



Early Childhood Education and Care A Position Statement

Public School is the only societal institution where children from diverse backgrounds gather for a common purpose - to become educated. The challenge for educators is to define what we believe about education in a manner that encompasses the values of a democratic society, respects the inherent uniqueness of the individual student, and at the same time provides equity of opportunity for all. (Toward Systemic Early Childhood Education & Care, MASS Ad Hoc Committee on Early Childhood Education, April 14, 2007)

The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) has taken note of a growing body of research that indicates that systemic Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs provide substantial long-term benefits for both individuals and societies.

Early Childhood Education and Care is increasingly being recognized as an area of concern for society as a whole. Although parents are clearly the child's first teachers, MASS believes that we have a responsibility to be partners in leading the development of systemic ECEC.

Research on Benefits of ECEC for Children

- The period between birth and age six is critical for language, cognitive, as well as social and emotional development (McCain and Mustard, 1999).
- Early development has a significant impact on mental and physical health later in life and the child's early years are critical to future academic and lifelong success (Health Canada, 2000).
- Children are ready for school when, for a period of several years, they have been exposed to: consistent, stable adults; a physical environment that is safe; regular routines of activity; competent peers; and materials that stimulate their explorations and joys of learning (Pianta & Walsh, 1996).
- A twelve-country review indicates that "children who receive high quality care and education in their early years show better cognitive and language abilities than those in lower quality arrangements" (OECD, 2001).
- If the first few years of life include support for growth in cognition, language, motor skills, adaptive skills and social-emotional functioning, the child is more likely to succeed in school and later contribute to society (Erickson & Kurz-Reimer, 1999).
- Research suggests that children in day care and other early childhood programs have a head start in school. By the time they get to kindergarten the children in programs have better communication, learning and math skills regardless of family income or their mother's education level (Carey, October 15, 1999). Some research has suggested that day care has negative consequences, but there is no definitive evidence confirming that children who are identified with difficulties experience these as a direct result of day care (Ahnert & Lamb 2004).

- In Manitoba the results of the Early Development Instrument, a readiness assessment administered by kindergarten teachers, show that since 2001 and continuing to the present, children who attended an “Organized Part-time Preschool” have achieved higher scores than children who did not attend preschool. This includes all assessed domains – Physical Health & Wellbeing, Social Competence, Emotional Maturity, Language & Cognitive Development, Communication Skills & General Knowledge. *This means that children in Manitoba who attended organized preschools were more ready for school than those who did not.*

Research on Benefits of ECEC for Society

In addition to benefits for individual children, good early childhood education has long-term societal benefits as well.

- High-quality early childhood education produces “long-term positive outcomes and cost-savings that include improved school performance, reduced special education placement, lower school dropout rates, and increased lifelong earning potential (The Business Roundtable/Corporate Voices for Working Families, May 2003).
- The longitudinal High/Scope Perry Preschool Study in Michigan showed that children who attended the preschool had significantly higher general achievement scores at 14 and literacy scores at age 17. A third more graduated from high school. Four times as many of the preschool group earned \$2000 or more a month. Three times as many owned their own homes (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2002).
- A longitudinal study of 22-year olds born in poverty showed that more who had attended Head Start graduated from high school, and only one third as many had been arrested for a crime (Oden, Schweinhart & Weikart, 2000).
- For every \$1 spent on child care there is a \$2 economic benefit. The benefit comes back through increased tax revenues and decreased social, education and health costs (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998).
- A higher percentage of young adults who participated in Chicago Child-Parent Center Programs completed high school and had a lower rate of ju-

venile arrests than those who did not. The program provided an economic return of \$7.10 per dollar invested (Reynolds, 2001).

Other Contributing Factors

- Family dimensions in Canada are changing rapidly. A growing percentage of women, many with young children, are in the workplace. In 1967 the ratio was one in six; by 2003 it had climbed to three in four (Friendly and Beach, 2005). Lone parent families with school-aged children increased by 35% from 1995 to 1999 where nearly 80% of women with school-aged children were in the labour force (The Progress of Canada’s Children, 2001).
- While preschool children have traditionally received care and education in their homes with parents, with relatives or in pay-for-service child care centres, an increasing percentage of children are receiving care outside the family home. In 2000-2001, 53% of preschool children (aged six months to five years) were in some form of daycare compared to 42% of children in 1994/95 (The Daily, 2005).

Changes Occurring as A Result of the Research

This greater understanding of the importance of the preschool years has led to an increasing integration of programs and services for preschoolers with programs and services for school-age children. In its 2004 report titled *Early Childhood Education and Care Policy* the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) indicates that a number of OECD countries, including Sweden, New Zealand, England, and Spain, have made substantial moves toward integrating systems. In Sweden, the reforms have included a uniform framework for training child care teachers, school teachers, and care providers.

In the 2006 study, *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care* research suggests a more unified approach to learning should be adopted in both the early childhood education and the primary school systems, and that attention should be given to transition challenges faced by young children as they enter school (OECD 2006). The study goes on

to discuss universal access and clarifies that this term does not necessarily mean full coverage due to the variation in demand for ECEC at different ages and in different family circumstances. It implies making access available to all children whose parents wish them to participate.

Canada's Progress toward Systemic ECEC

In Canada, different levels of government have responsibilities for ECEC. Social and educational programs are the responsibility of the provincial and territorial governments and, except for Prince Edward Island, they all treat care and education separately. Municipal governments and other local authorities are involved in ECEC at the discretion of the provincial governments. The federal government has responsibility for specific groups such as the Aboriginal people, military families and new immigrants and also administers maternity/paternity leave benefits and the National Child Benefit.

From the 1960's through to the mid-1990's, child care was characterized by cost sharing between the federal and provincial jurisdictions. When funds were forwarded to provinces as part of a block grant, the provinces began to use their funds differently from one another with the result that there is not a uniform system across the country.

The National Children's Agenda announced in 1998 made early childhood development a national political priority and in 2000 the Early Childhood Development Initiatives Agreement was reached with the provinces and territories, marking the renewal of a federal funding role in this area. The situation looked promising with the announcement in 2004 by the federal government of a proposal to create a national child care system. The new government elected in 2006 reduced funding and substituted the Universal Child Care Benefit. At this time, despite some localized progress in some of the provinces, the federal picture remains uneven and lacks cohesion.

The Council for Early Child Development (CECD), founded in 2004 by Dr. Fraser Mustard, is a leading national advocate for ECEC. Its vision is "community-based early child development and parenting centres linked to the school system and available to

all families and young children" (www.councilecd.ca). Its second report, *Early Years Study 2: Putting Science into Action*, describes the critical importance of the earliest years of life; identifies effective strategies for effective ECEC; and articulates the importance of ECEC in the development of a pluralistic, democratic society. This report clearly sets a definitive and healthy direction for ECEC in Canada.

Manitoba's Progress toward Systemic ECEC

In Manitoba the Community Child Care Standards Act of 1983 defined the types of child care settings that require licensing and ensured that early learning and child care provided in licensed centres and homes met proper standards. In 1994 the Manitoba government established the Children and Youth Secretariat and used consultations across the province to help shape the Manitoba ChildrenFirst Plan. The Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet was formed in 2000 and is made up of the Ministers responsible for Family Services and Housing, Health, Justice, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Status of Women, Education, Citizenship and Youth, Culture Heritage and Tourism, and Healthy Living. Also in 2000 the Early Childhood Development Advisory Committee was created to advise the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet.

The Educaring Committee: Strengthening Partnerships between Schools and Child Care has brought members of the community, school divisions, child care and others together in another forum. In 2001 twenty-six Parent-Child Coalitions were formed across Manitoba to bring together community strengths and resources through partnerships or coalitions of groups from different sectors. This approach promotes and supports community-based programs and activities for children and families. The same year saw the first implementation of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) in the Winnipeg School Division. Currently all school divisions in the province are using the EDI to provide information about the school readiness of Manitoba's children and the readiness of our schools for children. The information is being used to develop programs and services for preschool children by a variety of groups.

Since 2001 Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (MECY) has provided Early Childhood De-

velopment Initiative (ECDI) funding to school divisions to assist in their efforts to provide intersectoral services for pre-schoolers (birth to school age). ECDI, in partnership with Healthy Child Manitoba, is designed to facilitate pre-schoolers' readiness to learn prior to school entry.

Manitoba school divisions are heavily involved in financial and 'in kind' contributions to ECEC. In the Report from the Ad Hoc Committee for Early Childhood Education to the MASS Executive (December 2006), survey results showed that 24 of 37 school divisions (65%) responded to the survey with information about their involvement in ECEC initiatives and partnerships. The information showed that these school divisions recognize the value of Early Childhood Education, and are using grant funds as well as providing financial and *in kind* contributions to create a myriad of partnerships and opportunities for young children that include:

- Partnerships with local Parent/Child coalitions;
- Partnerships with regional Health Authorities;
- Limited support for nursery programs;
- Involvement in a variety of programs (Mother Goose, Play and Learn etc).

A Brief Review of Some Successful Programs and Partnerships in Manitoba

The MASS Survey of school division involvement in ECEC recorded a wide range of involvement by school divisions in both rural and urban settings. What follows are a few examples of partnerships and programs that involve services for children prior to their kindergarten year.

- Division scolaire franco-manitobaine has developed two position papers. The first of these presents a model of governance which has the school principal sitting on the board of nursery schools and child care centres which are located in schools (currently in 17 schools). The second provides for a range of activities offered at Centres de la petite enfance et de la famille (Early Childhood and Family Centres). These currently exist in two schools and will be set up in others.
- Frontier School Division operates Nursery (prekindergarten for 4-year-olds) in the major-

ity of its schools and in partnership with community organizations and federal agencies also runs programs for 3-year-olds, parent-child centres, lending libraries, activity nights and other events for families in some of its communities. Norway House has held a Toddler Talk conference for parents of young children for the past two years which is jointly supported by the school division and the band.

- River East Transcona School Division plays an active part in River East and Transcona Parent Child Coalitions. The chair of both coalitions is the Division's Manager of Community Initiatives. Many community programs are run jointly and are given 'in kind' support by the division.
- Seven Oaks School Division has a strong partnership with the Parent Child coalition and other agencies through the Neighbourhood Resource Network. This partnership provides pre-school programming in parent-child centres in all elementary schools. An early learning support teacher works with the community coordinator and early years' teachers in each school. Early Years in-services include coordinators and day care partners as well as teaching staff. A partnership with Public Health created the "Newborn Language Project" providing support to parents.
- Southwest Horizon School Division partners with several community groups including local nursery schools, child care centres, Public Health, the Promise Years and Parent-Child programs. Some of the joint ventures include Preschool wellness days, transition meetings, SLP, OT and PT therapy services. EDI data collected in the schools is shared with the partners and used to plan programming.
- Sunrise School Division has had school division staff on the board of the Bright Beginnings Parent Child Coalition since its beginning and continues to provide division support. The Division provides space for junior kindergarten programs funded by Wings of Power in Powerview and Pine Falls. They distribute a Pre-kindergarten kit of literacy and numeracy activities to families of 4 and 5 year olds.
- Winnipeg School Division provides Nursery (prekindergarten for 4-year-olds) in all of its

schools and has developed a guide for those programs called *Start with the Child*. They have included child care staff with school staff and parents in language facilitation projects for those living and working with 0-4 year olds. They use EDI data to advocate for resources and supports for in-school programs and for parents and preschooler programs.

While this is only a sampling of preschool activities associated with school divisions it gives an idea of the range of existing programs and partnerships.

Leaders and Supporters of Early Childhood Education and Care in Manitoba

MASS has clearly stated its support of early childhood education and care. The MASS Strategic Plan says that one of its objectives is “That there be strong support for early childhood education across the province.” Further, MASS intends to be involved in the sharing of effective program ideas and to participate in the dialogue on early childhood initiatives as steps toward supporting and strengthening early childhood education (<http://www.mass.mb.ca/pages/stratplan.htm>).

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (MECY) has shown its support for early childhood education in a number of ways including participating as a collaborating department in Healthy Child Manitoba and providing intersectoral leadership in the Early Childhood Development Initiative.

The Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST) has been actively engaged in the promotion of Early Childhood Education and Care investments and initiatives. Its policy statements acknowledge the critical importance of the early years in setting the stage for a child’s development, learning and success in later life and its federal and provincial budget submissions make repeated calls for greater government investment in the ECEC sector. MAST has worked closely with provincial government departments, community agencies and Manitoba’s child care sector to build stronger linkages and enhance collaboration among sectors and agencies involved in the delivery of ECEC services.

The Manitoba Teachers’ Society (MTS) supports ECEC and has participated in multi-organization discussions affecting the well-being of young children. In 2006 MTS passed a resolution which says that public school education should be available to all children in Manitoba who will be four by December 31st of their enrolment year and that the Society should lobby the Provincial Government to fund Nursery/Prekindergarten programs by the same formula as kindergarten programs are funded (Minutes of the 87th AGM of Provincial Council, MTS).

Planning for Good Quality Early Childhood Education and Care

Guiding Principles

MASS supports programs which promote the development of the whole child – physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication and general knowledge. MASS supports warm and nurturing programs based on sound knowledge of child development, the children in the program and the socio-cultural context of the children’s lives.

MASS believes that programming should be well-planned, available to all children, staffed by qualified professionals and accessible in terms of location and finances. MASS believes that links between child care and education should be strengthened and extended in order to ensure smooth and effective transitions for children and families. In practical terms this means that every child in Manitoba, whose parent wishes it, will have access to high quality integrated care and education.

In summary, MASS believes that systemic ECEC in Manitoba should have the following characteristics:

1. A high degree of equity and access while respecting cultural values and ensuring choice.
2. Practices that are grounded in a social pedagogic approach with a focus on the developmental social and emotional needs of children together with intellectual development.
3. Practices that are grounded in the work already being done by early childhood organizations and school systems that will have ‘made in Manitoba’ solutions with respect to governance and support structures.

Promoting the Vision: Recommended Actions

The Council for Early Child Development has articulated a Five Points Strategy that links research to community action and could be adopted to support this effort. CECD says:

- ◆ Harness the evidence on early child development
- ◆ Foster connections within and between communities
- ◆ Inform public policy on early child development
- ◆ Cultivate leaders who understand the significance of early child development
- ◆ Monitor results to promote evidence-based action

Five Point Strategy, CECD (2007).

MASS believes that there are many actions consistent with this strategy that are being taken and which can be built upon as the various partners in children's lives work together. MASS supports the following courses of action and resourcing necessarily done in concert with appropriate parties.

- Encourage intersectoral collaboration in all areas affecting young children. "Integrating early childhood services actually facilitates parent involvement by requiring professionals to speak to each other in a non-expert language that parents can relate to and understand" (McCain 2007).
- Support the development of provincial policies that support integrated early childhood programming.
- Make recommendations to update or change existing policies to facilitate integrated early childhood programming that presently inhibit or constrict the establishment of collaborative partnerships.
- Encourage reciprocal participation on Child Care Boards and local Parent Advisory Councils.
- Advocate for increased resources and help in planning to ensure resources for effective transitions between child care and schools.
- Work with the appropriate institutions to ensure the provision of effective professional learning opportunities for all staff working with young children.

- Examine the research to determine an effective curricular / pedagogic framework for ECEC that supports and is foundational to school-based curriculum. This framework should contribute to the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children as well as their later success in school. "Be informed about the science of early childhood development: share it, apply it, and act on it" (McCain 2007).
- Work with the various institutions to ensure that unused spaces in schools are used to accommodate preschool programs and before and after school care programs.
- Continue to support the primary role of parents/guardians in the education and care of children.

In the words of Fraser Mustard and his colleagues

"Early child development is a prime time investment opportunity for society providing greater returns than any other period of life. Investments need to be substantial and sustained to promote equal opportunity for optimal development for all children and produce the documented economic, health and social benefits."

(McCain, Mustard & Shanker 2007).

MASS supports this vision and calls on its partners to work together with MASS toward realizing a vision that will see that all children in Manitoba have full access to integrated and comprehensive early childhood education and care.

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The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) provides leadership for public education by advocating for the best interests of learners and supporting its members through professional services.

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