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MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
Provincial Associations
Executive Directors of Preschool Speech and Language, Infant
Development, Infant Hearing, Blind-Low Vision
Executive Directors of Special Needs Resourcing Programs
Executive Directors of Children's Mental Health Agencies
CEOs of Community Care Access Centres
Executive Directors of Children's Treatment Centres
Executive Directors of Regional Autism Service Providers
Consolidated Municipal Services Managers
District Social Services Administration Boards
First Nations Child Care Administrators

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SUBJECT: Services for Students with Special Needs / Special Education
Needs and the Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program
(FDK) in Year 2 (2011-12)

Full-day kindergarten (FDK) for our youngest students continues to be a key part of the government's plan to strengthen education in Ontario. FDK, which will be fully implemented by September 2014, is a key step in the government's plan to help Ontario's children get the best possible start and has both short- and long-term economic benefits. A full day of learning early in life makes the transition to Grade 1 easier for both parents and children. As well, students who achieve early success in school are more likely to perform well later in school and go on to post-secondary education.

The new program promotes the physical, social, emotional, communication and cognitive development of all children and builds on the existing Kindergarten Program (2006), incorporating the major elements of *Early Learning for Every Child Today*, the advice of the report of Dr. Pascal in *Every Child Every Opportunity*, and other learning programs and frameworks. *The Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten Program* document combines *The Kindergarten Program (2006)*, *Early Learning for Every Child Today*, and *Every Child Every Opportunity* and will remain in draft until 2012.

The Ontario government is also bringing child care and education together under one ministry to create a more integrated support system for families and young children. Stronger connections between child care and education will mean better services, resources and supports for families and young children. The transfer of child care to the Ministry of Education is being phased in over time in order to ensure a smooth transition.

UPDATE ON YEAR 1 OF FDK IMPLEMENTATION (2010-11) AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS/ SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

More than 35,000 four- and five-year-olds, comprising 15 per cent of the total kindergarten population, participated in the first phase of FDK implementation during the 2010-11 school year. FDK has been implemented in more than 1,400 classes in approximately 600 schools. During the core instructional day, FDK classes are staffed by a teacher and an Early Childhood Educator (ECE), who work together as a team.

Over the course of Year 1 FDK implementation, parents / guardians, local community service agencies, and school boards have been working collaboratively to support four- and five-year old children with special needs / special education needs to access, transition to and participate in FDK classes and before-/after-school programs.

The Ministries of Education (EDU), Children and Youth Services (MCYS), and Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) continue to work closely to support children with special needs/ special education needs to participate in FDK. Last year, EDU established a *Special Needs / Special Education Needs Reference* group, comprised of external stakeholders and representatives from across the three ministries, to provide advice to government based on feedback from the community, on supporting students with special needs / special education needs to participate fully in FDK.

FDK EVALUATION

Program evaluation is embedded in the FDK and is currently underway. The goals of the FDK evaluation are:

- to identify early indicators of effective practices related to the impact of the FDK; and,
- to gain knowledge from the first phase of implementation of FDK, to inform program delivery moving forward through to full implementation.

The Social Program Evaluation Group at Queen's University is providing leadership to the evaluation. The *Special Needs / Special Education Needs Reference* group and others have provided input to inform the evaluation. The evaluation is taking place during the first two years of FDK implementation (2010-11 and 2011-12), utilizing quantitative and qualitative measures, and offering case studies of the lived experiences for students, parents, educators, and community partners.

The evaluation engages representatives from a diverse population of children, parents, educators, and communities. School sites for this evaluation have been selected from across EDU's six regions and will represent English- and French-language schools, public and catholic schools, and subpopulations of students (i.e., Aboriginal students, students with special needs / special education needs, students whose first language is not English, and students from high-needs communities). Community agencies which support and transition children to these schools are also involved in the evaluation process.

The results of the evaluation will inform future direction of FDK for all kindergarten students, including those with special needs / special education needs.

DIRECTION FOR YEAR 2 OF FDK IMPLEMENTATION

Year 2 of FDK implementation will involve 800 schools with approximately 50,000 four- and five-year olds, including students with special needs / special education needs.

While FDK implementation is being phased in, the government is supporting other initiatives to improve outcomes for young children / students and their families. For example, through the public consultations on Ontario Best Start Child and Family Centres and the recent review of School Health Support Services, concerns were raised about how speech and language services are currently provided. Supported by the ministries of Children and Youth Services, Education and Health and Long-Term Care, up to eight demonstration sites will implement integrated speech and language services for children from birth through Grade 3 (at a minimum) from the fall of 2011 to August 2012. An external evaluation of these demonstration sites will inform future provincial improvements to speech and language services.

Additionally, Ontario released:

- an update on Ontario Best Start Child and Family Centres on June 21, 2011. The update is available on the Ministry of Children and Youth Services website: www.ontario.ca/beststart and outlines upcoming ministry activities as part of a broader strategy for an integrated child and family system. These key activities include the work on integrating speech and language services, engaging in community action research to learn from promising community-level practices towards integration and developing an Outcomes Index to measure broader, community and system-level outcomes.
- a new Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy which focuses on children and youth in the first three years. Support for kids target three key areas: fast access to high-quality services, early identification and support, and helping vulnerable kids with unique needs. Ontario's investments will start this year and total \$257 million over the next three years.

While these new initiatives are underway and the evaluation of FDK is ongoing, it is expected that school boards and community service providers will continue to work together with families to provide stability and continuity of service for students who enrol in Year 2 FDK for the upcoming 2011-12 school year. Enrolment in FDK does not affect the eligibility for and receipt of services; students will continue to receive services within current program and eligibility criteria. Pursuant to the *Education Act*, school boards have the legal responsibility to provide special education programs and services that are appropriate to meet the needs of students with special education needs, so they may participate in FDK.

The Guiding Principles for the provision of services / supports for students with special needs / special education needs in FDK released in advance of Year 1 of FDK implementation (see Attachment 1) will continue to be used to support local solutions for the delivery of services / supports.

Our ministries will continue to work closely with families and professionals from the education, health, child care, children's services, and municipal sectors as we move forward to support the implementation of FDK and the various initiatives underway related to children with special needs / special education needs. For your reference, please find attached in Attachment 2 a list of resources relating to FDK and supporting students with special needs / special education needs.

We would like to thank you for the work you have done over the past year to support the implementation of FDK. Your collaborative, flexible and child-centred approach to supporting students with special needs / special education needs and their families as they transition to and participate in FDK is appreciated.

Jim Grieve Grant Clarke Darryl Sturtevant Aryeh Gitterman Vasanthi Srinivasan

c: Local Health Integration Networks
MCYS Regional Offices
EDU Regional Offices

ATTACHMENT 1

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS / SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

Guiding Principles

Introduction

The shared goal of the ministries of Education, Children and Youth Services, and Health and Long-Term Care is to ensure that students and their families get the support they need to fully participate in the FDK.

Parents/guardians, school/school board personnel, and relevant community service agencies will need to continue to work together and, as partners, to identify existing effective practices based on the guiding principles and within existing policies, to support local implementation, in the following areas:

1. **Who** will provide services;
2. **How** services will be delivered (model);
3. **When** services will be delivered; and
4. **Where** services will be delivered.

Guiding Principles

1. Transition planning supports the participation of students in the FDK, including smooth transition and delivery of services for students with special needs / special education needs who enrol in the FDK. Transition planning should:
 - a. take place for students with special needs / special education needs and include students who are already receiving services within their community or who are on a waitlist to receive services within their community;
 - b. occur early; and
 - c. be coordinated by a designated individual.
2. Collaboration among parents/guardians, school / school board personnel, and relevant community service agencies facilitates the provision of services to the students with special needs / special education needs and minimizes potential barriers to service delivery.
 - a. Parents/guardians and relevant community service agencies should be invited by school / school board personnel to participate in transition and service planning.
 - b. Collaboration should focus on the individual needs of students and supporting seamless service delivery.
3. Decisions regarding service delivery consider the best interests of the student and the family in areas such as:
 - a. Continuity of service;
 - b. Expedient service;
 - c. Optimizing outcomes;
 - d. Supporting the child's participation in the FDK; and
 - e. Supporting the continuum of special needs / special education needs.

4. Ongoing review of the services provided focuses on meeting the needs of the student. This review:

- a. involves the family and all relevant partners;
- b. includes both formal and informal communication; and
- c. takes place throughout the school year.

As with all students, the school principal (team leader) is responsible for the special education programs and services students receive in the school. The principal is also responsible for sharing these guiding principles with all partners and for encouraging all relevant individuals to work within them.

ATTACHMENT 2

RESOURCES:

Joint memorandum from the ministries of Education, Children and Youth Services, and Health and Long-Term Care: *Services for Students with Special Needs / Special Education Needs and the Early Learning Program in Year One, 2010-11*

- http://cal2.edu.gov.on.ca/may2010/JointADMs_Memo%20ELP_May2010%20eng.pdf

Full-Day Early Learning - Kindergarten Program (Draft)

- http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/kindergarten_english_june3.pdf

The Extended-Day Program - Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program (draft)

- <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/kindergarten.html>

Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program for Four- and Five-Year-Olds: A Reference Guide for Educators

- <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/kinder2010.pdf>

Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings

- http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/topics/earlychildhood/early_learning_for_every_child_today.pdf

Planning Entry to School: A Resource Guide (2005)

- <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/planningentry.html>

For additional information please see:

Ministry of Children and Youth Services: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/>

Ministry of Education: Special Education: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/speced.html>

Ministry of Education: Full Day Kindergarten: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/kindergarten/>

Ministry of Education: Child Care: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/>

Ministry of Health and Long Term Care: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/>