
Best Start Phase I: Laying the Foundation

Implementation Planning Guidelines for Best Start Networks

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Ministry of Children
and Youth Services



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Introduction

Best Start is a comprehensive, evidence-based early learning and care strategy designed to help give Ontario's children the best possible start in life and help them achieve success in school.

Best Start is distinct from other initiatives in that it:

- will help parents and families – regardless of individual economic or social circumstances
- responds to the clear message from communities that Ontario needs more integrated accessible services for young children and families
- focuses primarily on meeting children's and family's needs by strengthening, enhancing, building on and integrating existing programs and services – rather than creating new structures or organizations
- asks all existing organizations that provide services for children from the prenatal stage through to Grade 1 – regardless of which ministry funds them -- to share their expertise, and plan together
- is community driven: the provincial government will set out the types of evidence-based services that should be available to children and families across Ontario and targets/outcomes for those services, but the planning for how those services will be delivered and integrated will be done by the communities based on each community's needs and strengths.

Because Best Start is community driven, it may look different in various communities (e.g., rural, urban, francophone and Aboriginal). With guidance from the province, each community will decide how best to organize and integrate services to meet its population's needs.

About these Guidelines

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) conducted consultations at a provincial and regional level with key French and English stakeholders. In total, approximately 1,800 people attended the consultations across the province. The goal of the consultations was to seek input on the draft version of the Implementation Planning Guidelines for Best Start Networks. To this end, stakeholders showed significant support for the vision and direction of Best Start and provided valuable input pertaining to the implementation of Best Start. The

Implementation Planning Guidelines for Best Start Networks have been revised based on that input.

Best Start is an ambitious strategy. It will take at least 10 years to implement all its components across the province, and planning and implementation will be done in phases at the local/community level and led by Best Start networks.

These guidelines are designed to guide the local planning and implementation activities of the Best Start networks. They provide an overview of the Best Start strategy and describe how to establish Best Start networks. They then set out the steps the networks and key partners, such as CMSMs/DSSABs, will take to start planning and implementing Best Start in their communities.

The guidelines are divided into two parts:

- Part I: guidelines for ***all*** communities to implement the Phase I components of Best Start.
- Part II: guidelines for ***three demonstration communities*** to implement all components of Best Start.

Please note that the reference to school boards in this document includes school authorities.

Ontario's Commitment to Children

Putting Our Children First

Our children are our future. The Government of Ontario is committed to putting children and youth first, and developing programs that will support families and help children and youth reach their full potential.

Ontario's Vision for Children

An Ontario where children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential.

A Ministry Dedicated to Children and Youth

In 2003, the Government established a ministry dedicated to the healthy growth and development of children and youth. The role of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) is to build a more seamless and rational system of services for children and youth. Its mandate is to:

- set the government's policy agenda for children and youth
- lead the implementation of the government's Best Start Strategy working in partnership with other ministries such as Education, Health and Long-Term Care, Community and Social Services, Culture, and Tourism and Recreation
- influence other ministries to assess their policies and programs for their impact on children and youth
- manage the system of children's services and deliver some services directly.

A New Approach to Planning and Managing Services for Children and Youth

Children and youth programs have been brought together under one ministry. Some government-funded children's programs – such as those managed by the Ministries of Community and Social Services, Health and Long-Term Care, and Community Safety and Correctional Services – have been transferred to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Other children and youth programs -- such as those provided by the Ministries of Education, Citizenship and Immigration, Culture, and Tourism and Recreation – will continue to be delivered by those ministries, but MCYS will work closely with them and with other

community partners to plan and coordinate services. The goal is to help give children the best possible start in life, prepare youth to become productive adults, and make it easier for families to get the services they need at all stages of a child's development.

The responsibilities for children and youth services, which have transferred to MCYS, will continue to be delivered through existing agencies and organizations, such as public health units, children's aid societies, Ontario Early Years Centres, and child care centres. However, the planning for those services will be integrated, which will encourage communities across the province to take a more integrated approach to serving children and families.

How Are Our Youngest Children Doing Now?

Ontario's children are generally doing well. Canada ranks near the top of the world in reading literacy, and Ontario's children are at the national average. But we do have some weaknesses: according to early evidence, as many as one out of every four children in Ontario (25%) may enter school not ready to learn (McCain and Mustard, 1999). Results from the 2003-2004 Grade 3 Provincial Test revealed that only 54% of English-language students achieved the provincial standard for reading, 58% for writing, and 64% for mathematics. Results of the French-language students are 49% for reading, 63% for writing and 55% for mathematics.

We also know that factors such as maternal depression, teen pregnancy, poor health, isolation, poverty, and disabilities may put young children at risk for poor learning.

- Ontario's population has a relatively high rate of postpartum/maternal depression (10 to 15% of women, 26% of teens) – much of which goes undiagnosed and untreated.
- We also have a high rate of teenage pregnancy: 5% of live births in Ontario are babies born to teens.
- The 2004 Report Card on Child Poverty indicates there are 373,000 children living in poverty in Ontario. That's a 35% increase since 1989, (Campaign 2000, Report on Child Poverty in Ontario, 2004).

These are problems we must address if we want children to reach their full potential.

What is the Most Effective Way to Support Young Children?

We know that the family is crucial to helping children develop learning skills, and that programs that enable families to support their children while they are young are highly effective (Mustard and McCain 1999; Hertzman and Keating, 1999). We also know that high quality licensed child care (centre-based or home-based), which involves parents and helps children develop cognitive and social skills can help children be ready for school (Peisner-Feinberg et al, 1999). This knowledge is being used to guide all programs for young children and families.

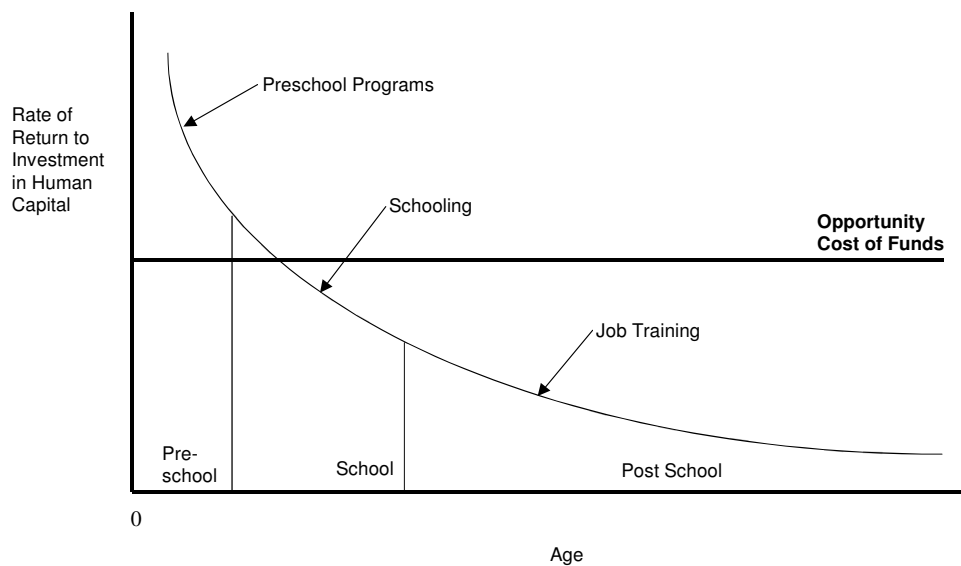
Rationale for Best Start

As part of its efforts to transform children and youth services, MCYS is focusing on services for young children. Best Start represents a major redesign of services in terms of how children and families are supported from the prenatal stage through to Grade 1.

The early years from conception to age 6 have the most influence of any time in the life cycle on brain development and subsequent learning, behaviours and health (McCain and Mustard, 1999). Learning begets learning: learning is a dynamic process and is most effective when it begins at a young age and continues through adulthood (Heckman, 2000). Children who are ready to learn when they start school are more likely to complete school, find employment and make positive contributions to society (Hertzman and Keating, 1999).

When we support our youngest children, society reaps the benefits over many years as those children develop into healthy, educated, confident and productive adults. Investing in children is an investment in Ontario's future. As the following graph shows, investing in our youngest children in the first years of their lives leads to the greatest return on our investment.

Figure 1:
Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment
(Carneiro & Heckman, 2003)



What is Best Start?

Goals of Best Start

Children in Ontario will be ready and eager to achieve success in school by the time they start Grade 1.

To make Ontario an international leader in achieving the social, intellectual, economic, physical and emotional potential of all its children.

Best Start is a government-wide priority. It is one of the multi-year strategic transformation initiatives that ministries will undertake to support the government's key priority of student success. It is a comprehensive and ambitious early learning and care strategy that requires different ministries to work together to address the factors that put young children at risk, and to create communities that support healthy child development and learning.

Best Start is a partnership with parents that recognizes the key role parents play in preparing their children for school. It is also a partnership among ministries and among different levels of government (i.e., provincial, federal and municipal) to help provide the services and supports to help children succeed.

Best Start will:

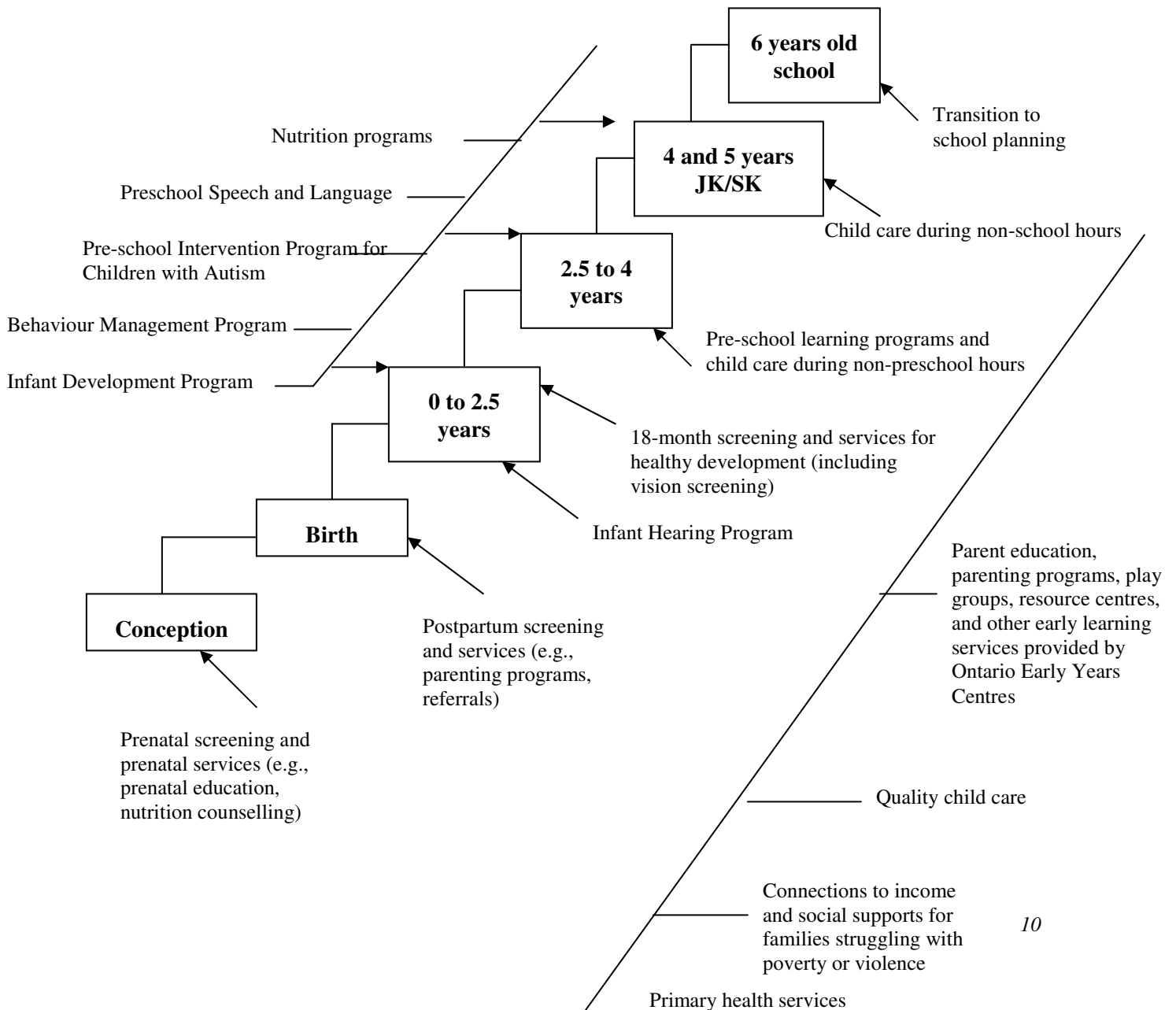
- Help parents help their children to be successful in school;
- Enhance existing services and introduce innovative approaches to healthy child development, early learning and care; and
- Bring community services together in a comprehensive, flexible, integrated and seamless way so children and parents can access them at familiar neighbourhood locations.

Best Start is the platform on which we can begin to address the broader determinants of healthy development. It will:

- *help parents support their children*
- *help children in Ontario be ready to achieve success in school when they start Grade 1*
- *help make the transition to Grade 1 as smooth, seamless and successful as possible*
- *make high quality early learning and care available for our youngest learners*
- *provide a variety of parenting supports*
- *help identify and provide support to children who need extra help*
- *build on partnerships with communities and with the federal and municipal levels of government.*

Scope

By using an integrated approach to the provision of service at the community level, Best Start will help create a comprehensive system of services that supports children, including francophone, aboriginal and children with special needs, from birth through to the transition into school. Some services, such as parenting programs, health services, infant development services and Preschool Speech and Language will be available to families and children at any time in the early years (i.e., from the prenatal stage through to Grade 1); others, such as screening services or certain learning programs, are provided at specific ages and stages of young children’s lives. Best Start includes services for young children, regardless of circumstances.



Strategies

To achieve this long-term vision of comprehensive services for young children, the MCYS will pursue 10 key strategies over the next 10 years.

In addition, three demonstration communities have been established and will receive funding to implement the full Best Start vision. The experience of these three demonstration communities will provide critical information and identify best practices that will guide the implementation of Best Start across the province.

1. Build on existing children’s services planning groups to establish Best Start networks responsible for planning and implementing Best Start in their communities

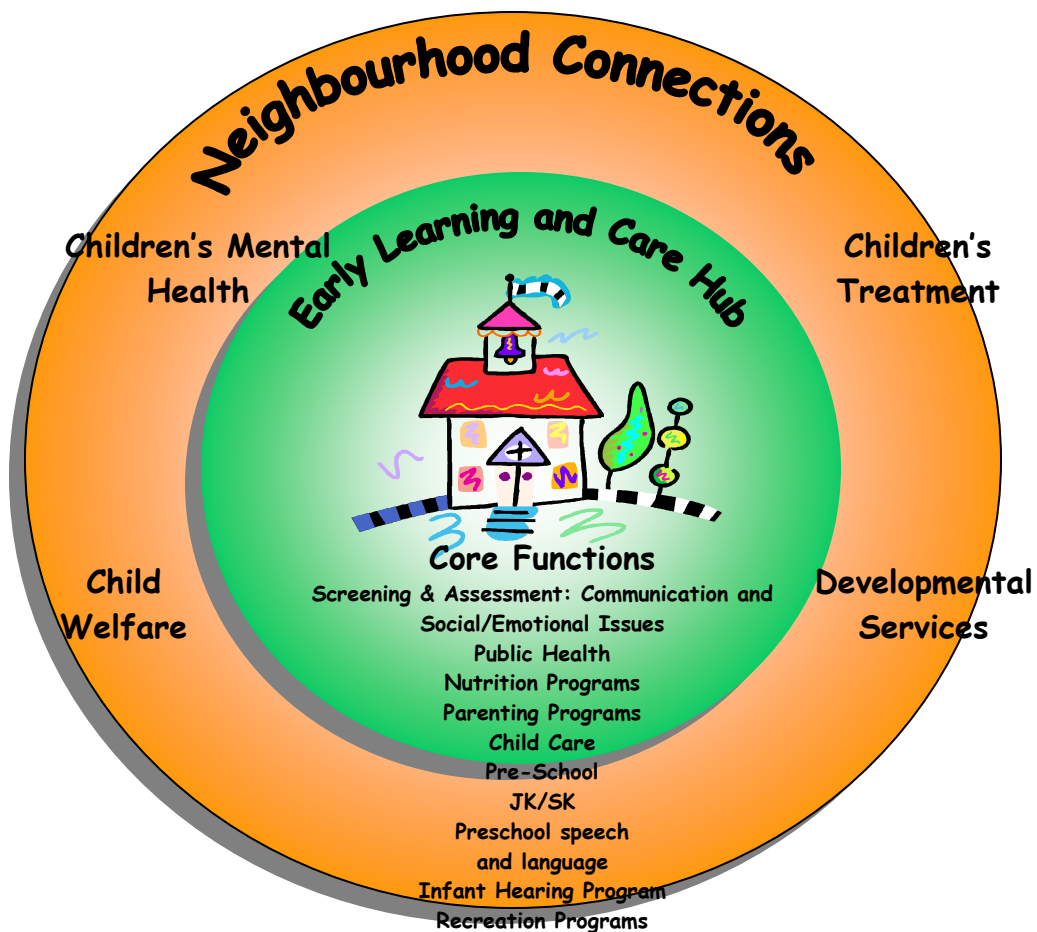
Early learning and care services are best planned and integrated at the local community/neighbourhood level. Communities across Ontario are currently at different stages in organizing and providing services for young children and families, and each community will have different strengths and needs. To help create an integrated system of services that works for each community, the ministry will ask all organizations that provide services for young children to build on and enhance existing early years planning groups to form Best Start networks responsible for planning and implementing Best Start in their communities. The CMSMs/DSSABs will be responsible for bringing community partners together for the first meeting to identify and establish the local Best Start networks. The boundaries of the local Best Start networks will be the same as the boundaries of the CMSMs/DSSABs. In addition, four regional French language networks will be created with broader boundaries using MCYS regions, Ministry of Education (EDU) districts, French language district school boards and CMSMs/DSSABs (see Appendix 1).

2. Create neighbourhood early learning and care hubs that provide integrated services and supports for families with young children

To make it easier for families to get the services they need, neighbourhood early learning and care hubs will be created in schools (please see Appendix 2 for the Schools First Policy) and, if not feasible, close to schools, where families can have access to: core early learning and care programs (e.g., public health services and well-baby visits, immunization, parenting programs, quality child care, pre-school programs, nutrition programs, other school health programs); some specialized supports (e.g., preschool speech and language, mental health services); and links to other specialized services (e.g., developmental services, child welfare, children's treatment centres) and to other services in the community (e.g., recreation programs).

Through the early learning and care hubs:

- *children will be assessed for problems or delays with all aspects of their development*
- *children and parents will have access to a wide range of early learning and care services*
- *children who need more specialized services will be referred to services linked to the hub (e.g., developmental services, children's treatment services, child welfare services)*
- *parents will have access to flexible programs available at times that meet their needs.*



3. Support flexible implementation strategies that make sense for communities (e.g., urban, rural, northern, francophone, Aboriginal, ethnocultural communities)

The neighbourhood early learning and care hubs will be designed by local Best Start networks to reflect their communities' unique needs and challenges. The expectation is that most hubs will be located in elementary schools, where they can be integrated with JK/SK programs (please see Appendix 2 for the Schools First Policy). In some communities locating a hub within a school may not be feasible. In those circumstances, communities may choose other sites as the hub (e.g., libraries, community centres, OEYCs) with formalized linkages to elementary schools. The decision about where to locate early learning and care hubs will be based on a number of factors, including: culture; language needs; parents' needs (i.e., for parents who work shifts or on a seasonal basis, schools may not be the most appropriate site for services); the distance between families' homes, work, schools and child care settings; the availability and security of suitable space in schools or other community settings; and the number and location of existing licensed child care centres. Best Start networks will work closely with parents to develop flexible implementation strategies that meet families' needs. The planning for the early learning and care hubs will need to take into consideration the needs of specific communities, such as the francophone population, Aboriginal communities, and ethnocultural communities.

4. Give communities tools to support the planning process

There are a number of tools that the communities can use to inform the planning process for Best Start, such as:

- the *Early Development Instrument* (EDI), which will help identify areas and neighbourhoods of high need for early child development programs and services,
- the *Community Service Inventory* (CSI), which will help communities integrate services and identify service gaps, and
- any other tools/relevant information that will assist the planning process such as the *Requirements for Developing Best Start Infrastructure Projects*.

5. Create an integrated early learning and care program that combines preschool, JK and SK with high quality, child care during non-school hours

An important component of Best Start is to develop a learning program for the early learning and care setting which will help prepare children for Grade 1. The key components within the early learning and care program include:

- A major expansion of child care with priority on children enrolled in JK and SK across the province. Families with children in JK and SK programs will have access to a seamless day that integrates quality child care five days a

week outside of school hours throughout the school year, and all day during the summer months. At the same time, there will also be a gradual expansion of child care for children aged 0 to 4 to increase their access to quality child care.

- The creation of a developmentally appropriate, universal, pre-school program for 2.5 to 4 year olds from September to June to be offered 2.5 hours per day (or equivalent) at no cost to parents. This will be implemented when funding will be available.

In order to support these two key components, MCYS has established an expert panel on an Early Learning Program, which is developing a framework for early learning programs in Ontario. Specifically in the short term, the panel will develop an early learning program to be implemented in the pre-school early learning and care settings that will link with the JK/SK program. In the long-term, the Best Start plan involves the creation of a single integrated early learning and care program that is developmentally appropriate for children ages 2.5 – 5 years.

6. Create more licensed child care spaces and assist more families in need with child care costs.

Best Start will use existing and the recently announced federal funds to build/renovate new child care spaces in licensed child care programs -- both centre-based and home-based -- and provide child care subsidies for more children. This will give more parents and children access to the licensed child care system. The focus of Best Start is to expand the early learning and care system for children in JK and SK for the non-school hours and to gradually expand the early learning and care system for children aged 0-4 years.

7. Improve the quality of both regulated and informal early learning and care programs in Ontario.

Best Start includes a comprehensive plan to improve quality in the early learning and care system in Ontario. The following steps are expected to result in improvements to the quality in the current child care system:

- An expert panel on Quality and Human Resources has been established to recommend how to create a knowledgeable and skilled early learning and care workforce by examining factors that impact on quality such as education and training, remuneration, recruitment, and retention in the regulated sector. The panel will also identify a baseline of knowledge for practitioners in the unregulated sector.
- The College of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) Working Group is developing a recommended model for a College of ECEs that will establish the qualifications and standards for professionals working in the early learning and care environment.
- The Best Start strategy recognizes that a quality integrated early learning and care system requires the need to stabilize the current child care system. In

order to achieve this, Best Start will be addressing the issues of wages, benefits and working conditions that support a quality interaction between the adult and child.

8. Enhance key early identification and intervention programs

The ministry has provided enhanced funding for existing early identification and intervention programs (i.e., Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Preschool Speech and Language, Infant Hearing Program). It will also explore and implement the best approach to early identification, intervention and treatment for postpartum and maternal depression.

9. Develop and support universal screening of all children at 18 months

When children in Ontario receive their 18-month immunizations, they will also be screened for healthy child development and, if necessary, referred to appropriate services. The ministry has established an Expert Panel on the 18-month well baby visit to identify strategies to promote consistent use of a common developmental record, and to bring parents, doctors/nurses and early years service providers together to talk about children's development.

10. Change policies and practices, and remove barriers

The ministry will review and, if necessary, modify ministry policies and practices that are barriers to integrating services for children. This includes a review of how child care operators are funded. The ministry will also develop and implement a sliding scale income test to determine eligibility for child care subsidies which will replace the current needs test.

As a further example of how the ministry will address issues of policies, practices and barriers, MCYS created the Best Start Quick Response Team to support the three Best Start demonstration communities. As a group of interministerial problem solvers, the Quick Response Team will work to eliminate barriers that may arise and impede the successful implementation of Best Start at the local level. This team will help streamline the approval process, within their respective ministries, to provide guidance to communities in a timely and effective way.

The Configuration of Best Start Networks – Composition and Roles, Accountability and Planning Phases

Local Best Start Networks

Communities across the province, led by CMSMs/DSSABs, are being asked to build Best Start networks responsible for planning and implementing Best Start at the local level in accordance with the Implementation Planning Guidelines for Best Start networks. There will be one Best Start network in each municipal planning area or a total of 47 networks. Appendix 7 provides maps of the English and French and, Catholic and Public district school boards along with CMSMs/DSSABs boundaries (school authorities are not included in these maps).

Regional French-Language Best Start Networks

“Recognizing the need for services in French for Francophone children, Ontario will work with CMSMs and DSSABs to address those needs through the early learning and child care system in order to support the vitality of the French language and culture in Ontario.” Moving forward on Early learning and Care – Agreement-in-Principle between the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario, May 2005

The French-language population in Ontario has specific needs in the area of early learning and care. The planning and implementation of Best Start must effectively address those needs and reflect the characteristics of the French-language population.

In order to facilitate the participation of French-language District School Boards and other francophone stakeholders and to respond to the needs of the French-language communities, broader boundaries will be used for the creation of French-language networks.

Therefore, in addition to the 47 CMSM/DSSAB-led networks, the MCYS Regional Offices will be responsible to bring together community partners to form and to coordinate four Regional French-language Best Start networks (see Appendix 1). Since Best Start is not limited to child care and, therefore, involves many other community programs and services, this option is viable only if concrete mechanisms are in place to connect the Regional French-language network with the local Best Start networks. For example, some members of the Regional French-language network must also serve on the local Best Start networks. This interconnected process will help meet the needs of the francophone population while following the policy development work of MCYS (see Figure 2).

It is expected that the CMSM/DSSAB-led networks will work closely with their respective Regional French-language network in order to address the need for services in French for francophone children and parents through the early learning and care system.

The four Regional French-language Best Start networks are structured as follow:

Network number 1 (Central-South-West), the largest, would include 5 MCYS regions, 3 French-language District School Boards, 1 EDU District Office, 26 CMSMs/DSSABs and other community players that provide services to francophone children and parents. They may decide to create sub-groups due to the size of network 1.

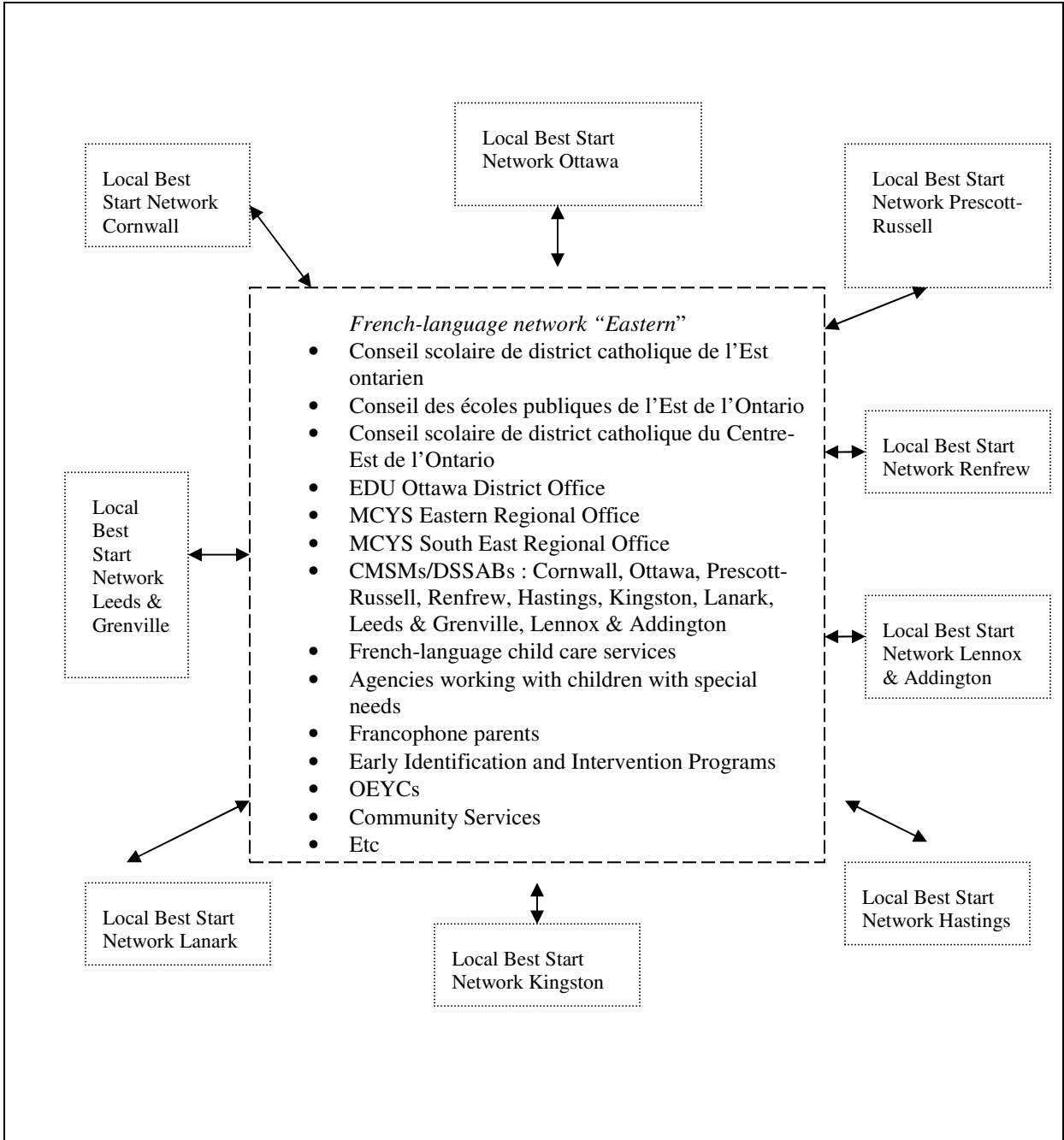
Network number 2 (Eastern) would include 2 MCYS regions, 1 EDU District Office, 3 French-language District School Boards and 9 CMSMs/DSSABs.

Network number 3 (North East) would include 1 MCYS region, 1 EDU District Office, 3 French-language District School Boards and 5 CMSMs/DSSABs.

Network number 4 (Northern) would include 1 MCYS region, 1 EDU District Office, 3 French-language District School Boards and 7 CMSMs/DSSABs.

The Regional French-language Best Start networks will be required to develop Terms of Reference (see sample in Appendix 4). However, since the priorities for the francophone population must be reflected in the local Best Start plans, the Regional French-language Best Start networks will not be required to develop a Best Start plan.

Figure 2 - Example of a Regional French-language Best Start network



Composition and Roles

As indicated earlier, the local Best Start networks/Regional French-language Best Start networks will reflect the unique composition of each community. The following is a suggested membership on the networks, recognizing that the distinctiveness of the community may impact on the composition of the network:

- Parents
- Parenting Programs
- Early Identification and Intervention Programs
- District School Boards
- Health and Specialized Services (includes Local Health Integration Networks)
- Income and Security Programs
- Population-specific Services
- Early Learning and Care Programs
- Community Services
- Policy makers/funders

For further discussion of the services/organizations that should be part of the Best Start networks please see Step 1.1. Also, a description of the distinct roles of each of the members of the network may be found in Appendix 3.

The roles of the individual service providers/organizations participating on the Best Start network remain consistent with their respective funder's requirements. The planning for services by the individual service providers/organizations will need to reflect and be informed by the Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan of the network.

Accountability

Best Start Networks

The local Best Start networks will be accountable to the MCYS for developing the Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan and for monitoring its implementation. This plan will integrate services funded by a number of different ministries, and provided by a number of different agencies. This means that all members of the Best Start network will have **shared accountability** for integrating services and making sure that they work together to achieve Best Start goals.

The local Best Start network has two main responsibilities:

- 1. Develop Terms of Reference for the local network*
- 2. Develop a Phase I Integrated Implementation Plan*

The Terms of reference and the Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan must be signed off by all members of the Best Start network.

Best Start Members

Some members will have **individual accountability** for planning and implementing components of Best Start in a way that is consistent with the network's Best Start plan and meets their funders' requirements.

Members of the Best Start network will bring their individual service plans/contracts to the local network table, where they will be shared and integrated into the Phase 1 Integrated Implementation plan. During that process, they will also confirm their role in Best Start (e.g., providing some services through Best Start hubs, accepting and making referrals to other Best Start services).

Network members are also accountable for fulfilling their role in Best Start. Agencies that sign off the Best Start plan and have the appropriate approval from their governing body (i.e. Council, Board of Trustees, Board of Health) will then be held accountable for making sure they fulfil their commitments for their component of the Best Start plan by their funders. For example, all MCYS funded partnership agencies' service contracts will reflect the Best Start Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan components relative to their agency in their service contract with MCYS.

Regional French-Language Best Start Networks

The Regional French-language Best Start network is required to develop terms of reference and will inform and guide the local Best Start networks so that needs of the francophone population are reflected in the local Best Start plan.

CMSMs/DSSABs

CMSMs/DSSABs will be responsible for the following:

1. Best Start Transition Plan 2005-2006 - lead the Best Start Transitional Plan, which includes the Infrastructure Plan, for the expansion of child care. The CMSM/DSSAB will be accountable for developing the Best Start Transitional Plan to increase licensed child care spaces as described in Task 2 of these guidelines.
2. Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan 2006-2007 onwards – plan with the local Best Start network and implement the child care components of the Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan.
3. Child Care Service Plan Incorporating Best Start Child Care Components – develop a child care service plan that describes the management and planning of local child care services. This plan will be revised to include the Best Start Child Care Components.

The CMSM/DSSAB will consult and provide the local Best Start network and the Regional French-language network with regular updates on the Best Start Transitional plan for 2005-06.

Municipal Council will approve the Best Start Transitional Infrastructure plan and Child Care Service Plan incorporating the Best Start Child Care Components prior to submitting these plans to the MCYS Regional Office for approval.

The Best Start Transition plan will be shared with the local Best Start network as another source of information used to inform the development of the Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan.

CMSMs/DSSABs will work with the Best Start networks to develop the Best Start Child Care Infrastructure plan and will provide a plan that is consistent and compliments the Best Start Phase 1 Integrated Implementation plan e.g. where possible CMSMs/DSSABs should look at opportunities to expand child care in the location of the neighbourhood early learning and care hubs.

As well, CMSMs/DSSABs will work with the local Best Start network to plan the implementation of the child care component of the Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan for 2006-07 onward.

HBHC, Infant Hearing, Preschool Speech and Language Services, OEYC's and other Pertinent Programs

HBHC, Infant Hearing, Preschool Speech and Language services, OEYC's , and other pertinent programs (i.e., children's mental health) will bring their current service delivery plans to the local Best Start network to inform the development

of the Best Start Integrated Implementation plan. Individual plans should be consistent and complement the Best Start Integrated Implementation plan. These partnering agencies will look for ways to integrate the Best Start goals and objectives into their existing and future plans.

Service providers of these programs will be responsible for planning and implementing the components of the Phase 1 Integrated Implementation plan relevant to their services at the local level. In addition to local accountability, MCYS will work through the service contract process to make sure these programs fulfill their commitment to a local integrated Best Start Plan.

Planning Phases and Timelines

Best Start is an ambitious strategy that will take 10+ years to fully implement. The pace of implementation will depend on the funding available each year for these services. Best Start will be implemented in two phases:

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Phase I										
Plan/implement certain Best Start components in all communities (e.g., enhance HBHC services, restore PSL and IHP service levels, enhance special needs resources, expand child care during non-school hours with priority on children in JK/SK, and gradual expansion for children 0-4)	→									
Plan/implement full Best Start strategy in three demo communities (urban, rural, francophone/northern)	→									
Develop an income test to determine eligibility for subsidies	→									
Develop 18 month well baby check up	→									
Establish a provincial baseline for children's readiness to learn at school using the EDI	→									
Develop early learning program	→									
Develop HR plan to support Best Start and ensure quality	→									
Establish the College of Early Childhood Educators	→									
Phase II										
Plan/implement full Best Start strategy in all communities				→						

Planning Supports

The implementation planning for Best Start will be community driven and there are a number of tools that the communities can use to inform the planning process such as:

- the Early Development Instrument (EDI), which will help identify areas and neighbourhoods of high need for early child development programs and services
- the Community Service Inventory (CSI) which will help communities integrate services and identify service gaps
- other tools/relevant information that will assist the planning process which includes:
 - Implementation Planning Guidelines for Best Start Networks
 - Requirements for Developing Best Start Infrastructure Projects
 - funding to CMSMs/DSSABs to support the community planning in the network
 - funding to support planning and implementation of Best Start Phase I components in all communities
 - funding to support the planning, implementation and integration of all Best Start components in the Demonstration Communities
 - Samples of Terms of Reference
 - Best Start Implementation Planning Template

Section 1
Implementation Planning
Guidelines for All Communities
Phase 1 of Best Start

Implementation Planning for Phase I

Planning Tasks: Phase I

Phase 1 of Best Start will be crucial in laying the foundation for the full implementation of Best Start over the next ten years. This first phase consists of the following four tasks at the community level:

- Task 1** Build Best Start networks based on existing planning bodies.
- Task 2** Develop a transition plan to increase licensed child care spaces and subsidies in 2005-06 with priority for children in JK and SK and gradual expansion of licensed child care and subsidies for children aged 0-4 years.
- Task 3** Develop a Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan
- Task 4** For Demonstration Communities only: develop plans to implement the full Best Start vision

Key Deliverables and Dates for Phase I Planning

Deliverable	Responsibility	Due Date
1. Best Start network (terms of reference and membership)	Best Start network	Sept. 30, 2005
2. Transition plan to use existing vacant child care spaces to increase the number of child care spaces for families with priority for children in JK and SK and gradual expansion for children aged 0-4 years, and identify any infrastructure planning required for renovations to accommodate additional spaces for 2005-06 and any out-year infrastructure projects that can begin in 2005-06	CMSMs/ DSSABs in consultation with networks	Oct. 31, 2005
3. Full implementation plan that outlines the community's vision for Best Start and its proposed multi-year roll out	Best Start network	Dec. 31, 2005

Task 1:

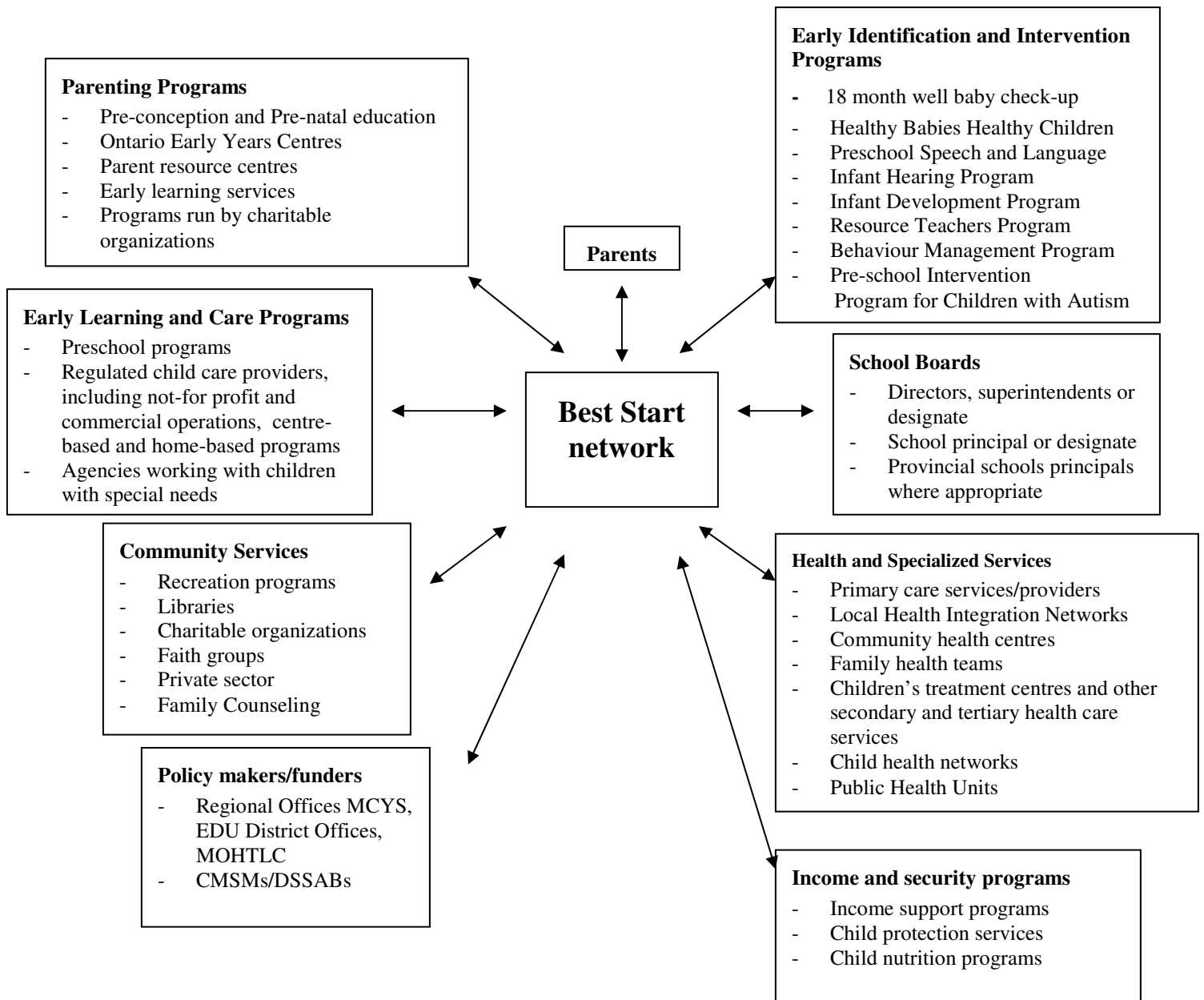
Build Best Start Networks

Building both the local and regional French-language Best Start networks will involve the steps described below.

Step 1.1: Bring Together Community Partners

Most Ontario communities have already developed groups responsible for planning and delivering early years services or children's services. The CMSMs/DSSABs will be responsible for bringing community partners together to identify which existing community planning table could form the local Best Start network (i.e., by adding members or expanding the group's mandate). Given the number of planning groups that exist in many communities, this may provide an opportunity to streamline and integrate those groups. Please note, given the emphasis in Phase 1 on expanding child care with priority for children in JK and SK and gradual expansion for children aged 0-4 years, the local Best Start networks will use the same boundaries as the CMSMs/DSSABs. As previously mentioned, the four Regional French-language networks will be created using broader boundaries (please see appendix 1).

The suggested membership on the networks is listed below, recognizing that the uniqueness of the community may impact on the composition of the network.



If the group is too large, or people cannot attend the meetings, the CMSMs/DSSABs can consider different strategies to involve community partners, such as:

- meeting with a group of partners and asking them to select one representative for the network
- establishing smaller working groups to plan different Best Start components.

Agencies invited to participate in a Best Start network are expected to designate a staff person/representative to attend meetings and to support their representative's participation (e.g., consider network activities as part of work hours, fulfil commitments to provide information).

Step 1.2: Engage Parents in Best Start and Build Partnerships

Parents play the most important role in nurturing children and preparing them for school. The environments they create and the choices they make about early learning activities have the greatest influence on their children's development. Parents are highly knowledgeable about their children. They know their strengths and their learning styles, and they are valuable sources of advice for children's services. The success of Best Start depends on parent involvement. The local Best Start network/Regional French-language network will identify ways to build strong effective partnerships with parents, including but not limited to:

- having parent representatives serve on the network
- asking parents to chair subcommittees
- finding ways to engage parents from a wide range of communities and socio-economic levels

Strategies to Engage Parents

Allocate a proportion of positions on the network to parents.

Contact School Councils at the local schools and other parent groups to find parents interested in serving on the network

If the network is serving a particular language or ethnocultural community, ask community leaders to help identify parents who can speak for the community.

Try to recruit parents of children with special needs: they are often very knowledgeable about services and aware of the gaps.

Hold a public meeting at the local school or community centre to talk about Best Start and the network.

Place ads in local papers or posters in places where parents go with their children.

Offer training and orientation for parents who would like to participate but do not have experience serving on planning committees.

Schedule meetings at times convenient for parents.

Reimburse parents for the cost of child care and transportation so they can attend meetings.

Find innovative ways for parents in rural areas to participate (e.g., video conferencing).

Find ways to overcome language barriers and communicate effectively with parents (e.g., avoid jargon).

- surveying parents about their preferred location for programs and about the services they would like to see co-located
- involving parents in planning services or serving on advisory groups
- involving parents in monitoring and evaluating services
- developing parent support groups that operate out of the neighbourhood hubs
- surveying parents about the types of information they want on Best Start services, and how they want to receive that information
- providing volunteer opportunities for parents.

Step 1.3: Provide an Overview of Best Start

The CMSMs/DSSABs, with the support of the MCYS Regional Office, will provide an overview of Best Start, including:

- the vision and goals
- the different components
- the long-term nature of the Best Start strategy, the phased implementation approach, and the proposed order for rolling out the components
- the importance of developing and implementing integrated services that reflect the needs of the community
- the role of the Best Start network and the role of individuals within the network
- the tasks to be completed during Phase I, the timelines and the network's deliverables.

MCYS will provide slides and information that can be used to present the strategy. MCYS Regional Office staff will assist with the presentation and be able to answer any questions about the strategy and its implementation.

Step 1.4: Develop Terms of Reference

Members of the local Best Start network must agree on their terms of reference. MCYS recommends that the terms of reference for the network include, at a minimum, the following:

- the tasks to be completed in Phase I
- timelines for the tasks
- criteria to ensure the network is inclusive and representative of all children and parents (e.g., children with special needs, ethnocultural communities) and the full range of services for young children
- roles, responsibilities, accountability

Please note that the Regional French-language Best Start network will need to develop terms of reference specific to their role.

See Appendix 4 for a sample Terms of Reference for the local Best Start networks and Terms of Reference for the Regional French-language Best Start networks.

Communities may also add other terms and conditions to the Terms of Reference to reflect their unique needs.

The terms of reference must be signed by representatives of: the CMSMs/DSSABs, MCYS Regional Office, EDU District Office, the relevant district school boards¹, and Public Health Units.

Step 1.5: Establish Clear Accountability

Please refer to the section on Accountability on page 20.

Step 1.6: Describe the Best Start Network

Best Start networks will submit a letter to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services which will describe the network, including:

- its terms of reference
- how it represents all community services/organizations that should be involved in an early learning and care strategy
- the mechanisms it will use to set clear accountability for both shared and individual responsibilities
- its commitment to implementing Phase I within the timelines.

Note: MCYS Regional Offices are responsible for reviewing and approving the composition and terms of reference of the Best Start network.

¹ The reference to school boards includes school authorities.

Task 2: Develop a transition plan to increase licensed child care spaces and subsidies in 2005-06 with priority for children in JK and SK during non-school hours and gradual expansion of licensed child care and subsidies for children aged 0-4 years.

The first priority of Best Start is to increase licensed child care spaces (centre-based and home-based) with priority for children in JK and SK during non-school hours and gradual expansion of licensed child care and subsidies for children aged 0-4 years, and to enhance community capacity to provide child care. The expansion of child care will be done most effectively by using a combination of vacant and newly created spaces (centre-based and home-based). Because CMSMs/DSSABs are responsible for planning child care services in their areas, they will take the lead on this task.

Some communities across Ontario may have some existing vacancies in child care programs that could be mobilized quickly to provide more child care for families. Some child care programs will also have the capacity to add new spaces quickly and easily. This task will involve the steps described below.

Step 2.1: Assess the need for child care during non-school hours for children in JK and SK and for children aged 0-4

Using the Early Development Instrument (EDI)* and Community Services Inventory (CSI) data and other available information on population needs, the CMSMs/DSSABs will assess the community's need for child care with a priority on children in JK/SK during non-school hours and for children aged 0-4. This will involve identifying the number of children who are:

- in JK and SK
- aged 0-4
- in formal child care (centre-based and home-based)
- in informal child care if it is subsidized (for Ontario Works participants) and available
- not in any form of child care but who might participate in child care.

Assessing the need for child care will also involve reviewing demographic trends in the area (i.e., age of the population, birth rates, immigration trends). The Best Start network should also assess the need for child care for children with special needs as well as programs that will help them make the transition to school.

*The **Early Development Instrument (EDI)** is a short, easy to administer checklist developed in 1997 by the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University and the Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation. It is a population-based tool used by teachers to assess the physical, social, emotional, language and communications development of children in kindergarten (i.e., assess their readiness to learn in Grade 1).*

Communities with the support of school boards can use EDI data to assess populations of children for their readiness to learn (e.g., ability to handle new experiences, ability to be co-operative) and identify the need for early learning and care programs. By analyzing EDI data over time, communities can also determine whether early learning programs are having an impact on readiness for school.

*The **Community Services Inventory** is a data tool designed to help communities gather information on the services available, map where services are located, and identify any gaps.*

* *Note: Some communities are already using the EDI. The tool is being rolled out across the province in order to establish a provincial baseline for children's readiness to learn at school and to assist communities with their planning process. MCYS will provide more information on the roll out.*

French-language context

The SK program is delivered on a full-time basis across the province in all French-language District School Boards. The JK program is also offered on a full-time basis in Ontario's French language District School boards, except in the Eastern Region where it is combined with a developmental and play-based program. These programs are funded by the boards at no costs for parents and follow the school calendar.

The French-language District School Boards decided to offer full-time JK and SK. They see this as an essential investment for the success of francophone students in a minority setting.

In this context, the steps recommended as part of the Best Start Strategy for the French-language population (as well as for some of the English-language District School Boards who are also providing full-time JK and SK program) consist of:

- Expand the number of regulated child care spaces and subsidies for the hours before 8:30 am and after 3:30 pm for children in JK and SK and for full-time child care for 4 and 5 year olds in the summer months
- Build on existing programs and invest at an earlier age, by expanding the number of regulated child care spaces and subsidies, for children aged 0 to 4.

By doing so, children attending licensed French-language child care programs will acquire the necessary language skills and will be more ready to learn by the time they enter JK in a French-language school and, therefore, will be more likely to achieve academic success in school.

Aboriginal context

These early learning and care supports will be available to Aboriginal children whether they live on- or off-reserve in local communities across the province. The needs of Aboriginal children and parents will be taken into account in the local planning and implementation of Best Start. It is an expectation that the needs of the Aboriginal community are addressed through the planning process. To that end, Aboriginal communities must be included in the planning.

These guidelines address the province's approach in which we will begin to provide early learning and care services in off-reserve communities. MCYS will proceed regarding on-reserve/First Nations communities when the Federal direction regarding investments becomes available.

Children with Special Needs

Best Start supports the inclusion of children with special needs at each stage of the planning and implementation process. It is expected that the transition plan and the Phase 1 Integrated Implementation Plan will describe how children with special needs will have access to the services provided through an integrated system of early learning and care.

Step 2.2: Identify the community’s current capacity to provide child care for children in JK and SK and for children aged 0 to 4

Using existing data, where possible, on child care programs in the community, the CMSMs/DSSABs, in consultation with the Best Start network, will identify the number of vacant child care spaces in existing licensed (non-profit or commercial) child care programs that could be filled if the places were subsidized, as well as the existing system’s capacity to add additional licensed spaces quickly.

Step 2.3: Identify the programs/spaces to receive subsidies, in order of priority

The CMSMs/DSSABs will develop a plan to use existing licensed capacity, including identifying the programs/sites and number of spaces to receive subsidies, in order of priority. Priority should be given to those programs that are located in schools and MCYS encourages focusing on child care within the non-profit sector located in schools. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services in collaboration with the Ministry of Education has developed a *Schools First* policy which states that Best Start networks must consider schools as the first choice for the community expansion of child care space or location for early learning and care hubs as part of Best Start (please see Appendix 2). The decision to expand child care in schools will be driven by available space and community need. Given that it may not be practical in all communities to expand child care in schools, communities may need to consider expanding in other locations such as child care centres near schools. If it is determined that new child care space is not to be located in schools, then the community plan must provide a rationale as to why the school was not the appropriate location, and describe how programmatic linkages to an elementary school or to a family of schools will be maintained.

In the process of doing this, the CMSMs/DSSABs will work with District School Boards and existing child care programs to identify and address space and other issues, including:

- process for integrating early learning and care programs, such as child care and JK and SK, within an existing school or family of schools
- the capacity of proposed sites to meet the requirements of the *Day Nurseries Act* and the *Education Act* (e.g., physical space, numbers)

- additional occupancy costs schools and other sites may incur by providing more child care spaces (e.g., hydro, heat, custodial services).
- security of tenure for child care programs (i.e., capping of elementary class sizes may limit extra space within schools; the impact on child care space when schools face pressure from increased enrolment)
- potential impact on the need for transportation (i.e., bus service)
- potential impact on existing licensed child care programs in the community (e.g., if all new spaces are added in one or two sites, they may draw children from other programs in the community and threaten their viability).

CMSMs/DSSABs will also identify the amount of subsidy required to support the additional spaces.

Step 2.4: Develop a child care infrastructure plan for renovations/new spaces

The Best Start Transitional Infrastructure Plan will consist of plans to expand the child care spaces for JK and SK children as well as plans to identify the need for moderate growth in the overall child care system for children 0 to 4 years of age. For both expansion requests the plan will include the sites to be renovated and or constructed following the Schools First policy for both age groupings, the costs for each infrastructure project and timeframes for completion for projects related to each age grouping.

The Best Start Transitional Infrastructure Plan outlines the infrastructure needs for the renovation and new building requirements for the development of new spaces for 2005-06. The plan will also include out year projects. Projects that can begin in 2005-06 that will be operational in 2006-07 and onward (refer to the Requirements for Developing Best Start Infrastructure Projects) will also need to be identified. As well, CMSMs/DSSABs must identify sites for expanding child care space and work with the Best Start network to incorporate the Best Start Transitional plan (that includes the Transitional Infrastructure plan) into the Phase 1 Integrated Implementation. This plan will identify where child care and early learning and care hubs can be integrated and developed for 2005-06 onwards.

Task 3: Develop a Phase I Integrated Implementation Plan

Best Start will be implemented in stages over a period of 10+ years. Each year, communities will be asked to develop/update a year-over-year plan to implement certain components of Best Start. For example, in Phase 1, communities are being asked to implement child care during non-school hours with priority for children in JK and SK and gradual expansion of child care for children aged 0-4 years, develop plans for early learning and care hubs, and enhance early identification and intervention services. The Best Start components to be implemented each year will be chosen based on a number of factors, including ministry direction, priorities identified by communities, the lessons learned in the demonstration communities, and available funding.

Although Best Start will not be fully implemented for a number of years, Best Start networks are being asked to lay-out their initial vision/plan for what Best Start – fully implemented – would look like in their communities. This will involve the steps described below.

Step 3.1: Describe the community's needs for early learning and care services

Using existing data (e.g., community service inventory, needs assessments, EDI results, data from the Social Development Council) wherever possible, the Best Start network will describe and map the community's need for early learning and care services. The description will include:

- an inventory of the agencies providing services for children up to age 6 and their parents, and the services/functions they provide, including child care programs, early identification and intervention programs, public health programs, nutrition programs, parenting programs and preschool learning programs (i.e., current community capacity)
- an analysis and map of existing children's services in the community
- a list of neighbourhoods where there are a significant number of families at risk for problems with healthy child development
- the population in those neighbourhoods (e.g., size, socio-economic status, language, culture)

- any gaps in existing programs (e.g., geographical areas not well served, francophone, Aboriginal)
- the types of services required to meet needs (e.g., parenting services, early intervention services, preschool learning programs, child care, programs for children with special needs).

Step 3.2: Develop a plan to implement early learning and care hubs

Identify hub sites

Based on the needs assessment, Best Start networks will identify the most appropriate number of early learning and care hubs to meet community needs, and the most appropriate sites for the hubs within the community. The number of hubs will vary in different parts of the province. For example, Best Start networks in urban areas may create 1 hub for a family of 4 to 5 elementary schools. In rural and northern areas, it may make more sense for each school to be a hub because an individual school serves a larger geographic area.

As per the Schools First policy, networks must first look at sites that are, or could be, located **within a new or existing school**.

If the school space is not suitable due to:

- family need -- proximity to parts of the community where the need for early learning and care services is high;
- physical space -- suitability to deliver the services;
- accessibility – for families and children with physical, developmental, cognitive, or other disabilities;
- safety; and
- ability to meet the needs of aboriginal and ethnocultural populations, where applicable

then communities may identify other sites that are near or within a family of schools, such as child care centres, Ontario Early Years Centres, community centres etc.

If the early learning and care hubs are not to be located in schools that provide JK/SK, then the Best Start plan must describe how the sites will be linked to the school programs as well as the rationale as to why the school was not the appropriate location. In some communities, it may make sense to establish spaces in home-based child care programs located close to schools.

When choosing sites for the hubs, the Best Start network should also take into account:

- security of tenure for the hubs (i.e., capping of elementary class sizes may limit extra space within schools; the impact on space allocated for the hub when schools face pressure from increased enrolment)

- additional occupancy costs that schools and other sites may incur by providing space (e.g., hydro, heat, custodial services, computer services).
- potential impact on families' need for transportation to access the hubs (i.e., bus service).

Identify hub services and mechanisms for service integration

The Best Start network will identify the early learning and care services that will be delivered through each hub. The constellation of services may vary from community to community, and from hub to hub, depending on community needs and where services are being delivered now. For example, some may decide to provide well baby services at the hub, while others may refer families to nearby clinics for these services. Not all services have to be provided in the hubs themselves: some could be provided through community satellites, but coordinated through the hubs. **At a minimum, MCYS expects that the services delivered through the hubs will integrate early learning and care programs that will include: child care for the non-school hours for children in JK and SK and child care for children 0 to 4, JK/SK programs and parenting programs.**

The Best Start networks will also identify: the specialized services that will be linked to the early learning and care hubs (including developmental services and other services for children with special needs), the mechanisms to help families access these services, and strategies to encourage integration of children's services in the community.

The services provided through the hubs will continue to be funded in the usual way (i.e., parenting programs by the Ontario Early Years Centres, the health programs that are funded by public health). MCYS encourages communities to identify ways to support integrated service delivery.

Step 3.3 Develop a plan to implement child care during non-school hours for children in JK and SK and for children 0 to 4 for 2006-07 onwards.

Giving families with children in JK/SK and children aged 0 to 4 access to high quality licensed, centre or home-based child care, will be the first Best Start initiative to be implemented province-wide. The transition plan – which uses *existing* child care capacity to add licensed child care spaces and subsidies for children in JK and SK and children aged 0 to 4 (see Step 2) in 2005-06 – will help some families. But more must be done to make sure that families with children have access to quality child care – if they choose to use it. Once existing capacity has been used, Best Start networks, through the CMSMs/DSSABs, will need to address the creation of *new* child care capacity, which are consistent with existing CMSMs/DSSABs child care plans.

Identify sites where new centre-based and home-based child care places could be added or developed

Using EDI and CSI data and other information on population needs, the Best Start network, through the CMSMs/DSSABs, will identify all the sites (centre-based and home-based) where child care during non-school hours for children in JK and SK and children aged 0 to 4 could be added or developed for 2006-07 onwards.

Note: these spaces would be over and above those filled/created as part of Step 2, the transition plan.

Please refer to step 3.2 pertaining to location of sites consistent with the Schools First policy.

For each site in the plan, the network will indicate: the number of new child care places that could be added over the next three years, and an estimate of the subsidy required (e.g., how many spaces would be fully subsidized, how many partially subsidized, how many families will receive subsidies).

As part of the plan, the network will also indicate the number of spaces that would still be required (in subsequent years) to meet community needs.

Develop an infrastructure plan for retrofits, renovations and new construction required for the additional child care spaces

The Best Start network, through the CMSMs/DSSABs and in some cases school boards, will identify the retrofits, renovations, capital improvements and/or new construction required to provide safe, high quality child care at the proposed sites. The network will also provide a workplan, including timelines and the estimated costs for all capital improvements or new construction.

MCYS has developed Requirements for Developing Best Start Infrastructure Projects to assist communities in this work. Please note both non-profit and commercial operators are eligible for new operating funding for child care. Only non-profit operators are eligible for infrastructure funding. Consistent with the Schools First policy, MCYS encourages the expansion of child care within the non-profit sector located in schools.

Identify human resource requirements and any other requirements

Increasing the number of child care spaces will create a demand for qualified child care professionals. The Best Start plan will assess the child care human resources available in the community, and determine the number of additional workers required to staff the added spaces in centre-based programs and providers in home-based programs.

Develop a budget for new/expanded child care programs

The CMSMs/DSSABs will provide a projected annual operating budget for the additional child care spaces (centre-based and home-based) for 3 years, based on the number of spaces and subsidies to be added in each year. This budget will be

based on available funding and consistent with the service contract requirements of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services for child care.

Step 3.4 Integrated plan to enhance key early identification and intervention programs

During Phase I, MCYS has increased funding to existing early identification and intervention programs (e.g., Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Preschool Speech and Language/Infant Hearing Program) to restore service levels and to help them reach their targets. Public health units and Preschool Speech and Language/Infant Hearing Programs will be responsible for planning and implementing these components of Best Start and they will participate in the networks to develop strategies for integrating these services into the overall Best Start plan. As part of the expansion of the child care system, funding for special needs resources that are funded under the *Day Nurseries Act* has also been increased. In addition to the enhancement of these existing early identification and intervention programs, MCYS is working with primary care providers and experts in child development to identify strategies to give families more consistent access to developmental screening for all children at age 18 months.

Describe how service enhancement/service restoration funding will be used to achieve provincial targets

As part of their plans, public health units and the agencies responsible for providing Preschool Speech and Language, Infant Hearing Program will describe how they will use the service restoration funding to achieve provincial targets for their programs. The service providers will also describe the strategies they will use to close the gap between the number of families who are receiving these services now and the provincial targets (e.g., outreach programs to hospitals to promote postnatal screening for all new mothers). This information will be included in the Best Start plan.

Describe how enhanced Healthy Babies, Healthy Children (HBHC), Preschool Speech and Language (PSL), Infant Hearing Program (IHP) and special needs resources for licensed regulated child care will be delivered, and how they will integrate with the neighbourhood early learning and care hubs

These key early identification and intervention services will continue to be delivered by HBHC, PSL, IHP and special needs staff working with a network of other providers and professionals (e.g., physicians, prenatal programs, midwives, hospitals, mental health professionals). While some of these services may be delivered in the neighbourhood hubs, others will continue to be provided in other locations in the community. Each of these programs will provide a description of their services, including those that can be delivered in the neighbourhood hubs, and a plan for implementing any changes will be required.

The Best Start plan will include a description of how and where the Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Preschool Speech and Language, Infant Hearing Program and Infant Development Programs will be delivered, and how they will be integrated with the neighbourhood early learning and care hubs (e.g., service agreements between the hubs and the public health units to provide screening services and other interventions on site certain days a week).

Step 3.5: Set out the longer term vision to implement Best Start

During Phase I, communities will focus on implementing child care during non-school hours for children in JK and SK and for children aged 0 to 4, helping enhance key early identification and intervention programs, and helping develop the early learning and care hubs. Although other components of Best Start will not be implemented until later, the ministry would like an indication of future community requirements now.

To help guide planning for Best Start, the networks will set out their longer term vision, including:

- the need for the various Best Start services in the community (i.e., the need for parenting programs, the projected demand for preschool learning programs, the projected need for child care for children in preschool learning programs for the hours outside of the preschool program)
- the order in which they would want to implement other Best Start components, based on the community's needs and capacity
- strategies for integrating programs and services
- what the Best Start system will look like when it is fully implemented

Step 3.6: Identify any challenges to implementing Best Start and strategies to overcome them

In the process of developing the vision for Best Start in their community, the networks will identify implementation challenges, including:

- lack of appropriate physical space at certain sites
- the need for renovations to physical space
- challenges in integrating programs and services
- geographic and transportation issues
- lack of capacity to implement certain components (i.e., lack of human resources, lack of technology).

They will also propose strategies to overcome these challenges. This information will help the ministry plan the roll out of Best Start province-wide.

Section 2

Implementation Planning Guidelines for the Three Demonstration Communities

Note: This section is included in this document so that everyone understands the implementation planning for the Demonstration Communities.

Implementation Planning Guidelines for Demonstration Communities

What are Best Start Demonstration Communities?

Early in 2005, MCYS identified three communities that will receive funding to implement the full Best Start vision by 2007/08 (Hamilton East, rural Lambton/Chatham-Kent and Timiskaming). The experience of these demonstration communities will provide critical information to guide province-wide implementation of Best Start over the next 10+ years. The purpose of the demonstration communities is to:

- demonstrate how the full continuum of Best Start services could lead to positive outcomes for children
- provide the opportunity to evaluate key components of Best Start before implementing them province-wide
- identify best practices to guide other communities, particularly those which may face implementation challenges. For example, rural communities will face some unique issues implementing Best Start, including long distances between parents' homes/work/schools and child care, smaller schools, fewer child care centres, and parents working shifts or on a seasonal basis. The rural site will demonstrate how a rural community can implement the Best Start vision in the midst of these challenges.

How Will Demonstration Communities Implement Best Start?

To help demonstration communities implement the integrated Best Start hub model, they will be “freed” from some of the current funding rules, regulations and mandate requirements. They will also be asked to build on existing partnerships, programs and planning structures.

The Best Start Demonstration Communities will establish neighbourhood early learning and care hubs that bring together quality child care, preschool, JK and SK, parenting programs, OEYCs, public health nurses, breakfast/nutrition programs and access to specialized support in one location. These hubs will have direct and well-organized linkages with preschool speech and language/infant hearing programs and children’s mental health programs. Screening and assessment for children with communication and social/emotional issues should occur within the early learning and care hub and, where appropriate, the interventions would be provided within the hub. The early learning and care hub will also have explicit and direct linkages with children’s treatment centres and Children’s Aid Societies so that children and families who require additional specialized help will receive it or that families involved in those services can benefit from the programs provided at the early learning and care hub. These hubs will provide services and programs in ways and at times that meet parents’ needs: they will have flexible hours and be open beyond the usual 9 to 5, Monday to Friday.

As per the *Schools First* policy mentioned earlier (see appendix 2), schools are seen as the most appropriate sites for early learning and care hubs. Within each neighbourhood or family of schools there will be one main hub that offers the full set of functions and is directly connected to each and every other school in the area. This main hub would provide the necessary support for an integrated and seamless approach to services for the family. In every school where JK and SK is provided, parenting programs and child care will be offered on site or, in the case of child care, through child care centres and home child care providers in the immediate school community. This will help provide a seamless day for children and families.

The demonstration communities will plan and implement their hubs in ways that make sense for children and families. There will be core functions that each hub must include, but how these are delivered will differ across communities.

Core Functions of the Hub

In the demonstration communities, the core functions of the Early Learning and Care Hub must include the following:

- child care for the non-school hours for children in JK and SK and children 0-4

- enhanced early identification and intervention programs
- linkage to 18 month well baby check up using the Nipissing and Rourke developmental assessment tools
- public health programs, including a postpartum/maternal depression strategy
- nutrition programs
- parenting programs/Ontario Early Years Centres
- preschool early learning program 2.5/hours/day, 5 days/week, or equivalent, at no cost to families

The Early Learning and Care Hub must also develop links with other children’s services , including:

- Primary care services
- Children’s mental health services
- Preschool Speech and Language/Infant Hearing
- Children’s Treatment Centres
- Child Welfare (Children’s Aid Society).

Planning Tasks

Like other communities across Ontario, demonstration communities will develop Best Start Networks and give priority to expanding child care during non-school hours for children in JK and SK, and gradual expansion of child care for children 0-4 years, enhancing early identification and intervention programs, and developing early learning and care hubs. At the same time, they will also plan and implement the other components of Best Start. Their tasks include:

Task 1 – Build Best Start Network based on existing planning bodies

Task 2 – Develop the Best Start Vision for the Community

Task 3 – Plan all Best Start Components

Task 4 – Integrate Implementation

Key Deliverables and Dates for Demonstration Communities

Deliverable	Responsibility	Due Date
1. Best Start network (terms of reference and membership)	Best Start network	June 30, 2005
2. Best Start vision	Best Start network	June 30, 2005
3. Final Best Start implementation plan	Best Start network	Oct 31, 2005
4. Evaluation of Year 1	MCYS, Best Start network	Dec 31, 2006

Task 1:

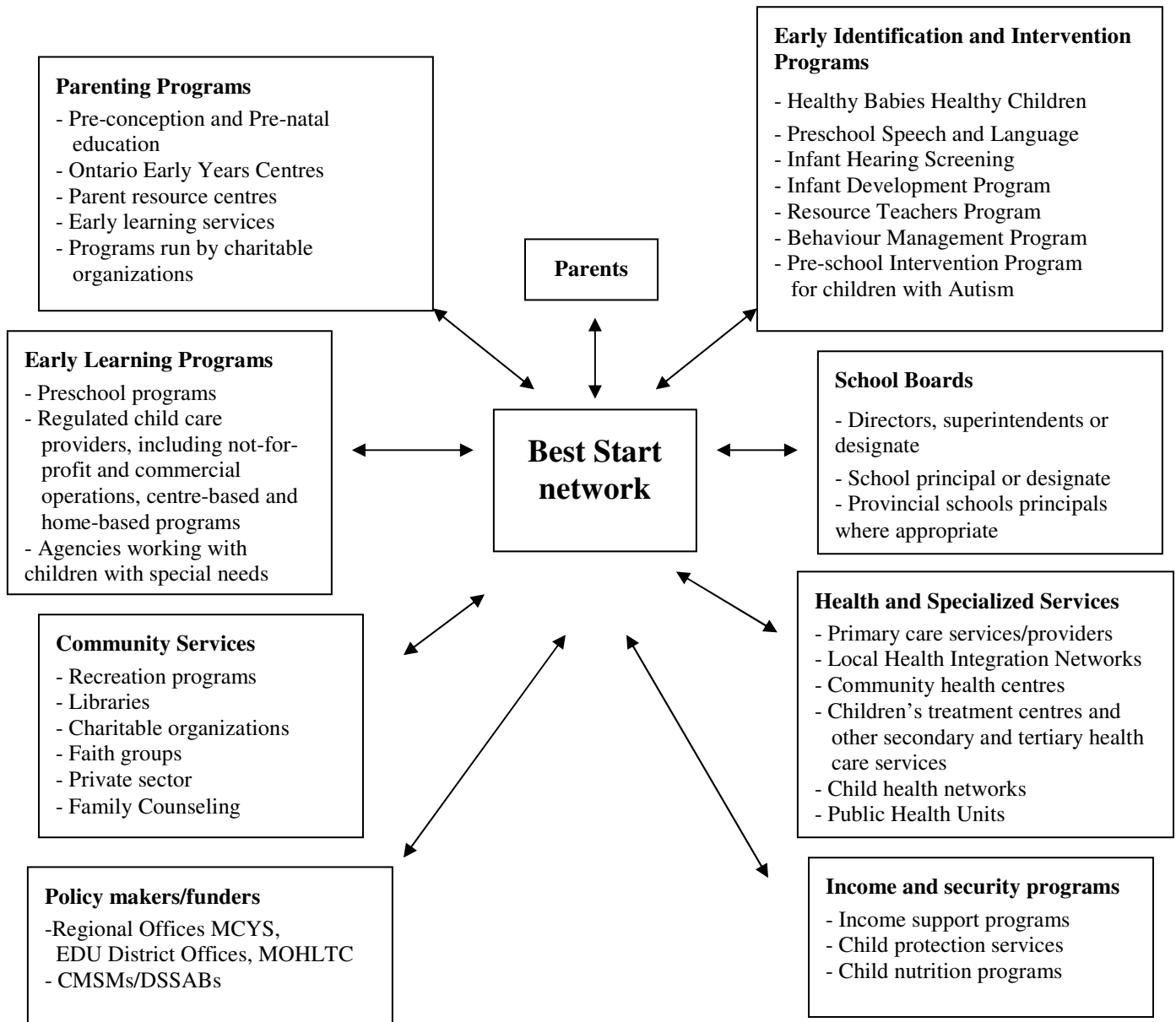
Build Best Start Networks

Communities across the province, led by CMSMs/DSSABs, are being asked to build Best Start networks. This will involve the steps described below.

Step 1.1: Bring Together Community Partners

Most Ontario communities have already developed groups responsible for planning and delivering early years services or children's services. The CMSMs/DSSABs will be responsible for bringing community partners together to identify which existing community planning table could form the Best Start network (i.e. adding members or expanding the group's mandate may be necessary). Given the number of planning groups that exist in the community, this may provide an opportunity to streamline and integrate those groups. Please note, given that the emphasis of Phase 1 is on expanding child care during the non-school hours for children in JK and SK and gradual expansion to children aged 0-4 years, the local Best Start networks will use the same boundaries as the CMSMs/DSSABs.

The suggested membership on the networks is listed below, recognizing that the uniqueness of the community may impact on the composition of the network.



If the group is too large, or people cannot attend the meetings, the CMSMs/DSSABs can consider different strategies to involve community partners, such as:

- meeting with a group of partners and asking them to select one representative for the network
- establishing smaller working group to plan different Best Start components.

Agencies invited to participate in a Best Start network are expected to designate a staff person/representative to attend meetings and to support their representative's participation (e.g. consider network activities as part of work hours, fulfil commitments to provide information).

Step 1.2: Engage Parents in Best Start and Build Partnerships

Parents play the most important role in nurturing children and preparing them for school. The environments they create and the choices they make about early learning activities have the greatest influence on their children's development. Parents are highly knowledgeable about their children. They know their strengths and their learning styles, and they are valuable sources of advice for children's services. The success of Best Start depends on parent involvement. The Best Start network will identify ways to build strong effective partnerships with parents, including but not limited to:

- having parent representatives serve on the network
- asking parents to chair subcommittees
- finding ways to engage parents from a wide range of communities and socio-economic levels
- surveying parents about their preferred location for programs and about the services they would like to see co-located
- involving parents in planning services or serving on advisory groups
- involving parents in monitoring and evaluating services

Strategies to Engage Parents

Allocate a proportion of positions on the network to parents.

Contact School Councils at the local schools and other parent groups to find parents interested in serving on the network

If the network is serving a particular language or ethnocultural community, ask community leaders to help identify parents who can speak for the community.

Try to recruit parents of children with special needs: they are often very knowledgeable about services and aware of the gaps.

Hold a public meeting at the local school or community centre to talk about Best Start and the network.

Place ads in local papers or posters in places where parents go with their children.

Offer training and orientation for parents who would like to participate but do not have experience serving on planning committees.

Schedule meetings at times convenient for parents.

Reimburse parents for the cost of child care and transportation so they can attend meetings.

Find innovative ways for parents in rural areas to participate (e.g., video conferencing).

Find ways to overcome language barriers and communicate effectively with parents (e.g., avoid jargon).

- developing parent support groups that operate out of the neighbourhood hubs
- surveying parents about the types of information they want on Best Start services, and how they want to receive that information
- providing volunteer opportunities for parents.

Step 1.3: Provide an Overview of Best Start

The CMSMs/DSSABs, with the support of the MCYS Regional Office, will provide an overview of Best Start, including:

- the vision and goals
- the different components
- the importance of developing and implementing integrated services that reflect the needs of the community
- the role of the Best Start network, and the role of individuals within the network
- the tasks to be completed during Phase I, the timelines and the Network's deliverables.

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services will provide slides and information that can be used to present the strategy. Regional Office staff will assist with the presentation and be able to answer any questions about the strategy and its implementation.

Step 1.4: Develop Terms of Reference

Members of the Best Start network must agree on their terms of reference. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services recommends that the terms of reference for the network include, at a minimum, the following:

- the tasks to be completed in Phase I
- timelines for the tasks
- criteria to ensure the network is representative
- roles, responsibilities, accountability

See Appendix 4 for a sample terms of reference for the local Best Start network.

The terms of reference must be signed by representatives of: the CMSMs/DSSABs, MCYS Regional office, EDU District Office, the relevant district school boards², and Public Health Units.

² The reference to school boards includes school authorities

Step 1.5: Establish Clear Accountability

Please refer to the section on Accountability on page 20.

Step 1.6: Describe the Best Start Network

Best Start networks will submit a letter to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services which will describe the network, including:

- its terms of reference
- how it represents all community services/organizations that should be involved in an early learning and care strategy
- the mechanisms it will use to set clear accountability for both shared and individual responsibilities
- its commitment to implementing the full Best Start strategy within the timelines.

Note: MCYS Regional Offices are responsible for reviewing and approving the composition and terms of reference of the Best Start network.

Task 2:

Develop Best Start Vision

The Best Start Networks are being asked to develop a vision for Best Start in their communities. This will involve the steps described below.

Step 2.1: Describe the community's needs for early learning and care services

Using existing data (e.g., community service inventory, needs assessments, EDI results, data from the Social Development Council) wherever possible, the Best Start network will describe and map the community's need for early learning and care services. The description will include:

- an inventory of the agencies providing services, and the services/functions they provide, including child care programs, early identification and intervention programs, public health programs, nutrition programs, parenting programs and preschool learning programs
- an analysis and map of existing children's services in the community
- neighbourhoods where there are a significant number of families at risk for problems with healthy child development
- the population in those neighbourhoods (e.g., size, socio-economic status, language, culture)
- any gaps in existing programs (e.g., geographical areas not well served, francophone, Aboriginal)
- the type of services required to meet needs (e.g., parenting services, early intervention services, preschool learning, child care, programs for children with special needs).

The network will then conduct a more specific needs assessment designed to:

- determine the need for child care during the non-school hours for children in JK and SK and children 0-4
- determine the need for parenting programs and preschool learning programs

Step 2.2: Set out the vision for Best Start in the community

To help guide planning for the full implementation of Best Start, the networks will set out their longer term vision, including:

- the need for the various Best Start services in the community (i.e., the need for parenting programs, the projected demand for preschool learning programs, the projected need for child care for children in preschool learning programs during non-program hours)
- the order in which they will implement other Best Start components, based on the community's needs and capacity – and keeping in mind the ministry priorities (i.e., expansion of child care for children in JK and SK during the non-school hours, enhanced early identification and intervention programs, neighbourhood early learning and care hubs)
- what the Best Start system will look like in their community when it is fully implemented

Step 2.3: Identify any challenges to implementing Best Start and strategies to overcome them

In the process of developing the vision for Best Start in their community, the demonstration communities will identify any implementation challenges, including:

- lack of appropriate physical space at certain sites
- the need for renovations to physical space
- challenges in integrating programs and services
- geographic and transportation issues
- lack of capacity to implement certain components (i.e., lack of human resources, lack of technology).

They will also propose strategies to overcome these challenges.

The MCYS Regional Office will review the needs assessment and vision to confirm that the demonstration communities' work reflects Best Start goals and principles.

Task 3:

Plan all Best Start Components

Demonstration communities will implement the full Best Start vision. To do this, the Best Start networks in these communities must plan each component. Priority should be given to planning for the early learning and care hubs, child care during the non-school hours for children in JK and SK and gradual expansion to children 0-4 years, and enhanced early identification and intervention services (i.e., the components of Best Start that will be implemented province-wide). This will involve the steps described below.

Step 3.1: Develop a plan to implement early learning and care hubs

Identify hub sites

Based on their needs assessment, demonstration communities will identify the most appropriate number of early learning and care hubs to meet community needs, and the most appropriate sites for the hubs within the community. As per the *School first* policy mentioned earlier, schools are seen as the most appropriate sites for early learning and care hubs. The number of hubs will vary in different parts of the province. For example, Best Start networks in urban areas may create 1 hub for a family of 4 to 5 elementary schools. In rural and northern areas, it may make more sense for each school to be a hub because each school serves a larger geographic area.

Identify hub services and mechanisms for service integration

In the demonstration communities, the core functions of the Early Learning and Care Hub must include the following:

- child care for children in JK and SK during the non-school hours and child care for children 0-4
- enhanced early identification and intervention programs
- 18 month well baby check up using the Nipissing and Rourke developmental assessment tools
- public health programs, including a postpartum/maternal depression strategy
- nutrition programs
- parenting programs/Ontario Early Years Centres

- preschool early learning program 2.5/hours/day, 5 days/week, or equivalent, at no cost to families

The Early Learning and Care Hub must also develop links with specialized services for children and families requiring additional help, including:

- Primary Care services
- Children’s Mental Health
- Preschool Speech and Language/Infant Hearing
- Children’s Treatment Centres
- Child Welfare (Children’s Aid Society).

Note: The services provided through the hubs will continue to be funded in the usual way (i.e., parenting programs by the Ontario Early Years Centres, the health programs that are funded by public health).

Step 3.2 Develop a plan to implement child care during non-school hours for children in JK and SK and gradual expansion of child care for children 0-4 years

Identify sites where new centre-based and home-based licensed child care places could be added or developed

Using EDI and CSI data and other information on population needs, the demonstration communities, through the CMSMs/DSSABs, will identify all the sites (centre-based and home-based) where child care during non-school hours for children in JK and SK and children aged 0-4 could be added or developed, starting with vacant places and unused capacity in existing programs. Please refer to Step 3.1 pertaining to location of sites consistent with the Schools First policy.

As part of the plan, the network will also indicate the number of spaces that would still be required (in subsequent years) to meet community needs.

Develop infrastructure plan for retrofits, renovations and new construction required for the additional child care spaces

The Best Start networks within the demonstration communities, through the CMSMs/DSSABs and in some cases school boards, will identify the retrofits, renovations, capital improvements and/or new construction required to provide safe high quality child care for non-school hours for children in JK and SK and children 0-4 at the proposed sites. The network will also provide a workplan, including timelines and the estimated costs for all capital improvements or new construction.

MCYS has developed Requirements for Developing Best Start Infrastructure Projects to assist communities with this work. Please note both non-profit and commercial operators are eligible for new operating funding for child care. Only non-profit operators are eligible for infrastructure funding. Consistent with the

Schools First policy, MCYS encourages the expansion of child care within the non-profit sector located within schools.

Identify human resource requirements and any other requirements

Increasing the number of child care spaces will create a demand for qualified child care professionals. The demonstration communities will assess the child care human resources available in the community, and the number of additional workers required to staff the added spaces in centre-based programs and providers in home-based programs.

The network will also identify the equipment, furniture, playgrounds and any other resources required to operate both centre-based and home-based child care programs within current provincial standards.

Develop a budget for new/expanded licensed child care programs

The CMSMs/DSSABs will provide a projected annual operating budget for the additional licensed child care spaces (centre-based and home-based) for the next 3 years, based on the number of spaces and subsidies to be added in each year. This budget will be based on available funding and consistent with the service contract requirements of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services for child care.

Step 3.3: Integrated plan to enhance key early identification and intervention programs

During Phase I, MCYS has increased funding to existing early identification and intervention programs (e.g., Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Preschool Speech and Language/Infant Hearing Program) to restore service levels and to help them reach their targets. Public health units and Preschool Speech and Language/Infant Hearing Programs will be responsible for planning and implementing these components of Best Start and they will participate in the networks to develop strategies for integrating these services into the overall Best Start plan. As part of the expansion of the child care system, funding for special needs resources that are funded under the *Day Nurseries Act* has also been increased. In addition to the enhancement of these existing early identification and intervention programs, MCYS is working with primary care providers and experts in child development to identify strategies to give families more consistent access to developmental screening for all children at age 18 months.

Describe how service enhancement/service restoration funding will be used to achieve provincial targets

As part of their plans, public health units and PSL/IH programs will describe how they will use the service restoration funding to achieve provincial targets for HBHC and PSL/IH programs. The service providers will also describe the strategies they will use to close the gap between the number of families who are

receiving these services now and the provincial targets (e.g., outreach programs to hospitals to promote postnatal screening for all new mothers). This information will be included in the Best Start plan.

Describe how enhanced Healthy Babies, Healthy Children (HBHC), Preschool Speech and Language (PSL), Infant Hearing Program (IHP), and special needs resources for licensed regulated child care will be delivered, and how they will integrate with the neighbourhood early learning and care hubs

These key early identification and intervention services will continue to be delivered by HBHC, PSL, IHP and special needs staff working within a network of other service providers and professionals (e.g. physicians, prenatal programs, midwives, hospitals, mental health professionals). In the demonstration communities, PSL and IHP will be extended to children up to Grade 1. While some of these services may be delivered in the neighbourhood hubs, others will continue to be provided in other locations in the community. Each of these programs will provide a description of their services, including those that can be delivered in the neighbourhood hubs, and a plan for implementing any changes that will be required.

The Best Start plan will include a description of how and where the Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Preschool Speech and Language, Infant Hearing Program, Infant Development and Behavioural Management Programs will be delivered, and how they will be integrated with the neighbourhood early learning and care hubs (e.g., service agreements between the hubs and the public health units to provide screening services and other interventions on site certain days a week).

Step 3.3.1: Plan for the 18 month assessment

The 18-month assessment is a critical strategy in helping parents to help children reach their full potential. The assessment allows parents and caregivers to identify children who may not be meeting developmental milestones, and take steps to help them with the developmental skills they will need to succeed in school. Tools like the Nipissing, a tool that can be administered by parents, and the Rourke Evidence Based Developmental Record, a tool that is used by primary health care providers can be used to assess children up to and at 18 months and beyond. To support communities' efforts to implement the 18-month assessment, MCYS has established an expert panel to provide advice on:

- building on existing HBHC work surveying primary care doctors and nurses to determine their knowledge of the 18-month assessment tools, the extent to which they are assessing children now, and any barriers to implementing a tool like the Rourke.

- strategies to engage doctors and nurses in the 18-month assessment, including communications about the value/importance of the 18-month well baby visit, the role primary care providers play in improving child health, and the work of the expert panel .
- strategies to promote the 18-month well baby visit to parents, to involve parents in the monitoring of their children’s development (e.g., mechanisms to give them easy access to the Nipissing and any support they may need to administer it), and to encourage parents to discuss their child’s development with their doctor or nurse.

NOTE: some of these strategies may change when the work of the expert panel is complete.

Step 3.3.2: Plan for public health and other programs

Public health units and programs like Preschool Speech and Language will work with the network to identify programs and services for families and children that will be delivered through or linked to the hubs. If the community does not already have a strategy for identifying and treating postpartum/maternal depression, it will develop one as part of implementing Best Start.

Planning for programs that will be part of Best Start will involve:

- developing strategies to deal with any gaps in programs for families and young children
- identifying how these services will either be located in the early learning and care hubs or linked to the hubs
- as part of the postpartum/maternal depression strategy, identifying the approach the community will use to identify women at risk as well as the strategies/processes to ensure appropriate referral and treatment
- developing strategies to raise awareness among primary care physicians of: the risks associated with postpartum/maternal depression, the benefits of early detection and treatment, and best practices in managing depression

Step 3.3.3: Plan for nutrition programs

Some children will benefit from access to nutrition programs. To plan for these programs, the network will:

- develop strategies to address any gaps in existing nutrition programs and provide any new programs required within available resources
- determine whether the nutrition programs will be located in the hubs or linked to them. (The network will explain the rationale for any decision NOT to locate the nutrition programs in the hubs in circumstances where the hub is located in a school.)

- develop strategies to reach the families and children who would benefit from these programs.

Step 3.3.4: Plan for parenting programs

To plan for and integrate parenting programs into the early learning and care hubs, the network will:

- identify the parenting programs that should be offered through the hubs
- describe how other programs and services, including Ontario Early Years outreach services and satellites will be linked with the Best Start early learning and care hubs
- develop agreements with Ontario Early Years Centres to provide services in the hubs, focusing particularly on those programs that model effective parenting
- develop strategies to market these programs and services to parents.

Step 3.3.5: Plan for a preschool early learning program

Children between the ages of 2.5 and 4 can benefit from an early learning program. Best Start demonstration communities will provide a preschool early learning program for 2.5 hours each day, 5 days a week (or equivalent) at no cost to families. To support this component of Best Start, the MCYS has established an expert panel to develop a preschool program that is integrated with the JK/SK curriculum.

To develop the preschool early learning and care programs, the demonstration communities will:

- assess the potential demand for a no-cost preschool early learning program (i.e., how many children are in the community, how many are in a preschool program now, how many families would be likely to take advantage of a no-cost learning program offered in a local school or other convenient location.
- identify the best sites for the programs – if the programs are not to be located in the early learning and care hubs, explain why
- describe how the program will be delivered (i.e., where, when, by whom, how it will be integrated with other Best Start programs, how many families and children will be served)
- identify the human resources, physical space (including capital improvements), budget and other resources required to offer the program

Step 3.4: Plan the links to other children’s services

The early learning and care hubs must develop links with specialized services for children and families requiring additional help, including:

- Primary care services
- Children’s mental health services
- Preschool Speech and Language/Infant Hearing
- Children’s Treatment Centres
- Child Welfare (Children’s Aid Society)

The plan must describe the purpose for the linkages and how families will use the hub to access and receive more specialized services.

Step 3.5: Prepare year over year plan and budget

Best Start networks will use a planning template provided by MCYS to complete a year over year plan to implement Best Start. In their plan, demonstration communities will provide more detail about how they will achieve the Best Start vision, including:

- describing the Best Start vision within the community
- identifying the key steps and timelines to fully implement the Best Start vision
- identifying strategies to overcome any barriers to implementing an integrated hub
- describing their plans for the neighbourhood early learning and care hubs, and each of the Best Start services
- identifying the costs associated with implementing the Best Start components, and providing a budget
- describing the community’s plans to monitor and evaluate both the implementation of Best Start, its ability to achieve its goals and objectives, and its impact on families, children, schools and other services for children.

Task 4:

Integrate Implementation

To implement Best Start, agencies and organizations will have to work closely together and co-ordinate their activities. This will involve the steps described below.

Step 4.1: Establish a coordinating/monitoring group

The demonstration communities, through their Best Start network, will establish a local coordinating/monitoring group responsible for guiding implementation of local Best Start implementation plan and resolving any issues. To develop the group, the network should build on existing partnerships, programs and planning structures. The coordinating group could be a subcommittee of the network.

The coordinating group will be responsible for implementing the network's monitoring and evaluation plan, and providing progress reports on the Best Start implementation. This group will be accountable to the ministry for these activities.

Step 4.2: Develop mechanisms to keep stakeholders engaged

The success of Best Start depends on the ongoing involvement and commitment of all partners. To keep stakeholders engaged, the network will:

- develop a feedback mechanism that all stakeholders can use to continue to be involved in planning and implementation
- develop a comprehensive communication plan to inform and gather feedback from families, parents, children, care providers.
- report back to the community about Best Start's impact on service integration and on outcomes for children.

Step 4.3: Share learnings

The demonstration communities will gain valuable knowledge and experience about Best Start that should be shared with one another and with other communities. The demonstration communities will:

- participate in a Best Start practice community with other demonstration communities to share research, best practices and success stories
- develop resources to assist other communities as they move to implement Best Start.