Social Services

District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services
Administration Board
Conseil d'Administration des Services du District Sault Ste. Marie
Zhawenimi-Anokiitaagewin

Child Care Operational Plan

Fall 2016

Table of Contents   Page

Introduction and Overview

The Ministry of Education has been modernizing child care over the past four years. This has resulted in significant legislative, policy and budgetary changes that impact the District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (DSSMSSAB) and providers in the service area. Throughout this period, the provincial changes have significantly challenged the community and as a result, the DSSMSSAB has been focused on effectively managing these changes, including the development and ongoing review of a new Funding Model. The DSSMSSAB was seeking to review its services and delivery model and update its vision with a new strategic plan and, consequently, the DSSMSSAB - Community Child Care Division retained the services of external consultants to conduct an environmental scan, analyze the results and, working with the board and senior management, develop a Strategic Child Care/Early Years Service Plan. This plan, which was developed following extensive consultations with a range of key stakeholders (*see Appendix B, Environmental Scan*), will support the realization of the DSSMSSAB's vision for community childcare.

Vision

A childcare system that is the highest quality system in the province, at all levels.

Key Themes

A number of key themes emerged during the consultation process. These include:

- The importance and value of dedicated Registered Early Childhood Educators as a core strength of the system.

- A broad endorsement of the DSSMSSAB's vision – a childcare system that is the highest quality system in the province, at all levels – and agreement on the importance of standardized quality and quality assurance.

- The need for improved communications, within the childcare sector and with other sectors, including parents and the general public.

- The need for more collaboration across the system, and support for this collaboration to occur. Identified opportunities for collaborative work include quality and quality assurance, information sharing, sharing of resources, programming and program development, and working collectively on policies and procedures.

- The importance of collaboration across sectors, including the idea of collaborating to establish a mobile early learning hub.

- Recognition of the challenges presented by the large number of small childcare centres in the system, and support for the idea of establishing some type of cooperative or consolidating some of the centres. Benefits would include economies of scale for administrative responsibilities and would likely also include improved recruitment and retention of staff, skills training and support, information flow, succession planning and governance capacity.

- The need for more opportunities for professional development (PD) training, especially involving interactive learning. Incentives or recognition for PD training would also be helpful.

- The need for a recruitment and retention strategy for Registered Early Childhood Educators in the City.

Goals, Objectives and Activities

Quality and Quality Assurance

Quality is the overarching umbrella above and the safety net beneath this plan. Every goal, objective and activity relates to quality, and quality assurance will inform the directions taken and assess progress ongoing.

Key Activities:
- Incorporate an ongoing review and assessment of this childcare plan into the work of the Quality Assurance Committee.
- Hire a QA Coordinator to support the work.

Goal 1: Implement a system-level plan to improve capacity and efficiency through opportunities for integration.

Objectives:

- Improved economies of scale, providing more resources for administrative functions (e.g. hiring a person specifically to do finance-related work) and potentially more resources to enhance staff access to technology and for PD training.
- Improved recruitment and retention of staff (better wages and more equity of wages across the system, fewer part-time jobs and split shifts, a larger pool of supply staff, more staff able to cover each other for prep time).
- Improved capacity for supervisor and staff skills training and support.
- Improved information flow and consistency of messaging.
- Better succession planning, including mentoring and learning plans to build leaders and leadership capacity in the community.
- Improved governance (establishment of one skilled and knowledgeable board of directors).
- Improved capacity for system planning and collaborative work (e.g. fewer centres for collateral agencies to interface with).

Key Activities:

- Have the Service System Manager engage with the Executive Directors and Supervisors of the smaller centres in the fall of 2016 to initiate conversations about integration.
- If feasible, develop and implement a plan for integration.

Goal 2: Build opportunities for collaboration within the childcare system

Objectives:

- Improved opportunities for knowledge sharing, professional practice, program policy development, and pedagogical leadership.

Key Activities:

- Implement an Early Years/Childcare Service System Table with regular ongoing meetings (at least three times annually) comprised initially of childcare centre Executive Directors or their equivalents.

- Hold the system table members accountable through bilateral agreements to develop opportunities for collaboration and to ensure that everyone can participate in collaborative work (e.g. in the Algoma Supervisor's Network meetings).
- Explore opportunities for the system table to work with other stakeholder partners on collaborative initiatives.
- Make the table responsible for enhancing program and system resources, i.e. developing an easily accessible clearinghouse or repository of resources, and for overseeing the development of recruitment and retention and communications strategies (see *Appendix A, Draft Terms of Reference*).

Goal 3: Develop and implement a structure and plan for cross-sectoral collaboration and service delivery

Objectives:
- Maximize available services and supports by sharing resources.
- Build capacity for inter-professional collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- Improve seamlessness of services.
- Improve accessibility of services by bringing them to families.

Key Activities:
- Set up a working group of cross-sectoral partners (either the Algoma Leadership Table or a sub-committee of it).
- Have the table explore, develop and implement a collaborative strategy to provide a range of accessible early learning services to children and families (i.e. via a mobile hub), working with the Early Years/Childcare System Management Table.

Note: This goal, objectives and activities are consistent with the Ministry of Education's direction around Early Years Child and Family Centres, the premier's strategy on community hubs, and the poverty reduction strategy. They also eliminate transportation barriers for families, which are typically an issue.

Goal 4: Develop and implement a recruitment and retention strategy for RECEs

Objective:
- Improve the recruitment and retention of RECEs in Sault Ste. Marie.

Key Activities:

- Include this as a component of the work of the new Early Years/Child Care System Management Table, through a recruitment/retention committee.
- Develop TOR for the committee which include the following tasks: reviewing identified opportunities to improve recruitment and retention (as identified in this report); identifying existing successes that could be built on; reviewing provincial work on the issue and other available data; and reaching out to and including other partners in the development and implementation of the strategy.

Goal 5:   Develop and implement a communications strategy about the Childcare System

Objectives:

- Improve public knowledge about quality childcare, how to access it and how the system works (cost structure, wait lists, etc.).

Key Activities:

- Upload more information about quality childcare on to the new DSSMSSAB website.
- Make the marketing of quality, licensed childcare one of the responsibilities of the new system management table, informed by the QA Framework.
- Ensure that individual centres are accountable to keep their information current.

Goal 6:   Build capacity for professional development training

Objectives:

- Improve access to quality professional development training within the childcare system.
- Create opportunities for cross-sectoral training.

\Key Activities:

- Modify the Terms of Reference of the QA committee to include a mandate for cross-sectoral PD training and expand membership as required.

- Have the committee develop a cross-sectoral training strategy inclusive of shared training opportunities, including training in working effectively with children with behavioral challenges.

Goal 7:   Implement more flexible and accessible childcare programming
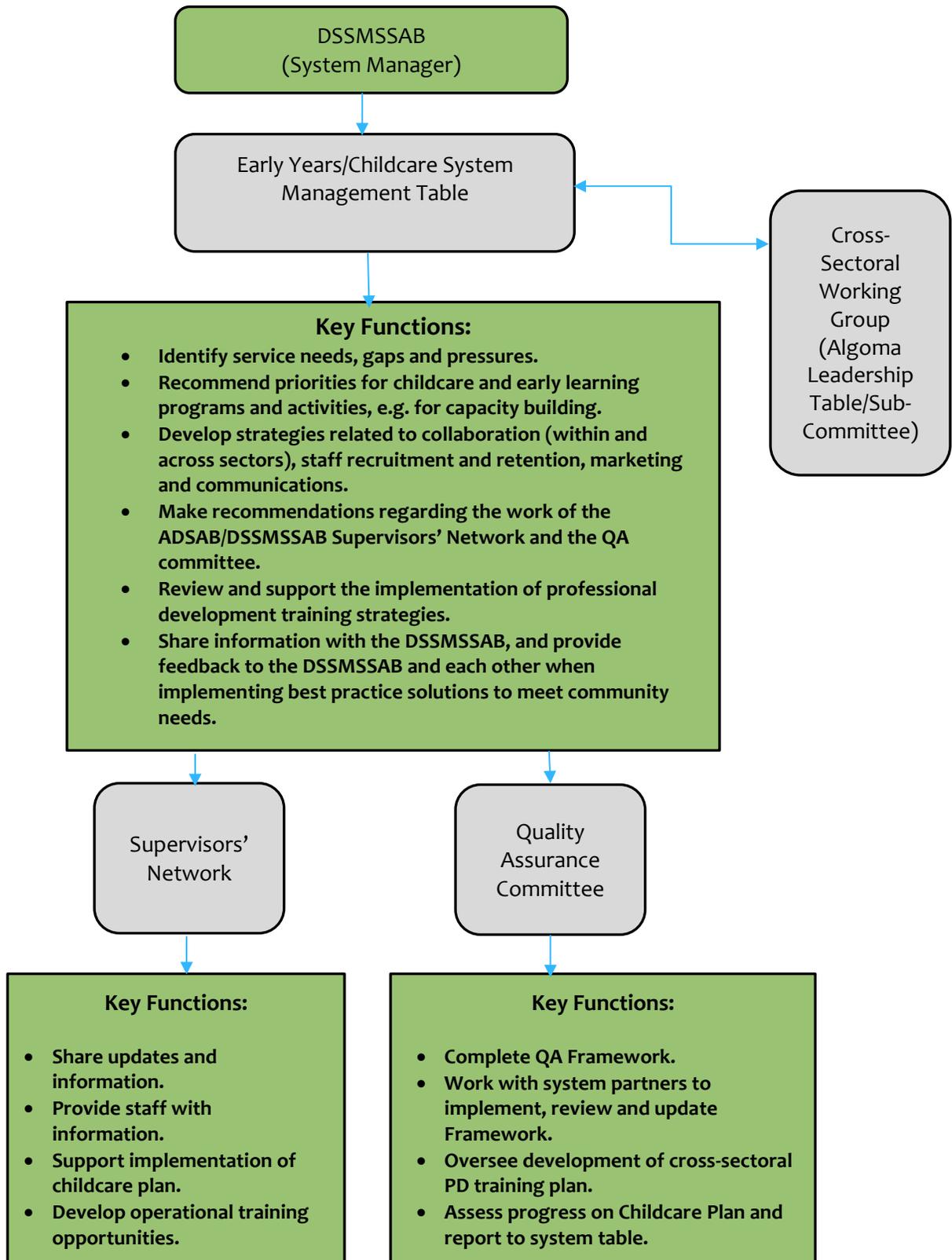
Objectives:
- Improve access to summer programming.
- Improve access to extended hours of childcare.

Note: The need for summer programming will be addressed to some extent through QA work and through the consolidation of smaller childcare centres.

Key Activities:
- Change the application process to include summer programming.
- Place information about summer programming on the DSSMSSAB website.
- Require centres to upload and update their own data.
- Develop a process to promote available spaces, through the application process on the "landing page" and as part of the communication strategy.
- Work with the successful applicant to the RFP for the former city childcare spaces to develop a plan for extended hours and to assist the DSSMSSAB with a needs assessment review (where the majority of people are who need extended hours, what the needs are specifically).
- Support a pilot project for one year in a centralized, easily accessible (especially by low-income parents) location.
- Review and report on the pilot to the DSSMSSAB and all childcare operators.

Schematic of Proposed Early Learning System

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│         DSSMSSAB            │
│      (System Manager)       │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐                    ┌──────────────────┐
│  Early Years/Childcare      │ ─────────────────► │     Cross-       │
│  System Management Table    │                    │    Sectoral      │
└─────────────────────────────┘                    │    Working       │
              │                                     │     Group        │
              ▼                                     │    (Algoma       │
                                                    │   Leadership     │
                                                    │   Table/Sub-     │
                                                    │   Committee)     │
                                                    └──────────────────┘
```

Key Functions:

- Identify service needs, gaps and pressures.
- Recommend priorities for childcare and early learning programs and activities, e.g. for capacity building.
- Develop strategies related to collaboration (within and across sectors), staff recruitment and retention, marketing and communications.
- Make recommendations regarding the work of the ADSAB/DSSMSSAB Supervisors' Network and the QA committee.
- Review and support the implementation of professional development training strategies.
- Share information with the DSSMSSAB, and provide feedback to the DSSMSSAB and each other when implementing best practice solutions to meet community needs.

Supervisors' Network

Quality Assurance Committee

Key Functions:

- Share updates and information.
- Provide staff with information.
- Support implementation of childcare plan.
- Develop operational training opportunities.

Key Functions:

- Complete QA Framework.
- Work with system partners to implement, review and update Framework.
- Oversee development of cross-sectoral PD training plan.
- Assess progress on Childcare Plan and report to system table.

Work Plan

Goals	Activities	Responsibility	Expected Completion Date
1. **Implement a system-level plan to improve capacity and efficiency through opportunities for integration.**	Engage smaller centres in discussions on integration	Service System Manager	Fall &Winter 2016/2017
	Complete consultations re: integration of smaller centres	Service System Manager	June 2017
	Based on feasibility, develop plan for integration	Service System Manager	Dec 2017
	Implement plan	Service System Manager and Operators	TBD
2. **Build opportunities for collaboration within the childcare system.**	Finalize TOR for Early Years/Childcare Service System Table	Service System Manager	July 2016
	Set up system table (including bilateral agreements) and sub-committees, introduce TOR, and commence meetings	Service System Manager and Service System Table	Jan 2017
	Conduct team building exercises with system table	Service System Manager	Spring 2017
	Develop and begin to implement collaborative strategies based on TOR (for marketing, recruitment, etc.)	Service System Table	Fall 2017 and ongoing
	Review and update collaborative strategies	Service System Table	Fall 2018 and annually thereafter

Goals	Activities	Responsibility	Expected Completion Date
3. Develop and implement a structure and plan for cross-sectoral collaboration and service delivery.	Set up a working group of cross-sectoral partners (either the Algoma Leadership Table or a sub-committee)	Service System Manager	Winter 2016
	Complete inter-sectoral group work plan (mobile hub)	Working Group	Spring 2017
	Commence implementation of initiative (mobile hub)	Working Group with Service System Table	Fall 2017
	Review project implementation and modify as required	Working Group with Service System Table	Fall 2017 and ongoing
4. Develop and implement a recruitment and retention strategy for RECEs.	Set up a recruitment/retention committee of the new Early Years/ Childcare system management table	Service System Table	Spring 2017
	Review identified opportunities to improve recruitment and retention (as identified in this report); identify existing successes that could be built on; review provincial work on the issue and other available data; and reach out to and including other partners in the development and implementation of the strategy	Sub-committee	Fall 2017
	Review, approve and implement strategy	Service System Table	Jan 2018
	Review implementation of strategy and revise as required	Sub-Committee with support from Service System Table	Fall 2018 and ongoing

Goals	Activities	Responsibility	Expected Completion Date
5. **Develop and implement a communications strategy about the Childcare System.**	Upload more information about quality childcare on to the new DSSMSSAB website and ensure individual operators are accountable to keep their information current	Service System Manager	Fall & Winter 2016/2017
	Develop and implement communications strategy	Service System Table	Fall 2017
	Review implementation of strategy and revise as required	Service System Table	Fall 2018 and ongoing
6. **Build capacity for professional development training.**	Modify the Terms of Reference of the QA committee to include a mandate for cross-sectoral PD training and expand membership as required	Service System Manager	Fall & Winter 2016/2017
	Develop a cross-sectoral training strategy inclusive of shared training opportunities, including training in working effectively with children with behavioural challenges	QA Committee with support from Cross-Sectoral Working Group	Spring 2017
	Finalize plan and implement strategy	QA Committee with support from Cross-Sectoral Working Group	Spring 2017
	Review implementation of strategy and revise as required	QA Committee with support from Cross-Sectoral Working Group	Fall 2017 and ongoing
7. **Implement more flexible and accessible childcare**	Send out RFP for city spaces	Service System Manager	July 2016

Goals	Activities	Responsibility	Expected Completion Date
programming.	Identify and implement changes required to landing site and website, including information about summer programs	Service System Manager and Childcare Operators	Fall & Winter 2016/2017
	Develop a process to promote available spaces, through the application process on the "landing page" and as part of the communication strategy (see Goal 5)	Service System Manager and Service System Table	Fall & Winter 2016/2017 and ongoing
	Review proposals and identify providers for city spaces	Service System Manager	Nov 2016
	Commence operations at initial site for former city spaces	DSSMSSAB and Selected Operator	Jan 2017
	Commence operations at second site for former city spaces	DSSMSSAB and Selected Operator	Sept 2017
	Implement pilot project for extended hours	Selected Operator	Jan 2018
	Review pilot project and modify as required	Service System Manager and Service System Table	Jan 2019
Quality Assurance Planning.	Hire QA Coordinator	Service System Manager	Fall 2016
	Review entire childcare plan and update as required	Service System Manager and Service System Table with support from QA Committee	Fall 2017 and annually thereafter

Work Plan Calendar

Year	Tasks	Expected Completion Dates
2016	Finalize TOR for Early Years/Childcare Service System Table	July
	Send out RFP for city spaces	July
	Hire QA Coordinator	Fall
	Set up a working group of cross-sectoral partners (either the Algoma Leadership Table or a sub-committee of it)	Winter
	Review proposals and identify providers for city spaces	November
2016/2017	Upload more information about quality childcare on to the new DSSMSSAB website and ensure individual operators are accountable to keep their information current	Fall & Winter
	Engage smaller centres in discussions on integration	Fall & Winter
	Modify the Terms of Reference of the QA committee to include a mandate for cross-sectoral PD training and expand membership as required	Fall & Winter
	Identify and implement changes required to landing site and website, including information about summer programs	Fall & Winter
	Develop a process to promote available spaces, through the application process on the "landing page" and as part of the communication strategy (see Goal 5)	Fall & Winter and ongoing
2017	Set up system table (including bilateral agreements) and sub-committees, and commence meetings	January
	Commence operations at initial site for former city spaces	January
	Finalize cross-sectoral training plan and implement strategy	Spring
	Complete inter-sectoral group work plan (mobile hub)	Spring
	Commence implementation of inter-sectoral group initiative (mobile hub)	Spring
	Conduct team building exercises with Early Years/Childcare system table	Spring
	Set up a recruitment/retention committee of the new Early Years/Childcare System Management Table	Spring
	Complete consultations re: integration of smaller centres	June
	Commence operations at second site for former city spaces	September
	Develop and implement collaborative strategies based on service system table TOR (for marketing, recruitment, communications, etc.)	Fall
	Review identified opportunities to improve recruitment and retention (as identified in this report); identify existing successes that could be built on; review provincial work on the issue and other available data; and reach out to and including other partners in the	Fall

Year	Tasks	Expected Completion Dates
	development and implementation of the strategy	
	Review implementation of inter-sectoral project (mobile hub) and modify as required	Fall
	Review implementation of cross-training (PD) strategy and revise as required	Fall
	Review entire childcare plan and update as required	Fall and annually
	Based on feasibility, develop plan for integration of smaller centres	December
2018	Review, approve and implement recruitment and retention strategy	January
	Implement pilot project for extended hours	January
	Review implementation of service system collaborative strategies and modify as required	Fall
	Review entire childcare plan and update as required	Fall and annually
2019	Review pilot project for extended hours and modify as required	January
	Review entire childcare plan and update as required	Fall and annually

Appendix A:

Draft Terms of Reference
Early Years/Childcare System Management Table

Preamble

This Terms of Reference was developed in June 2016 by the District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board DSSMSSAB– Childcare Division. It is intended to be a living document. To ensure the Terms of Reference are relevant and appropriate, the Early Years/Childcare System Management Table will regularly review the document and update it as required.

The System Management Table is a DSSMSSAB planning and advisory group. As such, it is accountable to the DSSMSSAB.

Primary Purpose of Table

The primary purpose of the Early Years/Childcare System Management Table is to plan for, promote and provide quality licensed childcare and other early learning programs and services, to advise the DSSMSSAB on relevant issues, and to work collaboratively with other sectors in the community.

Objectives

The objectives of the Early Years/Childcare System Management Table are:

- To continue to support the relationship and build trust between the service system partners (childcare service providers and DSSMSSAB).
- To identify service needs, gaps and pressures.
- To recommend priorities for childcare and early learning programs and activities, e.g. for capacity building.
- To develop strategies related to collaboration (within and across sectors), staff recruitment and retention, marketing and communications.
- To support the work of the QA committee.
- To review and support the implementation of professional development training strategies, including strategies in partnership with other sectors.
- To share information, gain a mutual understanding of each other's organizations and work, and to influence the DSSMSSAB and each other to implement the best solutions to meet community needs.

Key Deliverables

- Development, monitoring and evaluation of an annual service system work plan.
- Review of and, as required, updating of TOR annually.
- Development of strategies for collaboration, recruitment and retention, marketing, and communications.

Guiding Principles

The System Management Table members will:

- Ensure the needs of the children and families being served are at the centre of all discussions and decision making.
- Be respectful of and sensitive to issues of cultural diversity including but not limited to the unique needs and rights of Aboriginal and Francophone children and families.
- Create and maintain an environment that fosters mutual respect, transparency and openness.
- Understand the need for inter-dependence among members and with other partners to ensure the provision of the best services and supports.
- Be accountable to each other and to the children and families being served.

Jurisdiction

The service area is the District of Sault Ste. Marie.

Membership

The membership is composed of:
- DSSMSSAB Service System Manager.
- Executive Directors or equivalents of the DSSMSSAB funded early years/childcare organizations.

Meeting Frequency

Meetings will be held a minimum of three times a year.

Meeting Locations

Meetings will be held in Sault Ste. Marie.

Roles and Responsibilities of Members

DSSMSSAB

- Chair the meetings.
- Arrange for the venue.
- Call the meeting.
- Set the agenda, distribute it to members in advance of the meeting, highlight key decision items, and give other members an opportunity to provide input into the agenda.
- Take the minutes.
- Share relevant information with the Table as required.
- Come prepared to actively participate.
- Bring a service system perspective to the meetings.
- Contribute ideas and solutions.
- Participate in problem-solving and planning processes.
- Follow through on commitments or assignments in a timely way.

Other Members

- Attend meetings.
- Come prepared to actively participate.
- Share information as required.
- Bring a service system as well as an organizational perspective to the meetings.
- Contribute ideas and solutions.
- Participate in problem-solving and planning processes.
- Make recommendations to the DSSMSSAB.
- Keep Boards of Directors and staff informed of the process, including sharing the service system work plan.
- Implement the solutions agreed to by the Table.
- Follow through on commitments or assignments in a timely way.

Decision Making Process

All members share responsibility for decision making.

If a member is unable to attend a meeting involving key decisions, that member may provide feedback to the Chair in advance of the meeting.

A consensus model of decision making will be used for all issues that fall within the Table's scope of authority and responsibility.

Conflict Resolution Process

Each member with a specific issue of conflict with another member will attempt to resolve that conflict outside the system table.

For a conflict that arises that could affect the work of the table as a whole, the individual member who identifies such a conflict is responsible for raising the issue at the table. The members are responsible as a group for discussing such conflicts openly and transparently and seeking consensus solutions.

If the conflict cannot be resolved, the DSSMSSAB will mediate a solution.

APPENDIX B

District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board Childcare Programs Strategic Planning

Environmental Scan Report

Beverley Bourget & Lois Mahon

June 10, 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS   Page

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (DSSMSSAB) - Community Child Care Division is seeking to review its services and delivery model and update its vision with a new strategic plan. To facilitate this, the Board retained the services of two external consultants to work in collaboration with the board of directors, staff and community stakeholders to conduct an environmental scan, analyze the results and, working with the board and senior management, develop a Five-year Strategic Child Care/Early Years Service Plan.

Currently, there is a Quality Assurance (QA) Committee in place, which is developing a QA Framework for the childcare system. There are 19 childcare centres in the District of Sault Ste. Marie, with 15 not-for-profit centres. Many of the centres are quite small: collectively, the twelve smallest operators have only 32% of the total childcare spaces. This is lower than the largest operator, which has 40% of the total spaces in the system. It should also be noted that the City of Sault Ste. Marie has decided to close its centres, so those 117 spaces will be moving elsewhere in the system.

The methodology for the environmental scan involved a review of the background and context for this initiative, a meeting with senior management at the City and a review of relevant documents pertaining to the current state of the childcare system in the District of Sault Ste. Marie, an online survey and a series of follow-up focused group discussions. One hundred four (104) people responded to the survey.
Following the analysis of the online survey results, a series of focus group discussions were held in Sault Ste. Marie on April 13, 2016: one with city/DSSMSSAB management and staff, one with childcare centre supervisors and one with staff (RECEs).

The key findings from the survey and focus groups are:

- Dedicated Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) are a core strength of the system.

- There appears to be a broad endorsement of the DSSMSSAB's vision – a childcare system that is the highest quality system in the province, at all levels – as the need for standardized quality and quality assurance was identified by many respondents as a priority. Having a shared vision, goals, indicators and a plan with regard to quality

assurance will help to promote collaboration. A sub-theme related to quality is communications within the sector. In order to ensure commitment to a shared vision and quality, information must flow through to all staff and parents. This is not always happening. Goals and indicators need to be developed to address this issue.

- There is a need for more collaboration across the system. Identified opportunities for collaborative work include quality and quality assurance, information sharing, sharing of resources, programming and program development, and working collectively on policies and procedures. An Executive Director level system table would be helpful in overseeing collaborative initiatives. Supervisors and RECEs would like more face to face interaction and networking. This will require support (i.e. resources for backfilling) for supervisors to attend committee meetings.

- There is a need for more collaborative work across sectors, including collaborative planning and programming.

- There are many small childcare centres in Sault Ste. Marie which require a lot of administrative support, and administrative requirements have become more and more demanding. The idea of establishing some type of cooperative was received quite positively by childcare supervisors. This or an integration of some of the centres would allow the smaller centres to work together to achieve economies of scale, and it could likely improve recruitment and retention of staff, skills training and support, information flow, succession planning and governance.

- Respondents would like to see more opportunities for professional development (PD) training, especially involving interactive learning. Incentives or recognition for PD training would also be helpful.

- There is a need for a recruitment and retention strategy for Early Childhood Educators in the City.

- Parents are confused about how the wait list works and do not understand how costs are structured for childcare. It would be helpful to develop a communications strategy for families which clarifies these issues. A comprehensive communications strategy will also be needed to address the closure of the city childcare sites and share the plan to redistribute those spaces.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The impetus for this environmental scan is two-fold: 1) the Ministry of Education has been modernizing child care over the past four years. This has resulted in significant legislative, policy and budgetary changes that impact the District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (DSSMSSAB) and providers in the service area; 2) throughout this period, the DSSMSSAB has been focused on managing the implementation of these provincial changes, which in some cases have significantly disadvantaged the community, including the need for development of a new Funding Model. The DSSMSSAB is seeking to review its services and delivery model and update its vision with a new strategic plan.

Consequently, the District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board - Community Child Care Division retained the services of two external consultants to work in collaboration with the board of directors, staff and community stakeholders to conduct an environmental scan, analyze the results and, working with the board and senior management, develop a Five-year Strategic Child Care/Early Years Service Plan.

Legislative and Regulatory changes

The *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework* provides a vision for the early years where Ontario's children and families are well supported by a system of responsive, high-quality, accessible, and increasingly integrated early years programs and services that contribute to healthy child development today and a stronger future tomorrow.

In August 2015 the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 replaced the Day Nurseries Act, providing a new legislative framework to govern the provision of child care services. The Minister of Education through authority of CCEYA has issued a policy statement to guide early years programs. *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* is the provincial framework to guide programming and pedagogy in licensed child care.

In addition to the Minister's Policy Statement, program-related regulations under the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* have also been developed to align with *How Does Learning Happen?* and to help child care settings put the ideas and approaches of this pedagogical framework into practice. For example, the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* requires every licensee to have a program statement that is consistent with the Minister's Policy Statement on programming and pedagogy (*Section 46 of O. Reg 137/2015*, general). Licensees are also required to create and implement a staff training and development policy and identify the ways they will support continuous professional learning.

How Does Learning Happen? provides a comprehensive framework to guide program development and pedagogy in early years settings. It builds on the guiding principles to support Ontario's vision of high quality programs and services centred on the child and family with a view of children as competent and capable of complex thinking, curious and rich in potential. *How Does Learning Happen?* helps move Ontario towards increasingly integrated programs and services for children and families whether in child care, family support programs or kindergarten, with a shared view of the child, common pedagogical approaches and foundations of belonging, well-being, engagement and expression that are aligned with the full-day kindergarten program staff.

Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) are the designated child care service system managers responsible for planning and managing licensed child care services at the local level. Child care services are managed by CMSMs and DSSABs through a local service planning process that reflects current child care legislation, regulations and policies/directives, including this consolidated guideline as well as engagement with local licensees. The new *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* recognizes the essential role of the CMSM/DSSAB as the local service system manager in ensuring an increasingly integrated, high quality child care and early years system. The ability to strengthen the quality of child care and early years experiences and enhance system integration requires the strategic leadership of CMSMs/DSSABs to initiate, sustain and monitor local planning and development to achieve Ontario's vision for the early years.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the environmental scan involved a review of the background and context for this initiative, a meeting with senior management at the DSSMSSAB and a review of relevant documents pertaining to the current state of the childcare system in the City of Sault Ste. Marie, an online survey and a series of follow-up focused group discussions.

The survey questions were developed by the consultants and approved by the Service System Manager. The survey was uploaded to Survey monkey and the link was forwarded to the Service System Manager, who had the survey distributed across the early years community in early February 2016. It remained open to respondents until mid-March. Childcare Centre Supervisors were asked to encourage staff and parents to participate. One hundred four (104) people responded to the survey. Responding to individual questions was optional and not everyone chose to answer every question. In the results section that follows, please note that percentages have been rounded off.   A copy of the survey questions may be found in Appendix A.

Following the analysis of the online survey results, a series of focus group discussions were held in Sault Ste. Marie on April 13, 2016: one with city/DSSMSSAB management and staff, one with childcare centre supervisors and one with staff (RECEs). The first group involved a general discussion about the survey findings and potential next steps. The other two groups were presented with the survey findings and, through a facilitated discussion, shared their thoughts about the results. This elicited more detailed information about the key themes that had emerged in the survey findings.

CURRENT STATE

Child Care Operators

There are currently 19 separate childcare operators in the District of Sault Ste. Marie, including 15 not-for-profit operators, four commercial operators and one other (a preschool program operated by the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board). Table 1, below, shows all of the childcare operators, from largest to smallest, and the number of licensed spaces at each location.

Table 1: All Sault Ste. Marie Childcare Operators from Largest to Smallest (as of January 2016)

Not-for-Profit or Commercial	Childcare Operator	Number of spaces
Not-for-Profit	1. **Childcare Algoma**	
	Centre-based	416
	Home-based	175
	Total	**591**
	2. **YMCA**	178
	3. **Sault College**	162
	4. **City of Sault Ste. Marie**	117
	5. **Cedarbrook Child Development**	67
	6. **Waterfront**	57
	7. **Hand-in-Hand**	55
Commercial	8. **Northridge Montessori**	54
Not-for-Profit	9. **Riverside Christian**	51
Commercial	10. **Crystal's Little School**	49
Not-for-Profit	11. **Alternative Child Care Orchard**	41
	12. **Community Cooperative**	41
Commercial	13. **Meadow Park Montessori**	35
Not-for-Profit	14. **Brighter Beginnings**	30
	15. **St. John Back to Basics**	30
	16. **HS McLellan Preschool**	26
	17. **Waabinong Head Start**	24
Other – operated by Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board	18. **Holy Angels Preschool**	16
Not-for-Profit	19. **Mountain View**	15
	TOTALS	**1639**

Table 2, below, shows the 15 not-for-profit centres only; from largest to smallest, including the number of licensed spaces they operate. The twelve smallest operators each have less than 10% of the total spaces, with the smallest five centres each having 2% or less of total spaces.   Collectively, these twelve operators have only 32% of the total spaces, lower than the spaces of largest operator, which represent 40% of the total spaces in the system. It should be noted that the City of Sault Ste. Marie has decided to close its centres, so those 117 spaces will be moving elsewhere in the system.

**Table 2: Not for Profit Only Childcare Operators
(as of January 2016)**

Childcare Operator	Number of spaces
1. Childcare Algoma	
Centre-based	416
Home-based	175
Total	591
2. YMCA	178
3. Sault College	162
4. City of Sault Ste. Marie	117
5. Cedarbrook Child Development	67
6. Waterfront	57
7. Hand-in-Hand	55
8. Riverside Christian	51
9. Alternative Child Care Orchard	41
10. Community Cooperative	41
11. Brighter Beginnings	30
12. St. John Back to Basics	30
13. HS McLellan Preschool	26
14. Waabinong Head Start	24
15. Mountain View	15
	1485

Quality Assurance Activities

There is a Quality Assurance (QA) Committee in place with membership from the Child Care/Early Years community, DSSMSSAB Child Care staff, faculty of Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology as well as other community members as projects warrant. The mission of the QA Committee is to provide mentorship and support that facilitates the development of an extraordinary system of Child Care and Early Years services for the communities. Specific objectives of the Committee are to:

- Plan and implement a variety of Professional Development activities for the Child Care and Early Years community based on research and best practice.

- Partner with the Algoma District Supervisors Committee on projects that promote quality within the Child Care/Early Years sector.

- Provide recommendations in the development of a community wide Quality Assurance Strategy.

A comprehensive QA Framework for service providers has been completed and will begin implementation in the fall of 2016.

Professional Development Activities

The District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board and the Child Care Quality Assurance Committee have developed a number of professional development days and made these available to RECEs in the community. Additionally, once annually, the DSSMSSAB provides support so all staff can attend a professional development day.

Closure of City Sites

Since this review was initiated, the City of Sault Ste. Marie took a decision that it will no longer be operating childcare centres by the end of December 2017. Planning is currently underway to effectively manage this change to meet the needs of families and children.

SURVEY RESULTS

Introduction

The online survey was introduced to respondents as follows:

The District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board is responsible for administering childcare services in the District of Sault Ste. Marie. The Board's vision is a childcare system that is the highest quality system in the province, at all levels. To accomplish this vision, the Board is supporting the development of a five year Strategic Plan. External experts have been brought in to facilitate the development of this plan. As part of the process, they are consulting with different stakeholders in the community. We are asking you for your input to help us to move forward in accomplishing the vision.

It should be noted that the vision was clearly stated in the introduction, and that the DSSMSSAB specifically asked respondents to provide input that would help to move forward in accomplishing the vision.
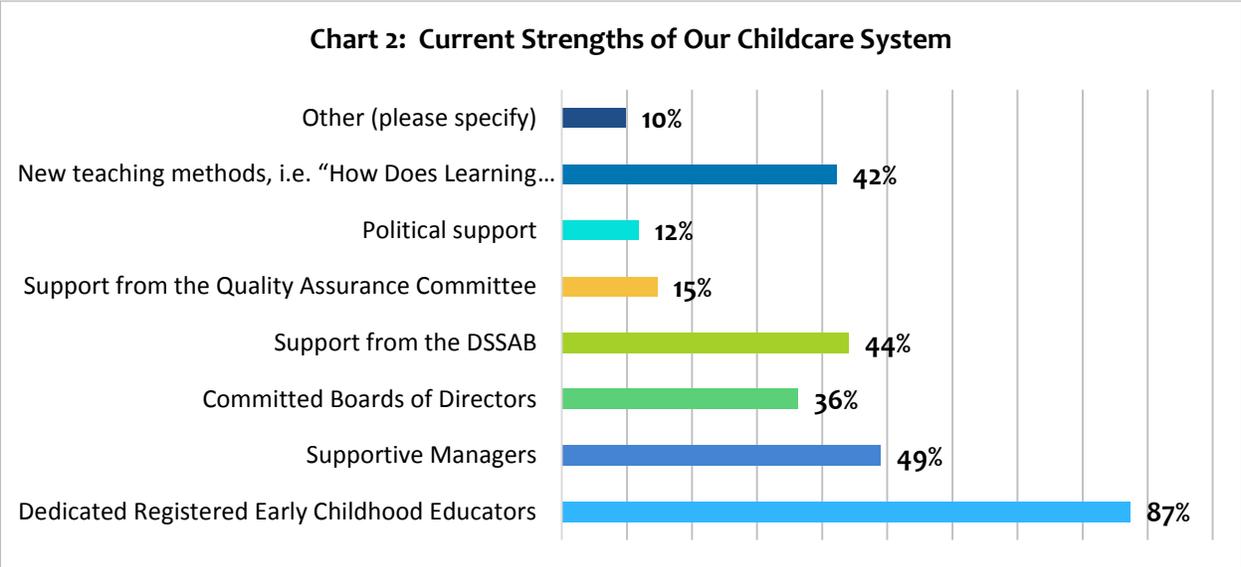
Overview of Respondents

When asked to identify themselves, participants were asked: "Please tell us who you are. If more than one answer applies to you (e.g. you are a parent and you also fit into one or more of the other categories), please select the one answer that best reflects the perspective you wish to take in responding to this survey." One hundred one (101) people choose a response from the list in the Chart 1, below, which shows the breakdown by answer. Please note that percentages have been rounded off.   The highest proportion of respondents at 28% of total, were parents or caregivers, followed by City staff – Ontario Works or Childcare (21%) and Childcare Centre Supervisor or Executive Director/Member of Supervisors' Network (18%).

Chart 1: Overview of Respondents

- Parent or caregiver — 28%
- City staff – Ontario Works or Childcare — 21%
- Childcare Centre staff — 15%
- Childcare Centre Supervisor or Executive Director/member of Supervisors' Network — 18%
- Best Start Network member — 9%
- Child Care Centre Board member — 10%
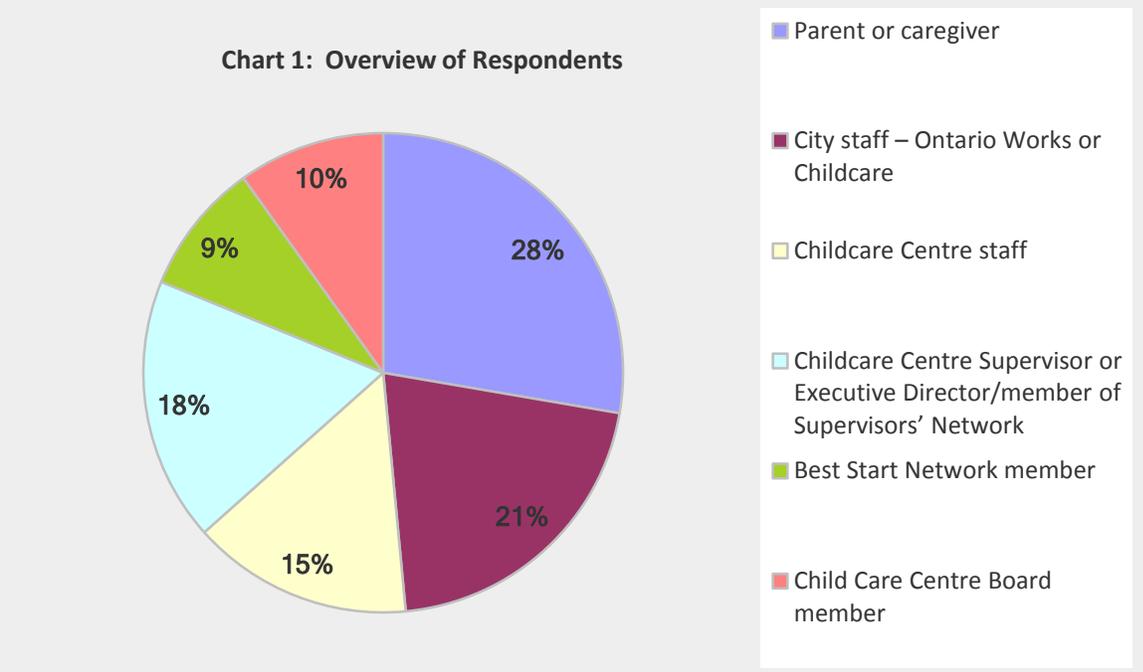
Strengths of the Current Childcare System

Participants were asked: What are the current strengths of our childcare system? They were asked to check all responses that applied. One hundred two (102) people answered the question. Their responses are shown in Chart 2, below.

Chart 2: Current Strengths of Our Childcare System

- Other (please specify) — 10%
- New teaching methods, i.e. "How Does Learning... — 42%
- Political support — 12%
- Support from the Quality Assurance Committee — 15%
- Support from the DSSAB — 44%
- Committed Boards of Directors — 36%
- Supportive Managers — 49%
- Dedicated Registered Early Childhood Educators — 87%

As the chart indicates, the most common response was "Dedicated Registered Early Childhood Educators" with 87% selecting this answer; it was also the most popular response among parents (92% of parents). The next most frequent responses among all participants were: "supportive managers" (49%), support from the DSSAB (44%) and "new teaching
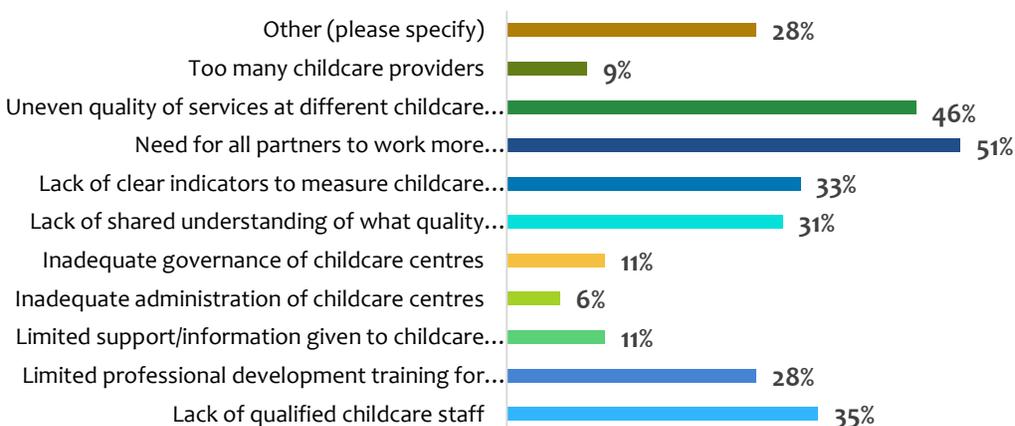
methods, i.e. 'How Does Learning Happen?'" (42%). The lower percentage for " new teaching methods" is consistent with requests for more training in this area.

Gaps and Challenges of the Current System

The survey asked respondents to identify the most significant gaps or challenges in the childcare system right now. They were asked to check all responses that applied. One hundred (100) people answered the question.   As shown in Chart 3, below, the most common response was "need for all partners to work more collaboratively, as a system, toward common goals" (51% of all respondents). For parents specifically, the most common response was "uneven quality of services at different childcare centres" (56%), which was also the second most frequent answer for all participants (46% of total).
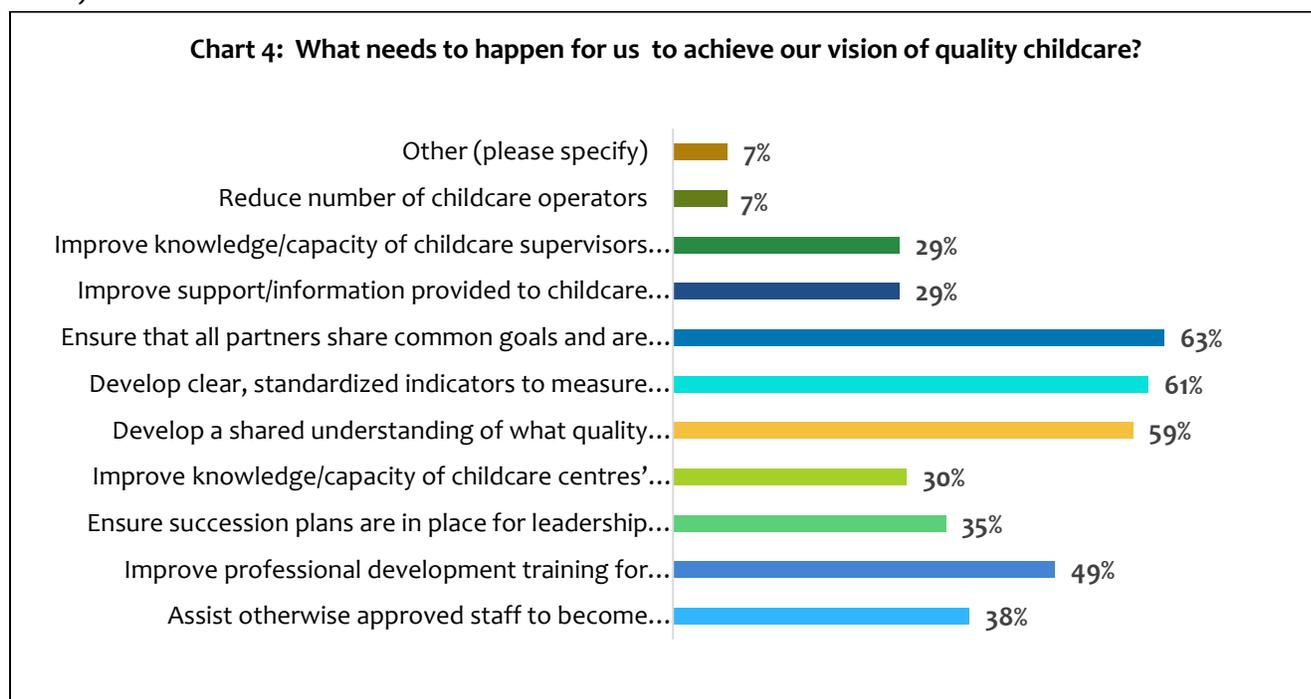
Of those who said "other", parents also seemed concerned about the variance in quality between home and centre-based childcare and the variance in quality among home childcare providers. Many parents also noted concern about the existing wait list process. Parents feel that having the DSSMSSAB "in charge of the system" limits their choice and may not present an accurate picture of where spaces are available. Moms who are pregnant put their child's name on the list right away and then wait over a year to hear back. Often they do not hear in time so they make other choices and are unable get their centre of choice. Parents feel the allocation of subsidy needs to be reviewed. They feel there is an uneven allocation to parents, particularly two parent families where both parents are working, and that there are inadequate subsized spaces. Many feel child care is not affordable.

Chart 3: The Most Significant Gaps or Challenges in Our Childcare System

Category	Percentage
Other (please specify)	28%
Too many childcare providers	9%
Uneven quality of services at different childcare…	46%
Need for all partners to work more…	51%
Lack of clear indicators to measure childcare…	33%
Lack of shared understanding of what quality…	31%
Inadequate governance of childcare centres	11%
Inadequate administration of childcare centres	6%
Limited support/information given to childcare…	11%
Limited professional development training for…	28%
Lack of qualified childcare staff	35%

Priority Directions

Participants were asked: What needs to happen for us to be successful in achieving our vision of quality childcare? They were able to select all answers that applied. As shown in Chart 4, below, the most common response, chosen by 63% of respondents, was "ensure that all partners share common goals and are able to work together as a system." Almost as many (61%) selected "develop clear, standardized indicators to measure quality across the system" with 59% choosing "develop a shared understanding of what quality childcare looks like in our community." Parent response choices were similar. Among parents, two answers were tied as the most commonly selected (chosen by 62.5% of parents). These were "develop a shared understanding of what quality childcare looks like in our community", and "develop clear, standardized indicators to measure quality across the system".
Among those who said "other", respondents are also looking for a quality assurance program/process that would provide direct visits to centres (in addition to existing license visits).

Chart 4: What needs to happen for us to achieve our vision of quality childcare?

Category	Percentage
Other (please specify)	7%
Reduce number of childcare operators	7%
Improve knowledge/capacity of childcare supervisors...	29%
Improve support/information provided to childcare...	29%
Ensure that all partners share common goals and are...	63%
Develop clear, standardized indicators to measure...	61%
Develop a shared understanding of what quality...	59%
Improve knowledge/capacity of childcare centres'...	30%
Ensure succession plans are in place for leadership...	35%
Improve professional development training for...	49%
Assist otherwise approved staff to become...	38%

Themes from Narrative Responses

Two additional questions, requiring narrative responses, were asked of survey participants: "If you could make one recommendation that would really help to improve the quality of our childcare system, what would it be?" And: "Do you have any additional comments you would like to share about our childcare system?" Forty-eight people provided written responses to the first question and twenty-five provided additional comments. The key findings that emerged are shown below.

Need for Standardized Quality

- The identification of the need for standardized quality, across the system, is a key theme.

Importance of Collaboration across Centres

- There was a suggestion by more than one respondent that Centres should collaborate and share resources.

Importance of Professional Development Training

- The importance of standardized quality also supported by another common theme: request for staff training/professional development. With regard to this, respondents said:
    - Need professional development to improve quality; professional development is also needed to ensure staff is up-to-date.
    - Need team building and collaboration.
    - Need training for Supervisors and Staff (RECEs).
    - Training on child management and behavior is required (this is also related to a sub-theme of inclusion where there is a request for training on FASD and ASD).

Low and Variable Wages

- Wages of RECEs are low and vary across centres. The provincial wage enhancement should assist in this area.

Need to Enhance Ratios

- Many are looking for increased funding to enhance ratios. However, the new regulations will be dealing with ratios and this is beyond the scope of the review and the DSSMSSAB.

High Costs, Lengthy Wait Lists and Lack of Clarity about Wait Lists

- Parents' concerns about cost and wait list process suggest a future review of the process or communication of goals/limits of the existing process

Need for RECE Preparation and Planning Time

- Many spoke of the lack of preparation and planning time, and time for staff meetings affecting both quality and goals set. New pedagogy approaches and regulations increase the need for planning and preparation time.

Need for Adequate Staffing, Recruitment and Retention

- A minor theme was the challenge of having adequate supply staff, and a common supply staff pool was suggested.
- There was mention that there are not enough RECEs; it was also noted that there are not enough full time positions. Both responses suggest the possibility of need for a recruitment and retention strategy.

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Child Care Supervisors and RECE Groups

Eighty-three per cent (83%) of Child Care Agencies with which the DSSMSSAB has a Service Agreement for Fee Subsidy had both staff and supervisory participation/representation during the forums. Both groups were asked to review and comment on the survey findings.

QUALITY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

One of the key themes that emerged during the discussions was the importance of high quality childcare, and the need for quality assurance to measure improvement in the sense of setting baselines and assessing movement toward goals. There was a general agreement in the supervisor group that quality needs to be part of the entire culture and everyone's business, not just the job of supervisors. Quality should be addressed at all levels – from the board level to individual programs. At the same time, the supervisors emphasized that there needs to be respect for the diversity and autonomy of individual programs, i.e. focusing on outcomes rather than standardized, inflexible programming.

We are all doing different things. You can have the same outcomes but allow flexibility within programs. Outcomes are more important than how you get there.

This led to a conversation about how to define "quality". There appeared to be some tension among participants around what quality childcare is specifically and who is providing the highest quality child care. They agreed that a common definition of quality and common

goals are needed. RECEs will value who they are when they have common goals. They emphasized however that the definition and the approach to quality improvement should be strength-based and not punitive. They do not want to see any comparing of Centres to try to demonstrate quality (e.g. suggesting one is better than the other).

Communication from the DSSMSSAB about quality assurance needs to be consistent across centres and programs, and the information needs to be shared with all stakeholders. Evaluation of quality should also be done on all levels and it should be connected to policy directions such as How Does Learning Happen? The local vision needs to align with the provincial vision, and all key stakeholders need to buy in to the vision.

A sub-theme related to quality is **communications within the sector.** Supervisors agreed that information flow is not always what it should be. Messaging does not flow down to all staff and parents, for example.   In the RECE group, a number of participants said they did not receive the survey link and suggested that in the future, such information be posted in the centres' log books.

COLLABORATION

Initially the supervisors said they would like to work more collaboratively but that it is difficult because it requires time and staff, both of which are limited. Toward the end of the session, they acknowledged that in fact, they are not united and not really talking to each other.   Some emphasized that there are differences in centres and these need to be embraced; others said that as well as differences they share many things in common. Based on comments from the ECE group, the issue appears to be primarily one of competitiveness and differences of opinion on what quality programming is and who is providing it. For example, the ECE participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that there is no competition, either within centres or between centres. They noted that some people are feeling that the quality of their programs is not being recognized by others.

The supervisors agreed that they need to talk about the "elephants in the room", i.e. the uncomfortable and difficult issues outlined above. This will enable them to move from working in silos to working together and will help to repair the childcare community. The ECE group also agreed that they need to work together and help educate each other in every aspect of childcare across the whole system.

The supervisors group suggested that identifying shared short-term goals and working on them together would help to support collaboration.   Additionally, they could do more in

terms of sharing information and working collectively on policies and procedures. The RECEs support the concept of sharing all information and functioning as a community of RECEs. To them, collaboration also means face to face interaction. They want opportunities to network with each other, e.g. through professional development activities. The supervisors also think that interpersonal interaction is key to collaboration and further to that, they would like more support for the Supervisors' Committee. The committee meetings provide them with opportunities to work on programming and programming development, and to share information. However, many people do not attend due to lack of resources (backfill) and time (the business of the day takes precedence over meetings). The supervisors would like Executive Directors and Boards to make these meetings a priority and to support participation, e.g. through approvals to bring in additional staff for backfilling. Supervisors feel they could then do more collaborative work, such as sharing resources and sharing operational policies and procedures.

Some of the Centres have administrative support for budgeting, forecasting, etc.; some do not. The facilitator asked the participants about whether working in a cooperative, like a family health team where resources are pooled to pay for these functions, would be helpful. Supervisors from the smaller Centres liked the idea.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Staffing

Accessing supply staff was cited as a challenge by the supervisors' group. The RECE group also said that supply staff, especially French supply staff, is insufficient. In the RECE group, the city staff said that there are fewer applicants at the College, and that recruitment and retention are big challenges. At the same time, the city staff are being told no centres will hire them because they are afraid the staff will bring the union with them.

Professional Development

The supervisors would like to have a variety of professional development (PD) opportunities. More flexible options would be helpful, such as PD online training at home based on personal preferences or more flexible times. It is also important that there is time to reflect and talk with co-workers about what was learned; this facilitates transfer of learning to practice. Of interest is the fact that one ECE said that she has been working 10 years and is still on contract. Because she makes $20 an hour, she is sent home when the numbers of children are low, while the lower paid employees stay. This is likely because the supervisor is being told to keep the budget in line. However, this relates to quality and also speaks to a need for supervisor training.

The supervisor group also talked about ratios, as the survey results showed a preference for better ratios. It was acknowledged that this is a provincial issue and beyond the scope of this review. However, the facilitator asked if the issue is really one of ratios, or of better training and support for staff to work within existing ratios. The participants agreed that staff need support and training to deal with children exhibiting aggressive and assaultive behaviors, and there is also some need for support and training for working with children with special needs. The RECEs also said that support and skill building may be more important than changing ratios.

The RECE group made some specific suggestions about PD training. For example, they said that interaction is part of professional development, in the sense that they can learn from interacting and being reflective with each other. They would like more opportunities for learning interactively.   They would also like more training and information on working directly with parents (tips that could help parents with things like potty training, etc., and information related to child welfare and child protection). Online training requires a lot of self-discipline and RECEs thought they would be more likely to participate in organized training events. Evening PD training events are challenging because they need that time to prepare for the following day. Some would like some sort of incentive or recognition for participating in PD activities. This could be something like a certificate for participation.

Wages

While beyond the scope of this review, wages are a challenge. Supervisors said that there is a huge variation in wages from centre to centre and more equity, in terms of a prevailing wage, would reduce these gaps. The RECE group agreed that there is inequity of wages across centres and that this should be addressed. They also talked about the importance of recognition for their work, beyond wages, through things like small tokens of appreciation, smiles, kind comments and positive interactions. They said that they often put in their own time and money because they love their jobs and the children (i.e. they are spending their own money to buy supplies). They would like to bring this out into the open, have a discussion about what is expected and what is fair, and create some balance.

Preparation Time

Adequate preparation time was raised as an issue by the supervisors' group: there is so much time required for reflection and documentation that there is less and less preparation time. The RECE group also said that preparation time needs to increase, including time to discuss ideas with co-workers and for planning.

Use of Technology

RECEs would like computer training, IT training and Ipads. Implementing more technology would keep them current with their field, would help them with documentation and curriculum development and would maximize time for interactions with parents.

Succession Planning

The supervisors agreed that there needs to be long term succession planning including mentoring, and learning plans to build leaders and leadership capacity in the community.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC

Improving Public Awareness

The supervisors would like parents and the broader public to have a full understanding of the value of their work. This includes the value of what is being learned on PD days, so parents understand the professionalism of RECEs. They would like to see a public communication strategy developed and implemented, to promote public awareness about early childhood education.

Clarifying the Wait List

The survey showed that parents are confused about the wait list and the supervisors agreed. Public awareness is needed, as people just do not understand how the wait list works. RECEs confirmed this saying that parents are asking them about the wait list. The supervisors recommended that the DSSMSSAB review the wait list process to see if there is anything that needs to be fixed and if not, to do a full-on communications strategy with parents, so they understand clearly how the system works. It was also noted that the transition plan for the closing of city childcare has to include wait list information.

GOVERNANCE

The supervisors said that Boards could benefit from training with regard to their role and responsibilities. The concept of collaboration should also be presented to Boards for discussion.

FOLLOW-UP CONSULTATIONS

Follow-up consultations were held with the childcare supervisors and with key stakeholders from other sectors on June 1, 2016. There were 18 participants in the supervisor's group and 10 people in the key stakeholder group, including representatives from Algoma Family Services, Algoma Public Health, the Algoma District School Board, the DSSMSSAB, City of Sault Ste. Marie and the Huron Superior Catholic District School Board. Both groups were presented with the key findings from the environmental scan and engaged in a discussion about them. Identified priorities included the following.

COLLABORATION WITHIN THE CHILDCARE SYSTEM

As discussed in the previous focus groups, the supervisors' group suggested that the small centres in particular could benefit from collaborating with regard to joint communications, working on new policies, etc. There is also an identified need for collaboration with regard to issues of system management. The Supervisors' Network is primarily about information sharing; it is not attended by Executive Directors and does not engage in any strategic development work.

The key stakeholder group supports the idea of integrating a number of smaller childcare centres as this would result in a system that is more streamlined, consistent and easier to collaborate with. It was noted for instance that it is difficult to interface with the childcare system due to the number of operators.

CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION

The key stakeholder group talked a lot about the need for more cross-sectoral collaboration. Among the issues identified are:

- The need to invest in collaborative prevention work, especially for children with emerging mental health problems and other special needs.

- The need to improve interfacing and supports to identify, recommend, coach, guide and support children in need earlier.

The group discussed opportunities for collaborative programming, such as a shared space downtown that could function as an early learning hub.   It was agreed that it would be ideal to bring services to where people live, through a mobile home or bus converted to a travelling centre, with Wifi. This could also boost youth employment, through summer jobs for youth to work with the participating children, provide access to recreational activities, and providing staff with opportunities for cross-sectoral professional learning, thereby building capacity. All partners expressed interest in participating in this initiative. It was agreed that a concrete way to facilitate this will be needed, and invitations to agencies who were not in attendance, to participate. Another potential area for collaboration includes accessing supply RECE staff (for schools).

SUMMER PROGRAMMING AND EXTENDED HOURS

There are some summer programs available, such as summer camps, especially for older children. The supervisors group said that if there is a gap with regard to summer programming, it would be more for the JK/SK group.   It can be difficult to promote childcare spaces and the benefits of choosing licensed quality childcare.   Better communication with regard to this, in partnership with school boards, would be helpful. The key stakeholder group indicated that there is a need, that there is a lack of access to public programming and that this creates a learning gap over the summer. This is more of a problem for marginalized families who do not have the means to pay for programming. There are some targeted programs running, but these are time-limited and directed at specific cohorts (e.g. children who need extra support with literacy and numeracy). There are also caps on attendance. Therefore, more access to summer activities would be of benefit.

There is also a need for extended hours of childcare. Most childcare centres close at 5:30 to 6:00 pm, with the exception of some homecare providers, who will stay open until 7:00 pm.

The demand for more flexibility has also increased (e.g. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday one week and Wednesday, Thursday, Friday the following week). Offering flexible and extended hours is a challenge. Families are making do, but not with quality, licensed care. There is a willingness on the part of childcare centres to provide the service, but an inability to respond in the system currently. Schools that have childcare centres are not able to respond to the need either. There are no staff on the premises to support early starts (custodians, principals, etc.). A possible solution to the problem could be the designation of one specific childcare centre to meet the need for extended hours.

COMMUNICATIONS WITHIN THE CHILDCARE SYSTEM

This is an important priority for the supervisors' group. Parents need more information about the wait list, funding and the closure of city childcare centres: there is a lot of misunderstanding and confusion. It is also important to ensure that information flows smoothly along from the funder to the supervisors and to staff and parents. Communication needs to be ongoing and messaging needs to be consistent. At the system level, a link or a tab could be put on the DSSMSSAB website that provides information and updates. There is also a Supervisor's Website. New information could be uploaded there and it could be opened up for RECES to access information, updates and ask questions. Partnering with the school boards to share information would also be helpful.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF STAFF

Recruitment and retention were re-affirmed as priority issues by the supervisors' group. There is a lot that could be done and suggestions included: working with the college on recruitment (e.g. agencies who are hiring post on the college website), having childcare representatives at open houses for students and parents. Implementing a shared supply pool of RECE staff could also be done, through a centralized, administered place, to match those looking for work and those looking for staff. There could also be opportunities to tap into the work of recruiting networks (e.g. SSM Economic Development) to attract staff from other communities, and marketing that the cost of living is lower here. There may also be grants or signing bonuses available to recruit RECEs to the north – this would be worth exploring.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

Standardized Quality and Quality Assurance

The importance of quality childcare and of quality assurance emerged as key themes in the survey and the focus groups. This suggests that there is a broad endorsement of the DSSMSSAB's vision: a childcare system that is the highest quality system in the province, at all levels.

The lack of a consistent and shared definition of quality and of how to measure it has created some tensions within and across centres. There is a degree of competitiveness with regard to who is providing the highest quality childcare and this is serving as a barrier to positive relationships and collaboration.

In order to accomplish the DSSMSSAB's goal, there needs to be a common definition of quality (based on provincial policy frameworks, as noted in the focus groups), a series of specific and shared goals for quality improvement, indicators for measuring progress toward goals, and a plan describing the road map for accomplishing goals and achieving the vision. Having a shared vision, goals, indicators and a plan with regard to quality assurance will help to promote collaboration and eliminate competitiveness about quality.

The plan need not be rigid and inflexible; it should build on existing strengths of individual programs and recognize that there are different ways to achieve the same outcomes.

The goals, indicators and plan could be developed collaboratively. This would help to achieve buy-in from all key stakeholders. Once completed, they need to be communicated across the system, from the Board level to individual RECEs, again, to support buy-in.

It should be noted that a comprehensive QA Framework for Service Providers is under development and nearing completion. It is expected to address many of the concerns about quality and quality assurance that emerged during the consultations for this report.

A sub-theme related to quality is **communications within the sector.** In order to ensure commitment to a shared vision and quality, information must flow through to all staff and parents. This is not always happening. Goals and indicators need to be developed to address this issue, including defined expectations and responsibility centres for communication.

Collaboration across Sectors

The follow-up focus group session showed a strong interest among key stakeholder partners for cross-sectoral collaborative work. They would like to work with the DSSMSSAB and the childcare community to plan and implement a range of collaborative initiatives, including but not limited to a mobile early learning bus to which all partners would provide resources and programming.

Collaboration within the Childcare System

The need for more collaboration across the system was a key theme in the survey responses and the focus groups.   Identified opportunities for collaborative work include quality and quality assurance (discussed above), information sharing, sharing of resources, programming and program development, and working collectively on policies and procedures. The supervisors and RECEs would like more face to face interaction and networking. This will require support (i.e. resources for backfilling) for supervisors to attend committee meetings. Collaboration could also be facilitated through the implementation of a system management role and function for childcare centres in the form of an Executive Directors' table.

Developing and supporting opportunities for collaboration across all centres would help to realize the DSSMSSAB's vision for the childcare system.   It would also help to set the stage for the amalgamation of smaller centres, discussed further below.

Integration of Childcare Centres

As shown in the Current State section of this document, there are many small childcare centres in Sault Ste. Marie. As noted by the DSSMSSAB, these smaller centres require more administrative support. Currently, the DSSMSSAB Childcare Administrative Support Clerk is providing support for wage enhancement grants to many programs, which is seen as unsustainable moving forward. Expectations of the funders and the ministry under the present model are unrealistic and failing – the wage enhancement and new legislation are hugely administrative and the smaller centres may be unable to meet these expectations. The smaller centres liked the idea of working in a cooperative where resources are pooled to pay for these functions. Key stakeholder partners were in favour of the idea of integrating a number of the smaller centres.

The benefits of integration would be quite significant, including:

- Economies of scale, providing more resources for administrative functions (e.g. hiring a person specifically to do finance-related work) and potentially more resources to enhance staff access to technology and for PD training.
- Improved recruitment and retention of staff (better wages and more equity of wages across the system, fewer part-time jobs and split shifts, a larger pool of supply staff, more staff able to cover each other for prep time).
- Improved capacity for supervisor and staff skills training and support.
- Improved information flow and consistency of messaging.
- Better succession planning, including mentoring and learning plans to build leaders and leadership capacity in the community.
- Improved governance (establishment of one skilled and knowledgeable board of directors).

The plan for integration and the benefits of the plan would need to be shared with all stakeholders to create buy-in. Fears and concerns about job losses, reductions in supervisor wages (e.g. because they would be doing less administrative work) and a reduction in the number of boards of directors, would need to be addressed. One way to mitigate concerns about losing Boards of Directors would be to establish a Parent Advisory Council, which could include former board members who are interested in participating.

Professional Development Training

It would be helpful for the supervisors' group and the QA committee to review the RECE group's suggestions to improve professional development training, i.e. providing more opportunities for learning interactively, offering more training and information on working directly with parents, support and training to deal with children exhibiting aggressive and assaultive behaviors and children with special needs, and providing incentives or recognition for participating in PD activities. In some cases, supervisors could also benefit from professional development training to build their skills and confidence in the supervisory role.

Recruitment and Retention Strategy

Survey respondents said that there are not enough RECEs, nor enough full time positions. In the RECE group, it was noted that there are fewer applicants at the College, and that recruitment and retention are big challenges. At the same time, the city staff are being told no centres will hire them because they are afraid the staff will bring the union with them. The follow-up focus group with supervisors emphasized the recruitment and retention

challenges facing the childcare sector. These findings suggest the need for a recruitment and retention strategy.

Public Communications

The results show that parents are confused about how the wait list works and do not understand how costs are structured for childcare. Centres are unable to answer parents' questions about these issues. A communications strategy should be developed for families which clarifies these issues. A comprehensive communications strategy will also be needed to address the closure of the city childcare sites and the plan to redistribute those spaces.

Survey Questionnaire

Introduction

The District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board is responsible for administering childcare services in the City of Sault Ste. Marie. The Board's vision is a childcare system that is the highest quality system in the province, at all levels. To accomplish this vision, the Board is supporting the development of a five year Strategic Plan. External experts have been brought in to facilitate the development of this plan. As part of the process, they are consulting with different stakeholders in the community. We are asking you for your input to help us to move forward in accomplishing the vision. Please click on the link below which will take you directly to an electronic survey. Your responses will be confidential; the survey findings will be rolled up into a report for us by the consultants. Thank you for your assistance with this important work.

1. **Please tell us who you are. If more than one answer applies to you (e.g. you are a parent and you also fit into one or more of the other categories), please select the one answer that best reflects the perspective you wish to take in responding to this survey.**

   - Parent or caregiver
   - City staff – Ontario Works or Childcare
   - Childcare Centre staff
   - Childcare Centre Supervisor or Executive Director/member of Supervisors' Network
   - Best Start Network member
   - Child Care Centre Board member

2. **What are the current strengths of our childcare system? (please check all that apply)**

- Dedicated Registered Early Childhood Educators
- Committed Boards of Directors
- Support from the DSSAB
- Support from the Quality Assurance Committee
- Political support
- New teaching methods, i.e. "How Does Learning Happen?"
- Other (please describe)

3. **What would you say are the most significant gaps or challenges in our childcare system right now? (please check all that apply)**

- Lack of qualified childcare staff
- Limited professional development training for childcare staff
- Limited support/information given to childcare staff, by supervisors
- Inadequate administration of childcare centres
- Inadequate governance of childcare centres
- Lack of shared understanding of what quality childcare is
- Lack of clear indicators to measure childcare quality
- Need for all partners to work more collaboratively, as a system, toward common goals
- Uneven quality of services at different childcare centres
- Too many childcare providers
- Other (please describe)

4. **What needs to happen for us to be successful in achieving our vision of quality childcare? (please check all that apply)**

- Standardize required qualifications for childcare staff
- Improve professional development training for childcare staff
- Ensure succession plans are in place for leadership positions
- Improve knowledge/capacity of childcare centres' Boards of Directors
- Develop a shared understanding of what quality childcare looks like in our community
- Develop clear, standardized indicators to measure quality across the system
- Ensure that all partners share common goals and are able to work together as a system
- Improve support/information provided to childcare staff by supervisors
- Improve knowledge/capacity of childcare supervisors to manage/administer childcare centres
- Reduce number of childcare operators
- Other (please describe)

5. If you could make one recommendation that would really help to improve the quality of our childcare system, what would it be?

6. Do you have any additional comments you would like to share about our childcare system?