



**Manitoba Child Care  
Association**

Briefing Note

# Planning for the Future

Nursery and Full Day Kindergarten in Public Schools



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## Nursery and Full Day Kindergarten in Public Schools

### Introduction

The Manitoba Child Care Association is aware that the education system, including school boards throughout Manitoba, are tuning into the abundant research that proves that the years prior to school entry lay an important foundation for future child outcomes. School divisions are already introducing a variety of informal or formal preschool programs to foster healthy child development and learning during the preschool years. Several school divisions have implemented nursery school programs for 4 year olds, and have full day kindergarten programs for 5 year olds.

There is increasing evidence that Manitoba might be formally moving toward province wide implementation of preschool programs under the jurisdiction of Manitoba Education. Manitoba's Consultation on Education invites the public to provide opinions on full day kindergarten. The Manitoba School Boards Association convention, held March 2011, provided an opportunity for school trustees to debate issues related to province wide provision of and financial support for full day programs for kindergarten. Media reports indicate that trustees voted overwhelmingly to ask the province to fund nursery and full-day daily kindergarten to be implemented at the option of local school divisions.<sup>1</sup>

MCCA is circulating this briefing note to inform and educate government, education system officials, school boards, and other stakeholders about the key issues that will impact on licensed early learning and child care programs as school divisions introduce nursery and/or full day kindergarten programs in Manitoba. We ask that everyone involved reflect on how children, parents, and other systems will be affected by decisions, and that processes be established to ensure communication and consultation with stakeholders is invited before the education system proceeds with plans to provide preschool programs. We have also included some recommendations for consideration.

### 1. Building the Best Foundation for Early Learning in Manitoba

The Manitoba Child Care Association believes the best foundation for our youngest children must include a range of early learning options and programs, intervention services, and parent supports all of which must begin at birth. One size and one model will not fit all, work for all, nor achieve the best outcomes for all.

Therefore, the Government of Manitoba should immediately take the lead role to work with parents, and community stakeholders such as representatives from education, early learning and child care, family resource programs, the Provincial Healthy Child Advisory Committee, the Child Care Regulatory Review Committee etc. The first step is to examine the research and identify and develop a comprehensive, multi-pronged early childhood development policy that will strengthen all children's preschool development physically, socially, emotionally, and

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<sup>1</sup> Winnipeg Free Press, *Province still studying full-day kindergarten*, March 28, 2011.

cognitively, inclusive of all children during the time of development most critical for healthy outcomes, that is birth to age 6.

MCCA recommends the Government of Manitoba:

1.1 Ensure parents are consulted, involved, and preferences respected. Parents are the first and most important and most long lasting educators in the life of a child. Their opinions and needs must be the backbone of any provincial early learning strategy.

1.2 Offer parents a wide range early learning opportunities for children from birth to age 6, either community based or school based, but also inclusive of family support and parenting programs which are available weekdays, evenings, and weekends on a year round basis.

1.3 Fund a province wide developmental screening program for all children at, for example, 18 months and again at age 3, along with timely and accessible early intervention services to ensure all children with vulnerabilities are identified and resourced at least two years before they begin kindergarten.

1.4 Eliminate wait times for parents who choose full or part time licensed early learning and child care services. There are 64,000 children ages 0 – 4 in Manitoba<sup>2</sup> and space for 19,725 preschool children in licensed full time early learning and child care programs or licensed part time nursery schools.<sup>3</sup>

A large majority of mothers of preschool children are in the workforce and someone is responsible for the care and early learning of their children during that time. Some of the children will be with family or friends while parents work. Others, likely the majority, might flip from unlicensed babysitter to unlicensed babysitter where there is no monitor on quality of health, safety, or learning environment. There could be as many as 40,000 children age 4 and under without access to a licensed early learning program – a cohort no serious early child development strategy can ignore.

## **2. Leading into the Future: Early Learning by Design Not by Chance**

The Government of Manitoba must ensure decisions made by Manitoba Education and/or provincial school boards regarding full day kindergarten or nursery school programs are made in collaboration with Healthy Child Manitoba, and the Department of Family Services & Consumer Affairs.

Preschool children moving from the early learning and child care system and into the education system will create systemic and financial problems that must be identified, planned for, and minimized to ensure the ongoing viability of the child care programs, and availability of non school services for children. Child care centres report schools do not typically consult them before making changes that affect preschoolers, leaving families and child care out of the decision making loop even when the change affects them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, 2009

<sup>3</sup> Government of Manitoba, Department of Family Services & Consumer Affairs Annual Report, Program Indicators for Early Learning and Child Care, 2010

<sup>4</sup> Manitoba Child Care Association online survey, *Trends and Issues*, February 2011

We have included some key examples of how early learning and child care facilities and the education system will be affected by adding nursery school and extending to full day kindergarten, along with some recommendations for pre-planning to minimize disruption to children, parents, child care services, and schools.

## 2.1 The Space Issue

Of the 635 licensed early learning and child care centres in Manitoba, 298 are co-located in a school or attached to a school.<sup>5</sup> Child care centres are concerned that schools that add full day kindergarten and/or nursery school may need to take back classroom space currently occupied by a child care centre at the same time the child care centre may need more space to accommodate the younger children in a before and after school age program.

Two critical issues arise if a child care centre loses its space in the school. First, the parents that rely on an early learning and child care program have a huge problem. Anecdotal information suggests many parents choose a school based on the availability of child care. The school that takes back classroom space from child care to accommodate more kindergarten/nursery children may solve their need for additional space, but may find the enrollment in the school changes if parents left without child care transfer their child to a school that does have child care.

Second, the displaced early learning and child care centre that loses its space also has a huge problem. Child care doesn't have a "system" that kicks in to establish a service or respond to interruptions in service. It is the responsibility of parent volunteers to do the leg work to seek out alternate accommodations, likely fundraise or apply for grants to renovate, and also supervise the entire process from design to permits, from packing to unpacking. A child care centre left homeless usually requires one year notice at absolute minimum, as well as funding to renovate the new space to provincial standards, and to cover re-location expenses.

It must also be noted that most existing licensed early learning and child care programs report wait times that stretch from months to multi-year, whether located in a school, community facility, or licensed family child care home. They may not have the room or staff to accommodate the 4 and 5 year old children moving out of full time preschool and into school age spaces for before after school, in-service days, early dismissal, school holidays, etc.

## 2.2 The Financial Impact for Early Learning and Child Care

Child care facilities are funded through a combination of regulated parent fees and regulated government operating grants for those eligible. The fees and operating grants are higher for preschool children than they are for school age children.

For example, revenue for a child care centre will drop by \$3,997.00 per year per full time kindergarten child who changes from full time preschool child care to part time/school age child care. If that centre has 10 kindergarten age children, the operating revenue will drop by an enormous \$39,997.00 per year. Licensed family child care providers will also experience a loss of revenue if their 5 year old preschoolers switch to part time/school age.

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<sup>5</sup> Email from Margaret Ferniuk, A/Director, Manitoba Child Care Program, April 1, 2011

In order to remain financially viable, early learning and child care programs may have no alternative other than to change their service to children ages 4 and under only, leaving parents of 5 year olds squeezed out of the preschool child care program due to finances and unable to enroll in school age programs because of space or a staff shortage.

The Department of Family Services funds licensed part time nursery schools that typically serve children 4 years of age and younger. Some are stand alone facilities; others are additional programs offered within full time child care centres. Under a province wide, publicly funded, school based nursery school program, the licensed fee based nursery schools will be marginalized.

### 2.3 The Financial Impact for Manitoba Education and School Boards

Obvious costs include the need for more classroom space in schools, and a much higher adult to child ratio for 4 year olds and for 5 year olds in all day kindergarten. School space must be modified to accommodate smaller children and developmentally younger children. Examples include lower sinks for hand washing, perhaps diapering facilities, lower coat hooks, cots for rest periods, age appropriate toys and learning materials, indoor classroom furnishings such as chairs, tables, and outdoor green space which must be directly supervised by an adult.

Other examples include:

- funding for 4 and 5 year old children with additional support needs who are currently eligible for the Inclusion Support Program, Department of Family Services
- school divisions will play a larger role in early identification and must be prepared to respond with accessible speech, physiotherapy, and occupational therapy services
- schools do, on occasion, ask early learning and child care programs to keep eligible school age children with additional support needs in child care for extended hours or an extra year. Due to different funding policies, parents of four and five year olds will expect their child to receive the same additional support in education that they do in child care
- some children may begin nursery school while still 3 years old, and along with the 4 and 5 year olds will require enhanced care and direct supervision on the school bus, in the classroom, on the playground, and over the lunch hour.
- preschool children will certainly require significant personal assistance and support with daily activities, routines, and transitions. For example, schools must accommodate the nutritional needs of very young children who will require frequent snacks throughout the day, and adult assistance at meal times, with toileting, shoe tying, dressing/undressing for outdoor play or home time.

### **3. Human Resource & Pedagogical Considerations for Education and for Child Care**

As the tides of education shift, it is essential that Manitoba Education and school boards re-invent the early year's school classroom to accommodate the unique learning needs of preschool children and the support and education needs of their families:

#### **3.1 Relationships in Early Learning:**

Warm, responsive, and supportive relationships are essential in the preschool years, and children's emotional needs must be met before they will feel safe, secure, and ready to participate in other activities and interact positively with other children and adults.<sup>6</sup> Manitoba Education and school boards must ensure the adult: child ratio and group size is small so preschool children receive plenty of personal attention and care throughout the day. Examples include adult assistance separating from mom or dad, a lap to sit on, a hug when sad, and a hand to hold when scared, someone to share a problem or accomplishment with, 1:1 time for teachable moments, to extend an interest, encourage and support socialization.

#### **3.2 Engaging Parents:**

Early learning and child care programs involve parents directly in the day to day operations and programming of the program. Parents drop their children off at the child care facility, and pick them up daily and are accustomed to a daily conversation with early childhood educators.

In order to continuously and actively engage parents in information sharing and decision making about the children, Manitoba Education and school boards will have to plan their preschool learning environments to include frequent contact opportunities for parents who are employed and not accessible during school hours as well as for "stay at home" parents.

**3.3 Ratio:** The fewer nursery and kindergarten age children in a classroom, the better. There must be a high adult to child ratio to ensure the health, safety, and well being of children as well as maximize learning opportunities. For example, the Community Child Care Standards Act requires the following ratios: 1:8 for children 3 years – 4 years; 1:9 for children 4 years – 5 years; 1:10 for children 5 years – 6 years.

#### **3.4 Qualifications:**

Preschool children should be free to imagine, explore and discover in an enriched, exciting, child centered environment, both indoors and outdoors, where their interests, (not the teachers) are the foundation of the curriculum. Desks, seatwork, academic subjects, rote learning, end product art, coloring books or worksheets have no place in the preschool classroom of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Graduates of a community college program in Early Childhood Education know preschool child development, are skilled in guiding children's behavior, and know how to maximize learning outcomes through an emergent curriculum approach to play based learning.

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<sup>6</sup> Manitoba Child Care Association, *Accreditation Standards, Criteria, and Indicators for Early Learning and Child Care Centres*, April 2007.

In Ontario, The Report to the Premier by the Special Advisor on Early Learning, Charles E. Pascal, recommends that early learning programs for 4 and 5 year old children should be staffed by well-trained teams of certified teachers and early childhood educators (ECEs).<sup>7</sup>

MCCA therefore recommends an Early Childhood Educator be an equal partner with a certified teacher in each kindergarten and nursery school classroom, as has been done in the Province of Ontario.

The Department of Family Services & Consumer Affairs needs to review research based best practices for school age child care programs to determine:

- if changing the definition of school age, or allowing 4 & 5 year olds to be considered school age, is in the best interests of children;
- if a school age ratio of 1:15 for children ages 4 – 12 enables quality early learning and care;
- if qualifications for early childhood educators and proportion of trained staff employed in school age programs should be enhanced if preschoolers as young as age 4 are included as “school agers”

### 3.5 Curriculum:

An Early Learning Program, *Every Child, Every Opportunity*, was created as the curriculum and pedagogy for 4 and 5 year olds in Ontario, to ensure a carefully designed connection as children transition from preschool into the primary grades. The Government of Manitoba should provide similar leadership to ensure a connection between the Curriculum Framework in Early Learning and Child Care and the preschool curriculum to be developed by Manitoba Education.

### 3.6 The Competitive Edge:

The Department of Family Services needs to plan for an even greater and inevitable exodus of Early Childhood Educators and Child Care Assistants out of the early learning and child care system and into the education system where the wages are much higher, the work hours shorter, and working conditions are better.

Around 30% of licensed early learning and child care centres are unable to meet provincial regulations for trained staff. When asked, most Directors say it’s because the wages are too low, with the second reason being the shortage of qualified staff. ECE wages are, on average, two to three years behind research based competitive wages based on equivalent knowledge, skills, and abilities. Wages scales in most child care centres haven’t changed since 2009.<sup>8</sup>

To ensure high quality early learning in child care as well as in education, the Government of Manitoba needs to implement an immediate retention and recruit back strategy for Early Childhood Educators that includes funding to eligible facilities for 2010 market competitive wages, benefits, along with the pension plan for all employees in all positions.

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<sup>7</sup> Pascal, Dr. Charles, *With Our Best Future in Mind, Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, June 2009

<sup>8</sup> Manitoba Child Care Association online survey, *Trends and Issues*, February 2011