



**THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY**  
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD



# QUALITY CARE FOR OUR FUTURE

October  
2011

A Report on the Quality Assurance  
Enhancement Pilot Project

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### **The Quality Assurance Internal Advisory Committee Members of TBDSSAB**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

In Northern and Southern Ontario respectively, District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) and Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) are responsible for planning and managing the system of publicly-funded licensed child care. The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) is the service system manager in the District of Thunder Bay. In addition to funding the system through a combination of provincial funding and municipal tax dollars, service system management responsibilities include ensuring child care services offer high quality standards of care.

From January to April of 2011, a review of the existing Quality Assurance Program evaluated the effectiveness of the self-assessment based system. The goal of the review was to identify ways in which the reliability and consistency of quality measurement in child care programs could be improved. There was a general consensus among early learning stakeholders in the District of Thunder Bay that the self-assessment process was a valuable but inadequate driver for making and sustaining concrete improvements at a program and system level. TBDSSAB began to explore options that would facilitate a transition to an objective, evidence-based process where evaluators external to the individual programs conducted program reviews, employing a standardized and consistent set of quality measurement criteria.

Upon reviewing available quality measurement systems appropriate for use in Ontario, the Toronto Operating Criteria developed by the City of Toronto was found to be the most comprehensive and appropriate for the needs of the District of Thunder Bay. The Toronto Operating Criteria outlines clear expectations, service standards, and guidelines which both assess and guide child care program operations. In addition to its use as an audit tool during unannounced site visits, it serves as a self-evaluation and planning tool for front line staff, private home providers, and supervisors. It has been used by City of Toronto employees to measure quality and contract compliance since 1997. In 2009/2010 the tool was assessed in detail by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and found to represent a valid and consistent quality measurement tool for licensed child care programs.

From June through August 2011, a Quality Assurance Enhancement Committee (QAEC) was established based on the Terms of Reference developed by TBDSSAB. The committee included representation from:

- Parents
- Licensed child care programs from throughout the District of Thunder Bay (urban, rural, and remote)
- One licensed private home child care agency
- The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario
- Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services
- Children's Centre Thunder Bay, Preschool Consultation Program Representatives (children's mental health program).

The goal of the committee was to provide advice to TBDSSAB on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the Toronto Operating Criteria tool for use in the District of Thunder Bay. Evaluation of the suitability of the Criteria for use in the District of Thunder Bay was conducted through:

- A pilot evaluation of volunteer urban, rural, and remote licensed child care centres and licensed private homes
- Item by item review of the criteria and their applicability in the City of Thunder Bay and rural and remote programs throughout the District.

The pilot concluded with implementation recommendations made by the committee in August 2011. The recommendations and time lines for implementation were subsequently discussed and endorsed at the Thunder Bay District Child Care Supervisor's Network in September 2011.

### **Key Findings:**

1. The overall item-by-item review of the tool, experience of the pilot evaluations, and average scores of the unannounced site visits/audits confirm that the tool is appropriate for use in the District of Thunder Bay without modification.
2. The tool was able to clearly and consistently identify non-compliance items which isolated areas of opportunity for quality improvement in specific programs. The Criteria identified and clarified in more detail strengths and areas of non-compliance consistent with the findings of the former self-administered QA tool.
3. The evaluations identified training needs and future capacity building opportunities for child care programs.
4. Child Care Operators and staff who participated in the pilot have an enhanced understanding of evidence-based quality measurement processes and high quality early learning and care expectations, which they report impacts their daily practice.
5. Committee members involved in the pilot noted it contributed to their understanding of quality of service expectations from a client perspective.

### **QAEC and Supervisor's Network Implementation Plan Recommendations:**

- **Phase 1:** From March to May 2012: Quality Assurance Analyst will complete Operating Criteria evaluations on the remaining child care centres who were not involved in the pilot project through unannounced visits.
- **Phase 2:** From May 2012 to May 2013: Childcare centres will have one year to address any deficiencies identified and to ensure all operating criteria indicator scores are meeting expectations (a score of 3 or 4).

- **Phase 3:** From May to December 2013: Child care centres will be evaluated using the Operating Criteria through unannounced site visits.
- **Phase 4:** January 2014: TBDSSAB will begin posting licensed child care quality rating scores on the TBDSSAB website based on operating criteria evaluations that occur after January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.
- TBDSSAB will review the results of the second audit in comparison with the baseline results from 2011 to 2013, and it is anticipated that in January 2014, scores from the Program and Nutrition Sections of the Operating Criteria will be posted on the TBDSSAB website for public information.
- As is the case in Toronto, it is anticipated that by January 2014 Service Agreements between TBDSSAB and licensed child care programs will be amended to require a minimum cumulative average score of three (3 = meeting expectations) for each licensed child care program site, and a plan of action to address any individual criteria scoring less than three (3).
- TBDSSAB will continue to employ the Operating Criteria to evaluate quality in child care programs and licensed private homes on an ongoing basis.

# INTRODUCTION

## Background

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) is responsible for planning and managing the system of licensed child care and licensed private home child care in the District of Thunder Bay. TBDSSAB's service system management responsibilities include ensuring child care services are meeting high quality standards of care.

Licensing of child care programs under the Ontario *Day Nurseries Act (DNA)* and regulations will be transferred from the provincial Ministry of Children and Youth Services to the Ministry of Education in January 2012. The *DNA* defines basic standards to be maintained within all licensed child care centres in the province. Many Service Managers and other stakeholders have identified the need to raise measurable standards of licensed child care beyond the safety and basic care-focused requirements of the *DNA*.

Towards this end, a Quality Assurance Working Group was established in the District of Thunder Bay in 2002 and subsequently developed a self-assessment based Quality Assurance Program and Process to supplement *DNA* standards. The goal was for child care programs to identify opportunities for improvement and to provide tools and supports to programs to exceed basic licensing requirements. Compliance with the Quality Assurance process is currently a condition of the service contract TBDSSAB has with each licensed operator. Meeting the terms and conditions of the service contract allows programs to maintain eligibility to receive wage subsidy, special needs funding, and to provide care to children in receipt of fee subsidy from TBDSSAB.

From January to April of 2011, a review of the Quality Assurance Program focused on the self-assessment-based system. The goal of the review was to research ways in which the TBDSSAB could enhance not only the reliability and consistency of how the quality of child care programs is measured, but also efforts at quality improvement and service contract compliance. There was general consensus among early learning stakeholders that the self-assessment process was a valuable but inadequate driver for making and sustaining concrete improvements at a program and system level.

At this point, the TBDSSAB began to explore options that would allow a transition to an objective, evidence-based quality evaluation and improvement process. One of the fundamental criteria was that the new process must supplement the existing self-evaluation process with third-party evaluators external to the individual programs. This requirement led us to focus our research on the Toronto Operating Criteria developed by the City of Toronto.

The Toronto Operating Criteria outlines clear expectations, service standards and guidelines to child care providers with a service contract with the City of Toronto. It serves as a self-evaluation and planning tool for front line staff, private home providers, and supervisors. In addition, it is used by the City of Toronto to measure quality and contract compliance. In 2009/2010, the tool was assessed by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) as a



valid way to assess key elements that are essential for a high quality child care program. While the essence of the Toronto Operating Criteria has not changed since its creation in 1997, the tool is refined based on feedback and research and should be considered a living document.

## **FRAMEWORK FOR PILOT PROJECT**

### **Pilot Development**

The purpose of the pilot was to provide advice to TBDSSAB on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the Toronto Operating Criteria tool for use in the District of Thunder Bay. Subsequent to consultation with stakeholders and the Supervisor's Network, TBDSSAB developed Terms of Reference for a pilot Quality Assurance Enhancement Committee (QAEC) to provide advice to TBDSSAB. The pilot was developed to reflect The City of Toronto's Quality Assurance process in the TBDSSAB pilot implementation.

### **Pilot Participation**

The QAEC included representation from:

- Parents
- Nine licensed child care programs from throughout the District of Thunder Bay (urban, rural, and remote)
- One licensed private home child care agency
- Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario
- Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services
- Children's Centre Thunder Bay Preschool Consultation Program Representatives (children's mental health program).

Evaluation of the suitability of the Criteria for use in the District was conducted through:

- A pilot evaluation of volunteer licensed child care centres and licensed private homes
- Item by item review of the criteria and their applicability in the City of Thunder Bay and rural and remote programs.

## Pilot Implementation Schedule

| Task   | Timeline    |
|--|-------------|
| <b>1. Review</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Overview Toronto Operating Criteria Process and Guidelines</li> <li>○ Present PowerPoint overview - have committee review introduction section</li> <li>○ Describe the benefits</li> <li>○ Identify risks and challenges</li> </ul>  | June 2011   |
| <b>2. Plan</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Develop process steps for implementation of program criteria and nutritional assessments</li> <li>○ Develop timelines for assessments and schedule</li> </ul>  | July 2011   |
| <b>3. Implement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Collect and assess data</li> <li>○ Review data at QA Enhancement Meetings</li> <li>○ Monitor process and progress against the implementation plan.</li> </ul>   | July 2011   |
| <b>4. Evaluate</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Summarize all evaluation results</li> <li>○ Formulate full implementation plan with steps and timeline</li> <li>○ Develop a report with recommendations and transition plan for future implementation of the Toronto Operating Criteria for Program and Nutritional sections in licensed centre and home based care</li> </ul> | August 2011 |

## Toronto Operating Criteria Pilot Implementation Process

1. The Quality Assurance Coordinator (QAC) arrives at the child care centre for an unannounced visit and speaks to the Supervisor and/or designate to confirm the following information:
  - which programs are in operation on the given day of visit.
  - ensures the correct criteria are being utilized for programs in operation on day of the visit.
2. The Supervisor introduces the QAC to all staff members, communicates the purpose of the visit and length of time QAC will be at the child care centre to all staff.
3. The QAC will manually complete all program criteria sections applicable, playground and nutrition sections.
4. Upon completion of the assessment the QAC will report non-compliances (criteria scores < 3) with Supervisor or Designate.
5. A report will be completed and sent out via email which will identify non-compliances.
6. After the report has been completed, Supervisors are required to complete an action plan identifying how non-compliance scores will be addressed.

## **DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY FOR PILOT EVALUATION**

### **Overall Pilot Evaluation Methodology**

The basic pilot evaluation methodology included:

- Defining evaluation objectives
- Researching validated tools to assess child care quality
- Identifying key stakeholders and pilot committee
- Reviewing the tool with Quality Assurance Enhancement Committee
- Planning and developing pilot timeline
- Implementing the tool at volunteer pilot sites
- Evaluating results
- Developing a recommended implementation plan

## **ANALYSIS OF PILOT RESULTS**

### **Licensed Child Care Pilot Results**

The Toronto Operating Criteria tool used in licensed child care centres is measured on a progressive 1-4 measurement scale:

- 1 = Does Not Meet Expectations
- 2 = Needs Improvement
- 3 = Meets all Expectations
- 4 = Exceeds Expectations.

A total of 9 licensed child care centres were audited during the pilot project. Of this total:

- 4 sites had an overall quality rating score (program and nutrition sections) of <2.9 (not meeting expectations).
- 5 sites had an overall quality rating score of >3.0 (meeting expectations).

The ratings for each of the sites audited are as follows:

## Individual Licensed Child Care Centre Results

| Licensed Child Care Location | Overall Quality Rating (Program and Nutrition) | Highest/ Lowest Overall Quality Rating | Overall Program Rating (Program Sections only) | Highest/ Lowest Program Rating (Program Sections only) | Overall Nutrition Rating | Highest/ Lowest Nutrition Rating |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Site A                       | 2.75   |  | 2.6  | Lowest   | 2.9                      |                                  |
| Site B                       | 2.9  |  | 2.6  |  | 3.2                      |                                  |
| Site C                       | 3.3  |  | 3.3  |  | 3.3                      | Highest                          |
| Site D                       | 2.95   |  | 3.2  |  | 2.7                      |                                  |
| Site E                       | 3.1  |  | 2.9  |  | 3.3                      |                                  |
| Site F                       | 3.0  |  | 3.0  |  | 3.1                      |                                  |
| Site G                       | 2.55   | Lowest                                 | 2.7  |  | 2.4                      | Lowest                           |
| Site H                       | 3.45   | Highest                                | 3.6  | Highest  | 3.3                      |                                  |
| Site I                       | 3.1  |  | 2.9  |  | 3.3                      |                                  |

In addition to an overall program rating, the audit also provided specific scores for the various age groups of the children.

The overall average program scores per age group were:

**Infant: 3.2 Toddler: 3.0 Preschool: 2.9 School Age: 3.0**

The overall average program score across all age groups was **3.0**.

## Licensed Private Home Results

The Toronto Operating Criteria tool used in licensed private home child care is measured on a progressive 1-3 measurement scale: 1 = Does Not Meet Criteria, 2= Meets Criteria, 3= Exceeds Criteria. Within the tool there are three sections which were audited: Health and Safety, Children's Program and Nutrition. This tool assesses multi-age group care and therefore will not give a breakdown of specific age group scores. Two licensed private homes were audited during the pilot project. The average overall quality rating was 2.1 out of 3.

## Individual Licensed Private Home Child Care Results

| Licensed <i>Private Home</i> Child Care Location | Overall Quality Rating (Health and Safety, Children's Program, Nutrition and Interactions) | Overall Program Rating (Program Section only) | Highest/Lowest Overall Quality Rating |
|--|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| Site #1  | 2.6/3  | 2.6/3   | Highest                               |
| Site #2  | 1.7/3  | 1.7/3   | Lowest                                |

A quantitative analysis of the data obtained during the pilot through the program, nutrition, and playground sections was sent to members of the QAEC for review prior to the last meeting held. At this meeting the proposed implementation plan was presented where members provided feedback and advice to TBDSSAB based on their review of the quantitative and qualitative results. All QAEC members in attendance endorsed the implementation plan and final recommendations. The results of the pilot and implementation plan and recommendations made by the committee were discussed and endorsed at the Thunder Bay Supervisor's Network in September 2011.

## **LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Significant Successes**

The pilot successfully followed the implementation schedule and was completed on time. Nine licensed child care sites and two licensed private home child care programs were evaluated during the months of June and July via unannounced site visits.

The tool was able to clearly and consistently identify non-compliance items which isolated areas of opportunity for quality improvement in specific programs. The Toronto Operating Criteria identified and clarified strengths and areas of non-compliance that are consistent with findings of the former self-administered QA tool.

Child Care operators and staff who participated in the pilot have an enhanced understanding of evidence-based, quality measurement processes and high quality early learning and care expectations, which they report impacts their daily practice.

Committee members involved in the pilot noted it contributed to their understanding of quality from a client perspective.

### **Potential Areas for Clarification and/or Improvement**

#### **Clarification Required for Specific Criteria Indicators**

It was reported that frontline staff and Supervisors required more clarification on the expectations of specific criteria. During Supervisor and frontline staff training, attention should be given to the following items in the operating criteria:

Item 3 – Displays

Item 16 – Seating

Item 20 – Toileting and Diapering Routines and Supplies

## **A validated tool**

The Toronto Operating Criteria tool has been validated by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), therefore the tool criteria indicators and expectations cannot be altered.

## **Different child care philosophies and cultural approaches**

Philosophical and cultural differences such as Montessori and Waldorf were present within our pilot child care centre sites. It was observed that many indicators required these programs to implement a process or require items to be present in their environment which would not necessarily fit with their interpretation of the centre's philosophy. In these particular cases centre Supervisors and the Quality Assurance Analyst will meet after their audit is complete to discuss the rationale behind the non-compliance indicator. Although criteria cannot be altered, opportunities for compromise can be discussed.

## **Process Recommendations**

The pilot evaluation results indicated that the Toronto Operating Criteria tool and process for both licensed child care centres and private homes is attainable for sites in Thunder Bay and District areas. In addition, other participants such as parents and community stakeholders are agreeable and supportive of the Toronto Operating Criteria tool and process the City of Toronto employs with their Quality Assurance Program.

It is recommended that the same Operating Criteria process employed during the pilot is used when evaluating child care programs and licensed private homes.

## **QAEC and Supervisor's Network Implementation Plan and Recommendations**

- **Phase 1:** From March to May 2012: Quality Assurance Analyst will complete Operating Criteria evaluations on the remaining child care centres who were not involved in the pilot project through unannounced visits.
- **Phase 2:** From May 2012 to May 2013: Childcare centres will have one year to address any deficiencies identified and to ensure all operating criteria indicator scores are meeting expectations (a score of 3 or 4).
- **Phase 3:** From May to December 2013: Child care centres will be evaluated using the Operating Criteria through unannounced site visits.
- **Phase 4:** January 2014: TBDSSAB will begin posting licensed child care quality rating scores on the TBDSSAB website based on operating criteria evaluations that occur after January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.

- TBDSSAB will review the results of the second audit in comparison with the baseline results from 2011 to 2013, and it is anticipated that in January 2014, scores from the Program and Nutrition Sections of the Operating Criteria will be posted on the TBDSSAB website for public information.
- As is the case in Toronto, it is anticipated that by January 2014 Service Agreements between TBDSSAB and licensed child care programs will be amended to require a minimum cumulative average score of three (3 = meeting expectations) for each licensed child care program site, and a plan of action to address any individual criteria scoring less than three (3).
- TBDSSAB will continue to employ the Operating Criteria to evaluate quality in child care programs and licensed private homes on an ongoing basis.

Based on the overall item-by-item review of the tool, experience of the pilot evaluations and average scores confirm that the tool is appropriate for use in the District of Thunder Bay without modification. Additionally, it confirms that the implementation plan and recommendations endorsed by the Quality Assurance Enhancement Committee and Supervisor Network can be executed successfully by January of 2014.

## Quality Assurance Operating Criteria Tool Implementation Plan

### Phase 1 – 2012

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Timeline           | March- May 2012: Quality Assurance Analyst will evaluate remaining childcare centres who were not involved in the pilot project through unannounced visits. Evaluate remaining childcare centres to acquire a baseline  |
| Resources Required | <p>Operating Criteria training module delivered to supervisors to train their staff members</p> <p>Childcare Network Meeting (infant, toddler, preschool, school age) training will be delivered regarding Operating Criteria expectations</p> <p>Identify TBDSSAB and child care operator service contract amendments</p> <p>Develop an action plan template and recommended process for using the action plan with Supervisors at their network meeting</p> |
| QAEC Feedback      | <p>Suggestion that this presentation occur during the “mentoring pairs” part of the Supervisors’ Meeting.</p> <p>Committee agrees it is important that both supervisors and their assistants/designates have the information/ability to train staff on the new Quality Assurance Operating Criteria Tool and expectations.</p>  |

### Phase 2 – 2012

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Timeline           | May 2012 – May 2013 : Childcare centres will have one year to address any deficiencies identified and to ensure all operating criteria indicator scores are meeting expectations (a score of 3 or 4)   |
| Resources Required | <p>Non-compliance Action Plans will be followed through with at this time by child care centre staff and Supervisors to ensure their centre is “meeting expectations” (score of 3 or above) in all criteria areas.</p> <p>All child care centres will have 8 months to ensure all criteria is scoring a 3 or higher.</p>   |
| QAEC Feedback      | <p>Noted that there are still some centres that close in the summer (college and district)</p> <p>Child Care Centres and City of Thunder Bay Private Home Support Worker will follow through with Action Plans during this time to ensure all centres are “meeting expectations” (scoring a 3 or above) before “go live” date</p> <p>Committee agreed this would be more than enough time to do this</p> <p>Ongoing training/support during this time period will be imperative</p> <p>Committee agreed that training/workshops should be based on the needs</p> |



|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>identified in the operating criteria results and action plan</p> <p>Training will be more individualized and build capacity between community and child care centre resources</p> |
|--|--|

### Phase 3 – 2013

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Timeline           | May – December 2013: Childcare centres will be evaluated using the Operating Criteria through unannounced site visits  |
| Resources Required | No external resources required   |
| QAEC Feedback      | <p>Connect with the college to see if Operating Criteria can be incorporated into the ECE curriculum</p> <p>Invite faculty to Supervisors' Meeting in September</p> <p>Committee thinks it is important that the student expectations are in alignment with Quality Assurance expectations</p> |

### Phase 4 – 2014

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Timeline           | January 2014: TBDSSAB will begin posting licensed child care quality rating scores on the TBDSSAB website based on operating criteria evaluation that occur after January 1 <sup>st</sup> 2014 |
| Resources Required | No external resources required   |
| QAEC Feedback      | All committee members agreed this was a fair timeline and the proposed implementation plan was attainable for child care operators and private homes   |