

Early Years Niagara Planning Council Meeting (EYNPC)
February 8, 2008 9:00 – 11:30 PM
Niagara Catholic District School Board

Present: Margaret Andrewes (Co-Chair), Dr. R. Williams (Co-Chair), Angela Alfieri-Maiolo, Anne Biscaro, Jocelyne Blais-Breton, Janet Booth, Carol Germyn, Elke El Farsi, Bonnie Filipchuk, Tiffany Gartner, Christine Graham (for John Crocco), Pat Heidebrecht, Trudy Hill (for Crystal LaForme and Tracy Zachariah), Linda Langston, Tammy McCormick-Ferguson, Florence Ngenzebuhoro, Kathryn O'Hagan-Todd, Judy Reid, Lynda Reinhart, Glory Ressler, Barb Sockovie, Michelle Thacker, Sandy Toth, Jackie Van Lankveld, Kaarina Vogin

Regrets: Eleanor Dolan, John Crocco, Donna Cunningham, Brian Hutchings, Crystal LaForme, Linda Kartasinski, Odette Lamontagne, Catherine Mindorff, Patti Moore, Dr. Mary-Louise Vanderlee, Tim Wright, Tracy Zachariah

Item	Discussion	Action	Timeline
1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS	M. Andrewes welcomed all in attendance and introductions were made.		
2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA	The agenda was approved.		
3. APPROVAL OF MEETING NOTES	Moved by Anne Biscaro Seconded by Jackie Van Lankveld <i>That the EYNPC notes of January 11, 2008 be adopted as written. Carried.</i>	Moved by Anne Biscaro Seconded by Jackie Van Lankveld <i>That the EYNPC notes of January 11, 2008 be adopted as written. Carried.</i>	
4. CORRESPONDENCE M. Andrewes, Chair	M. Andrewes noted that all recent correspondence has been forwarded to all members in the February news digest, including the following updates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandy Toth has been appointed to the position of Acting Executive Director for AFSSN. • Pat Heidebrecht will be retiring effective June 30, 2008. 		
5. PRESENTATION: Niagara Region Public Health's 'Be a Great Parent' Campaign (attached) Angela Alfieri-Maiolo, Manager, Healthy Babies, Healthy Children/Parent Child Tara Wincott, Health Promoter, Parent Child Program	A. Alfieri-Maiolo and T. Wincott provided an overview of the Niagara Region Public Health's 'Be a Great Parent' Campaign (attached). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The focus of the campaign is the importance of positive parenting, with emphasis on communication, guidance, and relationships. The target group is families including parents, expectant parents, and caregivers. • Promotional material developed for the campaign includes a web portal on the Niagara Region website, posters, and magnets. All materials will be made available in French and it is hoped that the website will also be translated. • Promotional material can be obtained through Public Health or downloaded from the website. • A few parent groups have already connected to the website. 		

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to community partners have been included on the website. Errors or omissions can be forwarded to T. Wincott. • Recommendations are welcome for literature to include. <p>The following suggestions for the campaign included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add a video of a parent (e.g. the video developed for the presentation by the Hub Committee); • Add a copy of the Spectrum article on the campaign; • Promote in the next ECCDC child care supplement; during home visits and/or packages mailed out to families with newborns; at adult learning centres, multicultural centres, and senior centres; • Coordinate a series of off eds from partners that utilize different perspectives to promote the campaign, i.e. ECCDC could talk about a parent's struggles with finding child care and make reference to the child care choices section of website. 		
<p>6. UPDATE: Parenting Program Task Group</p> <p>L. Langston, Chair</p>	<p>L. Langston reported on behalf of the Parenting Program Task Group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of a universal parenting program strategy, the group has assessed parenting programs currently available in Niagara, evidence-based and otherwise; reviewed literature; performed a gap analysis across Niagara including age groups, locations, and variety of programming. A report of their findings is underway. • The group is seeking grant funding to train professionals in implementing programs. Funding will also need to be secured for support in coordinating and monitoring implementation of the strategy including maintenance of the parent directory over two to three years. • Promotional strategies that have been examined include: parenting programming on Cogeco Cable; 'Be a Great Parent' website; billboard advertising; and postcards. • It was recommended that a peer support model be examined; however, ethical responsibility would have to be considered. 		
<p>7. GROUP DISCUSSION: Parent Engagement Strategies</p>	<p>As the development of a parent engagement strategy is one of the 2007-08 objectives of the EYNPC, members were asked to provide suggestions for parent engagement by sharing strategies employed in their organizations or examples of other models that could be implemented. Highlights of the discussion included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraising efforts are usually an effective means of engaging parents; • Building relationships with families over time is the critical foundation for parent engagement. • It was recommended that a template be developed based on that used for the 'Be a Great Parent' campaign and sent to the group to provide input. 	<p>M. Thacker to update and circulate template for parent engagement strategies.</p>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The template could be used to scan what types of strategies are already being implemented as well as help organizations focus their thoughts around how they would like to engage parents. Any representatives that would like to share their activities with the EYNPC could arrange to do so at their convenience. The template could also serve to bring to light a parent that has already taken a leadership position that could become involved with the EYNPC. 		
<p>8. REPORTS OF INTEGRATED PLANNING COMMITTEES & WORKING GROUPS:</p> <p>8.1 Agenda Planning & Accountability</p> <p>M. Andrewes, Chair</p>	<p>M. Andrewes reported on behalf of the Agenda Planning & Accountability Committee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The committee met on January 18'08 to develop a schedule for the next four months of meetings. The MCYS Expert Panel presentation has been scheduled for April 11'08. The duration of this meeting will be extended to 12:00 noon and will be entirely dedicated to discussion around the reports of the panels. Members of the public are welcome to attend. The group also discussed succession planning and membership gaps. J. Reid and M. Andrewes are working on developing a job description of the EYNPC co-chair for the March 28th meeting. A work plan template has been developed in order to update the 2007-08 Integrated Community Plan. This year all three Niagara plans: the OEYC, Niagara Region Children's Services, and Community Plans will be integrated. A task group will be established to complete the work plan, and will include representation from those whose funding is reliant on development of the plan, including OEYCs, Children's Services, EYNPC, and MCYS. The group will also consult members for input as needed. It was recommended that French Language and Aboriginal Services be included in the template categories. G. Ressler added that the Understanding the Early Years project is required to produce an action plan by the end of August and may be able to incorporate their plan if it is developed within the same timeframe. 	<p>Agenda Planning & Accountability Committee to update work plan template and call together meeting of Work Plan Task Group.</p>	
<p>8.2 Coordination of Education, Screening and Early Identification Committee (COESEI)</p> <p>J. Van Lankveld, Lead</p>	<p>J. Van Lankveld reported on behalf of the Coordination of Education, Screening and Early Identification Committee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group is continuing to develop their work plan. In looking to develop consistent developmental norms for parents, the group recently received a presentation by QCCN on the framework they are using. 		

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8.3 Hub Development J. Reid for E. Dolan, Lead	J. Reid reported on behalf of the Hub Development Committee. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group is working on confirming existing hubs in Niagara and has discussed the need to include program offerings for Aboriginal and Francophone hubs. • The Hub Communications Task Group is currently hosting focus groups with parents to examine how they identify with the early years. • E. Dolan will be moving from the position of chair upon her retirement; a process is in place to appoint a replacement. 		
8.4 Early Learning and Parenting 8.4.1 JK/SK 2010 Task Group Barb Sockovie, Lead	B. Sockovie reported on behalf of the JK/SK 2010 Task Group. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group will be meeting this afternoon. • Recommendations will be prepared for the EYNPC in April. • The Niagara Child Care Sector is in the process of conducting a survey of parents and ECEs. An update will be provided at the next meeting. 	B. Sockovie to provide update on Niagara Child Care Sector survey at the next meeting.	March 28'08
8.5 Niagara Aboriginal Children's Planning Council T. Hill for Crystal LaForme & T. Zachariah	T. Hill reported on behalf of the Niagara Aboriginal Children's Planning Council. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group is continuing to move forward with the development of their work plan. • K. Bell of Niagara Region Public Health visited the group in November regarding Aboriginal services. 		
8.6 Niagara Best Start Francophone Advisory Committee Jocelyne Blais-Breton, Chair	J. Blais-Breton reported on behalf of the Niagara Best Start Francophone Advisory Committee. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A meeting is planned for the end of February. • The terms of reference are being prepared and F. Ngenzebuhoro has provided the group with some suggested models for future operation. • The Regional Network has drafted a work plan; it is hoped this will connect to the local work plan. • Both Francophone Best Start projects are moving along very well. The LaMarsh project has had to recruit additional staff to meet the demand. 		
9. REPORT: Ministry of Child & Youth Services – Hamilton/Niagara Region Florence Ngenzebuhoro for Patti Moore, Program Supervisor	F. Ngenzebuhoro provided an update from MCYS and MCYS French Language Services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Regional French Language Network will be meeting on March 5'08. • The Network intends to elect a chair and vice chair and designate a secretary at this meeting. Once this structure is in place it is hoped that regular communications will be shared with EYNPC. • Dr. Charles Pascal recently visited the Hamilton Best Start 		

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	<p>Network and some Hamilton area schools on his first stop as Early Learning Advisor for MCYS. E. El Farsi and K. Calligan were in attendance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was requested that any additional information from this visit be shared with the group when it becomes available. 	<p>F. Ngenzebuhoro will consult with P. Moore to forward information to M. Thacker.</p>	
<p>10. REPORT: Regional Municipality of Niagara – Community Services Department (attached)</p> <p>Pat Heidebrecht, Director, Children’s Services</p>	<p>P. Heidebrecht provided an update on behalf of Niagara Region Children’s Services (attached).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report on income testing was accepted by Regional Council on February 7’08. A report will be made at the next meeting of Regional Council on next steps for the Niagara Region Child Poverty report. 		
<p>11. REPORT: Business Education Council of Niagara</p> <p>Judy Reid, Manager, Labour Force Development</p>	<p>J. Reid provided an update on behalf of the Business Education Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This year’s Annual Partners Breakfast, scheduled for February 15, 2008 is sold out. This year’s theme is Child Poverty. All of the main committees under Early Years have now developed terms of reference to be shared with the EYNPC. The 2007 award-winning title for the Debbie Zimmerman Early Years Niagara Literary Award, <i>Not a Box</i>, by Antoinette Portis, was announced before Niagara Region Council on February 7, 2008. A fact sheet on ConnectAbility (http://www.connectability.ca/connectability/pages/login.html) was circulated. ConnectAbility is a website spearheaded by Community Living Toronto that features resources for children with special needs. 		
<p>12. NEW BUSINESS</p>	<p>T. McCormick-Ferguson reported that QCCN is planning a conference for June 20-21’08. Additional information will be shared as it becomes available.</p>		

EYNPC Meeting Schedule	
DATE	LOCATION
March 28, 2008 9:00-11:30 AM	Niagara Catholic District School Board 427 Rice Road, Welland
April 11, 2008 9:00-12:00 PM	SPECIAL MEETING OF MCYS EXPERT PANELS Niagara Catholic District School Board 427 Rice Road, Welland



REPORT TO: Co-Chairs and Members of
Public Health and Social Services Committee

SUBJECT: Provincial Legislative Changes to Financial Eligibility
for Child Care Update

RECOMMENDATION

That this Committee recommend to Regional Council that this report be received for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Financial eligibility determination for assistance with child care costs changed effective January 2007 from the previous needs test to an income test based on legislative changes to the *Day Nurseries Act*
- Eligibility determination is now measured against a family's "adjusted income" using the Federal Notice of Assessment provided to the Revenue Canada Agency
- The \$20,000 income threshold (turning point) beyond which parental contributions are charged is proving to be challenging for low income earners and Ontario Works clients who are exiting social assistance
- Child Care Service Care Providers who are unable to recover the parental contribution portion of their costs may experience increased destabilization of their services impacting the child care system as a whole or, are in some cases choosing to only accept unsubsidized families.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff have managed the legislative and policy changes in the 2007 Budget and within the forecasted 2008 Budget. Those are consistent with 2006 Budget demands. The report is meant to highlight possible future financial implications.

PURPOSE

This report has been prepared to provide Committee and Council with a status report on the implementation of Provincial legislative changes to financial eligibility determination for child care which took place January 2007.

BACKGROUND

Children's Services has responsibility for the determination of eligibility for financial assistance for families choosing to access the approximate 7,200 licensed child care spaces across Niagara. Over 3,200 families received financial support in 2007.

Committee Report COM 01-2007 outlined amendments to the *Day Nurseries Act* which changed the way families access financial assistance for child care from a "needs test" to an income test, which is part of the Provincial Best Start ten year strategy. The needs test involved calculating eligibility based on a formula that considered family size, liquid assets, net income and eligible expenses, while the new income test assesses eligibility based on income information associated solely with taxation information. The income test has been positioned to be "simpler", more transparent and determines eligibility by considering the "adjusted income", which is the family's net income confirmed on the family's most current Federal Notice of Assessment (NOA) as provided by the Canada Revenue Agency.

Under income testing, an income threshold and sliding scale calculating method is utilized. The threshold (turning point income) of less than \$20,000 is the income level at which a full subsidy is available. For incomes above the threshold of \$20,000, partial subsidy is available on a sliding scale as follows:

Total Adjusted (Net) Income	Parental Contribution
\$0 - \$20,000 (income turning point)	full subsidy
\$20,000 - \$40,000	10% of the adjusted income between \$20,000-\$40,000
Over \$40,000	10% of the adjusted income between \$20-\$40,000 plus 30% of the adjusted income over \$40,000

The income testing methodology is applicable to all clients who apply for assistance with their child care costs, the only exception being families receiving social assistance under the Ontario Disability Support Program and/or the *Ontario Works Act* who automatically qualify for a full subsidy. Parental contributions do not apply to these families even though their income in some cases may exceed the \$20,000 income threshold.

REPORT

The child care subsidy system supports in excess of 3,200 families with their child care costs. Family breakdown in 2007 was as follows:

Family Type	Number served in 2007	% of total
Families in receipt of social assistance	1,138	37%
Low income families not in receipt of social assistance	1,980	63%
TOTAL *	3,118	100%

*in excess of 1,300 families whose children have special needs were served in 2007

In 2007, the child care subsidy eligibility process gradually transitioned from the former needs assessment system to an income assessment. Because the provincial guidelines require that existing families (with children under six years of age) are not negatively impacted, this “grand parenting” requirement means that a full analysis of the impact is not available at this time.

With the proviso above, after one year of implementation, the following observations are offered under the categories of advantages, impacts and challenges.

A) Advantages of an income testing system

- Less intrusive for families as the amount of required information and documentation is significantly reduced.
- Enables more families to qualify for child care subsidy.
- The sliding parental contribution scale promotes universality and accessibility by expanding the fee subsidy system to a broader range of incomes.
- The change aligns Ontario with other Provinces in Canada, as all other Provinces use an income test to determine eligibility for child care subsidy.

B) Anticipated impacts based on Niagara’s experience

- Families with broader income levels are starting to make application which may result in waiting lists in 2008.
- Reduction in subsidy for some families (particularly for families with school-aged children all over age six) and increases in subsidy for others.
- Some families are required to be reassessed twice in one year as a result of a provincial parental contribution grand parenting provision. The grand parenting application provides a comparator between both income and needs testing for existing families with children under six years of age and the opportunity to apply the lower of the two parental contribution amounts.
- Applicant’s most recent adjusted income amount is not always reflective of their current financial reality (particularly for applicants with income changes of 20% or greater) which necessitates staff completing a modified income test. A contributing factor to this is Niagara’s high levels of employment turnover.

- Unlike the initial prediction by the province, income testing has not resulted in a reduction in staff time due to the complexity and frequency of changes required for client eligibility.
- Income testing eligibility determination is primarily focused on families with children under age six leaving parents of children over age six with the financial strain of having to pay for the full cost of before and after school care. Families who have income levels over \$20,000 have expressed their frustration in having to choose between basic life necessities and child care, and may be faced with discontinuing their child care resorting to a “latch key” approach, where children are left unattended at home until parents return from work or school.
- The \$20,000 income threshold is too low and inconsistent with other forms of government income support—(Gross income before deemed ineligible for social assistance sole support family \$35,781 and two parent family \$47,635). Families in the \$20,000-\$40,000 income levels have indicated that they are unable to pay the parental contribution that is being levied. A further impact may be families reverting back to social assistance with not being able to afford the fees associated with child care costs which further exacerbates poverty in their already complex lives.

C) Challenges

Instability of the Child Care System

- Increased parental contributions for families particularly in the \$20,000-\$40,000 income levels may result in increased destabilization of the child care system if child care service providers are unable to collect the required fees.
- Collection of increased parental contributions will result in increased administrative costs for child care service providers who are already historically under funded.

Welfare Wall

- Limited incentives for families on social assistance with young children and income beyond the threshold of \$20,000 to exit social assistance as clients who are not in receipt of social assistance are automatically levied a significant parental contribution which may result in them as well as low income earners being forced to revert back to dependence on social assistance.

Increased Wait Lists

- More families are now eligible for financial assistance under the new legislation, which is positive. However, without additional funding investments, waiting lists for services could be an outcome, and has been experienced in other municipalities, where a first come first serve approach has been used, irrespective of income levels.
- In Niagara, there has been no promotion undertaken to encourage families to apply financial assistance as the approach to date was to gain experience with the impact of the new legislation. In other communities across Ontario, increased waiting lists have been a reality.

- Niagara's priority for admissions policy was reviewed and input received resulted in a modified status quo approach. Niagara's first priority continues to be placements for provincially mandated Ontario Works participants as an employment support opportunity and for emergency situations such as families who are victims of domestic violence. All other client groups are provided equal placement priority based on a first come- date of inquiry first served basis.

Workload increases

- Potential increased work loads beyond the grand parenting or modified work load levels as families with school-aged children move in and out of the subsidy system during peak periods such as summer months, March and Christmas breaks.

Experience from other Consolidated Municipal Service Managers

- Children's Services staff participate in Ontario Municipal Social Services Association's (OMSSA) child care network meetings and has learned that other CMSM's are experiencing similar challenges and impacts as Niagara. The exception is that unlike Niagara, some Municipalities have experienced immediate and significant increases in their wait lists for child care subsidies.
- In comparison to other CMSM's, Niagara has managed the shift in the eligibility determination system with little impact to date. However, it is anticipated that with an increased understanding of how subsidies are determined, Niagara may experience an increased demand in 2008.

Next Steps

Children's Services will continue to monitor the implementation of income testing from both a client and service delivery impact perspective given that 2007 has been a year of transition. It is anticipated that it will be mid 2008 before true income testing outcomes data is available to report on as a result of the provincial parental contribution grand parenting provision and a slower than anticipated up take in subsidy applications from families with broader income levels.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

Brian Hutchings
Commissioner of Community Services

Mike Trojan
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared by Janice Horner, Manager and Patricia Heidebrecht, Director of Children's Services.