

BEST START PROGRAM INITIATIVE RECOMMENDATION

PURPOSE:

To obtain Board approval for participation and implementation of the Best Start Program Initiative in the Board's elementary schools.

BACKGROUND:

Trustees received Staff Report **Item 9.3 - An Overview of the Best Start Program Initiative** and a presentation on the Best Start Program from Mary Beth Jonz, Director, Children's Services, Social & Community Services Department, Region of Halton at the October 18, 2005 Board Meeting.

The Best Start Program is a comprehensive, evidence-based early learning and care strategy designed to help give Ontario's children the best possible start in life and help them to achieve success in school. The Program is community driven and may look different in various communities. Each community, with guidance from the Province, will decide how best to organize and integrate services to meet its communities needs.

Best Start is intended as a system of services that seamlessly supports families with children from birth through their transition into Grade 1. These services run the gamut from newborn and infant screening to hearing programs to speech and language therapy that help identify and provide support to children who need extra help for healthy early development. They include quality child care, public health and parenting programs that help their children to be successful in school. Also, Best Start will put families in touch with other services that they may need.

COMMENTS:

The Best Start Program is a very progressive initiative to help children to achieve success in school. Board staff have worked collaboratively with Regional and Ministry staff in the collection and analysis of data, and the identification of potential Best Start sites in our elementary schools for Best Start – Phase I implementation (child care facilities). Senior staff fully supports the Best Start Program Initiative in our Board, and looks forward to the potential implementation of the Program, ideally at all Board elementary schools.

As part of the implementation of the Best Start Program, there may be schools selected for the Program where a classroom could be relocated from the main school building to a portable classroom to facilitate a Best Start (child care) Program at the school. While the relocation would be for a short term duration it may cause a reaction in some school communities. Senior staff believes that this short term pain for long term gain will be worthwhile for the benefit of student learning and support for families.

At this time recommended specific school sites and other potential sites for the Best Start Program (child care facilities) have not been confirmed. Regional staff in consultation with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the school boards and other stakeholders is still analyzing and reviewing the collected data from the various neighbourhoods in Halton Region. It is anticipated that the proposed school site locations will be confirmed later in the month of November 2005.

CONCLUSION:

The Best Start Program Initiative is a very innovative and progressive program to help children to achieve success in school. Senior staff fully supports the Best Start Program Initiative in our Board, and recommends that the Board become an active participant in the implementation of the Best Start Program at all Board elementary schools.

RECOMMENDATION:

The following recommendation is presented to Trustees for their consideration and approval:

RESOLUTION:

Moved by:
Seconded by:

*RESOLVED, that the Halton Catholic District School Board approve its participation and the implementation of the **Best Start Program Initiative** in its elementary schools.*

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