

**Deputation: Re: EC8.15
EarlyON Child and Family Centres**

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“Families are composed of individuals who are competent, capable, curious and rich in experience. Families love their children and want the best for them. Families are experts on their children. They are the first and most powerful influence on children’s learning, development, health and well- being. Families bring diverse social, cultural and linguistic perspectives. Families should feel that they belong, are valuable contributors to their children’s learning and deserve to be engaged in a meaningful way.”

Excerpt from *How Does Learning Happen*

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Terri Preston, Vice-President Unit B, Toronto Education Workers, Local 4400:
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Thank you for providing me an opportunity to speak to you today.

I am Vice-President of Local 4400 responsible for the bargaining unit which represents Parenting Workers the front-line workers who deliver the Toronto District School Board's EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

History of the TDSB Early ON Program

These programs date back to 1981 when they were first established in 5 inner city schools by Mary Gordon who has since won the Order of Canada.

By 2006, TDSB was directly funding 55 centres at a cost of 3.2 million to operate.

In 2007, the Ministry announced \$6 million in funding for these centres and initiated their expansion across the province.

The government announcement described the programs this way:

“Located in culturally diverse and high-needs neighbourhoods, the centres focus on building children’s literacy and numeracy skills through stories, music, reading and playing. Staff also engage parents in the children’s learning and can link families with appropriate community resources for special needs, health and other related services. “

In 2017 the Ministry of Education decided to provide the funding directly to local governments to administer.

The role of the city is to coordinate the various models of service delivery and ensure access to various models of programming throughout the entire city. “The city is taking a staged, transitional approach to system transformation” Staff are working on a Service Plan (2020 - 2024)

TDSB as an EarlyON Service Provider:

As stated in the report before you today:

- The TDSB is one of 53 third party providers holding service agreements with the city for the delivery of the EarlyON program.
- Located in 75 sites, it represents approximately one-third of the EarlyON sector in the city.

- Of the \$29.618 million cost to deliver the program in 2019, the TDSB receives \$4.622 million or approximately 1/6 of the funding.
- The TDSB closed two centres last year as enrolment in the schools had grown and the space was required to run kindergarten classes at those two sites.
- The city reports states clearly that the money recovered amount from the TDSB (expected to be \$120,000 for the year 2020) “is not reflective of the actual cost of operating a community based EarlyON Centre as the TDSB program costs do not consider rental, utility, maintenance costs.”
- Further cost efficiencies are found within the existing administrative structures of the TDSB including payroll and other employee services. The TDSB operates with one parent worker on site as opposed to many community programs which operate with two staff on site.
- Parenting workers employed by the TDSB have worked, on average, 10 years in the program. They are dedicated to the children and families who attend the program in their community school.
- The effectiveness of the delivery model is well-documented by research which was quoted by the federal government when justifying their grant to the province of \$40 million per year for the delivery of these programs.

So why are we here?

In its budget process the TDSB identified a potential structural deficit of \$500,000 in the delivery of the programs for the 2019 -2020 school year and a potential structural deficit of \$750,000 the following year.

This year’s projected structural deficit, as noted in the report, has been mitigated by Children’s Services continued approval to permit the TDSB “to operate above the allowable limits” for staff related costs provided for in the Collective Agreement covering TDSB EarlyON front line staff **for this year**. (It should be noted, TDSB parenting workers earn approximately \$36,000 per year)

It is important for the stability of the programs, the City re-examine the benchmarks established pertaining to staff costs and recognize in some fashion the In-Kind support provided by the TDSB to run the programs. It is not good enough to provide one year exemptions.

The City staff should be directed to work with the TDSB to ensure its ongoing support for the running of its cost-effective programs.

The City of Toronto should be joining forces with the TDSB and other groups committed to Family Support and Early Years programming to ensure provincial and federal funding adequately addresses the funding required to run and expand the programs.

Program expansion in identified areas can take place with cost effective delivery models such as that of the TDSB. The city has yet to do benchmarking for overall delivery costs and needs to review its benchmarking of staff compensation in light of the actual job of a front line worker in an EarlyON program. (The current benchmark is based on an ECE working in a childcare and does not take into account the role of the parent worker with parents)

The city implies that it would support a smooth transition if the TDSB terminates its service agreement with Children's Services and yet...the staff report has already indicated that if the cost of running community based programs exceeds that of the TDSB programs....(so wouldn't this result in fewer overall programs?) The emphasis should not be on termination of programs but on having city staff work with the TDSB to address their concerns regarding any funding shortfall to ensure stability of the program.

Shared Values of Equity and Inclusion

The TDSB shares the values of the city when it comes to equity and inclusion and frankly has recognized the importance of programs such as the EarlyON Child and Family Centres since their inception in 1981.

Surely we can find common ground if our emphasis is on maintaining a high quality program with a proven track record that works.

We realize as City Counsellors you have many demands on your time...however, we would like to invite you to visit the TDSB EarlyON Child and Family program in your area...and see for yourself the magic that is this program.