

CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING

Discussion Paper

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Background

This discussion paper provides commentary and considerations for the provision of child care and early learning services in the Greater Victoria School District (GVSD). The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework for further discussion regarding the provision of these services.

The UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre commissioned a study to examine the quality of early childhood services in The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Ten benchmarks were developed to guide this work:

1. A minimum entitlement to paid parental leave.

The minimum proposed standard is that, on the birth of a child, one parent be entitled to leave of at least a year (to include pre-natal leave) at 50 per cent of salary (subject to upper and lower limits). For parents who are unemployed or self-employed, the income entitlement should not be less than the minimum wage or the level of social assistance. At least two weeks parental leave should be specifically reserved for fathers.

2. A national plan with priority for disadvantaged children

All countries going through the childcare transition should have undertaken extensive research and evolved a coherent national strategy to ensure that the benefits of early childhood education and care are fully available, especially to disadvantaged children (see discussion below). This aspect of early childhood services cannot currently be assessed and compared in a satisfactory way. Rather than omit such a critical factor, benchmark 2 records, as a proxy measure, whether governments have at least drawn up a national plan for the organization and financing of early childhood services.

3. A minimum level of childcare provision for under-threes

The minimum proposed is that subsidized and regulated childcare services should currently be available for at least 25 per cent of children under the age of three.

4. A minimum level of access for four year-olds

The minimum proposed is that at least 80 per cent of four-year-olds participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for a minimum of 15 hours per week.

5. A minimum level of training for all staff

The minimum proposed is that at least 80 per cent of staff having significant contact with young children, including neighbourhood and home-based child carers, should have relevant training. As a minimum, all staff should complete an induction course. A move towards pay

and working conditions in line with the wider teaching or social care professions should also be envisaged.

6. A minimum proportion of staff with higher level education and training

The minimum proposed is that at least 50 per cent of staff in early education centres supported and accredited by governmental agencies should have a minimum of three years tertiary education with a recognized qualification in early childhood studies or a related field.

7. A minimum staff-to-children ratio

The minimum proposed is that the ratio of pre-school children (three-to-five year-olds) to trained staff (educators and assistants) should not be greater than 15 to 1, and that group size should not exceed 24.

8. A minimum level of public funding

The suggested minimum is that the level of public spending on early childhood education and care (for children aged 0 to six years) should not be less than 1 per cent of GDP.

9. A low level of child poverty

Specifically, a child poverty rate of less than 10 per cent. The definition of child poverty is that used by the OECD; i.e. the percentage of children growing up in families in which income, adjusted for family size, is less than 50 per cent of median income.

10. Universal outreach

To reinforce one of the central tenets of this report – that early childhood services should also be available to the children of disadvantaged or marginalized families – this last benchmark attempts to measure and compare demonstrated national commitment to that ideal. As no direct measure is currently possible, the suggested proxy measure is the extent to which basic health services have been made available to the most marginalized, disadvantaged, and difficult-to-reach families. Specifically, the benchmark of ‘universal outreach’ is considered to have been met if a country has fulfilled at least two of the following three requirements: a) the rate of infant mortality is less than 4 per 1000 live births b) the proportion of babies born with low birth weight (below 2500 grams) is less than 6 per cent and c) the immunization rate for 12 to 23 month-olds (averaged over measles, polio and DPT3 vaccination) is more than 95 per cent.

Bennett, John (2008), 'Benchmarks for Early Childhood Services in OECD Countries', Innocenti Working Paper 2008-02. Florence, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

For the purposes of this discussion paper, it is germane to contemplate these benchmarks in the context of British Columbia as a whole, as well as the specific context of the Greater Victoria School District.

Child Care and Preschool

There are a number of fundamental differences between child care programs and preschool. Fundamentally child care programs allow parents to leave their children in the custody of responsible people who take care of the children in the absence of their parents. Child care programs aim to provide an organized and structured environment that ensures safety and quality of care. Child care programs are typically available to children of a range of ages and do not have any type of formal curriculum. Staff working in child care programs are typically trained. In addition, many child care facilities are licensed by a government agency.

Unlike child care, preschool programs are more education focused. These programs more closely follow the concept of an elementary school providing early learning opportunities to children that begin to prepare them for more formal learning. Children in preschool programs are typically of the same age. Children in preschool programs learn through play-based activities that focus on social development as well as activities to develop early literacy and early numeracy. Staff providing preschool programming typically have formal education in early childhood education practices. Preschool programs also follow a curriculum.

The Canadian Context

There are currently four Canadian provinces that have implemented, or are in the process of implementing 4 year old preschool programming.

Ontario was the first province to establish universal 4 year old programming. Called junior kindergarten or JK, all children in the province had access by September, 2014. While universally available junior kindergarten is not mandatory in Ontario.

The Northwest Territories currently provides either half day or full day junior kindergarten programs in 20 communities. Territorial implementation of junior kindergarten is planned for the 2017-18 school year. The decision to enroll a child will be at the discretion of their parents.

The Nova Scotia government has expanded pre-primary programming bringing the total number of schools offering the program to 43. The government plans to provide universal access to preschool over the coming years. Pre-primary is not mandatory in Nova Scotia.

In Quebec, four year old kindergarten was initially developed for low-income children although this is no longer universally the case. Most four year old kindergartens are in Montreal. There is no new development of four year old kindergarten; those existing are being maintained.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE GREATER VICTORIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

There are principles that should guide the implementation of child care and preschool programming in the GVSD.

Program Framework

Preschool programming should be offered as part of elementary school programs. Since preschool is essentially an educational program it is logical that it be included in consideration of overall programs in elementary schools. Much like kindergarten, preschool facilities and staffing should be considered as part of planning for elementary schools.

Child care, on the other hand, is a community service that is not part of typical school district programming. While the move toward subsidized universal child care will necessitate strong partnerships with the GVSD it does not necessarily follow that the school district would take sole responsibility for the provision of this service.

District Control of Assets

It is essential that the GVSD retain ownership of its lands and have control over buildings that are placed on those lands. The deterioration of physical assets is an ongoing concern for the district. The accumulation of deferred maintenance for facilities that are not used for educational programming has created financial burdens on the District. Regardless of which models are used for the provision of child care and preschool programs a fundamental principle must be that there is a long term plan for such things as land use first for core educational programming, and planning for the replacement of capital assets.

GOVERNANCE

Provincial Government

Since, fundamentally, child care for 0-3 year old children is not considered educational programming it would seem logical that the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) be primarily responsible for child care programs. This is not to say, however, that MCFD need necessarily have sole responsibility. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has a secondary role to play in the provision of these programs. The use of educational lands for the purpose of child care will require consideration of provincial educational policies. While the GVSD has decreasing space in school buildings for such programming, there are districts in the province that have space in schools for child care programs. The MOE has a key role to play in provincial legislation and regulations that contemplate such uses.

Preschool, on the other hand, is fundamentally an educational program. Like kindergarten, the MOE should be primarily responsible for preschool programming.

It is the responsibility of the provincial government to develop regulatory and funding frameworks that provide for adequate and sustained funding to implement quality child care and preschool programming.

Local School Districts

While provincial ministries should have oversight of child care and preschool programs it is essential that this be a shared governance model with local school districts. It will be incumbent on school districts to develop policy and regulation that govern the provision of preschool programs in school districts. In addition, long term facilities plans must be developed by local school districts that take into account how school buildings and school district lands are used.

PRESCHOOL PROGRAMMING

Canadian Curricula

Ontario and the Northwest Territories provide examples of jurisdictions that have developed curriculum for preschool or junior kindergarten.

1. The Ontario Curriculum

Junior kindergarten curriculum in Ontario is based on four frames (outer circle) that are rooted in the four foundations for learning and development (inner circle) that are set out in the early learning curriculum framework.



2. The NWT Curriculum

The Northwest Territories preschool curriculum is based on a framework of competencies that are connected to the principles of being, belonging and becoming.



Common themes in both these curricula include

- A sense of self and self-regulation
- Emerging literacies in reading and writing, and mathematics
- Communication and engagement with others including a sense of belonging

Existing Programs

1. Strong Start – StrongStart BC is a free drop-in early learning program for all preschool aged children. Children must be accompanied by a parent or caregiver while attending the program.
2. Ready, Set, Learn - Intended for families and their three- to five-year-old children, Ready, Set, Learn provides information about how to support a young child's early learning and development. It also develops positive connections between families, the school system and local community agencies.

These existing programs and preschool are not mutually exclusive. Both programs provide meaningful supports for families and children. Should a preschool model be adopted

consideration should be given to changing the targeted age categories for both of these programs.

MODELS FOR IMPLEMENTATION (PHYSICAL ASSETS)

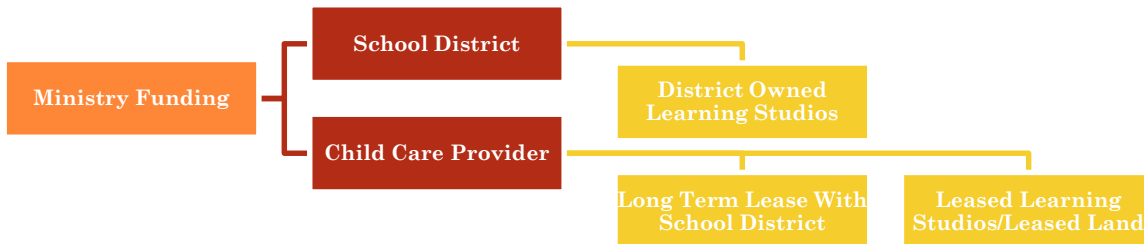
When discussing models for implementation it is important to consider three aspects of child care and early learning:

1. Preschool
2. Before and After School Care
3. Full Day Child Care

Preschool and Before and After School Care

As previously discussed, preschool should be part of the educational programming in schools with designated space provided for this program. Before and after school care, from an efficient use of facilities perspective, fits well with designated preschool space. Preschool space can be used to provide care for school aged children prior to preschool beginning in the mornings and again at the end of the day. It is important that this be clear from the outset thereby mitigating the current concern of the use of classrooms for this purpose.

Child Care



In keeping with the principle of school district control of land and assets there appear to be two basic models for the provision of child care on school district lands. What is key to both approaches is the provision of purpose built space for child care provision.

1. District Provided Child Care

In this model, the District would be fully responsible for the provision of full day child care including providing purpose built space such as the current Learning Studios and being responsible for programming and staffing.

The advantages of such an approach include control over the quality of care and the staff who provide the services.

Challenges include the need for additional district human resources to oversee child care services.

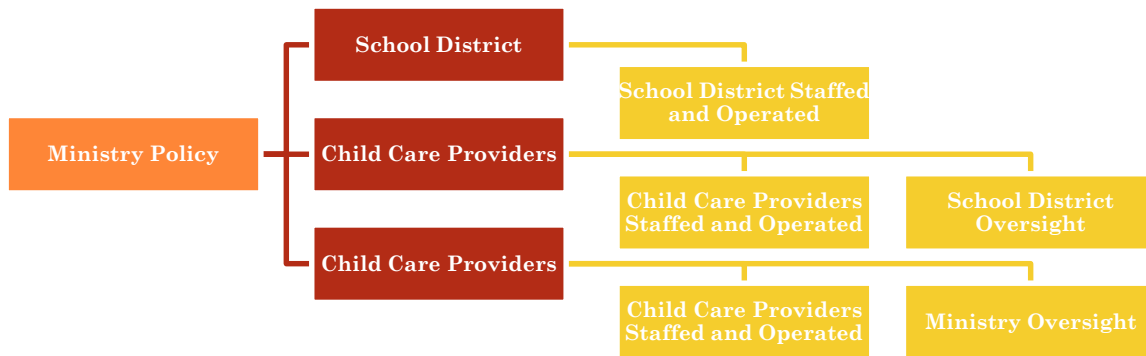
2. Not for Profit/Private Provided Child Care

In this model, Child Care Providers would enter into long term building and land lease agreements for the use of purpose built child care spaces. The Child Care Providers would be responsible for the provision of care.

The advantage of this approach for the school district is that the responsibility for programming, staffing, compliance with regulatory frameworks, etc. rests with the Child Care Provider.

Challenges include entering into landlord/tenant relationships with members of the community and the devolvement of the responsibility for quality programming.

MODELS FOR IMPLEMENTATION (STAFFING)



In the consideration of staffing models it is important to consider both the staffing requirements and the quality of programming. The provision of quality programming is essential to quality child care.

As illustrated above, there are three different models that could potentially provide the necessary staffing as well as program quality assurance.

1. School District Operated

Guided by Ministry Policy and Regulation the school district could wholly staff and operate child care facilities located on district lands. This would provide both oversight and control of programming.

2. Child Care Providers with District Oversight

This blended approach would allow for independent operators to provide programming in school district facilities with the quality of programming monitored in collaboration with school district staff.

3. Child Care Providers with Ministry Oversight

Similar to the current situation this approach would continue to have Ministry personnel monitor Child Care Providers. Current licensing requirements and programming oversight would remain in place.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

When conceptualizing staffing in child care and preschool programming it is instructive to examine other Canadian jurisdictions.

Ontario

In Ontario full day junior kindergarten classes have an average of 26 students with two qualified professionals in the classroom – a teacher and an early childhood educator (ECE) – there is an average of one adult for every 13 children

Where a school provides a board-operated before- and after-school program, the program is staffed with a registered ECE and there is a minimum of one adult for every 15 children. If there are more than 15 children enrolled in the before- and after-school program, a second adult will support the ECE. The second adult may receive additional training to work in the program, but is not required to be a registered ECE.

Where a school provides a before- and after-school program through a third-party provider, such as a community agency, the staffing and adult-pupil ratios must comply with the Day Nurseries Act.

Northwest Territories

In the NWT preschools are funded at a ratio of 12:1. The programs are led by a teacher. The 12:1 funding ratio also addresses the additional personnel and resources available in schools such as the principal, assistant principal, program support teacher, classroom assistants, counselors, etc. Decisions regarding class size, teachers, and supports are made by the Education Authorities.

Schools allocate the resources to meet the needs of their specific circumstances including class size, multi-grade classrooms, and assistants.

Before and after school care staff must be at least 19 years of age and have a first-aid certificate and a clear criminal record with regard to offences respecting a child. There are no early childhood training requirements.

SUMMARY

There is a fundamental difference between child care and early learning. For the GVSD consideration should be given to the extent to which the District wishes to offer early learning preschool programming.

While child care is distinctly different, the District has a fundamental role in determining how this type of programming is delivered in GVSD buildings on District land.

There are guiding principles that ensure that the GVSD has control over both lands and buildings.

There are a number of elements of child care and early learning which the District must consider. These include:

1. Use of land and buildings
2. Governance structures
3. Quality of programming including existing programming
4. Staffing levels and staff qualifications
5. Funding structures

As discussions continue at the provincial government level it will be incumbent on the Board of Education of the GVSD to have a voice in the determination of child care models in the province of British Columbia and the District.