



August 2009

French Language Services & Child Care Providers

Background

Since the transfer of child care programming to this Board, there have been numerous attempts to encourage and support French language child care centres. Despite the presence of significant numbers of French speaking parents and children in various areas within the jurisdiction, centres which were established either did not attract sufficient numbers to remain viable or closed after operating for a period of time. Presently French language child care is available in Espanola and Chapleau.

The issue viability of French language child care was recognized in the Strategic Plan. The need to identify the barriers to the creation of French language child was recognized as a first step in addressing the problem. Through barrier identification and reduction, it was hoped that the availability of this service would be improved. The following represents the efforts of DSSAB Child Care staff to ascertain from the Providers the challenges associated with creating French language child care spaces. They have also set out the efforts of the DSSAB staff to reduce those challenges.

Essentially, all of the challenges which face Providers in the creation of viable sustainable Child Care programs exist to a greater degree when the language of care is French. Existing sectoral problems related to funding, staffing and resources are more extreme when the goal is to create these spaces. Real progress may only come with the basic restructuring of all of child care as envisioned in the report recently created by Charles Pascal, the Special Advisor to the Premier.

See: <http://www.msdsb.net/ADMIN/Correspondence/CS-Pascale-Report---With-Our-Best-Future-in-Mind.pdf>

Barrier Identification

Child Care Providers were interviewed to determine what the challenges were related to establishing and maintaining French Language child care.

- Challenges expressed in establishing French language child care
 1. The attraction of qualified staff in remote rural areas

It has been very difficult to attract qualified Early Childhood Educators in very remote rural areas. In some regions, it has made it impossible to find a

provider to establish a French language program, as it is the case presently in Noëlville.

In the Noëlville case, as a solution, the Children's Program Supervisor is working very closely with the French School board, *Conseil Catholique du Nouvel Ontario*, in trying to secure a Provider to operate a French Language Child Care in the area for September 2009.

- Challenges expressed in maintaining French Language child care
 1. An evident lack of qualified French speaking staff

According to the Service Providers it was very apparent that the biggest issue is the lack of qualified French speaking staff and lack of French speaking staff in lieu of those with qualifications (otherwise approved; untrained).

2. Better salaries and benefits in other sectors

The workforce shortages in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector could be linked to the fact that many new graduates choose to use their ECE training as a "stepping stone" to a career in a higher paying, more competitive sector (i.e. education)

With the creation of the ECE College, which now recognizes ECE as a profession and acknowledges that Early Childhood Educators can regulate themselves as a professional body, this will eventually create a positive perception of ECEs as a valuable and viable career option.

3. Lack of French language resources

Having to purchase French Language resources can be very disadvantageous for Providers. These resources are very limited and often the materials available have been translated thus making them more expensive.

It was also noted that there are little or no training opportunities offered in French to enhance Early Childhood Educators to better their programming skills. The Children's Program Supervisor is constantly seeking training opportunities in French or programs that can be adapted to French Language programs.

In a positive note, Children's Program Supervisor and Financial Assistant acting solely on behalf of their service Providers and not on behalf of any suppliers organised a group discount on all merchandise and on shipping and handling for all orders placed with two different French catalogue suppliers.

4. Affordable Parent fees

Due to some of the extra programming expenses attached to a French language child care mentioned in the previous paragraph, French child care services becomes more expensive and less affordable for full fee paying parents. Having fewer children attending the child care centre will result in fewer parent fees which will affect the viability of the program.

As a marketing effort, flyers and letters were sent to all the Providers and the schools informing the community of the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSSAB child fee subsidy. Parents are encouraged to go visit the DSSAB's website and click on Children's Services and fill-in the Quick Income Test to see if they qualify for child fee subsidy.

Summary

Board staff continues to work with Providers to create and maintain French language child care spaces. The long term solution however is a restructuring of the child care programming to ensure viability for services in both official languages.