



REPORT FOR ACTION

Equity-Based Planning for EarlyON Child and Family Centres

Date: October 1, 2019

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Children's Services

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report responds to two Member's Motions adopted by City Council at its meeting of June 18th, 2019, where the General Manager, Children's Services was directed to work with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and other community partners to identify options for the replacement of the EarlyON Centres at Niagara Street Junior Public School and Blake Street Junior Public School, as these Centres have been slated for closure due to space issues caused by the need to implement alternate programming at these locations.

This report also provides an update on the risk of additional closures of EarlyON Centres operated by the TDSB as a result of ongoing financial pressures being faced by the TDSB.

As well, this report outlines the equity-based planning approach used to guide Children's Services' decisions about investments and funding reallocations within the EarlyON system. This evidence-based approach uses relevant demographic and service level data to identify service gaps and opportunities to enhance service access for vulnerable families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Direct the General Manager, Children's Services to continue to use an equity-based planning approach to identify EarlyON service system needs and allocate operating funding to EarlyON service providers, which aligns with the provincial guidelines established by the Ontario Ministry of Education for the EarlyON sector.

2. Direct the General Manager, Children's Services to continue to work closely with TDSB to identify potential solutions for the school board to continue operating EarlyON Centres within the existing funding envelope, or to support a smooth transition process if TDSB terminates its service agreement with Children's Services.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The total allocation for the administration and service delivery of EarlyON Child and Family Centres is \$29.618 million in 2019, of which \$26.989 million is funded by the Provincial and Federal governments, and \$2.629 million is funded by City contribution. Fifty-three third party service providers currently hold service agreements with Children Services for the operation of EarlyON Centres, including TDSB. In 2019, TDSB will receive \$4.622 million from Toronto Children's Services to operate its EarlyON Centres.

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

EQUITY IMPACT

EarlyON Centres are an important resource for all families in Toronto, as they provide no-cost community spaces where families can connect with one another, support healthy child development, and connect families to important resources within their communities (e.g., employment centres, specialized support services, culturally relevant associations, etc.).

EarlyON Centres are widely used by equity-seeking groups, including families that identify as Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ, families with children with extra support needs, low-income families, single-parent families, and newcomer families. EarlyON Centres are also important resources for home child care providers or caregivers, many of whom are often newcomers themselves. System needs assessments have indicated the invaluable support child and family programs provide to these families and caregivers, as they help to reduce systemic barriers, build support networks for families, and support healthy child and family well-being.

An intersectional analysis reveals that low-income families living in communities with high inequities are significantly less likely to attend any form of early learning programming. This inequity may be in part due to the lack of access to EarlyON Centres in several high-inequity neighbourhoods.

Adoption of the recommendations contained in this report will allow Children's Services to continue improving the accessibility of EarlyON Centres and increasing the positive impacts for equity-seeking children and families. Driving the City's commitment to the Poverty Reduction Strategy, of improving service access to high quality programs for children and youth. This will be achieved by better integrating programs with other community services, improving workforce capacity, investing resources through an equity-based approach, and partnering with community-based organizations to collaboratively build programs that are responsive to local need.

DECISION HISTORY

Council adopted Members Motion:

At its meeting of June 18th, 2019, City Council adopted two members' motions directing the General Manager, Children's Services to work with partners to identify options for the replacement of the EarlyON programs at Niagara Street Junior Public School and Blake Street Junior Public School.

MM8.12 <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/mm/bgrd/backgroundfile-134481.pdf>

MM8.47 <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/mm/bgrd/backgroundfile-134911.pdf>

Council approval for EarlyON Initial Plan:

At its meeting of October 2, 3 and 4 2017, City Council adopted CD22.3 the Draft Ontario Early Years and Family Centre [Initial Plan](#), acknowledging the research and consultations conducted to date, and established priorities and next steps for realizing the provincial vision for Ontario Early Years and Child and Family Centres in Toronto.
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.CD22.3>

Staff report CD22.3 (<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/cd/bgrd/backgroundfile-106429.pdf>)

Council approval for EarlyON system planning:

At its meeting of October 5, 6, and 7, 2016, City Council adopted CD14.4 "Planning for Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres" and reinforced that "future growth [is] to achieve equity goals" associated with the "planning, transformation and ongoing service system management of child and family programs."
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.CD14.4>

Staff report CD14.4 (<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2016/cd/bgrd/backgroundfile-95965.pdf>)

BACKGROUND

Service System Management

In January 2018, the Province of Ontario transferred responsibility for the management and planning of Toronto's EarlyON Child and Family Centres to Consolidated Service System Managers (CMSMs), including Children's Services. The Province, as outlined in the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centre Planning Guidelines, directed municipalities to consolidate and rebrand four previous child and family programs including Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (operated by school boards), Better Beginnings Better Futures programs, and Family Resource Programs. Through the service system management of EarlyON Centres, Children's

Services was directed to: provide parents, caregivers and their children with access to a core suite of high-quality early years programs; enhance public awareness of available programs and services; distribute programs based on demonstrated community needs; and integrate programs with other relevant early years and community services.

Citing the fragmentation of programs, lack of awareness by many parents of the services available, the inequitable distribution of programs, and the variation of services between Centres, the Province mandated CMSMs to plan and manage the delivery of EarlyON Centres under provincial guidelines. CMSMs were directed to determine how services are delivered and by whom, with the intention of ensuring services are community-based and respond to a thorough understanding of the strengths and priorities of the communities served. CMSMs were also directed to more equitably and responsively distribute services to meet community needs through program relocations or reallocation of funds.

As the service system manager for early years' programs, Children's Services is responsible for system planning and funding for EarlyON Centres in alignment with the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 and Ministry of Education guidelines.

EarlyON Background

EarlyON Centres offer free programs to parents/caregivers and their children (prenatal to six years of age). These programs support parents/caregivers in their roles, foster early learning and development, and connect families to broader community supports. Children's Services holds service agreements with 53 organizations representing over 270 EarlyON Centres. EarlyON funding is based on historical allocations organizations received from the Ministry of Education and the City of Toronto before the transfer of responsibility for EarlyON in January 2018.

Children's Services committed to maintaining existing allocations for each service provider during the transition period (2018-2019) and working with providers to align their programs to the new provincial core service requirements.

Children's Services embarked on a robust and inclusive engagement strategy to hear from parents and service providers to help form an Initial Plan that was required by the Province. The Initial Plan was approved by Council and sets out the priorities for EarlyON system transformation. These priorities reflect the diversity and unique needs of serving children and families in Toronto using an equity based approach to planning and resource allocation while aligning with the provincial Guidelines.

Children's Services has established an [EarlyON Action Plan 2018-2020](#), an EarlyON Advisory Committee, several sector working tables, and internal working groups to implement key priorities identified in the Action Plan related to advancing evidence-informed planning, establishing program standards, enhancing inclusion, enhancing Children's Services' capacity to collect and evaluate data, supporting the sector in professional learning and capacity-building, and strengthening communications with the sector and the public.

System Enhancements

After assuming responsibility for EarlyON Child and Family Centres on January 1, 2018, the City pursued a public engagement strategy to shed light on how to shape and enhance the EarlyON sector in Toronto using provincial system enhancement funds. Through a series of conversations with service providers, families and experts, it became clear that EarlyON Centres require additional supports to meet the needs of children and families.

In response, Children's Services redistributed existing base funding to provide all EarlyON service providers with a 3 per cent increase in their annual operating funding in 2018, an additional 2 per cent increase in 2019, and provided grants for centres to upgrade program materials and their IT infrastructure.

An initial analysis of service and demographic information in 2017, identified several service gaps in the system, including 31 neighbourhoods without EarlyON Centres. These gaps provided a foundation from which to plan for an initial service expansion. Decision-making about initial investments was driven by an analysis of relevant socio-demographic, geographic and service equity data. This led to the establishment of two new EarlyON Centres in the underserved communities of Rexdale and Milliken, a new French language EarlyON Centre in Scarborough, as well as a new mobile program designed to meet the unique needs of 2SLGBTQ families. Separate provincial investments were received to significantly expand the availability of Indigenous-led child and family programs as well.

Toronto District School Board

The TDSB is the largest EarlyON service provider in Toronto, representing nearly a third of the EarlyON sector. There are currently 75 TDSB-run EarlyON Centres which are located in public schools and operate 20 hours per week, 40 weeks per year. These Centres operate across 60 neighbourhoods in the City, and are led by an EarlyON Parent Worker who is responsible for leading each EarlyON Centre in a school.

At the time of the transfer of responsibility for EarlyON, Children's Services received full allocations for the transferred programs and maintained these allocations to EarlyON service providers to ensure a seamless transfer. Since 2018, the TDSB EarlyON allocation has been increased by 3 per cent in 2018 and by an additional 2 per cent in 2019. However, TDSB's EarlyON operating costs exceed their annual allocation from the City, largely due to contractual salary increases, changes to benefit administration, and supply worker coverage costs.

At its May 22, 2019 Board of Trustees meeting, the Board passed a motion: "Whereas, the Toronto District School Board is facing unprecedented financial pressures, including a \$500,000 projected deficit in the EarlyON program for the 2019-20 school year; Therefore be it resolved that the City of Toronto be requested to assume all aspects of the EarlyON child care programming as soon as possible."

In recognition of TDSB's operating costs, Children's Services has committed to the continued approval to operate above the allowable limits with relation to salary, benefit and casual staff costs, at the 2019 rates. As funding for EarlyON is enveloped and has not increased since the transfer of responsibility in 2018, Children's Services cannot provide additional funding without provincial funding increases.

In response to the TDSB motion, Children's Services has communicated that it is unable to assume direct service responsibility for the TDSB EarlyON Centres or staff, as Children's Services does not directly operate any EarlyON Centres. In addition, Children's Services does not currently fund nor have the available resources to pay for rental costs, currently covered by the school board, for all 75 EarlyON Centres (rental costs of \$11.77/sq. ft.), the existing structural deficit of approximately \$200,000, and future incremental wage and benefit increases.

TDSB is currently exploring options and will be reporting back to the Board of Trustees later this year. TDSB EarlyON Centres will continue to operate as expected until a decision is made by the Board.

COMMENTS

Equity-Based Planning Approach

EarlyON Centres are intended to support all children, parents and caregivers in learning, growing, and connecting – together. All families with children, from birth to 6 years, should have access to these centres, and benefit from the programs they provide. Evidence shows that some families in the City of Toronto face systemic barriers to access programs and services, and often experience lower service levels. In order to achieve equitable access, system planning needs to utilize a needs-based approach.

Toronto Children's Services uses an equity-based planning approach to guide decisions about investments in programs and services according to defined measures of need. This approach supports decision making by considering socioeconomic inequities, outcomes for children and families, and service levels. It also ensures that the process to identify potential service expansions, relocations, or changes in programs is evidence-based and transparent. This approach aligns with the broader equity-focused work of the Toronto Child and Family Network and the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

This approach has enabled Children's Services to take an intersectional equity lens to consider the needs, barriers, and impacts on equity-seeking groups across the City (e.g., newcomers, refugees, Indigenous families, French speaking families, those living on low incomes, racialized communities, 2SLGBTQ families, and children with extra support needs).

Planning Considerations

At the EarlyON Strategic Planning Day meeting in February 2018, community and sector stakeholders identified the following goals for the EarlyON Sector:

- **Increased Access:** All EarlyON Centres will provide access to an integrated, inclusive early childhood and family system that provides a “no wrong door” approach to accessing community services.
- **Greater Equity:** All EarlyON Centres will apply an equity lens to their programs to ensure services are responsive to the diverse needs of Toronto’s families.
- **Higher Quality:** All EarlyON Centres will offer consistent, high-quality services that are guided by evidence informed standards and evaluation tools.

Children’s Services has taken multiple steps to respond to family, sector and community partner feedback to ensure that EarlyON service providers are able to meet the varying and changing needs of children and families across the City. In addition to the key initiatives outlined in the EarlyON Action Plan, Children’s Services worked with the EarlyON Advisory Committee and Planning Working Table to identify the following aspirational planning statements regarding the EarlyON service model in Toronto, including:

- EarlyON Child and Family Centres should be available in every ward in the City. In each ward, this includes at least 5 days of service per week, including a Saturday or Sunday and afternoon programming. This minimum service level expectation can be met through the delivery of programs and services in multiple locations, by multiple providers.
- As new funds become available and/or relocation opportunities arise, resources will be directed to meet the minimum ward service levels outlined above and to neighbourhoods with relatively high inequities and low EarlyON service levels.
- EarlyON Centres should be located in consistent locations with regular, predictable schedules to enhance access and awareness for families.
- All EarlyON Centres are expected to deliver all of the mandatory core services, and it is understood that these services may be delivered in different ways depending on space, staffing and community needs.
- EarlyON Centres can select their own operating hours in an effort to maximize service access, based on demonstrated community needs and funding levels.

Children’s Services will continue to use these statements to guide policy and system planning decisions as we collectively move forward with system transformation.

Planning Layers

Initial work has demonstrated that there are a number of underserved neighbourhoods with higher numbers of families who experience inequity and socio-economic vulnerability. By considering the following equity-based planning layers, we are able to gain a nuanced, data-informed understanding of the needs of the EarlyON system and service levels:

1. **Socioeconomic Need:** Child & Family Inequities Score

The first layer of the approach uses the Child & Family Inequities Score, which was developed by the Toronto Child and Family Network. The Inequities Score is a summary measure derived from five indicators:

- Low Income Measure;
- Parental Unemployment;
- Low Parental Education
- No Knowledge of Official Language; and
- Core Housing Need

which describe the socio-economic challenges and inequities experienced by the child and family population in each of Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods. The Child & Family Inequities Score is unique because it uses indicators that are specific to families with children under the age of 12.

Neighbourhoods are divided into quartiles, with scores in the top 25 per cent considered to have 'Very High' level of inequities through to 'Low' levels of inequities (Appendix A: Image 1). The equity-based planning approach prioritizes service and program investments in neighbourhoods experiencing higher inequities.

2. **Child and Family Outcomes:** Participation in early learning programs

Increasing access and enhancing Equity are two foundational goals of the EarlyON sector, as outlined in the EarlyON Action Plan (2018-2020). To help achieve this goal, the planning approach incorporates the 'Participation in Early Learning Programs' indicator of [Raising the Village](#) and prioritizes neighbourhoods where children are less likely to have had the opportunity to attend an early learning program before school.

Who is and is not participating?

In the 2017 TDSB Census, parents of students (Grades K to 6), reported on whether their child regularly attended an early learning and care program at a child care centre, nursery/pre-school program, home child care, or a child-family program (Appendix A: Image 2.1). This data is further disaggregated by income brackets (Appendix A: Image 2.2). Children in higher income families are more likely to access child care, preschool, child and family programs and home child care.

The evidence shows that 43 per cent of children in families making under \$30,000 do not attend any programming compared to less than 8 per cent of children from families with incomes over \$100,000.

3. Service Level: Number of EarlyON Centres in a neighbourhood

The final layer of the approach is a measure of service levels. The number of EarlyON Centres available in a neighbourhood allows us to understand whether a community has a high or low level of service relative to others. Children's Services analyzes a variety of data points to identify service inequities to support system planning in the EarlyON sector, including:

Number of EarlyON program locations

Hours of programming available

Availability of evening, weekend, and summer service

Number of FTEs employed to provide services, including those with RECE qualifications

EarlyON Centre demand and participation rates

Applying the Equity-Based Planning Approach

The application of the planning layers allows Children's Services to identify service gaps and determine opportunities to scale up services for families based on need, supporting the EarlyON Action Plan goals of increased access and greater equity.

An equity-based planning approach was used with community based EarlyON Centre closures and reallocations throughout 2019, whereby service providers were required to engage in this process.

Current Needs of the EarlyON system

By applying the equity-based planning layers Children's Services can identify neighbourhoods across Toronto experiencing the highest levels of need with low service levels as seen below in Image 3. Neighbourhoods in red are identified as experiencing High or Very high inequities and have 0 or 1 EarlyON Centres.

There are currently 25 neighbourhoods across the city facing Very High and High inequities and have 0 or 1 EarlyON Centres. Neighbourhoods in red indicate areas requiring additional resources to expand EarlyON service intensity. These neighbourhoods also have higher percentages of TDSB students who did not attend an early years programs before starting school and whose families are making under \$30,000.

Priority neighbourhoods for EarlyON:

Very high and high inequities level and 0 or 1 EarlyON site

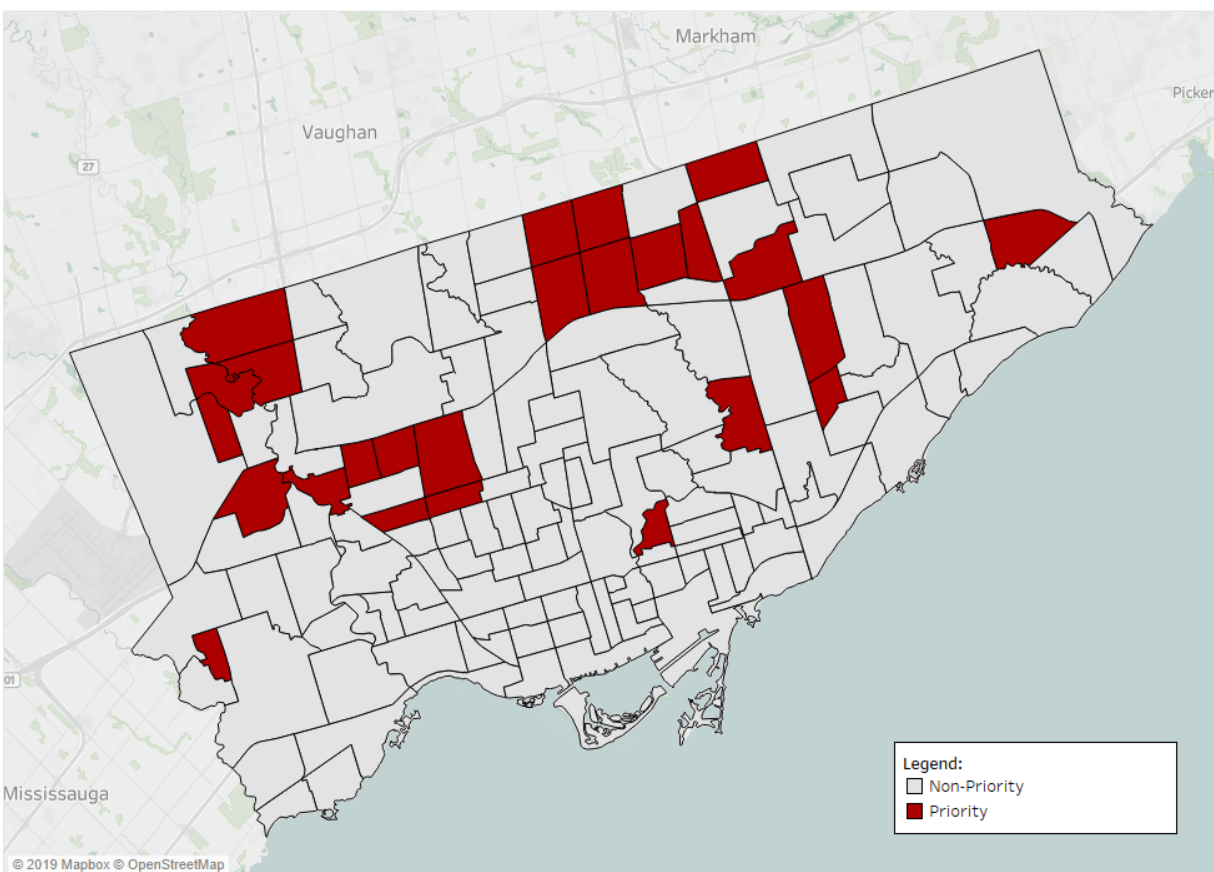


Image 3: Priority neighbourhoods for EarlyON planning.

The consideration of these existing system needs will help Children's Services determine any reinvestment priorities should the TDSB decide to cease operating any programs in the future.

Blake Street EarlyON & Niagara Street EarlyON

On May 27th, 2019 the TDSB's Internal Accommodation Committee approved the decision to close two TDSB EarlyON Centres as of June 30th, 2019. The Blake Street EarlyON was located in the Blake-Jones neighbourhood (69) and Ward 14 (Toronto-Danforth). The Niagara Street EarlyON was located in the Niagara neighbourhood (82) and Ward 10 (Spadina-Fort York). This decision to close the two Centres was made by TDSB due to emerging space issues caused by the need for a new full-day kindergarten classroom (Niagara PS) and a new French immersion program and before and after school program (Blake PS).

TDSB communicated both closures to families that attend the program and directed families to nearby EarlyON Centres within walking distance.

TDSB's 2019 allocation has been reduced by \$60,030 to account for the six month two-site closure. This will result in a reduction of \$120,060 for 2020. It is important to note that the recovered amount is not reflective of the actual cost of operating a community based EarlyON Centre, as the TDSB program costs do not consider rental, utility or maintenance costs.

Reallocating these funds within Ward 14 and Ward 10 would not be in alignment with the equity-based planning approach outlined above and does not take into consideration future potential closures of TDSB-run EarlyON Centres. The recovered amount will be applied to expand services in areas identified through the equity-based planning approach.

CONCLUSION

Toronto City Council has long advocated for embedding equity as a consideration and priority in how the City make decisions and prioritizes initiatives. This includes the development of equity enhancing strategies, policies and programs such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, the Strong Neighborhoods Strategy, the Community Grants Policy and the Welcome Policy.

The equity-based planning approach of the EarlyON sector provides an opportunity for the City of Toronto to build a more evidence-based, cohesive, and community-led early years' service system that meets the needs of all children and families, by addressing system gaps experienced by Toronto's most vulnerable families. This approach allows Children's services to ensure investments can be made quickly and with the greatest positive impact on child and family outcomes. As the Service System Manager, Children's Services is requesting authority through this report to reinvest these funds in accordance with an equity-based planning approach.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Equity-based Planning Layers Maps

Appendix B: EarlyON Action Plan 2018-2020 (attached as PDF)

Appendix A- Child and Families Inequities Score

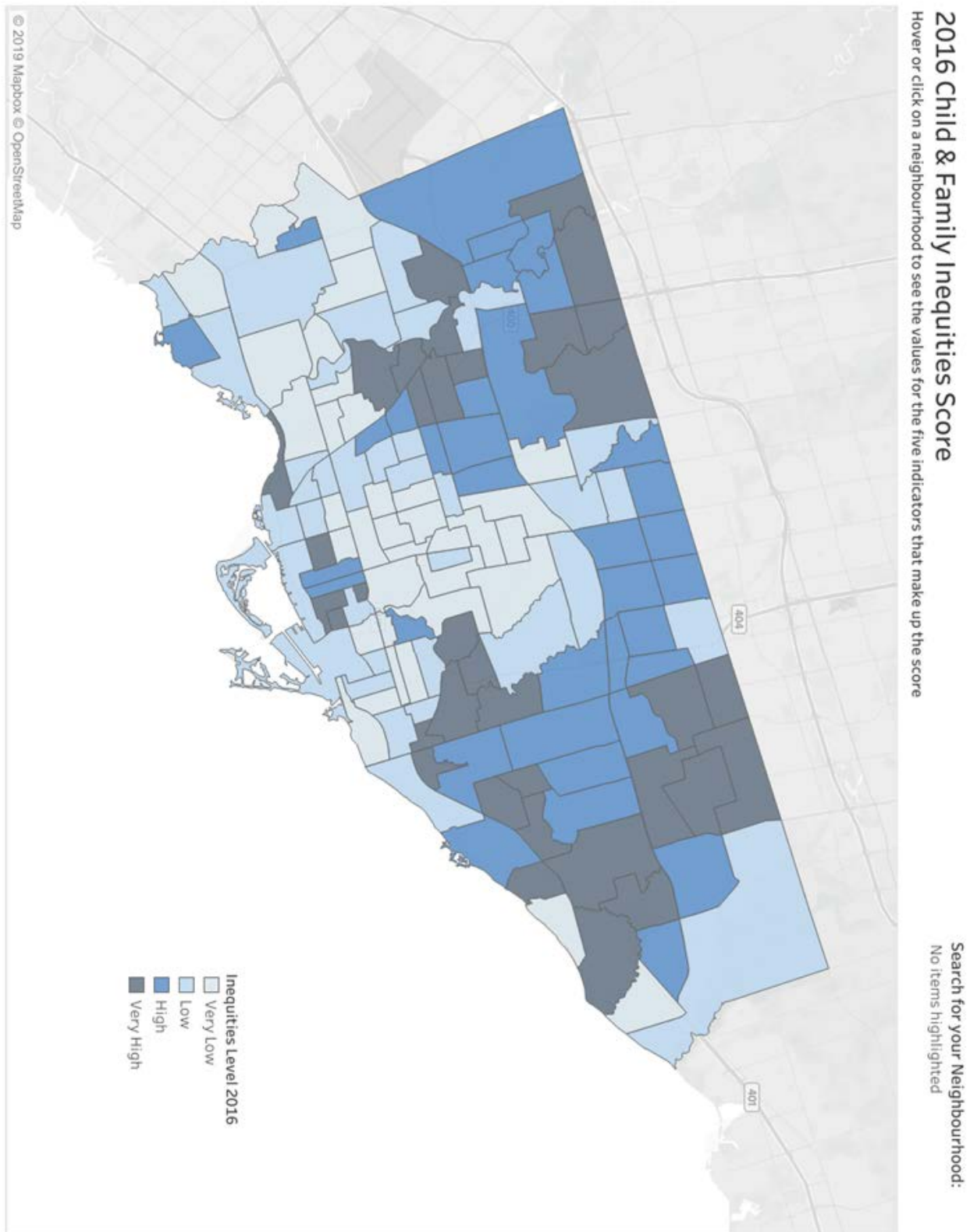


Image 1: 2016 Child and Family Inequities Score

Appendix A- TDSB Parent Census, 2017

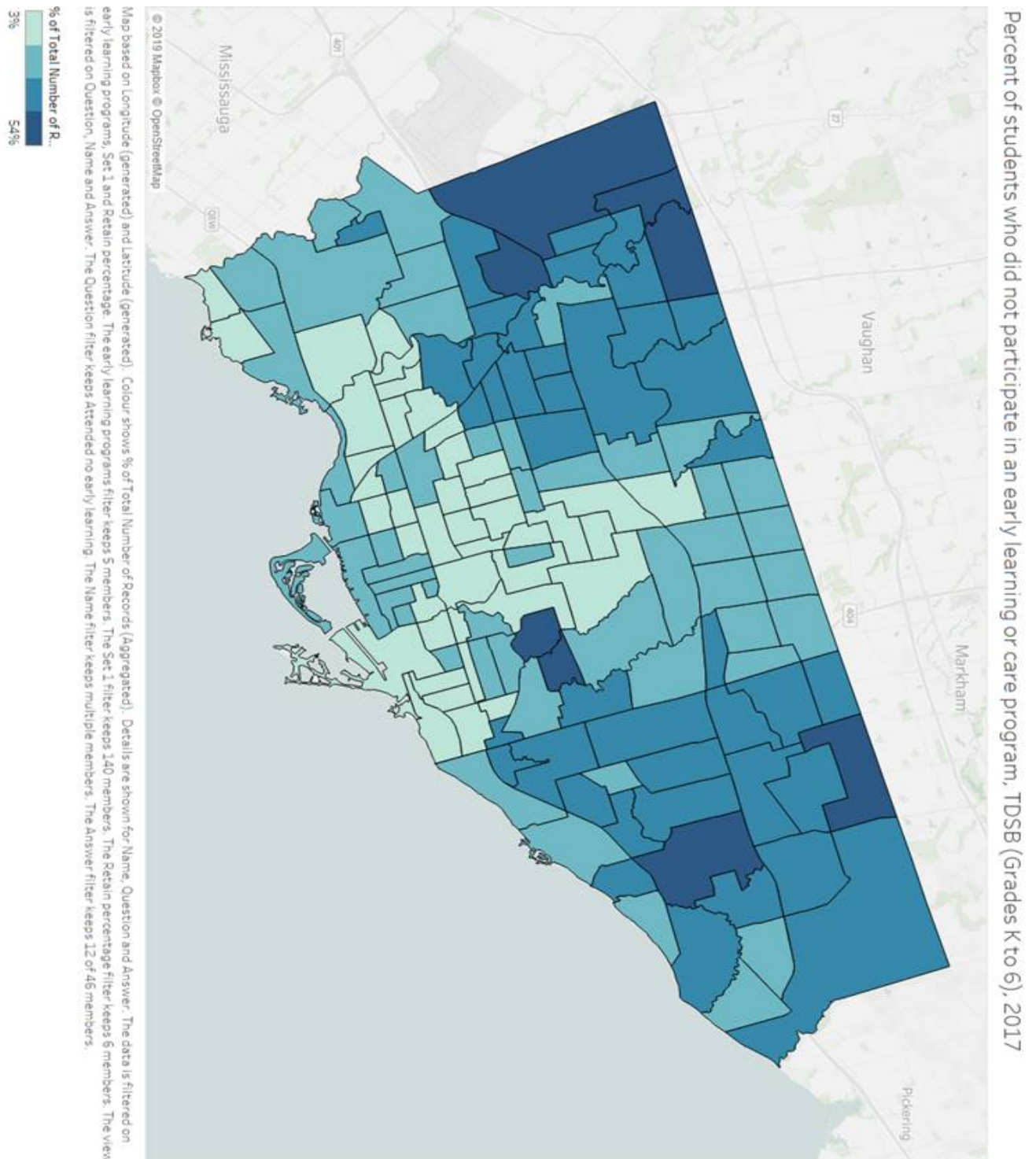


Image 2.1: TDSB participation in early learning or care program

Appendix A- TDSB Parent Census, 2017

Chart: TDSB parent responses to "Before entering Kindergarten, did you child regularly attend any of the following programs?" by parent and child demographics (TDSB Parent Census, 2017)

Stratifier
Parent's Income

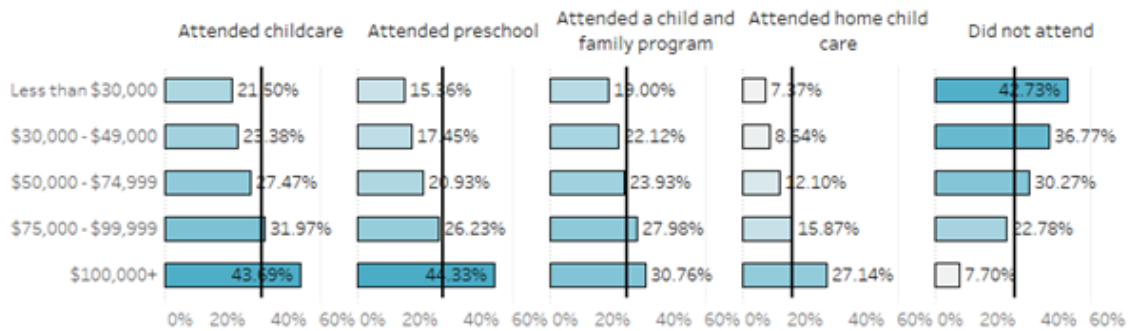


Image 2.2: TDSB participation in early learning or care program by income.