



MASS

MANITOBA ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

Early Childhood Education and Care

A Position Statement – 2015

Introduction

The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) published “Early Childhood Education and Care—A Position Paper” in 2007. In the document, MASS established its strong support for early childhood education, recognizing the positive impact of high quality programs on children’s growth and development. Since that time, the body of research continues to grow, further strengthening MASS’ position regarding the crucial role of education and programming in the early development of the child for the long-term benefits of both individuals and society.

The importance of early childhood education and programming is not in dispute. Current research is widely acknowledged and accepted, and there exists general consensus among stakeholders that an investment in the learning and development of young children is critical, not only for their individual growth, but for society in general. Economic benefits are also included in the societal reasons for having a strong early childhood program in place. “One of the commonly found benefits of intensive, high-quality ECE found in methodologically sound studies is that it increases the number of years spent in schooling, high school graduation rates, and likelihood of attending a four-year tertiary college” (ECE Taskforce, 2011).

The original position paper cited extensive research outlining the benefits of early childhood education and noted a number of international jurisdictions where effective early learning programming had been implemented resulting in positive impacts. A number of local initiatives were also recognized, both at the provincial level and in partnership with school divisions across the province. The paper indicated, however, that despite the recognized importance of early learning opportunities and initiatives that were in place, availability and access to programming were inconsistent across the province. In its endorsement of universal access to high quality education and programming for our children, MASS made a number of recommendations, calling for action and appropriate resourcing to be undertaken with their partners and other stakeholders.

Some progress has been made in Manitoba; however, much more needs to be done. The purpose of this paper is to reaffirm our commitment to early childhood education and programming, to re-establish our vision, and to propose a further call to action. MASS calls on all of us to engage in closing the gap between our beliefs and the current reality in Manitoba.

Current Situation

Since 2007, Manitoba has moved forward in its recognition of the significance of quality early childhood education and programming. In 2011, Manitoba Education established the Early Childhood Education Unit, with a mandate to provide support in creating connections between early childhood education and the formal K-12 system. Their goals are to increase children’s readiness for later academic and social learning and to support their success in the early years.

In 2013, *Starting Early, Starting Strong: Manitoba’s Early Childhood Development Framework* was published under the jurisdiction of 11 provincial ministries. The document recommends “investing early and wisely in early childhood to provide the best start for all our children and the best future for our province” (Manitoba Government, 2013).

As well, the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry Report, released in 2013, recognizes that early childhood education programs “can significantly benefit children and their parents” and that the “[p]re-school years offer the most significant opportunity to influence children’s capacity to learn throughout their lifetime.”(Manitoba Government, 2013, Recommendation 59)

The Public Schools Act mandates school divisions to provide educational programs and services to children between the ages of six and twenty-one. Provincial funding currently extends to support half-time kindergarten classrooms and, as of 2014-15, Manitoba Education has provided small dollar amounts through the Early Childhood Development Initiative grant that can now be allocated to nursery programs. School divisions throughout the province have expanded programming beyond their mandate to address the needs of their preschool learners by providing or supporting a variety of early learning opportunities beyond kindergarten, such as nursery school, junior kindergarten, child care facilities, family centres, and community programming in their schools. Programs are offered at the discretion of the school division and vary widely both among the schools within divisions and among the divisions themselves.

Divisions across Manitoba provide many early learning opportunities. A few examples are:

- “Junior” kindergarten for four year olds;
- Full-day, everyday kindergarten and nursery programming;
- Parent-child community centres in rural schools for children from infancy to age four;
- Nursery programs in every elementary school.

Challenges

Despite our common understanding of the importance of early childhood learning opportunities, and despite having moved forward in some domains since the publication of MASS’ first paper, there remains a huge disparity in equitable access to education and

programming opportunities in Manitoba. Some of the current inequities and challenges faced by Manitoban families are as follows:

- Access to quality child care, including a lack of spaces and affordability for many families and wait lists;
- Disparity of services (health, social and educational) across our province, in northern, rural, and urban communities;
- Low family income, limiting participation in, or access to, early childhood programming.

There are systemic challenges and inequities across the province impacting early childhood education and programming that must be addressed:

- Alignment of mandates and goals of the provincial jurisdictions concerned with early childhood education (developmentally appropriate practice) and care;
- Availability and consistency of programming within communities;
- Culturally appropriate programs;
- Financial inequities across provincial regions and communities;
- Guidelines and regulations for school divisions regarding preschool programming.

The impact of these inequities is profound. The TD Economics Special Report, “Early Childhood Education Has Widespread and Long Lasting Benefits” (2012), states that “economic, social, and health outcomes are better for children who were exposed to early education Studies show that children who enter kindergarten with a higher skill set generally experience fewer grade repetitions, on time graduation, lower dropout rates and higher post-secondary attendance than those that enter with vulnerabilities.” Further, there were indications of “fewer instances of drug and alcohol use, smoking, teen pregnancies, and criminal behavior.” The report

concludes that “the benefits of early childhood education far outweigh the costs.”

The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP), in its summary report “The Health of Manitoba’s Children” (2012), corroborates the findings of the TD paper, noting that children who were considered vulnerable in kindergarten, as determined by the Early Development Instrument, measuring school readiness, were less likely to meet the Grade 3 expectations in reading and numeracy. Further, the MCHP report states, “It seems that the likelihood of positive and negative outcomes is indeed set early in life,” and that children who are vulnerable tend towards a negative outcome. The report also found the “the burden of poor outcomes ... is not spread evenly throughout the population. In almost every case ... those living in the poorest areas are shouldering the burden disproportionately.”

MASS is calling on stakeholders and partners to take action to close the gap between our knowledge and beliefs and the current reality for many of our children.

Vision

MASS believes it is imperative that stakeholders and partners take action, committing to its vision of high quality, systemic early childhood education and programming that is equitable and accessible for all Manitoba children and their families. We envision:

- That the social, physical, intellectual, cultural, and emotional needs of all Manitoba children are met;
- That parents are recognized as children’s first teachers, and that resources are available to support raising healthy, well nourished, and educated children;
- That learning opportunities reflect local context, cultural values, and parental choice;
- That early childhood education and programming is collaboratively approached, planned, and conducted in partnership with all provincial stakeholders;

- That programming is deliberate and provides developmentally appropriate learning opportunities;
- That practitioners are well trained, knowledgeable and responsive.

Call to Action/Recommendations

MASS endorses the following actions to lead us, with our partners, to further the agenda of quality early childhood education and programming in our province, and to move us towards equitable access for all children and their families. We recommend:

- That the provincial government confirm early childhood education and learning as a provincial priority and that policies are developed and enacted, ensuring all children the right to quality early learning programs and opportunities;
- That the provincial government fund preschool programming providing availability and equity across the province;
- That service centres or “hubs” be established in every community, where children and families can access health, social and education services (e.g. universal screening, access to diagnostic preschool services, parental supports, etc.);
- That Healthy Child Manitoba educate the public about the importance of early childhood learning and development;
- That sufficient programs are available to train and certify all early childhood practitioners in the province;
- That the importance of early childhood development and learning be emphasized at faculties of education;
- That collaboration occurs between early childhood educators and school personnel supporting early learning;
- That educational organizations (e.g. MASS, MSBA,

MASBO, SSAAM and MTS/COSL) cultivate leaders who understand the significance of early childhood development and its impact on student learning and success.

Conclusion

The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, in its report, concludes, "...change is possible. So long as there exists the right policies and programs, delivered to the right groups of children, at the right time" (Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, 2013).

MASS believes that we, with our partners, have a responsibility to lead in the development of systemic and equitable early childhood education and care opportunities. MASS supports the vision put forth in this paper and, once again, calls on its partners to work together with MASS toward realizing a vision that will see all Manitoban children able to fully access integrated and comprehensive early childhood education and care.

Bibliography

Baldacchino, Anna, Ray Doiron, Martha Gabriel, Alaina Roach O'Keefe, Jessica McKenna. (2015). "From Child-Minders to Professionals: Insights from an Action Research Project on Prince Edward Island." *Canadian Children*, vol. 40(1). Canadian Association for Young Children.

Barnett, Steven, Kwanghee Jung, Min-Jong Youn, and Ellen Frede. (2013). *Apples: Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study: Fifth Grade Follow-Up*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Clinton, Jean. (2013). "The Power of Positive Adult Child Relationships: Connection is the Key." McMaster University. Retrieved from www.edu.gov.on.ca/child-care/Clinton.pdf

Council of Ministers of Education Canada. (2012). "SMEC Statement on Play-Based Learning." Retrieved from <http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/282/>

[play-based-learning_statement_EN.pdf](#)

ECE Taskforce. (2011). "Cost Benefit Analysis in Early Childhood Education." April, vol. 2(12).

Guilfoyle, Christy. (2013). "For College and Career Success, Start with Preschool." *An Information Brief from ASCD: Policy Priorities*. Winter, vol. 19(4), pp. 1-7.

Manitoba Centre for Health Policy. (2012). "The Health of Manitoba's Children."

Manitoba Centre for Health Policy. (2013). "Manitoba Centre for Health Policy Summary Report." Retrieved from <http://mchp-appserv.cpe.umanitoba.ca/deliverablesList.html>.

Manitoba Government. Public Schools Act. Retrieved from http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/p250_2e.php.

Manitoba Government. (2013). *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children*. Ted Hughes (Hon), Commissioner. Retrieved from <http://phoenixsinclairinquiry.ca/>

Manitoba Government. (2013). *Starting Early, Starting Strong: Manitoba's Early Childhood Development Framework*. Healthy Child Manitoba.

Manitoba Government. (2015). *Starting Early, Starting Strong: A Guide for Play-Based Early Learning in Manitoba—Birth to Six*. Healthy Child Manitoba.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2007). *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario's Early Childhood Settings*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/oelf/continuum/continuum.pdf>

Mustard, Fraser and Pippa Rowelliffe. (2009). "The Long Reach of Early Childhood." SECD: Science of Early Child Development.

TD Economics. (2012). "Early Childhood Education Has Widespread and Long Lasting Benefits."