



**OMSSA Response to *Modernizing Child Care*
in Ontario: *Sharing Conversations,*
Strengthening Partnerships, Working
*Together***

September, 2012

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Introduction

The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) welcomes an opportunity to respond to the government's discussion paper, *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario*. Over the better part of the last decade, the government has taken important steps to build an early learning and child care system that not only responds to the needs of Ontario's families and children but will also contribute to the strength of the province as an educated and dynamic economic force for the future. We share the government's vision for the development of a high-quality, accessible and coordinated early learning and care system that better supports all children and families in Ontario.

OMSSA also envisions an integrated early learning and child care system that is family-centred, universal, and seamless for families and children that acknowledges and addresses the unique needs of our diverse communities. We believe that the next steps in child care transformation provide an opportunity to move further towards these objectives.

Building on the strong partnership that OMSSA has developed with the government, working together to build this vision, we offer our feedback and recommendations for moving forward on these next, critical steps in child care modernization.

Our comments and feedback focus on two key themes that we believe will drive the success of this important undertaking and will ensure the government's objectives to modernize child care in Ontario can be realized on the ground, in communities across Ontario.

These are:

- The importance of a strong provincial-municipal partnership.
- The role of the Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs), as service system managers and the solution to child care modernization.

The context for moving forward

Since 2008, the government and its municipal partners have taken significant steps in transforming the funding, the policy frameworks and service delivery context in a number of social program areas in Ontario, most notably to date, homelessness and housing and the administration of social assistance. Driven by the strength of the Provincial Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review (PMFSDR) recommendations and its principles, the government and its municipal partners, through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the City of Toronto, have agreed to move to a system that best utilizes each order of governments' resources, capacities, and expertise, essentially, to find ways to do things smarter and better, in an effort to address and meet community needs across Ontario. This approach recognizes municipal diversity in both resource capacity and local needs.

On the matter of child care, during the PMFSDR policy discussions and development, the Premiers Advisor to Early Learning and Child Care, Dr. Charles Pascal, was in the midst of developing recommendations on the government's framework for moving forward on this program. At the time, it was agreed amongst the provincial and municipal partners, that transforming and modernizing child care was not within the purview of service delivery transformation discussions under the PMFSDR and would be best undertaken in the future and on the government's response to and action on Dr. Pascal's work in the same spirit and commitment of the PMFSDR.

Dr. Charles Pascal's report, *With Our Best Future in Mind*, released in 2010, came out firmly in support of municipal service system managers, to lead early learning and child care as partners with boards of education and community stakeholders. Fundamentally, this recommendation requires a continued and strong provincial-municipal partnership in moving forward on early learning and child care.

However, since that time, significant economic events have caused all orders of government to adjust and scale back expectations and commitments through budget restraints and cuts.

Despite the call from some to cancel full-day kindergarten, the 2012 Ontario budget included the commitment to maintain Full Day Learning and Kindergarten program (FDLKP) and the announcement of transitional funding for the child care sector. This was clearly a welcomed and positive step in addressing the many challenges that OMSSA members as service system managers of early learning and child care face. This additional funding is however, only one piece of the comprehensive reform needed to help child care programs and facilities remain viable.

OMSSA recognizes that the child care modernization exercise is occurring in a broader context, a context framed and driven by fiscal austerity. We also recognize that the provincial government, like municipal governments, has a great deal on the line when it comes to responding to service pressures in our communities.

While child care modernization is focused on stabilizing and transforming the system over the next three years to support higher-quality, consistent services that support growth in the future, service system managers are experts at balancing the many competing priorities and demands with finite capacity and resources. Moreover, service system managers operate within a publically accountable form of government.

In order to get child care modernization right, the province, OMSSA, and service managers need to work hand in hand as partners. In this way, we have an opportunity to turn our expertise, our ideas, innovation, and our experience into positive outcomes and into success for Ontario's children and families.

Factors for success

In early 2012, the government commissioned report "*Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services*" (Drummond) was published to the Government of Ontario. Fundamental to the report was the need to restructure public services to provide efficient, quality services that support economic growth while limiting fiscal impacts, notions that are consistent with the efforts undertaken in the implementation of the PMFSDR.

Like the government, OMSSA, CMSMs, and DSSABs understand that Ontario's overall prosperity is directly dependent on a sustainable, quality early learning and child care system. Access to early learning and child care services reduces poverty by helping people prepare for, get into, and stay attached to the labour market, helping our schools and businesses, and giving more people the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to our society, essentially, providing key ingredients that support a robust labour market and economy. Moving forward, it is essential that municipalities have the flexibility to respond to local needs and conditions within an accountability framework that is developed in collaboration with the province that is responsive to the all stakeholders and is outcomes driven.

It is imperative that we get policy development and implementation right. OMSSA believes that the best way forward to ensure achieving the goal of modernization is through a partnership between provincial and municipal experts. True collaboration between provincial policy makers and service system managers, the experts who understand their communities and ultimately, who direct and implement provincial policy on the ground, will be the key to successful child care modernization in Ontario.

The framework for policy development and child care modernization:

The child care system in Ontario sits in delicate balance. OMSSA and its municipal partners recognize the need to transition a chronically underfunded, fragmented child care system toward a high quality, stable system on which to support future growth. The new provincial investment of \$139 million over three years in capital and operating funding is an important first step that signals the government's ongoing commitment to the system. And, we remain hopeful, that as the government's fiscal circumstances improve over time, greater efforts and resources will be committed to stabilizing and growing Ontario's child care system. But, it is because we are only, at this time, striving to stabilize the existing system that a great deal now hinges on how we manage the transition of existing programs and funding through this important policy development effort.

OMSSA has long argued that any transformation of the early learning and child care system must retain a central role for municipal service system managers. As service system managers, working for municipal councils and district services boards, CMSMs and DSSABs are ideally positioned to provide leadership in the area of service planning funding and management, within a province-wide framework, for the new early learning and child care system.

CMSMs and DSSABs can best align government priorities and maximize resources. They can assist the provincial government in achieving its commitment to build a system of public services that are integrated, efficient and responsive. CMSMs and DSSABs are doing this work today through integrated human services planning. This includes the ability and capacity to understand and respond to current and future service needs, from across their organization, and making strategic decisions on service and resource allocations to best meet local needs within government capacity.

CMSMs and DSSABs have significant financial investments in their local children's services systems. In some cases, they pay 20 percent of costs, in others 50 percent, and still others pay 100 percent of costs in addition to their obligations. This further clarifies the importance of modernization the early learning and child care system in partnership with OMSSA and service system managers and funders.

Examples abound of the CMSM's and DSSAB's importance in local planning. Examples such as the service manager role in the planning and integration of immigration services through the Local Immigration Partnerships - a municipal, provincial, federal collaboration on service planning and delivery. And, we need to look no further than the government itself through its Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy and the work of the PMFSDR, having established municipalities and service system managers through legislation and regulation, as the leaders in developing local housing and homelessness service delivery and funding plans to respond to local needs. This includes providing service managers with block funding to identify and respond to local issues in ways that make sense and respond to capacity.

It is important to note, that all aspects of Ontario's housing transformation has been developed, each step of the way in partnership between provincial and municipal representatives. This includes the development of the Housing Services Act and its regulations, the new consolidated funding framework, planning guidelines and performance measures. This work has been undertaken over the last number of years and continues today.

The establishment of CMSMs and DDSSABs, as mentioned, through legislation and regulations and in partnership during policy development, as leaders in their communities in service system planning and delivery, has long existed in child care. In fact, CMSMs and DSSABs are ahead of their housing counterparts as they already service system manage and plan through Best Start. Similarly, the unique role of service system managers in understanding and linking all the key elements related to special needs resourcing must be recognized. Any changes to identified program areas, creates a potential for significant impact to children and families served by other community agencies as well. CMSMs and DSSABs provide a holistic lens to systems and service planning recognizing how changes in one area provide the great potential for further destabilization and deleterious program and individual outcomes. By providing such insight and working as partners on child care modernization we can ensure against perverse policy outcomes and further destabilization of an already fragile system. OMSSA and its members can make the link between one or many policy decisions against the implications in all other service areas at the local level.

The precedent has been set. CMSMs and DSSABs are the key to successful policy development and implementation.

The modernization consultation exercise will gather many good ideas and suggestions on how to move forward on this next stage of child care transformation. But it is the vision from the ground, from the implementation experts, that can best advise how to move forward.

Over a decade on from Local Services Realignment many lessons have been learned, and municipalities and service managers have become the experts in getting provincial policy to work, on the ground in municipalities across the province. OMSSA and its members can provide the innovation, the reality of municipal diversity, the importance of timing regarding local budget processes and service realities. Like the province, municipalities do not have unlimited resources and can bring ideas on service efficiencies and effectiveness to the table.

Consistent with the Drummond recommendations to develop a system of public services in Ontario that will be the model to be emulated, OMSSA believes the following are the key ingredients to achieving this in early learning and child care.

1. Build on Dr. Pascal’s understanding and vision that CMSMs and DSSABs are leaders amongst leaders by:
 - a. Modernizing Ontario’s child care system in partnership with municipalities and OMSSA.
 - b. Including OMSSA and municipalities throughout all stages of policy discussions and development on all aspects of child care modernization and transformation.
 - c. Developing a “governance partnership table” including relevant provincial representatives and municipal social services commissioners to guide policy development and recommendations for provincial and municipal decision making tables. All policy tables should feed in to this table for an integrated, holistic policy lens.

OMSSA believes a second important element for policy development and child care modernization is;

2. The development of a flexible funding model and child care service system that maximizes resources and responds to local need. This should be developed with the following considerations/principles in mind:
 - a. Developing the new funding and service system approach is an exercise built on partnership. This includes, working together, going forward, based on the PMFSDR relationship and principles.
 - b. There will be no winners or losers. Municipal service managers will not see a reduction in funding from current allocations.¹
 - c. There will be no transfer of financial risk. If the new funding approach results in capping or funding reductions, mitigation must be considered.
 - d. A new funding formula and service delivery framework must be responsive to local need and capacity. Capacity differs around the province. This must be recognized in policy, program and funding development and ultimately in the implementation of the new formula/model and system.

CMSMs and DSSABs are implementing and managing numerous provincial initiatives and transformations simultaneously. Municipal councils must weigh all provincial policies and local service needs against a finite funding source, the property tax payer. And, it is important to recognize that each of the 47 service managers do so in a context different from each other. Fiscal and resource capacities vary significantly from municipality to municipality, from rural, urban, remote and northern. Other factors such as geography, transportation and local labour market realities are all important factors that must be considered as a new funding and service system is developed. A modernized child care system must be responsive to the lived reality in all communities across the province.

Add to this, the anticipated recommendations from the Ontario Commission on the Reform of Social Assistance, and the value of working with OMSSA and its partners becomes very clear.

¹ This point is consistent with the Drummond Commission recognition that transferring services, especially without resources to support them, when it has been done in the past may be successful in past in shifting responsibilities from one government to another but can also shift the burden. Drummond recommends this practice.

We need to work as partners to ensure resources are maximized and policy implementation across the service system is manageable and feasible.

Conclusion

The modernization of the child care system in Ontario presents an opportunity to bring together the province, municipalities and DSSABs as government partners, working together for children and families in our communities.

An opportunity exists for the government and OMSSA, in these challenging times, to deliver on the promises the government has made to support our families and children through a responsive early learning and child care system and in building a strong, educated labour force and dynamic province.

It is at the table, as partners, where OMSSA will be most effective in providing advice on child care modernization. The greatest asset that CMSMs and DSSABs can bring to the table is the ability to turn provincial policy into success on the ground by meeting the needs of children and families in real ways in the communities where they live, from a holistic planning and service delivery lens. When we understand the government's intentions and directions on child care modernization, it is then we can offer our service system management and funding expertise and our service delivery planning and funding innovations.

In this response to the governments discussion paper we have offered our advice on the key elements for the best way forward to transform the good and important ideas on Ontario's child care system into solutions that will work, on the ground, in our communities and for our families and children.

OMSSA looks forward to the next steps in realizing Ontario's child care vision.

The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) is the professional association representing human services staff in the 47 Consolidated Municipal Services Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) across Ontario. Our members in the CMSMs and DSSABs have a mandate to be the local Service System Managers for a range of human services, including social housing, homelessness prevention, social assistance, employment services and early learning and child care.