

Hamilton's Best Start Network Strategic Framework: 2011-2016



Since its inception in 2005, the Hamilton Best Start Network has modeled a “collective leadership” approach to planning and implementing a bold vision for a comprehensive system of services and supports for children and families.

After a period of dialogue at our Best Start Network meetings (from January to June 2011), our strategic framework has emerged to guide our work over the next 5 years. When reflecting on this framework it is important to recognize the following:

1. Our Framework allows us to move forward locally on our bold vision for our children, families and community.
2. Our Framework is consistent with Provincial directions and is flexible enough to align with future decisions of any level of government.
3. Our Framework provides the starting point for discussion. The proposed activities identified in the Framework are preliminary suggestions; some may or may not move forward, or they may change and new activities emerge.
4. The structure of the Best Start Network will change as required to support the development and implementation of the work plan that emerges from our Framework.

We Will Provide Leadership in Times of Change



We will demonstrate leadership by:

- Providing the “space” where we can come together as a community to discuss key issues and develop strategies
- Being inclusive by ensuring that the work of Best Start includes a wide range of community interests
- Focusing on effective processes so that we can plan and work together in effective ways
- Developing strong leadership so that we can focus on facilitating agreement
- Engaging in the “tough” conversations

Why this makes sense:

- By 2014 all 4 and 5 year old children in our community will have access to full-day kindergarten
- Our child care sector is in the midst of a major transformation
- The Provincial government is signaling major changes to the early years system through the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres
- Fiscal restraint in all sectors will present a challenge

Success may be indicated by:

- The development of pro-active strategies to support the transition of early years programs and their staff to new roles within the community

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN



We Will Remain Committed to our Vision



Best Start is about Children

Each Child is an active learner, full of curiosity and potential, eager and capable of achieving success in school and beyond. Best Start is about providing the supports to bring out the best in children.

Best Start is about Families

Parents are the first, most important and most lasting teachers in a child's life. Best Start is about supporting parents and families, and collaborating with them to enable them to provide children with the best possible opportunities early in their lives.

Best Start is about Community and Connections

Community partners view themselves as part of an integrated system of supports for early child development and parenting. Best Start is about strengthening partnerships and enhancing the integration of all community supports for children and their families.

Best Start is about Our Future

A continuous learning environment, a commitment to early child development and parenting are key priorities for our community. Best Start is about doing what is best for our children and our future.

We will be Leaders in Creating Environments That Improve Child Outcomes



Leadership in this area supports our belief that *Best Start is about children.*

Bringing out the best in our children means ensuring that the places where children live, play and learn are environments where healthy development can occur.

We will demonstrate leadership by:

Developing strategies for improving child outcomes through a focus on “place”

- As a starting point for discussion we will further explore the following:
 - Ensuring children are welcomed in all “settings” in the community
 - Creating a process for engagement of children as citizens of the community
 - Defining how the Children’s Charter can be used as a decision making lens
 - Helping families to provide the basic needs in the home

Why this makes sense:

- While developmental vulnerability as evidenced by the Early Development Instrument (EDI) has remained relatively stable in Hamilton since 2005 (at about 26%), Hamilton’s vulnerability rate remains above the provincial average
- Opportunities for partnering exist with the launch of the City of Hamilton’s neighbourhood development strategy to improve the health of neighbourhoods

Success may be indicated by:

- Reduction in the level of vulnerability as measured by the EDI
- Increase in number of children growing up in nurturing environment
- Increase in the participation of children in planning and decision-making processes

We will be Leaders in Providing Parents With A Pathway to Information



Leadership in this area supports our belief that *Best Start is about families.*

Collaborating with parents to provide their children with the best possible opportunities early in their lives means ensuring that reliable information and support is readily available.

We will demonstrate leadership by:

Developing strategies for improving the accessibility of information and supports.

- As a starting point for discussion we will further explore the following:
 - Developing “one number” for phone support for families that may operate on a 24/7 basis
 - Developing easy to use single portals of parenting information that has been “vetted” for content
 - Providing services in more accessible ways for families
 - Engaging parents to better understand how best to provide support
 - to help shape what supports they need

Why this makes sense:

- Parents have questions about their child’s development and want to find answers and support they can trust
- Current information and support is available in a variety of places – there is no “go to” phone number or website that can be a good starting point for parents
- Parents need to be aware of all of the supports that are available to them
- Parents should be given the opportunity for input into the kinds of supports and information that would be helpful

Success may be indicated by:

- Increased parental accessibility to information and supports
- Increased active engagement of parents in decision-making/planning

We Will be Leaders in Developing an Integrated Early Years System



Leadership in this area supports our belief that *Best Start is about community and connections.*

This means that every door will be the right door for families and their children (pre-natal to 12 years old) to seamlessly navigate a comprehensive early years system that will provide a best practice, family-centred, trans-disciplinary approach.

We will demonstrate leadership by:

Developing strategies for a re-engineered system of early years services

- As a starting point for discussion we will further explore the following:
 - Creating a system-wide plan with shared vision, goals and outcomes and opportunities for organizations of all sizes to play a part
 - Ensuring services are accessible, utilized and delivered with high quality
 - Ensuring programs and services meet the needs of different neighbourhoods
 - Developing a “pilot” for an integrated system in specific neighbourhoods

Why this makes sense:

- The current early years system is fragmented
- Changes to the early years system are already underway
- Parents have indicated that they could use help in navigating the system – particularly when they need to access supports to address developmental issues with their children
- Parents have indicated that they can become frustrated by having to “tell their story” on multiple occasions to satisfy different intake and screening approaches

Success may be indicated by:

- Implementation of a system-wide plan
- Data that shows changes in outcomes (↓ poverty, ↓ in children in child protection, ↑ in quality child care etc.)

We will be Leaders in Building a Children's Agenda in Hamilton



Leadership in this area supports our belief that *Best Start is about our future.*

It is critical that we continue to build a collective voice that will ensure that “what we know” regarding the importance of child development drives “what we do” in our community.

We will demonstrate leadership by:

Building strategies to more broadly engage all those involved in building a city that is truly “fit for kids”

- As a starting point for discussion we will further explore the following:
 - Implementing the Parent and Children's Charters
 - Communicating the value of a re-engineered system of children's services
 - Aligning key messages to increase the awareness of the importance of child development
 - Supporting agencies through the system re-engineering process

Why this makes sense:

- Building a true “system” that supports child development requires broad-based support to ensure that the necessary investments are made
- Ensuring that we continue to build a high quality system of services will improve our outcomes as a community
- Ensuring the best outcomes for our children are sustainable in whatever political climate that may exist

Success may be indicated by:

- Increased public awareness about the importance of child development
- Use of the Parent and Children's Charters by variety of community groups
- A re-engineered system to better meet the needs of children and families with evidence based services and supports