advisory Committee, (whose membership includes child care operators, post-secondary institutions, a Home Child Care operator and City staff), an annual professional learning plan is established to increase knowledge and enhance overall quality in the sector.

The current version of the AQI was developed through consultation with the sector and is based upon research and best practices of high quality programs. It provides clear expectations, service standards and guidelines for quality on three main components: programming, environment, and educator interactions. The AQI is the only Canadian tool that has been validated as a measure of child care quality. The validation process was completed by Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) in 2014. In addition, an inter-rater reliability process ensures that the assessment is consistently and accurately implemented regardless of who administers it.

On July 28, 2017, a consultation session with child care operators was held in order to understand the sector's perceptions and experiences of both the AQI and child care licensing processes carried out by the Ministry of Education, including their opinions of possible overlap. One hundred operators attended. This session was designed with the input of the Community Quality Advisory Committee.

The consultation generated mixed results from operators. With respect to perceptions of duplication, while several operators identified some similarities in the general areas assessed, most groups commented on the greater depth of detail assessed through the AQI. While some saw this as a strength, others questioned the necessity of some of the AQI specifications.

Some areas of more direct duplication were identified, with the following two areas most commonly cited:

- Nutrition: language in the updated CCEYA is very similar to that of the AQI's nutrition section. Effective January 1, 2018, the Nutrition Section is no longer assessed for quality.
- Health and safety: The AQI includes Toronto Public Health requirements and standards and observed to verify that these standards are implemented.

The consultation also identified that the process of administering the AQI tool should be addressed in order to be a more positive experience for supervisors. From a customer service perspective, some operators requested that the AQI be more flexible, in particular, by providing centre supervisors more opportunities to explain areas that do not meet expectations, and for assessors to consider situations that can negatively impact scores (e.g. the unpredictability of working with children; excluding supply staff working at the time of the visit; etc.).

Operators also requested further education for parents to better understand how and when the AQI is conducted and more specific details about the actual score, including where a centre received lower ratings. There has been a lot of emphasis on the educator's experience through the evaluation process, however, quality is about the children's experience and how the AQI supports their learning and outcomes.

Children's Services acknowledges that any external evaluation can be a difficult experience for staff providing programs. The process continues to evolve, and through the sectors commitment, effort and feedback, we see the impact of this work through the quality ratings which have increased 6.35 % since 2014 with the average rating in 2017 of 4.19. Given this feedback from operators, the Division is committed to pursuing improvements that enhance the experience for operators while maintaining the essential components of the process that ensure program quality and provide information to families.

## **Review**

In response to the feedback received from child care operators, Children's Services embarked on a review of how the AQI is administered in the field to address customer service concerns, focusing on how to make the process a more positive experience for operators. It also explored other possible procedural improvements that could be made without affecting the tool's validity. The review was conducted by Children's Services staff in collaboration with the Community Quality Advisory Committee. Below is the outline of the three main areas reviewed and the items that will be incorporated into the Advisory workplan to continually improve the assessment process.

### **Customer Service:**

The committee held conversations related to the various roles and expectations included in the assessment process and the need to ensure that a high level of customer service is being provided to all stakeholders. The following areas will be explored further:

- Conduct an independent customer survey and adjust practices based on the results, as recommended in a recent report by the Auditor General
- Explore opportunities for both City and program staff training on relationship building based on the customer service survey
- Allow time during visits to discuss assessment outcomes and quality best practices
- Provide the quality framework structure as a resource on the website which outlines the role of the assessment process in Toronto's early learning system.
- Provide additional funding to centres to support quality
- Provide an interactive annual summary of the system ratings on the website.

### **Parent Education:**

The committee's discussions covered how families looking for high-quality early learning programs should have as much information as possible in order to make informed decisions. This includes increasing the transparency of the assessment process and how it works, how accessible the information related to quality is and outreach to families. The following areas will be explored further:

- How quality ratings are posted online to ensure more transparency and clarity
- Development of a tool kit for operators, families and educators that will provide resources and information related to quality
- Development of a parent engagement and communication strategy related to quality with the goal of increasing knowledge and awareness of the importance of high quality early learning programs and the positive impacts on child outcomes. This includes promoting parent education through bus shelter ads and outreach to existing parent groups, social media and parenting conferences.

### **AQI Implementation:**

The committee also reviewed how the quality assessment is administered and common concerns that could be addressed while still upholding the integrity of the tool. Children's Services is working in collaboration with its community partners to identify ways of increasing flexibility in the implementation of the assessment. The following areas will also be explored further:

- Engage the Community Quality Advisory Committee in a review of the language currently used to identify areas for improvement to encourage strength based language
- Continue inter-rater reliability three times per year with the expectation to maintain 80 per cent reliability.
- Review the AQI with OISE along with the Community Quality Advisory Committee to explore possible improvements that could be made without affecting the tool's validity.

In addition to these areas, Children's Services has made additional funding available to child care operators in the Minor Capital Health and Safety Program for 2018. Eligible uses for this funding include learning materials or equipment that enhance quality programming. Finally, City Council has directed the City Manager to convene a round table with not-for-profit child care operators to discuss issues and opportunities related

to service delivery. Children's Services will recommend that any issues with the AQI are raised at this roundtable and that the results are used to inform the Division's next Service System Plan, expected at the end of 2019.

### **Conclusion:**

The quality assessment is an integral part of Children's Services work to ensure City funding is allocated in areas where children experience quality programming that positively contributes to their development and well-being, and families who enrol their children in child care programs can be assured that their children are in high quality learning environments and safe. Children's Services will continue to work in collaboration with the Community Quality Advisory Committee to make improvements to the process and other quality initiatives. Children's Services will also continue to consult with the Province on how both orders of government can work together to assess quality, building on the benefits of the AQI.

### **CONTACT**

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### **SIGNATURE**

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