

STAFF REPORT 9.3

HALTON CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

An Overview of the Best Start Program Initiative



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Note: The Best Start Report (Item 9.3) will be presented by Mary Beth Jonz, Director, Children's Services, Social & Community Services Department - Region of Halton and will be based on the "overview" report as well as on information from Halton Region.

What is Best Start?

Introduction

Best Start 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 achieve success in school.

Best Start is distinct from other initiatives in that it:

- will help parents and families – regardless of individual economic or social circumstances
- responds to the clear message from communities that Ontario needs more integrated accessible services for young children and families
- focuses primarily on meeting children's and family's needs by strengthening, enhancing, building on and integrating existing programs and services – rather than creating new structures or organizations
- asks all existing organizations that provide services for children from the prenatal stage through to Grade 1 – regardless of which ministry funds them -- to share their expertise, and plan together
- is community driven: the provincial government will set out the types of evidence-based services that should be available to children and families across Ontario and targets/outcomes for those services, but the planning for how those services will be delivered and integrated will be done by the communities based on each community's needs and strengths.

Because Best Start is community driven, it may look different in various communities (e.g., rural, urban, francophone and Aboriginal). With guidance from the province, each community will decide how best to organize and integrate services to meet its population's needs. *In essence, Best Start is intended as a system of services that seamlessly supports families with children from their 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 parents help their children to be successful in school. And they put families in touch with other services that they might need.*

(Source: Ministry of Children and Youth Services – Implementation Planning Guidelines for Best Start Networks, 2005: pages 4, 10)

Funding of Best Start

In Halton, who will be responsible for funding the Best Start plan?

- The Ontario government has developed a system of 47 planning and management groups across the province; these groups are called Consolidated Municipal System Managers (CMSM's).

- In Halton, the CMSM is the Regional Municipality of Halton, Children's Services Division (the Region). Currently the Region receives and administers significant funding from the province for a variety of programs e.g. child care fee subsidy, programs for children with special needs, health & safety and playground improvement funding, etc.
- The new Best Start funding will be added to the current funds at the Region for allocation within the Best Start Guidelines.

How will the new funds be delivered to the community?

- The Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) has developed a set of guidelines (available at <http://www.region.halton.on.ca/scs/cs/okn.htm>) which covers all areas for which the funding is intended. Feel free to download this document
- Strict reporting expectations will be given to the Region so the province knows how all funds are allocated and that the Region is meeting the expectations of the province.

Goals of the Provincial Best Start Plan and what Halton is doing to meet them?

Following are the 10 goals the MCYS has designed to develop and maintain a sustainable holistic child care system in Ontario that will ensure *Children in Ontario will be ready and eager to achieve success in school by the time they start Grade 1.* (The bullets below outline what Halton is currently doing to meet these goals.)

1. **Build on existing children's services planning groups to establish Best Start networks responsible for planning and implementing Best Start in their communities**
 - In Halton, the planning group is the Our Kids the Early Years Committee (OK-EY)
2. **Create neighbourhood early learning and care hubs that provide integrated services and supports for families with young children**
 - Building on the current Our Kids Hub Model of Integrated Service Delivery, the *Licensed Child Care Operators - 2005 Centre/Nursery School Survey* is one of the tools we can use to determine what supports are required in the different neighbourhoods within Halton
3. **Support flexible implementation strategies that make sense for communities (e.g., urban, rural, northern, francophone, Aboriginal, ethno cultural communities)**
 - The OK-EY committee will work with all members of our community to determine gaps and requirements to support an inclusive system for families, children and youth
4. **Give communities tools to support the planning process**
 - Halton already has determined previous demographic information by utilizing multiple sources, which include the Kindergarten Parent Survey (KPS) and Early Development Instrument (EDI), and is in process of developing a local Community Services Inventory (CSI). Research to support planning is ongoing

5. **Create an integrated early Learning and care program that combines preschool, JK and SK with high quality, child care during non-school hours**
 - Responses to the *Licensed Child Care Operators - 2005 Centre/Nursery School Suwey*, along with input from parents and other stakeholders, will help us develop additional licensed child care spaces initially by expanding current capacity through space availability, and in the future, through the creation of new child care spaces
6. **Create more licensed child care spaces and assist more families in need with child care costs.**
 - Responses to the *Licensed Child Care Operators - 2005 Centre/Nursery School Suwey* will be the beginning of this process
7. **Improve the quality of both regulated and informal early learning and care programs in Ontario.**
 - In conjunction with the Halton branch of the Association of Early Childhood Educators, Ontario representatives from across our community child care system are developing an initiative to support heightened quality care for our children. Look for information on the "Quality First" initiative.
8. **Enhance key early identification and intervention programs**
 - Work with all current community partners to expand our early identification & interventions services such as the Nipissing Screen, Developmental Early Identification & Prevention Program (DEIPP) Clinics, and Community Intervention Program etc.
9. **Develop and support universal screening of all children at 18 months**
 - The ministry has established an Expert Panel on the 18-month well baby visit to identify strategies to promote consistent use of a common developmental record, and to bring parents, doctors/nurses and early years service providers together to talk about children's development
 - Halton will establish its criteria based on this strategy.
10. **Change policies and practices, and remove barriers**
 - Halton will review and modify policies and practices based on Ministry recommendations.

Who will be involved in Halton's development of how the new funding will be used?

- Halton Region is in a strong position to be able to apply the new funds appropriately.
- Our Kids Network has been working together for several years to ensure high quality programs and supports for children, youth and families.
- The committees involved in Our Kids Network have community representation from a variety of sources including Halton Region's Health and Social Services Department, Halton District School Board, Halton Catholic District School Board, Children's Aid Society, Halton Child and Youth Services, Transitions for Youth, Ontario Early Years Centres, recreational programs, Sheridan College, United Way, Halton Police Services, Halton Multicultural Council, various provincial ministries, etc.

- Our Kids-Early Years (OK-EY) is the specific community-based committee that will serve as Halton's Best Start Network, working together with the community to develop a child care plan for Halton that includes Best Start
- The Senior Executive Group of the Our Kids Network, will be responsible for approving the child care/Best Start plan before it is sent to Halton Region and both School Boards for formal approval and official sign off.

What will be the focus of Halton's planning process for early learning and child care?

- Halton Region's Children's Services Division, in collaboration with OK-EY in its capacity as Halton's Best Start Network, will work with the wider community to develop an Integrated Early Learning & Child Care Plan for 2005-2010 that incorporates:
 - o the Halton Child Care Plan for 2006-2010 for prenatal-12 year olds and services for children with special needs up to 18 years;
 - o the requirements of the Provincial Best Start Strategy when announced
 - o the existing Our Kids (OK) Hub Model of Integrated Service Delivery

What research do we have that will help us with our planning?

- In developing "A Vision for Children in Halton: Report Card" extensive research was undertaken through a variety of sources to ensure that the new, and current funding meets the needs of children, youth and families in Halton. The Kindergarten Early Development Instrument (EDI) and the Parent Survey (KPS) and Community Services Inventory (CSI) have also been completed.
- Visit the website <http://www.region.halton.on.ca/scs/cs/okn.htm> and download more information on these resources including the Kindergarten Parent Survey (KPS) and Early Development Instrument (EDI) (which are included in the research in the Report Card)

If you have any questions regarding the above information, please contact the following at 905 825 –6000 or 1-866-442-5866 (toll free).

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(Source: Region of Halton – Best Start Laying the Foundation Frequently Asked Questions, July 2005)