



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	July 12, 2017
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Hamilton Early Years Quality Program (CES17032) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:

Not applicable

Information:

Background

The Early Years community in Hamilton has had a strong historical commitment to continuous quality improvement in early learning and child care programs and has been seen as quality leaders across the province. In 2002, the community initiative, "Raising the Bar" was launched by Affiliated Services for Children and Youth (ASCY), the professional resource centre, to support Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in their continuous commitment to excellence. This initiative provided a framework for best practices, to guide child care operators in delivering high quality services for children and families. Over time, Raising the Bar was adapted for a variety of other early years settings, such as Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) and licensed home child care. It was also adopted by several other communities across the province.

In 2015, the City of Hamilton, identified a need to develop a new early years quality program that focuses on continuous quality improvement and would build on the previous success of the Raising the Bar initiative. While Raising the Bar will continue to provide a number of useful tools and resources, it was recognized that a new quality program was needed to better align with changing local and provincial directions, priorities, and best practices, as well as the City's expanded roles and responsibilities within the Early Years sector.

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OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

In late 2015, the City of Hamilton, in partnership with ASCY and the Region of Waterloo, began a research project to examine best practices in quality improvement in early years settings. As a result of this research project, the City of Hamilton launched a new Hamilton Early Years Quality Program in February 2017

Overview of the Hamilton Early Years Quality Program

The Hamilton Early Years Quality Program is a process to guide continuous quality improvement for organizations providing early years programs through funding agreements with the City of Hamilton. The purpose of the program is to raise the level of quality in all early years programs by collectively making Hamilton the best place to raise a child and the best place to be a child and by cultivating high quality early years programs and services where children, families, and educators are viewed as capable and competent.

The program consists of:

- A Hamilton Early Years Quality Program Guide (attached as Appendix A to Report CES17032) which provides a framework for quality and outlines our collective commitment, vision and goals for early years programs in Hamilton.
- A Hamilton Early Years Quality Program, System Priority Template which is used by early year's organizations to document their quality goals and achievements. It is completed annually by operators and submitted to city staff.
- A Hamilton Early Years Quality Program Toolkit, which provides a number of resources and tools to support operators and educators in identifying and achieving their quality goals.

The program is enhanced and supported through access to professional learning, consultation and other community resources.

Participation in the new quality program is mandatory for all licensed child care operators that currently have a funding agreement with the City of Hamilton. Child care operators will be supported throughout the process through a number of mechanisms such as:

- Annual visits with city staff;
- Follow-up site visits with city staff as required;
- Systems priority funding to achieve quality goals; and,
- Mentoring, professional learning and consultation provided by ASCY's Professional Learning Consultant staff.

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The new quality program builds on the strengths and assets of early years providers and aligns with the Ministry of Education's *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*, Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan, 2016-2020, the Hamilton Parent Charter of Rights, and Hamilton's Charter of Rights of Children and Youth.

The new quality program has been designed to be flexible and responsive to emerging priorities and recognizes that each Early Years organization has different strengths and areas for improvement. The quality program builds on a reflective model that allows individual operators and their staff to identify and set their own organizational goals within a prescribed framework. The program is also designed to enhance and strengthen the relationships between City staff, Early Years organizations, and ASCY. Based on the feedback that has been received from operators to-date, it is felt that this reflective, flexible and relationship-focused approach is one of the greatest strengths of the new quality program.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Hamilton Early Years Quality Program was informed by feedback and research from a number of key stakeholders and quality experts, both locally and provincially. The stakeholder engagement process included:

- Key informant interviews with 14 quality champions;
- Jurisdictional scan of quality initiatives in 13 other municipalities; and,
- Focus groups and feedback sessions with a variety of local early years tables and organizations.

In addition, a pilot project involving 12 early years and child care operators was launched in the fall of 2016. This pilot group had the opportunity to utilize the draft tools and documents in advance of the launch. Their feedback and input during the pilot helped to shape the final documents. The pilot participants are now acting as local quality champions with their peers across the community.

On February 22-23, 2017, the City of Hamilton hosted three community information sessions with the majority of child care operators to introduce and launch the new quality program. Additional workshops were offered on March 2, 2017 for those operators that wanted to review and practice using the new template in a hands-on computer lab environment.

Next Steps

City staff are currently in the process of reviewing the Hamilton Early Years Quality Program, System Priority Templates which were submitted by all child care operators

that have a funding agreement with the City of Hamilton. Staff are also in the process of scheduling meetings with all child care operators to discuss their quality goals and collectively develop an implementation plan to support the achievement of their quality goals.

The City remains committed to working in partnership with child care and early years organizations, the Ministry of Education, and ASCY to continually improve the quality of the programs and services that are provided to children and families.

An evaluation of the new Hamilton Early Years Quality Program will be undertaken in January 2018 with an expected completion date of late March 2018. Results of the evaluation will be shared with ECS committee in the third quarter of 2018.

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