



Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kathleen Flanagan and Jane Beach

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Kathleen Flanagan and Associates, Inc.

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Dear Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross,

On behalf of Kathleen Flanagan and Associates, Inc., we are pleased to provide you with an Executive Summary of the Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission Report.

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INTRODUCTION

The availability of child care is essential to healthy child development, literacy, women's equality, social integration of newcomers, job creation, economic strategies, poverty reduction, family support, early intervention, etc. Everyone agrees that access to child care is a priority.

For the past 15 years, Manitoba has consistently planned for the ongoing development of a high quality, publicly-funded, non-profit system of early learning and child care. Manitoba has long been held in high regard across Canada and internationally with respect to early childhood public policy, including a strong regulatory framework, high quality Early Childhood Educator (ECE) education programs, a progressive approach to funding child care, and an exceptionally well developed system for integrated services.

Manitoba has historically taken a universal approach to Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) by subsidizing costs for all families through regulated parent fees, and subsidizing centres with operating grants. Child care fees increased across Canada between 1998 and 2012 in all jurisdictions except Manitoba and Quebec. Consultations in 2001 revealed that 82% of Manitobans fully support a vision for a "universal, accessible, affordable, quality" child care system.

In March 2015, the Government of Manitoba established the Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission to provide recommendations on implementing a universally accessible child care system. In the November 2015 Throne Speech, Manitoba committed to a target of creating 12,000 new ELCC spaces, which will be guided by this proposed plan.

The approaches herein are ambitious, require investment, and are constructed to ensure quality is not compromised with expanded access. They are inter-related, are part of a comprehensive policy framework to guide their implementation, and include four key components: Governance and Local Infrastructure; Access including Availability, Affordability, and Sustainability; Quality, including Pedagogy and Human Resource Development; and Data Collection and Analysis / Research and Evaluation.

GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The responsibility for governing child care centres falls to volunteers, many of whom are parents. While many parent boards are strong and efficient, others need support to manage the centre, staff, finances, and handle responsibility for children's well being. Local infrastructure, rather than individual parent boards, is needed to organize and coordinate the level of effort needed to create an early learning and child care system with significant expansion.

The report recommends the creation of local infrastructures by establishing five Children's Councils. These councils would have a mandate to expand and develop child care in the province, maintain data and information, support ELCC centres, incorporate Parent-Child Coalitions, and work with government to develop a plan for creating 12,000 new spaces. The Councils may assume other levels of responsibility as the new strategy unfolds.

A ROLE FOR EDUCATION

The Commission proposes that school-age (6-12) child care become the responsibility of school divisions. This child care would operate before and after school when school is in session, on professional development days, school holidays and during the summer. MELCC would work with centres to replace school age spaces with infant and preschool spaces.

ACCESS

AVAILABILITY

One of the key challenges to achieving universal access to ELCC is the current level of availability of licensed ELCC spaces for children in Manitoba. Manitoba is one of only four jurisdictions in Canada with a centralized registry and wait list. The Commissioners found challenges with the wait list's accuracy, especially with monitoring, managing parents' expectations, and keeping requests current. Directors often need to contact several people before finding a person who still needs the space. Even so, it is generally acknowledged that centralized wait lists are a more accurate approach for determining child care need.

Capital construction and renovations need to be part of long-term expansion planning. Availability cannot increase substantially without additional facilities, and new spaces should be created to established quality standards. A number of provinces provide minor capital grants for start-up costs, for repairs, or for expansion, but Manitoba is one of only a few provinces to provide major capital funding for the creation of new child care spaces.

Experiences with capital expansion in both Manitoba and other jurisdictions suggest that schools are a priority location. In addition to school-based programs, co-locating child care with other community services, and broader ELCC programs, as well as in a range of publicly owned buildings has proven effective. Manitoba has a long history of co-locating child care in schools. Government policy requires child care be included in any new school construction or major renovation and child care has priority for surplus school space. Almost half of Manitoba's licensed child care centres are in schools.

The Commission proposes government:

- Work with school boards to develop stand-alone infant and preschool centres on school properties wherever there is enough space
- Work with post-secondary institutions to create on-campus child care facilities
- Include child care in all new Manitoba Housing projects, where demand warrants
- Conduct an inventory of space in provincially owned buildings to explore co-locating child care
- Assess the feasibility of collaborating with local government to co-develop child care in municipal buildings, such as libraries and community centres
- Consider construction of child care centres on publicly owned land.

The Commission suggests that responsibility for planning and development transition over time to Children's Councils. Where necessary or desirable a Council may hold the licence for a new program, or incubate a new program while recruiting community and parent representatives to take it over.

The report also touches on enhancing the quality of the physical environment in child care centres by:

- Applying current research findings to planning and development of new spaces, on the importance of contiguous indoor and outdoor space, information on optimum layout and types of materials for outdoor play spaces, optimal orientation on the building site, etc.
- Regularly reviewing and updating as necessary the Child Care Design Guidelines and sample templates for architects and developers
- Providing professional development opportunities for child care staff and directors to increase their awareness of the impacts of effective space design and enhance design literacy.

The Commission proposes no specific systems-wide changes to family child care at a provincial level, but that individual Children's Councils consider family child care within the overall context of the needs of their communities.

AFFORDABILITY

In order to have the lowest parent fees outside Quebec, ensure equity of fees across income groups, and streamline the approach to assessing parent fees, the Commission proposes revising the fee structure and assessing parent fees on a sliding scale according to income up to the revised maximum fee. This includes assess the feasibility of a sliding scale where families with median annual incomes pay **no more than 10%** of their income for child care, and that families below the median pay **less than 10% as well as** indexing fees to the cost of living. The subsidy program would be based on a sliding sale and the \$2/day based fee for subsidized families would be eliminated.

SUSTAINABILITY

The unit funding model provides an equitable approach to funding across age groups, but limitations with the current formula need to be addressed in order to ensure program sustainability and equity for staff. The Commission proposes amending the unit funding model to:

- Include a mandatory province-wide wage scale in the unit funding formula.
- Allow for flexibility in allocations for occupancy.
- Reflect the training levels of all staff in the funding formula.
- Fund all eligible non-profit centres.
- Where feasible, streamline additional grants and roll into unit funding.

QUALITY

PEDAGOGY

Recognizing that Aboriginal children comprise a significant proportion of Manitoba's population, and recognizing the importance of ensuring that diversity and inclusion are honoured in all ELCC programs, the Commission proposes that pedagogical guidelines be established to ensure that Aboriginal culture is reflected in all ELCC centres and that curriculum and other resources be identified for all ELCC programs to reflect Aboriginal culture.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANSION

The Commission proposes that the government work with CCEPAC and post-secondary institutions to design a program that allows for continuous study toward an ECE degree, where:

- the first 90 hours is applied toward a new one-year certificate
- the one-year certificate allows entry to the second year of a two-year diploma program; and
- two-year diploma graduates can move to advanced standing with a 4-year ECE degree program
- Phase out the Child Care Assistant level over five years (will not affect existing staff with this level).

The Commission proposes that the current requirement for an ECE credential for school age child care staff no longer be the only required credential. The Commission further proposes that a School Age Transition Team develop standards for qualifications for school age child care providers as employees of Manitoba school boards.

Moving Forward on Post-Secondary Early Childhood Education

The Commission proposes that:

- MELCC work with post-secondary ECE programs determine the potential for increased capacity
- Admission criteria to the accelerated Workplace Training Program for those with a post-secondary credential be reduced to one year of experience in ELCC
- Post-secondary ECE programs develop strategies to fast track CCAs with degree credentials in related fields of study.

Introduction of an ELCC Provincial Wage Scale

Recognizing the key role of qualified staff in determining the quality of an ELCC program and improved outcomes for children, and recognizing the impact of wages and benefits on recruitment and retention of staff, the Commission proposes that Manitoba introduce a provincial wage scale that considers the recommended wage levels as proposed by the MCCA Competitive Salary Guidelines, and is at parity with average wages for Education Assistants working in public schools with comparable qualifications and responsibility. This provincial wage scale would be indexed annually.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS / RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

A coordinated, responsive, well-planned and accountable ELCC system relies on good information about the size and scope of the system, its impact on the children and families it serves, the effectiveness and efficiency of investments in the system, areas for improvement, and plans for sustainability. The Commission proposes that:

- Government invest in a re-designed data management system for ELCC administrative data that allows for in-depth analysis
- Healthy Child Manitoba expand its current approaches to monitoring and measuring child outcomes to include children in licensed ELCC programs
- The Family Services department better monitor human resource trends of early childhood educators.