

Advisory Committee for Extended Day and Child Care Programs Report

**Thursday, December 3, 2020, 7:00 pm
Zoom Meeting**

Members: Lucas Malinowski (Parent Member), Laura Kelly (Parent Member), Terry Warner (Special Education Advisory Committee), Melanie Aqiqi (Parent Member), Kass Inglis (YMCA), Tanya Burger, Tammy Piche (OSSTF), Prince Duah, Julie Cyr (Manager of Early Learning), Susan Baker

Staff and Guests: Chris Ellis (Trustee), Blake Doucett (Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils), Nasrin Javanfar (Advisory Committee on Equity), Myriam Pepin (Children's Village), Orlie Gagline (REKSAP Centres for Early Learning).

1. Call to Order

Chair Malinowski called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m.

2. Welcome and Introduction

Following the introductions of the committee members, Chair Malinowski welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked the members to introduce themselves.

Chair Malinowski expressed his appreciation to Manager Cyr and her team for their work in preparing for the meeting. He noted that it has been a challenging time for the District since the effects of the coronavirus pandemic began last March, and the OCDSB has done a remarkable job adjusting to the new operating environment. He added that, despite all of the COVID-19 restrictions, the great programming of Extended Day Programs (EDP) and third-party child care organizations has continued

3. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Tanya Burger, seconded by Blake Doucett,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

4. Update from Prince Duah, Superintendent of Instruction

Superintendent Duah acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territory and thanked the Algonquin Nations for hosting the meeting on their land.

Superintendent Duah advised that prior to the COVID-19 shut down in March, there were approximately 5600 students enrolled in the Extended Day Program (EDP). During the closure, staff recognized the impact of job losses and the economy on access to child care. Families were reimbursed for any fees paid during the closure period.

While the EDP program was not operating, staff made a number of pedagogical enhancements to improve the program and better support students. Professional development (PD) activities were developed for EDP staff to undertake just prior to the program start-up in September 2020. A number of options for attending the EDP program were also developed to provide families with choices, depending on their circumstances.

Most of the children in EDP programs are in kindergarten and they have been the group most affected by the closure. Over 800 kindergarten students have not yet attended school. As of September 2020, 50 percent of the projected EDP enrolment of 5,600 children had not yet registered. At one point, enrolment was as low as 29 percent of projected enrollment.

Although actual enrollment was significantly less than projected, the District did not close any of its 66 programs, although one-morning program at one school was discontinued because there were no children enrolled in that program.

It is the policy of the District to have a minimum of two staff members at every site. Where numbers have declined, there could be as few as two staff members for one child enrolled in a program. Although this results in a program that is not operating as cost recovery, it does provide child care for families who are in need.

Superintendent Duah noted that the District is proud of what has been done to ensure safe and caring child care spaces for children. To date, there have been four cases of COVID-19 in our EDP programs. The Ministry's guidelines for the operation of EDP and school programs are separate and different. For example, the guidelines for communicating with parents where there has been a case of COVID-19 are different.

A few days ago, parents were advised that there was some room available in bricks and mortar schools and, as of the current date, approximately 50 families have requested that their child be placed in a school. Superintendent Duah noted that online learning is difficult for many young children and it is expected that attendance at bricks and mortar schools will continue to rise.

5. Extended Day and Infant, Toddler, Preschool Programs Update

5.1 Registration

Manager Cyr advised that the significant decline in registration and the high number of staff has impacted the viability of EDP programs. She noted that funding flows from the Ministry to the City of Ottawa and then to the District and is difficult to access in a timely manner. As a result, the program is operating at a deficit and will take some time to recover. It is hoped that enrolment will increase once a vaccine is available.

In response to a query from Trustee Ellis with respect to whether there are differences in enrolment in schools located in lower income areas; Manager Cyr advised that enrollment has been low across the District. She added that families who have applied to the City of Ottawa for subsidies have not experienced any delays in receiving approval, and there is no wait list for subsidies at the present time. Trustee Ellis noted that school districts are prohibited from providing subsidies to low-income families. Superintendent Duah added that enrollment in bricks and mortar schools in low income areas is approximately twice as high as in Kanata or Greely.

In response to a query from Chair Malinowski regarding funding flexibility, Manager Cyr noted that the District's EDP policy aligns with the Ministry guidelines. Third party child care operators have access to federal funding that was not available to school boards. The District has requested the Ministry to provide equivalent funding for expenses related to the closure and reopening of EDP programs. It is expected that an answer will be provided in early January 2021.

Manager Cyr noted that job security was an issue during the summer because collective agreements required staffing to be finalized before the end of May. Some reassignments due to enrollment fluctuations usually take place in September. Staffing for Early Learning Assistants (ELAs) was adjusted for declining numbers in October.

In response to a query from Terry Warner regarding class sizes in bricks and mortar schools, Superintendent Duah advised that kindergarten classes in low socioeconomic schools, also known as RAISE schools, are capped at 22 students, although new families are accommodated as they come into the catchment area. He added that the two-year kindergarten program is not mandatory, and children are not required to attend school until they reach grade one. We have an example of some families of students with special needs who initially chose not to register their kindergarten child and now the school has received requests from CHEO or Ottawa Public Health (OPH) to provide support for them in bricks and mortar schools. Late registrations have slowed down the process to provide supports for students with special needs.

5.2 Digibot: e-registration platform

Manager Cyr advised that the Early Learning Department has moved from a paper registration system to the online platform Digibot. Although it was challenging to implement the system due to changing dates for start-up, the transition is now almost complete. As well as decreasing the amount of paper used, staff is able to use the system to provide data for reports and communicate with other departments and families. Any family requiring assistance in accessing the Digibot platform to register their child or obtain receipts, are invited to come in for one-on-one instruction on a Chromebook.

5.3 Additional Program Supervisor

Manager Cyr advised that the Early Learning Department will hire an additional program supervisor in a term position due to an increase in the number of EDP programs and services. Program supervisors provide coaching and mentoring, training, and recommendations and strategies. They also resolve issues and obtain support for children with special needs. An additional supervisor will reduce the number of schools currently served by program supervisors.

5.4 Communication with Families

Manager Cyr advised that the Early Learning Department has implemented a regular communication process to keep families informed about the program. The department has also developed a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document to address commonly asked questions and reduce the time required to respond to emails.

5.5 Parent Handbook: 3 additional policies/procedures

Manager Cyr advised that the EDP Parent Handbook was reviewed and updated during the school closure period. She thanked the parents and third-party operators for their comments and suggestions to help make the handbook easier to understand. The following three additions were added to the Handbook:

- the policy on privacy is the same policy as the privacy policy for the OCDSB and the Infant, Toddler and Pre-school (ITP) program;
- the release of information and terms of registration are available only to the account holder. Where the parents are separated or divorced, two accounts may be created; however, the primary account holder depends on the parent that has custody of the child. Neither parent can access the other parent's account; and
- the safe arrival policy on page 11 of the Handbook was clarified with respect to the responsibilities of staff and parents of children attending the afternoon EDP program.

During discussion of the handbook, the following points were noted:

- The Handbook is posted on the District's website;
- Staff are working with the District's webmaster to update the website to allow for translation of the Handbook;
- Families who require assistance with the website or understanding the EDP program's policies, are provided with personal attention, either at the OCDSB administration offices or by telephone;
- The District's multicultural liaison officers (MLOs) assist with translation or explanation of procedures, if required, and liaise with communities in navigating the school system and setting up meetings;
- Nasrin Javanfar provided some examples of the needs of newcomers to Canada and suggested that the settlement workers at the York Region District School Board are a good example of how the District could assist new families settle and/or advocate for services. In addition to providing information about the school system, they also assisted families with other programs and services in the community;
- Superintendent Duah noted that the District is aware of this program and is seeking funding to provide additional service to RAISE schools in low socioeconomic areas. He added that community support workers can work with settlement workers to provide services and meet the needs of families, it works that way in Toronto.

6. Early Learning Department Updates

6.1 Lead Program Supervisor

Manager Cyr advised that the Early Learning Department is working on succession planning. An additional lead program supervisor position was approved last year, The additional staff in the department will strengthen the administrative foundation and build more connections with third parties, educators and families.

6.2 Website Updates

Manager Cyr reviewed the Early Learning Department web page which is available to staff through the staff portal. The web page provides information, training videos and handbooks for employees. Updates to the website are ongoing to build accessibility and encourage early childhood educators (ECEs) to collaborate and share resources.

Chair Malinowski queried whether third-party operators have access to the staff portal. Myriam Pepin noted that the Children's Village has their own resources for their staff. Manager Cyr added that she often shares information with third-party operators if she determines it would be helpful

to them. Superintendent Duah also noted that the Indigenous, Human Rights and Equity Roadmap is also shared with the public.

Manager Cyr noted that the Early Learning Department is working on a mission and vision statement which will be presented to this committee for their input at a future meeting.

7. Third Party Partner Updates

7.1 Reopening childcare

Manager Cyr advised that third-party operators were given seven days' notice from the Ministry to reopen. The challenges of reopening provided opportunities for staff and third-party operators to communicate and get to know one another.

Orlie Gagline expressed appreciation for the opportunities to collaborate and share resources.

7.2 Ministry and Public Health Operational Guide

Manager Cyr noted that the Ministry of Education provided guidelines for school board's before and after school programs, infant, toddler and preschool programs, as well as child care programs operated by third parties. While the different guidelines were frustrating for staff, operators and families, they have resulted in better communication with partners and families. The Ministry has recently updated the guidelines to bring them into better alignment with each other.

7.3 Meetings with Third Party Partners

Orlie Gagline noted that she has been working with the District for a long time and is very appreciative of the collaboration between staff and third-party operators, particularly over the past year with COVID-19 restrictions.

Superintendent Duah also expressed appreciation to staff and committee members for sharing their expertise about extended day and child care programs.

8. Building on How Does Learning Happen ? Pedagogical Approach to Reopening Early and Childcare Programs in Ontario

Manager Cyr advised that the document "Building on How Does Learning Happen" has been shared with third-party operators. She encouraged the committee members to read it and reflect on how system leaders, partners and educators can demonstrate that they value families as competent, capable and valuable partners.

Chair Malinowski added that information on how to improve discussions between parents and educators, particularly when parents are not able to come into schools and child care facilities due to covid restrictions.

Superintendent Duah recalled that, at a leadership meeting with aspiring leaders and parents, participants were asked how the District could better support children. Parents said that when they tell the staff that their child needs help, they need to be heard.

Orlie Gagline advised that third-party operators reach out to parents when they see a child with challenges. It is more difficult for parents to discuss their concerns when they are not able to enter the facility. Staff arranges to meet the parent outside of the building and to discuss what may be occurring in the home and what the child reports about their child care activities. She noted that her child care facility also uses the parent communication feature of the Digibot system to communicate.

Nasrin Javanfar noted that during her time working for the York Region District School Board, she found that newcomers often put their trust in the education system and do not challenge anything they might not agree with. Others may feel that the education system is not good enough and their children will end up in low paying labourer jobs. She noted the need for school boards to work with newcomers to educate them on the Canadian education system and how to communicate with schools and child care providers in order to break the cycle of poverty.

9. Next Meeting

9.1 January 27, 2020

The next meeting will take place on 27 January 2021.

10. Adjournment

Chair Malinowski wished everyone a safe and happy holiday. He noted that this is his last meeting as Chair.

The meeting adjourned at 9:04 pm.

Lucas Malinowski, Chair,
Advisory Committee for Extended
Day and Child Care Programs