PARENTS’ DAY-TO-DAY INVOLVEMENT AND CHALLENGES WITH THE EARLY LEARNING AND CARE SYSTEM:
IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

by

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Abstract

In Canada and internationally, policy makers are moving towards more comprehensive and integrated service delivery models for early learning that include parent involvement and support as integral to their design. The current study was part of an ongoing evaluation of the Best Start project in Peel Region, a municipality in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Best Start aims to integrate preschool, junior/senior kindergarten, child care, public health and parenting programs into a seamless, easily accessible early child development system. This study examined whether parents with kindergarten children enrolled in Best Start schools, where kindergarten and child care were co-located and service integration was underway, would report lower levels of parenting daily hassles compared to parents of children in demographically similar schools where there was no service integration. Parental perceptions about hassles specific to child care and early learning settings were measured using the Early Childhood-Parenting Daily Hassles Scale (EC-PDH) (Arimura, 2008). Three areas of parenting stress that could potentially be reduced through service integration were explored: (1) seamless day – seamless access to care, education and
family support; (2) connectedness – parents feeling involved and connected to their child’s school; and (3) parenting capacity – parents feeling confident in their parenting role. The study also combined hassles scores from Best Start and comparison schools to examine all parents’ involvement in the early learning and care system and the hassles they may or may not face on a daily basis as a function of parent demographics and program usage. Parents from 369 families in 10 schools were included in this study. Although Best Start parents did not report lower levels of parenting daily hassles compared to comparison parents, qualitative analyses at Best Start sites where parents used child care suggested that parents were feeling supported and they were forging positive relationships with staff. The positive relationships reported among parents and ECEs or other staff were not as frequent between parents and kindergarten teachers. Combined data indicated that all parents seemed to be experiencing the greatest hassles in the parenting capacity domain. Results are discussed in terms of policy implications for parent involvement in integrated full-day early learning programs such as full-day kindergarten.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade research on early experience and brain development has focused our attention on the early years as a foundation for later learning (Pascal, 2009; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). This attention has included calls for the creation of a system of early childhood care and education programs. As parents have the greatest impact on young children’s development (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2007), the notion that they should be involved in child care and education settings has become increasingly important (Corter & Pelletier, 2005; Zellman & Perlman, 2006). Conceptually, the common theme is the development of the whole child through a process of greater coordination and collaboration among the various “systems” in the child’s life. This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological approach to child development. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989) argues that to be effective, and have any lasting impact, early intervention programs need to involve the children’s parents and communities, so that all environments affecting children foster similar goals. In this “systems” view, the child-parent relationship is embedded in social networks which, in turn, are embedded in still larger community, societal, and cultural levels of organization (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Corter & Pelletier, 2005; Lerner, Rothbaum, Boulos, & Castellino, 2002). Service integration in this sense is based on the principle of ecological reach – more points of attack in the child’s social ecology should lead to greater depth and range of effects.

Both in Canada and internationally, policy makers are moving towards more comprehensive and integrated service delivery models for early learning that include parent involvement and support as integral to their design. Sure Start in the United Kingdom, the
School of the 21st Century (21C) in the United States, Better Beginnings, Better Futures (BBBF), and Toronto First Duty (TFD) in Ontario, Canada, are just some examples of early childhood service integration models that are showing evidence of improved outcomes for children and families when parents’ capacity to connect to schools in meaningful ways is promoted (Corter & Peters, 2011; Corter, Pelletier, Janmohamed, Bertrand, Arimura, et al., 2009; Melhuish et al, 2008; Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 2007). In Ontario, enhancing family and community environments has been a common goal in both BBBF (Peters, Bradshaw, Petrunka, Nelson, Herry, Craig, et al, 2010) and TFD (Corter et al, 2009). These programs have shown positive results in terms of enhancing parents’ social networks, improving family functioning, adding to feelings of empowerment and easing the day-to-day hassles of having a child in an early childhood setting (Arimura & Corter, 2010; Corter et al., 2009; Nelson, Pancer, Hayward, & Kelly, 2004; Patel, 2004). Research has also revealed an increasing desire among parents for meaningful input into their child’s educational programs (Corter et al., 2009).

In Peel Region, a municipality in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), at the time of the writing of this thesis, early childhood service integration was newly underway. Seven schools in the region were selected as pilot sites for integrated early learning and care programs. The current study was part of an on-going, large-scale evaluation being conducted by a research team at the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The study aimed to expand the existing body of work on early childhood service integration by exploring the role of these settings in shaping parents’ daily experiences. Particularly relevant to this study was Arimura’s TFD research on parenting daily hassles (Arimura, 2008; Arimura & Corter, 2010). Arimura
developed a new measure, the Parenting Daily Hassles – Early Childhood Services (PDH-ECS) scale, to tap into the day-to-day stressors of parenting within the context of early childhood settings. Her findings showed that parents with children in the TFD program reported lower levels of daily hassles than parents who did not have access to service integration (Arimura & Corter, 2010). The current study aimed to build on Arimura’s (Arimura, 2008; Arimura & Corter, 2010) findings by examining the potential effects service integration may have on parents’ daily hassles and their involvement in their children’s early learning. It should be pointed out that parent involvement in the context of this study encompassed both attitudes and actions. In other words, while participating on a school council or volunteering in the classroom are more literal examples of involvement, in this study involvement was also considered in terms of degree of interest, engagement or investment in children’s education. Involvement in this sense means parents feeling connected to their child’s early learning, establishing relationships with educators and fostering the home learning environment. To contextualize the study, it was important to review the theoretical foundation for discussing service integration and the research literature on parent involvement in general and in integrated models in particular.

The literature review is divided into five sections. Section one provides a brief background on how socioeconomic changes over the last several decades have made parenting young children even more multi-faceted and challenging and points out why families with young children continue to need more support. The section then presents a theoretical socio-cultural foundation for the discussion of service integration and follows with a review of ecological models that describe the systems of mutual influence among parents, children and the social environment. Section two reviews seven, international and
domestic, models of early childhood service integration. The examples draw attention to a variety of integrated approaches such as “school as hub” models like TFD and 21C, as well as more community level approaches such as BBBF and Aboriginal Head Start, that merge a wide range of service types and include community development as one of their aims. This section also addresses how parents and families are supported within these models and highlights the need for more parent-focused research evaluating the impact of these programs on the well-being of families rather than simply on child outcomes. To contextualize the current study, section three reviews the early childhood system in Ontario from an historical perspective with a specific focus on initiatives in Peel Region consistent with its current Best Start plan, the program of interest for the present study. Section four provides a review of the evidence to support parent involvement in early childhood education in terms of parent outcomes and family well-being. The final section of the literature review presents the research on parenting stress in general, and in early childhood settings in particular. Evidence is presented to suggest that parenting daily hassles is a relevant conceptual framework for evaluating the day-to-day challenges of parenting and why more research is needed in the context of service integration. The section concludes with the statement of the problem and outlines the research questions that were addressed by the current study.
Families Need Support

Nearly everyone can agree that parents have a major influence on their child’s cognitive, social, emotional, language and physical development. Parents are the role models from whom children learn about themselves, their family and the community they live in. The opportunities for optimal development are determined by the richness of the parent-child relationship and the quality of attachment, nurturance and day-to-day interactions (e.g., Carlson & Sroufe, 1995). Although all parents hope for optimal developmental opportunities for their children, social and economic changes, particularly over the last 20 years and a more rapid pace of living have added stress and constraints to parents’ daily lives (Vanier Institute of the Family, 2010). The increases in the number of working mothers and single parent households have led to a significant rise in the number of children in non-parental care arrangements during their preschool years (Beach, Friendly, Ferns, Prabhu, & Forer, 2009; Colley, 2005; Shonkoff, 2003). In 1967 fewer than 20% of mothers with young children were in the paid labour force. Today the percentage is over 70% and growing (Beach et al., 2008; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007). There has also been a rapid increase in single-parent families from about 6% in the early 1970’s to about 16% today. The majority of single-parent families are headed by women who are separated or divorced.

Recent immigration adds to the complexity of current parenting issues. Socio-economic hurdles such as underemployment and minority language status put immigrant
families at a significant disadvantage. In 2001, over 18% of the Canadian population was foreign born, the highest level since the country’s first immigration boom ended in 1931 (Statistics Canada, 2003). The proportion of foreign-born Canadians is highest in Canada’s largest cities – Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. In Toronto’s kindergarten classes, more than half the children are from recently immigrated families and speak a first language other than English (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). Almost 50% of new immigrant families with children are of low income (Morissette & Zhang, 2001). A Toronto study found that the rate of poverty for children under six years from ethnically diverse neighbourhoods is 45%, compared to 26% for children of the same age from predominantly white neighbourhoods (Bradshaw, 2001). Low family income is associated with poorer outcomes for children and the longer the child lives in poverty, the more pronounced the difficulties (Vanier Institute of the Family, 2010). Socio-economic, language, and cultural barriers facing recent immigrant families makes finding good quality child care, accessing health and family support services and negotiating a new “culture of schooling” particularly challenging.

For all parents, regardless of background, the parenting role is multi-faceted and challenging. Social expectations that parents excel on multiple fronts have left many of them feeling anxious and their sense of self-efficacy undermined. Given the literature connecting parent feelings of efficacy to child outcomes, this deserves attention for both parents’ well-being but also for children’s success in school and in life. Parents who feel competent are in a better position to respond to their children in ways that foster healthy social, emotional and physical development. For example, parents with high self-efficacy believe that they have the ability to effectively and positively influence the development and behaviour of their
children and engage in positive parenting behaviours (Coleman & Karraker, 2000). They are also more responsive to the needs of their children and interact with them more directly (Donovan & Leavitt, 1985; Donovan, Leavitt, & Walsh, 1997; Mash & Johnson, 1983). The opposite is true for parents with low self-efficacy. For example, parents with low self-efficacy have higher rates of depression (Teti & Gelfand, 1991), and report higher stress levels (Wells-Parker, Miller, & Topping, 1990). They also demonstrate greater defensive and comparisonling behaviour (Donovan, Leavitt, & Walsh, 1990) and have greater perceptions of child difficulties (Halpern, Anders, Coll, & Hua, 1994). Support for parents within early learning and care settings is increasingly recognized as critical for promoting parenting self-efficacy. Opportunities for parent learning within these settings may support further child learning since parents maintain or adopt good practices that are played out at home with their children. Programs that provide parents with various opportunities for the acquisition of skills that enhance their efficacy beliefs help parents believe they are able to effectively influence their children’s education and gives them valuable skills to extend the learning at home. Research from a school-based readiness program for prekindergarten children and their families showed that parent participation in the program increased parents’ feelings of self-efficacy and involvement in their child’s learning both at home and at school (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Converging evidence from teachers and children suggested that parents’ increased sense of competence and involvement had cumulative effects leading to enhanced child outcomes. Direct assessments in vocabulary, early reading and number sense the following year revealed significant differences between children who had attended the readiness centres and those who had no preschool experience. Furthermore, teachers reported that their kindergarten teacher colleagues observed that children who had attended a
readiness centre program with their parent were noticeably “more ready” in kindergarten the following year (Pelletier & Corter, 2005). The evidence is mounting that involving parents in meaningful ways in early childhood programs and services empowers them to take a more active and positive role in their child’s education at home and at school.

**Early Childhood Service Integration: Theoretical Orientation and Conceptual Framework**

As Best Start, the focus of this study, is a model of early childhood service integration, this section provides a theoretical context for parent involvement in integrated approaches. The section focuses on socio-cultural theory as a theoretical platform for thinking about service integration and then goes on to highlight Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) Ecological Systems theory as a useful conceptual framework for supporting the integration of early childhood programs and services.

Broadly speaking, Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory emphasizes the role of social institutions and adult support in children’s cognitive and language development. Unlike Piaget, also hugely influential in early childhood developmental theory, Vygotsky claims that the way children think is not primarily influenced by innate or inherited factors, but instead, that processes of thinking are products of the activities practiced by individuals within the social institutions of their culture. In other words, social processes and cognitive processes are inextricably linked. Interaction with adults is therefore central to Vygotsky’s theory (Tudge & Rogoff, 1989). From a Vygotskian perspective, teaching is not didactic or simply the transmission of knowledge, but rather a collaborative process through adult-child
and child-child interactions. As parents are indeed the most significant adults in a child’s life, early childhood settings and programs that support parents in a collaborative and reciprocal way are, in the Vygotskian sense, supporting, guiding and facilitating the healthy cognitive, social and emotional development of their children.

Like Vgotsky, Barbara Rogoff (1995, 1996, 1998) approaches development from a socio-cultural perspective. In her view, both children and their social partners, including parents, contribute to the learning process in culturally structured activities that occur in three mutually interdependent planes: personal, interpersonal and community. These three planes interact dynamically such that as children develop, so too do their social partners and cultural community. In this way, learning is a community process rather than a one-sided process in which only teachers or learners are responsible for learning. Rogoff (1990) proposes a “community of learners” model that involves both active learners and more skilled partners. Its underlying theoretical notion is that learning is a process in which both adults and children contribute and support each other through shared endeavors and all participants are active. Children take an active role in managing their own learning, coordinating with adults who are also contributing to the direction of the activity while they provide the children with guidance and orientation. Parents, as key social partners in children’s lives, are integral participants in a community of learners. Parents bring cultural values, goals and practices to the learning experience and the collaboration with teachers and other children provides richness to the learning environment and greater continuity. Rogoff’s notion of “guided participation” extends her theoretical model and lends support to the importance of involving parents in children’s early learning experiences. “Guided participation” regards children’s development as occurring through their active participation in culturally structured activity
with the guidance, support, and challenge of social partners who vary in skill and status. This model applies well to parent-child interactions as well as to child-child or child-teacher interactions. The “guidance” involves the direction offered by cultural and social values, as well as social partners; the “participation” refers to observation as well as hands-on involvement in activity (Rogoff, 1995). The concept of guided participation provides a perspective on the process by which children develop through their participation in the evolving practices of their community. Sharing of values, goals and practices among key social partners provides a richer learning environment and greater continuity in children’s lives. Since practices among communities of learners differ cross-culturally, much can be garnered about models of learning from communities around the world who vary in goals of development, arrangements of childhood activities, and nature of communication between children and their social partners. For example, Rogoff, Mosier, Mistry, & Göncü (1989, 1993) examined cultural differences in adult-child interactions in four very different communities: a Mayan town in Guatemala, a tribal village in India, and two middle-class urban communities, one in the United States and one in Turkey. She and her colleagues found that guided participation varied by the extent to which children were integrated into the social milieu of the community. In the Mayan and Indian communities, children were embedded in the everyday lives and work of their extended family and community. These children learned through observation and participation in adult activities, and in that sense, took responsibility for their own development. In contrast, children in middle-class urban communities, particularly in the United States, were segregated from the work and social world of adults. In North America, the norm is to segregate children by age in social institutions such as daycares and schools. In schools, the focus tends to be explicit
instruction by teachers or caregivers, and children are given little opportunity to observe or participate in the everyday lives of their adult social partners. Rogoff believes that there needs to be a balance between the prevalent North American model of didactic instruction and the more participatory model evident in the Mayan and Indian communities. Her *Community of Learners* model aims to expand the social and cultural contexts of classrooms by involving parents and other key social partners in the learning environment. This concept lends support to the idea of early childhood service integration. Children come to classrooms from diverse cultural backgrounds and home learning environments. Early childhood service Integration brings programs and services together and promotes, rather than discourages, home-school-community partnerships. Through an integrated service approach, schools and educators come to a better understanding of the cultural influences that children bring to the classroom. A deeper shared understanding and more interplay among children, teachers and caregivers results in a more holistic framework that takes into account the social environments in which children live and learn.

In a similar vein, Dan Keating’s work on developmental health (Keating, 2000; Keating, 2006) underscores the value of socio-cultural theory in children’s learning and development. Keating makes a strong claim that “social capital” is a fundamental contributing factor in developmental health outcomes. He argues that the way in which early childhood services and supports are delivered within communities has implications for the quantity and quality of social capital. He is a strong proponent of early childhood service integration as a way of creating “learning societies” that renew and enhance social capital.

Keating’s “habits of mind” (e.g., Keating, 1996; Keating & Miller, 1999) takes developmental health from the societal level and shows how social interactions at an
individual level play a critical role in how children cope and learn. While experience accrues throughout life, it is particularly influential during the earliest years. Research has established that children who have developed appropriate social, emotional and attentional capabilities are more likely to display appropriate patterns of competence and coping later in life (Keating & Miller, 1999). The social and emotional influences found within relationships between parents, caregivers and educators have a profound impact on children’s cognitive functioning. Keating and Miller (1999) state that there is a strong link between neurophysiological patterns, behaviour, and subsequent competence that come together in what he refers to as “habits of mind”. These dispositions or proclivities are the domain-general, or global, patterns of thinking that have been internalized from experience and that guide the more automatic ways in which individuals engage with the world. Keating believes that these habits, not only cognitive, but also social and emotional, are most important for health and well-being. Habits of mind are acquired through participation and mutual interaction with social partners in the cultural activities of society. As such, attitudes, values and skills are shaped by a shared understanding that is passed on from one generation to the next. In this way, knowledge is a social and cultural product. According to Keating (1996), early childhood policy needs to recognize the importance of supporting the development of habits of mind that are central to building strong learning environments. It is essential that early childhood settings are arranged so as to maximize competence and coping. Keating stresses the link between social and community partners as vital in shaping habits of mind such as attitudes, curiosity and coping skills. Embedding educational activities in the broader social context and involving parents and families in ways that encourage the active exchange of information and expertise provide greater consistency and continuity
between school and home learning environments. An understanding of developmental health and the importance of social capital on a societal level, as well as habits of mind and the social and emotional influences on young children’s development, adds support to the conceptual argument for addressing the community context in early childhood service provision.

**Ecological Systems Theory**

A useful way to examine the theoretical influences of socio-cultural theory and developmental health is through systems theory. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory provides a particularly apt conceptual framework for early childhood service integration. It emphasizes the social institutions, or “systems” in which the child lives as integral to his or her development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1989), children develop within a complex system of relationships. These relationships are affected by the environment on a number of different levels or systems, such as family, school and community. These various strands interact dynamically, from micro systems in which the child participates directly – home, school and community – through to the macro level of cultural values, government policies, and societal influences. Lerner merges his ideas on developmental systems theory with Bronfenbrenner’s model and helps map this complexity and applies it to parents’ roles in child development (Lerner et al., 2002). Lerner’s model takes a developmental contextual view of human development. He merges his own ideas on developmental systems theory with Bronfenbrenner’s (1989, 1994) general theory resulting in a “process-person-context-time” model for understanding how children develop in relation
to other parts of their social system. Simply put, the process is the bi-directional interplay between the various levels of influence in the child’s life. For example, through the diverse interactions a child has with his or her parents, the child influences the parents who are in turn influencing him or her. The child is thereby bi-directionally shaping his or her own development. This child-parent relationship is then embedded in social networks which, in turn, are embedded in still larger community, societal and cultural levels of organization. This “process” of bi-directional influence takes place within all these contexts. And because the factor of time cuts through all these contexts (chronosystem), these social systems are continually changing along with the people who populate them.

Lerner et al.’s (2002) model underpins a strong conceptual argument for integrated early childhood programs providing both a rationale and a model to understand how they work together. Integration in this context means aligning the family system with early childhood services and community support. As such, parent involvement takes a prominent role and as a result, improving outcomes for parents becomes intertwined with improving outcomes for children. In other words, outcomes for parents may serve as processes affecting child outcomes such as social and emotional school readiness and achievement. By the same token, community outcomes may be linked in two-way connections to parent supports. Integration brings programs and services together so that the needs of children and families can be collaboratively met (Pelletier & Corter, 2006). Integration is also seen as a means to provide a higher level of continuity for children in early childhood service settings (Pelletier & Corter, 2006). Continuity implies that children experience greater consistency in their daily interactions across settings, or over a span of time, as a result of fewer transitions. Continuity operates both horizontally as the child and parent move across settings at one
point in time and vertically as the child moves through developmental transitions in time (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Service integration strategies that promote home-school-community partnerships foster continuity by minimizing both horizontal and vertical transitions. Horizontal transitions require children to move from one type of setting to another at one point in time. An example of this type of transition is a child having to comply with different rules for behaviour in a kindergarten program in the morning and a child care program in the afternoon. In contrast, vertical transitions require children to adjust to a new stage of their life as they move through developmental transitions over time – entering kindergarten for example. Child care in schools for preschoolers or before- and after-school care for older children can be both vertical and horizontal integration. More continuity can mean fewer transitions for the child, better and more consistent programming, and more consistent support from adults. Continuity is beneficial for parents as improved outreach increases their comfort level with services and schools and builds relationships leading to better perceptions of educational institutions (Corter, Patel, Pelletier & Bertrand, 2008).

Given the ecological importance of the role of parents, teachers and other adults in integrated early childhood settings forging positive relationships among the important adults in children’s lives is so important from a developmental systems perspective. Research by Pianta and colleagues (Crosnoe, Wirth, Pianta, Leventhal, & Pierce, 2010; Pianta, 2003; Pianta, 2004; Pianta & Nimetz, 1991; Pianta & La Paro, 2003; Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, Clifford, Ealy, et al., 2005) has shown that social relationships between children and parents, parents and children, and parents and teachers are important conduits to early school success. Pianta (2004) argues that definitions of “school readiness” that focus on children’s
competencies alone do not consider the full range of inputs and processes that explain how children acquire these competencies. He contends that a more comprehensive framework that better integrates the complexity of developmental systems is needed to better understand school readiness. Pianta’s (2004) Contextual Systems theory identifies components of child-adult relationships that help describe how relationships function to facilitate development of school-related competencies. In this model, learning during the transition to school is best understood as either supported or disrupted by relationship systems among children and adults in various early childhood settings (home, child care, preschool). Learning proceeds more smoothly when interactions are aligned and settings offer consistently enriching experiences - for example, when parents and teachers cultivate children’s skills in similar, mutually reinforcing ways. Relationship systems are affected by characteristics of the children and adults involved – characteristics such as temperament, personality, and developmental history - as well as individuals’ mental “representations” of the quality of the relationship itself. Relationships include information sharing and feedback loops between members, whereby social norms, academic knowledge, and language are exchanged between children and adults. Parents and families are typically the most consistent agents of young children’s learning and preparation for school. Family culture such as values and norms for appropriate behaviours define for children a clear set of expectations to follow. The degree to which children’s normative behaviours within the family are in alignment with the expectations of the school may determine the smoothness of the transition. Pianta contends that forging strong home-school relationships is the key to enhancing the overall congruence between home and school that results in a more integrated experience for children (Crosnoe et al., 2010; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Thus even for children whose home cultures are
different from the dominant culture of school, Pianta’s ideas about early childhood home-school connections would mean more open communication and greater understanding of the other prior to children’s transition into the formal school system.

Relationships that children form with teachers and early childhood educators can have lasting effects on their success in school. Teachers not only teach basic academic skills, they also regulate activities, communication and peer contacts, provide behavioural support and facilitate the development of coping skills, all of which help children acquire social and behavioural competencies needed in school (Doll, 1996; Howes & Hamilton, 1993; Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton, 1994; Pianta, 1997). There is ample research that describes the quality and nature of relationships that children experience with their teachers that indicate that close, low conflict, and low dependency relationships, and classrooms having high quality emotional and instructional climates, are important ecological characteristics related to children’s readiness for school (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Howes, 2000; Howes et al., 1994; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995). In particular, student-teacher closeness is related to increased performance, more favourable attitudes towards school, greater self-directedness (Birch & Ladd, 1997), and higher competency with peers (Howes et al., 1994). There is also evidence that teacher-child relationships during the early school years have long-term effects on children’s school outcomes through eighth grade. Hamre and Pianta (2001) followed a sample of 179 children from kindergarten through eighth grade to assess the extent to which kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of their relationships with students predicted subsequent social and academic outcomes. Findings indicated that negative relationships in kindergarten characterized by conflict and dependency were associated negatively with academic and behavioural
outcomes through eighth grade, and these effects were significantly stronger among children with higher behaviour problems, particularly boys.

Two longitudinal studies in the United States – the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) and the National Centre for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) – each used extensive observational methods to assess the quality of children’s experiences, including the quality of teacher-child relationships, within prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first-grade settings. Results of more than 1,500 observations from these studies provide a comprehensive description of the nature and quality of children’s early school experiences. In general, emotional climates within these classes were characterized by positive social interactions that were emotionally supportive. However, interactions during instructional activities tended to involve low quality interactions. Most instructional activities focused on basic skills in which children were passively engaged, there was little direct contact with teachers that stimulated learning, and the interactions between teachers and children did not challenge, scaffold, or extend children’s skills (Pianta & La Paro, 2003).

The NCEDL study of prekindergarten assessed the quality of children’s experiences using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998) which resulted in four dimensions of quality – CLASS – emotional climate, CLASS – instructional climate, ECERS-R – teaching and interactions, and ECERS-R – provisions for learning. After comparisonling for the influence of child and family characteristics, dimensions of quality and teacher-child interactions were significantly associated with gains in language and literacy skills. For example, higher quality emotional climates were positively associated with children’s gains in expressive and receptive
vocabulary, higher quality instructional climates were associated with children’s gains in receptive vocabulary and gains in teachers’ ratings of language and literacy skills, and higher quality teaching and interactions were associated with gains in children’s expressive vocabulary (Howes et al., 2008). In sum, social relationships among children and parents, parents and teachers, and teachers and children can be viewed as conduits through which children become motivated and interested in school activities and acquire competencies associated with school readiness.

**Part 2: International and Domestic Models of Early Childhood Service Integration**

This section provides a review of seven models of integrated services that have been implemented in North America and the United Kingdom. Of particular interest in this context is the involvement of, and support for, parents in these models. A review of each of the following programs follows: 1) Sure Start in the United Kingdom (e.g., Melhuish et al., 2008) aims to improve the health and well-being of young children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods by providing early learning, health and family services. 2) In the United States, Head Start is a long-running, targeted and comprehensive early childhood development and school readiness program serving primarily preschool children and their low-income families. 3) The School of the 21st Century (Zigler, 1989) is a well-established approach for delivering school-based, integrated child care and family support services. 4) The CoZi model (Finn-Stevenson & Stern, 1996) is a comprehensive school reform model that combines the School of the 21st Century with James Comer’s School Development Program (Comer, 1980), a school management and collaborative decision-making model. 5)
In Canada, the Better Beginnings, Better Futures (BBBF) project (Peters et al., 2010) is a community-based, 25-year demonstration project for children and families living in eight disadvantaged communities in Ontario. 6) Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) programs in a number of First Nations communities in Canada bring families and communities together into community-based hubs, and lastly, 7) the Toronto First Duty (TFD) project (e.g. Corter et al., 2009) is a more recent school-based initiative that continues to be piloted in Ontario.

Sure Start in the United Kingdom

Since 1997, the UK government has made integration of services for young children a priority with programs such as Sure Start. Sure Start Local Programs were set up between 1999 and 2003 to develop new and better ways of providing services in deprived communities. The original programs were area-based, with all young children and their families living in a prescribed geographic area being the targets of the intervention. Although local programming has varied, each Sure Start program was expected to provide five core services: 1) outreach and home visiting; 2) support for families; 3) support for good quality play, learning and child care experiences for children; 4) primary and community health care and advice about child health and development and family health; 5) support for children and parents with special needs and help with access to special services (Department for Education and Skills, 2005b; Rutter, 2006). Sure Start Local Programs were targeted to 20% of the most deprived areas in England and programs were managed by a partnership of health, education, social services, and voluntary sectors. Each local program was responsible for working with the community to improve existing services according to local needs while
covering core services. Policy makers permitted Sure Start partners a great deal of flexibility in program design and curriculum choices, the rationale being that local programs could tailor their services based on demographics and needs. The idea was to work with the community to improve and build on existing services.

Beginning in 2004, the program evolved to become Sure Start Children’s Centres, changing its service delivery model somewhat to offer more clearly focused and specialized services and a stronger emphasis on the most vulnerable families (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2008). Children’s Centres are service hubs where children under 5 years old and their families can receive seamless integrated services and information. There are 3,500 children’s centres across England, servicing over 2.7 million children under 5 and their families. The centres are models of integrated service provision, where health, education, child care providers, social services and community and voluntary agencies work together to deliver, seamless, holistic services. Governance arrangements vary between centres, but are all managed through partnerships that reflect local need and diversity of all agencies involved in the delivery as well as the users of services themselves.

Several large-scale evaluation studies have been conducted over the years and despite criticisms and possible methodological flaws (e.g., Kane, 2008), there are strong signals that Sure Start is moving children and families in the right direction (Allen, 2008; Avis, Bulman & Leighton, 2007; Melhuish et al., 2008; Moran et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2008). While these studies tend to focus primarily on child outcomes, they do show evidence to suggest that participating in Sure Start may improve parenting capacity and the home learning environment. In a quasi-experimental observational study comparing 5,883 three year old children and their families from 93 disadvantaged Sure Start areas, it was found that
risk of negative parenting was less in Sure Start than in non-Sure Start areas and parents provided a more stimulating home learning environment. These findings could be generalized across population sub-groups (e.g., unemployed parents, single mothers, teenage mothers etc.) (Melhuish et al., 2008). In a qualitative investigation by Avis and colleagues (Avis, Bulman & Leighton, 2007), parents’ primary reasons for engaging with Sure Start were to overcome feelings of isolation and to gain practical benefits for both themselves and their children. A study conducted by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED) reported that in 11 of the 20 Sure Start Children’s Centres visited, the impact of the integration of services on improving outcomes for children, parents and families was good or outstanding. Parents strongly preferred a single site, “one stop shop” model of services and the centres were successful in involving parents from minority ethnic groups (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

A recent report on Sure Start Children’s Centres from the House of Commons, Children, Schools and Families Select Committee highlighted the success of the program as “one of the most innovative and ambitious Government initiatives of the past two decades” (House of Commons, Children, Schools and Families Committee, Sure Start Children’s Centres, Fifth Report of Session 2009-10, paragraph 16), and went on to address the next phase in Sure Start policy direction as building on these Centres as a universal service for all young children and their families. Further, a recent commentary by Melhuish and colleagues (2010) strongly suggests that growing evidence of the impact on children and parents is due to the integrated nature of Sure Start programs.
Head Start in the United States

Started in 1965, Head Start is one of the longest-running programs to address systemic poverty and promote school readiness and cognitive development among low-income preschool age children in the United States. Like Sure Start, which actually builds on the Head Start model, Head Start aims to improve services for disadvantaged young children and their families through a comprehensive “two-generation” approach to health, education and social services. Head Start programs reach out to families in a variety of ways - encouraging parent involvement in their child’s classroom, providing parent education to help strengthen parents’ knowledge and skills, and providing referrals to address family needs so that parents can be more effective in their role as caregiver. Recognizing the importance of the early years, Early Head Start (EHS) was established in 1994 to serve children from birth to three years of age. This age period is increasingly being acknowledged as an under-utilized time of opportunity to connect parents to schools in meaningful ways (Patel & Corter, 2011 in press). The Head Start Program Performance standards define four service delivery options that Early Head Start programs can choose for providing services to individual families: 1) a home-based option – families receive weekly home visits and at least two group socializations per month; 2) a centre-based option – families receive center-based child care plus other family support activities, including a minimum of two home visits per year; 3) a combination option – families receive both home visits and centre experiences with specified intensity; and 4) a locally designed option, most often a family child care option. Research has found (e.g. Love, Kisker, Ross, Raikes, Constantine, Boller, et al.,
that “mixed programs” combining home visits and centre-based programs appear to have broader impacts on children than either approach alone.

Head Start and Early Head Start share similar eligibility requirements and their service delivery models are the same. While Sure Start offers services to all families within deprived communities, Head Start is an income-based, targeted program. Head Start families must qualify to participate based on fairly stringent income criteria. A family is eligible to participate if their family income is below 100% of the federal poverty guideline, or if the family is on public assistance, or is homeless. There are some exceptions, but the needs of all income eligible children in the service area must first be met. Like Sure Start, Head Start programs are locally driven and administered by different community organizations and service providers.

Head Start programs encourage parent involvement and are mandated through statute and federal regulations to provide comprehensive family services. They are required to have parental participation in decision making and council meetings. The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES; O’Brien et al., 2002) provides a snapshot of the levels of parent involvement in 40 Head Start programs across the United States during the 1997-1998 school year. According to FACES, 83% of parents visited and observed their child’s classroom, 69% volunteered in the classroom at least once, 55% attended at least one parent workshop, 51% helped with one or more field trips, and 36% were involved in Policy Councils during the school year. FACES also found Head Start parents to be highly involved with their children at home. More than three quarters of parents reported telling their child stories and playing counting games in the past week, and two thirds reported reading to their child three or more times per week (O’Brien et al., 2002). Other studies report similarly high
levels of parent involvement in Head Start. A Survey of four Head Start programs in North Carolina, (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004) found that more than three quarters of Head Start volunteers were parents. Of the parent volunteers, the majority (59%) participated once or twice, 9% volunteered three times and a third (32%) volunteered more than three times during the year. Classroom volunteering was the most frequent parent volunteer activity, followed by program meetings (Policy Council) and classroom meetings (e.g. parent-teacher conference). Overall, Head Start parents report being highly satisfied with their programs and staff (Lamb-Parker et al., 1997; O’Brien et al., 2002). However, variability in how parents feel about their programs is associated with their amount of involvement. Powell (1998) found that Head Start parents were most likely to become involved in their children’s schooling when they believed that their involvement was welcomed by the program and that they would be capable of having a positive impact on their child’s education.

Extensive data have been collected on Early Head Start through the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation (EHSRE) study, a large-scale, longitudinal study conducted in 17 Early Head Start sites across the country. Of the original 143 programs funded in 1995 and 1996, 17 sites were selected for variability in culture, geographic location, urban versus rural setting and diversity of program options. Data were collected on a broad array of child, family and program factors. In terms of family outcomes, meaningful, yet modest, impacts were revealed on parenting and parent self-sufficiency (Administration for Children and Families (ACF), 2002; Love et al., 2005) with more sustained effects being found mostly in the domains of parenting and child socio-emotional functioning (ACF, 2006). Using data from the EHSRE, Roggman, Boyce and Cook (2009) assessed whether poor children formed
more secure attachments to their mothers if the mother was involved in a parenting program that specifically attempts to improve parenting sensitivity and quality of stimulation.

Roggman et al. (2009) used data on a single Early Head Start program that employed home visitors to support mothers to improve parenting skills and the mother-child relationship. Results showed that the home visitation program had positive impacts on attachment security and that the impact was stronger for mothers with lower levels of education. An interaction with maternal education has been observed in previous studies, but findings have been inconsistent in terms of whether mothers who bring more by way of knowledge and skills or mothers who bring less benefit from participation in parent education programs (Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, & Bradley, 2005). In the Roggman et al. (2009) study, evidence showed that home visitors became increasingly competent in facilitating parent-child interactions. Over the course of the program, home visitors forged more comfortable and productive relationships among parents and children. Roggman et al. (2009) suggest that evaluating the degree to which programs are progressing on key program goals is important to understanding the factors critical in helping early education programs enhance parent and child functioning.

Over the years, numerous evaluation and impact studies have been conducted on Head Start programs with mixed results (e.g., Currie & Thomas, 1995; Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2002; Melhuish et al., 2008; Henry, Gordon & Rickman, 2006; Ludwig & Phillips, 2007b; Zigler & Styfco, 1994, 2004). Many researchers acknowledge that Head Start appears to make a significant educational impact early on but argue that these benefits fade as soon as the second or third grade when students who attended Head Start programs begin to fall behind their non-participating peers (e.g. Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Garces, Thomas &
Currie, 2002; Henry, Gordon, & Rickman, 2006). However, most of these studies have focused on child outcomes in terms of academic or cognitive gains, with relatively less attention being focused on improvements in family functioning in general, or parenting capacity in particular (e.g. Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005; Ludwig & Phillips, 2007a, 2007b). Allen (2008) provides a detailed review of evaluations conducted on Sure Start, Head Start and Early Head Start and argues that the impact on family functioning, parenting practices, and parental empowerment were the most salient signals in these studies. He adds that, although modest, the effect sizes reported with respect to the positive impact on family functioning are meaningful and a valid indicator that these programs are enhancing the well-being of families. However, these studies also highlight the complexity of examining programming effects in the context of dynamic family systems and the need for more research on the factors moderating the impact of Head Start and Early Head Start on parenting and family well-being.

The School of the 21st Century in the United States

Critics of early childhood education in the United States describe the system as fragmented and highly variable in terms of quality, access and service provision. Too much mediocrity in the system has led to achievement gaps evident even before children start school. The *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* in 2001 was intended to raise academic achievement by ensuring that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. Edward Zigler, a strong proponent of universal preschool, argues that in order for NCLB to be successful, the first goal must be school readiness and
developmentally appropriate experiences for young children. He advocates for a national policy of universal preschool through the public school system (Zigler, Finn-Stevenson, & Marsland, 1995; Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 2007). In 1987, Zigler created the school of the 21st Century model, a school-based, universal program that integrates child care into the existing educational system. It is a comprehensive program that offers a range of holistic services to children and families including child care, education, family support, health and social services. The 21C model takes a locally driven approach whereby schools develop and implement their own programs based on the needs and resources of their communities. Based at Yale University in Connecticut, the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social policy develops, researches, networks with and supervises the national model and provides the theoretical framework outlining six guiding principles: 1) strong parental support and involvement, 2) universal access to child care, 3) non-compulsory programs, 4) focus on the overall development of the child, 5) high quality programming and 6) professional training and advancement opportunities for child care providers (http://www.yale.edu/21c/guidingprinciples.html. Over the last decade, the school of the 21st century model has been adopted by over 1,300 schools nationwide making it one of the most widely implemented models of integrated early childhood education and care in North America (Henrich, Ginicola, & Finn-Stevenson, 2006; Finn-Stevenson, Desimone, & Chung, 1998; Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 2007). It has also paved the way for a growing number of programs that see the school as accessible to children and thus essential for the delivery and/or coordination of services (Dryfoos, 1994). Within the 21C model, there are two child care components – all day, year-round child care for children ages 3-5 and before- and after-school and vacation care for children ages 5 -12. Parent support and involvement is one of
the guiding principles and is integral to the model. Positive relationships with parents are fostered and efforts are made to make the school environment as welcoming to parents as possible. Parent meetings are held at the school to welcome families and provide social support, including referrals to special services as may be needed – e.g. health, mental health, and nutrition education. Parents also learn about their role in their children’s development and education. There is also a home visitation component, patterned after the *Parents as Teachers* (2006) program. Parent educators visit the home to provide information to parents about their children’s development as well as screen children for potential developmental or learning programs. In some communities, schools also provide social services and infant care in response to local needs or requests by parents. Additional components such as literacy enhancement curricula for preschool and school-age programs and training support for schools with immigrant children have been added to help programs address local and current needs. All components are part of the 21C “umbrella” and are coordinated as a whole (Finn-Stevenson, Desimone, & Chung, 1998; Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 2007).

*The Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy* at Yale University has conducted a number of national and state-wide evaluations, including an on-going national study funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Results suggest that their integrated, school-based model leads to improvements in children’s academic achievement as well as enhanced quality of the learning environment (Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 2007). However, evidence that these programs are having an impact on parents is limited. Nevertheless, there are a few studies that have examined the effects of 21C on parent outcomes. The first phase of a longitudinal outcome evaluation conducted by the Yale 21C Program in Independence, Missouri, the first school district to implement 21C, parents gave
their schools higher marks for academic focus, caring and sensitivity, school community relations and collaborative decision making than did parents at comparison schools (Finn-Stevenson, Every, & Albright, 2009). Also, in comparison to parents in a non-21C school, parents in a 21C school in Leadville, Colorado reported experiencing significantly less stress, as measured by the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1983), and less money spent on child care and fewer days of missed work (McCabe, 1995). In a 2004 to 2005 evaluation of 21C implemented in Arkansas, mature sites - those in operation five plus years - had higher levels of parental involvement than new sites in terms of parent-teacher conferences and informal discussions with teachers (Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 2007). While there is growing evidence to suggest that the School of the 21st Century is having a positive effect on children’s cognitive outcomes, more research needs to be done with respect to parents and, in particular, whether a school-based, integrated service delivery model supports parents and families on a day-to-day basis.

The CoZi Model in the United States

The CoZi model, developed at Yale University, combines two well-established models of school reform: Comer’s School Development Program (SDP) (Comer, Haynes, & Hamilton –Lee, 1989) and Zigler’s School of the 21st Century (Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 1989). The SDP is a comprehensive K-12 education reform program first introduced in two low-achieving schools in 1968. Over the years, the SDP has been implemented in hundreds of schools in more than 20 states. The SDP is regarded as a process – a way of managing, coordinating and integrating support services and activities to create a cohesive community
of parents, teachers and students. The CoZi model links the SDP process with child care and the other holistic services of 21C. The major components of CoZi are (a) parent and teacher participation in school-based decision making (b) parent outreach and education beginning at the birth of the child, (c) child care for preschoolers and before- and after-school care for kindergarten through sixth graders, and (d) parent involvement programs (Desimone, Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000).

An evaluation study comparing a CoZi school in the state of Virginia with a non-CoZi comparison school in the same district showed significant differences between the schools on particular dimensions of parent and community involvement and school climate (Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000). Parent and community participation rates were higher at the CoZi school compared to the non-CoZi school. This difference is noteworthy given the traditionally hard to reach and engage population at the CoZi school – African American, very low income and single mother households (Comer, 1988; Lareau, 1987). Although student achievement, parent-child interaction, parent social and psychological outcomes and teacher efficacy were not significantly different between schools, the direction and type of differences found in the study suggest that the CoZi model had begun to transform the culture of the school by achieving a more meaningful and working relationship among parents, teachers and administrators (Desimone et al., 2000).

**The Better Beginnings, Better Futures (BBBF) Project in Ontario, Canada**

The Better Beginnings, Better Futures (BBBF) project in Ontario is providing insights into the long-term effects of community-level service integration (Peters et al., 2010). In
1990, the BBBF project was announced by the Ontario government as a 25-year longitudinal demonstration project designed to prevent emotional and behavioural problems and promote general development in young children, while also improving family and neighborhood characteristics (Corter & Peters, 2011; Peters et al., 2004). Eight disadvantaged communities in Ontario were selected for universal, community-based programming. Five of the sites focused on children from birth to age four offering home visiting, enriched child care programs and additional programs for children and families based on locally identified needs and available resources. The other three sites focused on children from four to eight years and offered school-based activities such as classroom enrichment, homework help, breakfast programs and summer tutoring. Programs for parents and children included parent relief, before-and after-school programs, toy libraries, and programs during school breaks and summer holidays. Because each site developed programs to best meet local needs, there were substantial differences in the programs offered at each particular site. However, at all sites, parent and community participation was a key focus with the goal of affecting community change by strengthening parenting and family functioning. In a case study of a BBBF Enrichment site in an ethnoracially diverse and socio-economically disadvantaged area, marked increases in parent involvement in family support programs were recorded over time (Nelson, Pancer, Hayward, & Kelly, 2004). For instance in one six-month period, 651 parents used the Family Resource Centre compared to 1247 parents who used the Centre in the same six-month period one year later – a 92% increase. In part, the authors credit the dramatic increase in involvement to outreach efforts by a group of parents who had taken a leadership role in the planning and start-up phase of the project. Their findings support the value of a partnership approach to prevention program planning developed by Nelson and
colleagues, (Nelson, Amio, Prilleltensky, & Nickels, 2000) whereby residents of intervention programs are brought into the partnership alongside other stakeholders. In another BBBF evaluation, of the three sites for children ages four to eight years, the site providing the most intensive and consistent supports for parents showed effects in terms of improved parenting, decreased stress and parental depression, improved marital, school and neighbourhood satisfaction and social support (Peters, Petrunka, & Arnold, 2003). A follow-up evaluation looking at longer-term effects of BBBF on parents with children in grades 3, 6, and 9 produced mixed results (Peters et al., 2010). There were several outcomes on which BBBF and comparison communities did not differ and some outcomes on which the comparison communities outperformed BBBF. However, positive effects were reported in community outcomes. At grade 3, the BBBF families showed significantly more involvement in social activities and greater use of health and social services. At grade 6, the BBBF families showed significantly higher levels of parental involvement in neighbourhood activities, a greater sense of community involvement, greater neighbourhood satisfaction and more use of health and social services than parents from comparison sites. At grade 9, significantly higher levels of neighbourhood satisfaction continued in BBBF neighbourhoods. The active involvement of staff who worked intensively with parents, providing home visits, parent support and information about programs and resources in the local community, may have facilitated parents’ ability to locate and use available community resources, and feel less isolated in their community (Peters et al., 2010). This study serves as a strong indicator that improved parent, family, and community outcomes may have the potential to positively impact the long-term development and well-being of children from the BBBF project into adolescence and beyond.
Aboriginal Head Start in Canada

The Aboriginal Head Start program in a number of First Nation communities in Canada has demonstrated that integrated early learning and care programs can be the impetus for promoting community wellness and social cohesion (Ball, 2005). Ball believes that early child development programs can be the “hook” that brings families and communities together into community-based hubs. Many adults may be willing to seek services for their child even though they may be reluctant to seek services for themselves. When they bring their child to a Head Start program, they are exposed to service providers and the variety of services available through the centre (Ball, 2005; 2011 in press).

A community-university research project conducted from 2003-2004 found promising practices in three groups of rural First Nations that were working towards integration and coordination of programs to meet the needs of children and families (Ball, 2004). Across the study sites, 60 community members including instructors, parents with children in community programs, Elders, administrators, and service providers were interviewed about changes they observed in their community, how they thought children and families were benefitting, and what this meant to them culturally as well as in terms of needs they saw in their communities. Analyses highlighted several ways that centre-based early childhood care and development programs were functioning as a hub for enhanced health and social support service delivery. All of the communities were taking steps towards integrating child health and development programs on site in their child care programs, and towards clear linkages between the child care program and other health, cultural and social programs.
to benefit children and parents. Four years after delivering training to community members, all three communities had mounted child care programs. Two had also implemented Aboriginal Head Start programs. All programs were thriving and looking forward to expansion. Ball (2004) emphasizes the need for conceptual agreement on the importance of integrative approaches at all levels within the implementation process. Co-location of services is not enough without the conceptual buy-in among stakeholders that families are the central organizing focus for the delivery of services that drives the quality of these programs. In other words, the well being of children is seen as dependent upon and contributing to the well being of the family (Ball, 2005; 2011, in press).

**Toronto First Duty (TFD) in Ontario, Canada**

The Toronto First Duty Project in Toronto provides a strong model of integrated school-based care and education for young children and their families (Corter et al., 2009) as described in the report to the Premier of Ontario by the Early Learning Advisor (Pascal, 2009). Toronto First Duty (TFD) was established in 2001 as a partnership among the City of Toronto, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and community agencies supported by the Atkinson Charitable Foundation. Like other models, TFD was designed to demonstrate that the existing patchwork of programs and services in the community could be transformed into a single, integrated, and comprehensive early childhood program. In Phase 1 of the project, each of five sites worked towards deep integration along five dimensions: a common learning environment, an integrated early childhood staff team, seamless access, integrated governance, and common family outreach and involvement strategies (Corter et al., 2007;
Corter et al, 2009). Research from TFD pilot sites has been instrumental in informing early childhood policy in Ontario and has provided the framework for similar initiatives in the province and beyond. In particular, Best Start in Peel Region, the focus of this study, has looked to TDF in the implementation of its own integrated early learning and care program.

Parent participation is one of the five key elements critical to a TFD program. Parents are welcome to take part in all activities at all times. This includes joining in their classroom and outdoor activities, eating lunch or snacks with their children and participating in programs designed for parents/caregivers on their own and in family literacy programs. Research conducted at two of the five sites in phase one of the project, found that for TFD parents, compared to parents in comparable schools where only kindergarten was offered, teachers and early childhood educators (ECEs) and program coordinators were equally mentioned as important to the parents’ social network, showing that parents were connecting with teachers as much as they were to ECE’s (Arimura, 2008). Compared to parents at non TFD sites, TFD parents were more likely to feel empowered to talk to their child’s kindergarten teacher and felt more confident to foster learning at home (Corter et al., 2007; Patel & Corter, 2006, 2011 in press). Taken together, these studies provide evidence that integrated staff teams are in a unique position to foster parent-teacher partnerships and encourage a climate of communication and community.

In summary, this section outlined seven models of early childhood service integration that have been implemented in North America and the United Kingdom. While there are some important differences in emphasis, all models share common goals of promoting healthy child development and supporting family life. Goals vary in the degree to which service distribution is targeted or universal. For example, models such as Sure Start, Better
Beginnings, Better Futures and Aboriginal Head Start address systemic poverty and inequity by offering universal access to holistic services within deprived, or disadvantaged, communities. Service integration in these models is the impetus for strengthening and empowering these communities to better respond to the developmental needs of children while enhancing the health of the community as a whole. Head Start and Early Head Start are also intended to address systemic poverty, however, these programs target low income families directly based on fairly stringent income criteria. Raising academic achievement and closing achievement gaps among disadvantaged children is a key focus of the Head Start model. Models such as Toronto First Duty, School of the 21st Century and CoZi take a more universal approach to service delivery. These models regard the school as accessible to children and thus the logical “hub” for integrating services. Core services among all seven models are similar but the program mix tends to be locally driven through partnerships among schools, service providers and community agencies and reflect the demographic needs of the communities they serve. Appendix A provides a table comparing the seven models along key elements of early childhood service integration.
Part 3: Historical Context in Ontario that Frames Initiatives Towards Early Childhood Service Integration in the Present Study

While the previous section has contextualized the trend towards early years service integration, it is also important to review the early childhood system in Ontario from a historical perspective to highlight some of the significant strides towards integration that have been made over the past decade leading to the context for the current study. The following section will focus specific attention on the initiatives in Peel Region consistent with its current Best Start plan, the program of interest for the present study, in particular of parents’ day-to-day involvement and challenges with the early learning and care system.

Background and Historical Context

A national system of child care and education has been on the political agenda in Canada in varying degrees for over three decades. A national system of child care was promised when the conservatives swept to power under Brian Mulroney in 1984, and again four years later. Those promises went unrealized. The economic realities of the early 1990s under the Chrétien government meant that a national system of child care was once again put on the back burner. However, in the late 1990s, the economic climate began to shift, and in 1997, Quebec introduced its own universal childcare system offering spaces initially at $5 and currently $7 a day. Due in part to Quebec’s lead, the former Liberal government under Paul Martin’s leadership finally committed to establishing a national system of early learning and care. This vision regarded affordable, accessible, developmentally focused, and
regulated early learning and care services as integral to the health and well-being of Canadian families and a strong and productive economy. In 2005, after lengthy negotiations, the federal government successfully signed bilateral agreements on early learning and care with 10 provinces and two territories. The federal government committed to transferring $5 billion dollars over five years to the provinces and territories to begin building their own child care systems. These systems were to be based on a shared vision, adhere to specific principles and objectives and be accountable to a national quality framework (http://www.universalchildcare.ca).

Despite intense criticism from the child care community, the minority Conservative government elected in 2006 cancelled these bi-lateral agreements; the three provinces that already had five-year funding agreements (Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba) were given one year’s worth of federal funding, ending in March 31, 2007. Instead of a national child care plan, the federal government introduced the “Choice in Child Care Allowance”, later renamed the “Universal Child Care Benefit” – an annual payment of $1,200 to all parents with children under age six, taxed in the hands of the lower-income spouse. In addition, $250 million in transfer payments were announced in the 2007 federal budget, a fraction of the $5 billion over five years promised by the previous government. Ontario, as well as some other provinces, chose to use these transfer payments to begin funding their Best Start early learning and care vision. Ontario’s Best Start plan was envisioned by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services as a platform to connect child care and family support to schools, in particular kindergarten programs, the entry point for children making the transition to the school system (http://www.childcarecanada.org/ECE2008).
Kindergarten, Child Care and Family Resources: Distinct and Parallel Streams

Early childhood services in Canada, outside Quebec, have traditionally been divided into three distinct streams – kindergarten, child care, and family resources. Although they share a common goal of promoting the healthy development of children, until recently, they have operated under separate legislative mandates. This has led to service silos and barriers within and among sectors. In Ontario, until late in 2010 when it moved to education, child care has fallen under the auspice of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and has operated under the *Day Nurseries Act*. This act has provided licensing and monitoring of regulated, centre-based care including enforcement standards such as maximum child:staff ratios, group sizes, minimum staff requirements and guidelines for parental involvement. These centres have employed a user-pay system with financial subsidies for some families who meet eligibility requirements. There is a mixture of municipal, private for-profit and not-for-profit, regulated and unregulated programs. At the service delivery level, the bulk of regulated child care is not-for-profit and is initiated by parent/volunteer board of directors, community agencies and non-governmental organizations. Although many child care centres are located in schools, historically, there has been little connection between kindergarten and child care services at either the policy or service delivery level. Regulated family child care consists of full and part-time care for small groups of children in a caregiver’s home. Up to five children including the provider’s own children are permitted under the legislation in Ontario. Caregivers are considered self-employed or as affiliates with a family child care agency. Unregulated family child care, including some in-home care, is not governed by legislation. There are no requirements for professional qualifications, monitoring is the
responsibility of the parent and fee for service is arranged between the parent and the caregiver (Beach et al., 2009).

Kindergarten programs were, and still are, offered by district school boards under provisions of the Education Act, with program guidelines provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Four and five year old children may attend free public kindergarten, usually for 2.5 hours per day, but enrolment is not compulsory. Kindergarten has been viewed as an “educational program” with no attempt to meet child care needs of working parents until recently, when the Ministry of Education took over responsibility for child care. Indeed, at the time of the writing of this thesis, the province has recently moved to implement full-day early learning for four and five year old children with an implementation start in September 2010, and responsibility for child care services has changed to the Ministry of Education; that is, all child care services are subsumed under the Ministry of Education’s new Early Learning Division (www.children.gov.on.ca). Details of these changes will be outlined in a subsequent section.

Ontario’s Child Care System: A Fragmented, Patchwork of Programs and Services

The groundbreaking Early Years Study (McCain & Mustard, 1999), commissioned by the premier of Ontario in 1999, highlighted the need to develop a more coherent system for delivering early childhood education programs and services. This need was reinforced once again in the Early Years follow-up study in 2007 (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). Early Years Study 2 referenced the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) report that referred to Canada’s child care system as “a fragmented, money-
wasting patchwork of programs…” (OECD Report, p. 147, cited in CRRU, 2004). According to the OECD report, programs were scattered, disconnected and availability and quality varied considerably community to community. The Young Women’s Christian Association’s (YWCA) audit of early childhood programs in four diverse communities (rural, large urban, suburban, and a mid-size town) revealed similar challenges (Mayer & Farheen, 2006). The Early Years Study 2 acknowledged that community-based efforts, albeit scattered, were making positive differences in the lives of children and families and that local programming allowed for greater flexibility in meeting the diverse cultural and ethnic characteristics of the communities they were serving. So, while they recommended that programs and services be brought together into an integrated system, they advocated for a community-based evolutionary approach, building upon existing strengths and resources within communities. Parenting support was a pivotal component of the early learning and care framework they outlined for the province (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007).

**Ontario’s Best Start Plan**

This plan was developed in response to the clear message that Ontario’s young children and their families need more integrated and accessible services and more high quality, regulated child care spaces. Toronto First Duty (TFD), as a demonstration project, influenced and informed Best Start as to the feasibility of integrating preschool, junior/senior kindergarten, child care, public health and parenting programs into a seamless, easily accessible early child development system. Evaluation studies on TFD focused on both the
process of implementation as well as outcomes of the new model and influenced policy and ideas at the local agency, municipal and provincial government levels (Corter et al., 2009).

**Ontario Best Start in the Peel Region**

**Rapidly changing demographics.** A brief introduction to the demographics of Peel Region is warranted to set the context of this section. Peel Region is a municipality in Southern Ontario. It consists of three municipalities to the west and northwest of Toronto: the cities of Brampton and Mississauga, and the town of Caledon. The entire region is part of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and with a population of 1,159,405 (2006 census), it is the second largest municipality in Ontario after Toronto.

According to census data, 30,000 new people arrive in Peel every year, primarily from South Asia, and in particular, the Punjab region of India ([www.statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca)). While the population of Toronto is decreasing every year, Peel’s population continues to grow. In 2006, India surpassed China as the number one source of immigrants settling in the GTA and most of them settled in Mississauga and Brampton. This dramatic population increase has highlighted the absence of crucial early learning resources in some newer, high-density neighbourhoods (Agrawal, Qadeer, & Prasad, 2007).

**Initiatives in Peel Region**

**Early Years Hubs and Readiness Centres.** In 2004, the Peel District School Board (PDSB) launched the Early Years Hubs and Readiness Centres (Wolanski, 2008) although the board
had piloted Readiness Centres several years prior to that (e.g., Pelletier, 2002; Pelletier & Corter, 2006). The goal of these centres is to prepare children and their caregivers to enter kindergarten for the first time. They were built upon the success of a 12-week preschool parenting and readiness program for four and five year olds in which parents came to school with their children and participated in large group time including story reading and various activities in the classroom. Children who had participated in a readiness centre performed significantly better in kindergarten the following year than children who had not attended a centre – the results were even stronger for English as an Additional Language (ELL) children (Pelletier, 2002).

Today, four Hubs and 10 Readiness Centres operate in the board’s highest needs communities, or in neighbourhoods that have few or no services for families but have a significant population of children under six (www.cdrap.com). They are designed to accommodate children from birth to four years of age who are accompanied by their caregivers. The Hubs are staffed with a kindergarten teacher, teaching assistant, part time social worker, speech language pathologist, and outreach workers. They also serve newcomer families whose first language is not English. Participation in these centres is associated with parents being more supportive of their children’s learning and children having more positive experiences in formal schooling (Wolanski, 2008).

Besides the Hubs and Readiness Centres, Peel Region offers Family Literacy Workshops. These are free for children from 0-6 and their caregivers and are held at various elementary schools and other locations across Peel. The program is a series of between 6-12 workshops, often held in community schools in the evening, that give parents the skills to help their child learn early reading and writing skills. In each session, parents are given ideas
on how to incorporate learning into every day living and regular home activities. Free parenting workshops are also offered at various licensed child care centres. Topics include Single Parenting With Success; Guiding Your Child’s Behaviour; Sibling Rivalry; Healthy Mealtimes among others (http://peelregion.ca/children/programs/best-start.htm). Research has shown the positive impact of the Family Literacy programs on parents’ knowledge and home literacy practices and on children’s literacy development (e.g., Pelletier, 2008).

**Peel Success by Six.** Success by Six Peel is a collaboration of more than 45 partners in business, labour, education, recreation, health, social services, and government. It supports families with young children through the integration of services. Initiatives under the Success by Six umbrella include mobile early learning units in the form of retrofitted travelling vans, Best Start programs and neighbourhood projects (http://www.successby6peel.ca).

**Peel Best Start.** As the present study is conducted within Best Start sites in the Region of Peel, specifics about the project and sites are described in more detail in the Methodology section of this thesis; however, a brief overview of the project is provided here.

True to Ontario’s Best Start vision, Peel Region has made significant strides towards the integration of child care and education into a seamless system of supports for children and families. Using Toronto First Duty as a model, seven new child care centres were created within schools and operate as pilot sites for the reshaping of early learning and care services in Peel. Four school boards (2 English, 2 French) have been actively engaged in the process and have demonstrated a strong commitment to the principle of early childhood
service integration. The Best Start Integrated Programming Committee (IPC) was established to ensure that all stakeholders were represented and were committed to work collaboratively. Members of this committee include the Ontario Government, school boards, Region of Peel Children’s Services, Region of Peel Health Department, child care operators such as PLASP (Peel Lunch and After School Program) and Family Day, Early Years Centres, neighbourhood services, resource and treatment centres among others (http://www.peelregion.ca/children/resources/committees/integrated.htm).

Recent Initiatives Towards Early Childhood Service Integration: A New Framework for Early Learning and Care in Ontario and Connections to Best Start

Within the context of moving forward on Ontario’s Best Start vision of a seamless and integrated system of supports for children 0-12 years old and their families, the Premier’s special advisor on early learning, Dr. Charles Pascal, delivered his report, With Our Best Future in Mind, in June 2009, providing the government with a broad vision and comprehensive action plan to implement full-day learning to 4 and 5 year old children in Ontario as a first step to achieving the vision. His plan also proposed establishing integrated child and family centres for children under 4 years. Full-day kindergarten was intended to be phased in over time, starting in 2010. Up to 35,000 four and five year olds were to benefit from the first phase of early learning beginning in September 2010. The program was to be expanded in stages with the goal to have full implementation across the province by 2015-16. Teachers and early childhood educators work together as a staff team to provide a seamless school day with no distinction between care and education as far as the child is concerned.
Child care, funded by parent fees and subsidies, was intended to be offered before and after the regular kindergarten day in an “extended day” at sites where 15 or more families requested this service; the extended day was to be based on the same program principles as the “full day”. Fundamental to the vision was a broad parent engagement and support strategy. By providing a full day of learning for kindergarten age children, parents are freed up to work or study, while at the same time given opportunities for meaningful participation in their child’s learning (Pascal, 2009).

Although the full-day “kindergarten” part of the plan has been in progress for five months, the full vision has not. Extended day programs are currently operating in some full-day sites but the service is not necessarily operated by school boards, as outlined in the plan. Rather, many school boards have chosen to contract with third party child care operators, bringing in early childhood educators who are not employed by the school board. This has created a different system than what had been envisioned. Nevertheless at the time of this writing, there are plans to phase out the use of third party operators and to have school boards take over the operation of the full and extended day early learning and care. This will mean that designated early childhood educators (DECEs) will split the full day “shift” and will overlap with the kindergarten teacher between 8:30 am and 3:30 pm.

In addition, another part of the vision has not yet been realized: the Best Start Child and Family Centres. In order to follow through with this recommendation from the Report to the Premier (Pascal, 2009), Internal and External Reference Groups were established in fall 2010. Thus the full vision has not been lost but rather, is being realized differently than what was originally intended.
There is a growing literature to suggest that parental involvement in children’s education has a positive impact on children’s learning and success in school (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein, 1996, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Jeynes, 2003, 2005a). Izzo, et al. (1999) examined the ways in which parental involvement in children’s education changes over time and how it relates to children’s social and academic functioning. In their study, teachers provided information on parent involvement and school performance for 1,205 urban, kindergarten through third-grade children in a small, ethnically diverse, southern New England city for three consecutive years. The researchers found that parent involvement in years 1 and 2 was positively associated with improved child performance in year 3, even after comparisonling for year 1 school performance. In particular, parent participation in educational activities at home predicted academic achievement significantly more strongly than any other parent involvement variable. This study provides further evidence that strong home-school connections can positively moderate achievement outcomes for children.

In another study, longitudinal data from kindergarten children who were followed to grade 5 showed that higher levels of parent involvement were associated with better literacy performance in children (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). Data for this study were drawn from an evaluation of the Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP, St. Pierre, Layzer, Goodson, & Bernstein, 1999) and the School Transition Study (STS, Harvard Family Research Project, 2006). The CCDP was a federally funded early
intervention program at 21 sites across the United States for low-income children and their families from birth to entry into kindergarten. The intervention included services aimed at children (e.g., high quality preschool) and their families (e.g., education and job training), with the dual goals of enhancing child development and family economic self-sufficiency. The STS was a follow-up investigation for children from three of the CCDP sites. The primary aim of the STS was to examine the developmental implications of family and school contexts for low-income children, including the developmental role of family educational involvement. The research found that although there was an achievement gap in average literacy performance between children of more and less educated mothers if family involvement levels were low, this gap was nonexistent if family involvement levels were high. This finding suggests that low-income children may benefit from more parent involvement, particularly, if their parents have a low education.

Getting parents involved in programming, apart from better outcomes for children, has been associated with enhanced parenting skills, higher educational expectations for children, improved parent-child relationships, reduced parenting stress, increased self-efficacy and social support (e.g., Cleveland et al., 2006; Corter & Fleming, 2002; Epstein, 2001; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Pelletier, 2006; Pelletier & Brent, 2002; Reynolds, 2000). Parents who are involved in their children’s schooling exhibit increased self-confidence in their parenting and more thorough knowledge of child development (Epstein, 2001). Researchers have also claimed that involvement in their children’s early education increases parents’ understanding of appropriate educational practices (e.g., Gelfer, 1991), and improves parental commitment to schooling (Izzo et al., 1999). When parents communicate constructively with teachers and participate in school
activities, they gain a clearer understanding of what is expected of their children at school and they may learn from teachers how to work at home to enhance their children’s education (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Moreover, good parent-teacher collaboration may lead students to receive consistent messages from home and school about the importance of education, which may positively influence their learning and social development. Parent involvement contributes to raising the value of the parenting role and helps parents recognize the importance of their contribution to their child’s early learning (Epstein, 2001).

Furthermore, parenting knowledge plays a role in building the foundation for parenting behaviours. Research indicates that parents use their beliefs and understanding of child development in everyday life to guide their interactions with their children (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1997; Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1992). Grusec and Kuczynski (1997) point out that the degree to which parents are aware of their child’s active contribution, and understand child characteristics and developmentally appropriate behaviour, influences the quality of these interactions accordingly. In other words, bi-directional parent-child interactions are more positive when parents are able to appropriately accommodate the child’s temperament, emotional state, and stage of development.

Research suggests that many effective early childhood programs have both child-centered and adult-centered activities in “two-generation” approaches (Cleveland et al., 2006; McCall, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2008; Moran et al., 2004, Reynolds, 1997, 2000). High quality programs provide children with the learning opportunities to build the foundation skills for reading, writing and numbers while at the same time provide parents with knowledge and techniques to build on those skills at home. Parent participation also creates opportunities for teachers to model best practices and for parents to share ideas and tips with each other.
Evidence from the Chicago Child Parent Centers (CPC), a two-generational early educational project, points to parent involvement as one of the most salient features of the program in terms of producing better outcomes for children (Clements, et al., 2004; Reynolds, 1997, 2000). CPC is a centre-based intervention that provides comprehensive educational and family support to the most economically disadvantaged children and their parents in Chicago. Using data from the CLS (Chicago Longitudinal Study, 1999), Reynolds and colleagues have traced the development of more than 1,000 preschool children to age 14, and have demonstrated that large-scale programs can be successful in promoting the school success of disadvantaged children. Their research identified parent involvement as one of the most important predictors of early literacy skills, later reading achievement, and high school completion (Clements et al., 2004). Parent participation is an eligibility requirement of the CPC program. The centres make substantial efforts to involve parents. At least one-half day per week of participation in the centre is required. The full-time parent resource teacher organizes a parent room within the centre to implement parent educational activities, initiate interactions among parents, foster parent-child interactions and provide opportunities for further education and training. Reynolds (Clements et al., 2004) contends that the longer-term program effects evidenced with CPC may be that the intervention encourages parent involvement in school and in children’s education at an early age such that when the intervention ends, parents are more likely to continue to provide the nurturance necessary to maintain gains in the program (Clements et al., 2004; Reynolds, 2000).
Ecologically driven models of early learning and care regard the school as more than simply convenient places to run children’s programs, or as single-facility places of education. These models strive to involve parents in such a way that the school community becomes a resource and an important social context for learning. Within the parent involvement literature, parents’ social networks are an often overlooked factor that has been associated with enhanced involvement which in turn is thought to enhance educational outcomes for children. Coleman (1988) argues that the social relationships parents maintain with other adults encourages the exchange of information, helps shape beliefs and determine norms of behaviour. Lareau and Shumar (1996) found that parents of elementary school students who maintained ties to teachers and other parents regularly gained access to information about the school and their children’s schooling. Similarly, Useem (1992) found that mothers who were part of an informal social network knew more about school policies and how best to advocate for their children. Furthermore, Sheldon (2002) found that the size of parents’ social networks predicted the degree to which parents were involved at home or at school. According to Sheldon (2002), to the extent that network size may be considered a measure of the potential social capital to which a parent has access, those with access to more social capital are more likely to be involved in their child’s education. Although there is no guarantee that every social relationship provides parents with resources, Bourdieu (1986) has argued that network size can be taken as a measure of both the amount and variety of capital to which an individual has access. In addition to network size, Sheldon (2002) found that the individuals with whom parents interact seem to be associated with the way parents are
involved in their children’s schooling. The number of parents with children at the same
school and with whom a parent interacts predicts parental involvement at school. In contrast,
the number of other adults (e.g., relatives, educators, and/or parents with children at another
school) with whom a parent speaks about her own child predicts parental involvement at
home. This finding suggests that different types of individuals provide varied types of
support. It is likely that parents with children at school focus their conversations on school-
related topics while conversations with other adults would tend to focus more on general
parenting topics and activities at home or in the community. It is interesting to note that
almost one-third of the parents in Sheldon’s (2002) study reported not talking about the
school or their child’s education with any other parents who had a child at the school. These
parents, by virtue of their isolation, might have been at a disadvantage in terms of their
ability to help their children in school. However, Sheldon (2002) emphasizes that it may not
take a large or extensive network to promote and encourage parent involvement. The
average parent network in this study involved approximately two parents, and the average
size of the other-adult network was about three adults. Connecting an isolated parent with
one or two other parents has the potential to increase involvement. Based on these findings,
integrated programs that identify parent involvement as a priority need to encourage
interactions among parents by developing strategies to connect parents and fostering parent
networks to form.

However, there appears to be very few studies examining the idea of enhancing parents’
social networks by forging stronger linkages between home and school settings. One notable
exception is the CoZi evaluation study that found that compared to parents who did not have
access to multiple services from a school site, CoZi parents had significantly larger social
networks (Desimone et al., 2000). The CoZi study asked parents, in the spring and fall, to name their child’s friends whom they knew, as well as the names of other parents from the school. The study reported significantly larger social networks for the CoZi parents at both time periods. This finding suggests that CoZi parents had more opportunities to interact with people from the school community leading to the development of social ties which they could then use to access both practical and emotional support. Another example comes from research on Toronto First Duty. Arimura (2008) found that parent involvement in TFD programs resulted in qualitative differences in the program staff whom parents selected as important sources of daily support. For TFD parents, teachers, early childhood educators, and program coordinators were equally mentioned as important to the parents’ social network. In comparison, parents from non-integrated sites selected staff and parents from the child care centre. It was thought that parents at non-integrated sites did not have as much contact with the teacher or school staff and as a consequence these people were not part of their social support system.

**Parenting Capacity and Self Efficacy: Leads to More Involvement in Children’s Education and More Confidence in the Parenting Role**

Parenting self-efficacy has been defined as parents’ perceptions of their ability to positively influence the behaviour and development of their children. In general, parents with strong beliefs in their own parenting efficacy also engage in positive parenting behaviours (Coleman & Karraker, 1998). The more parents are involved in their child’s early learning and the more positive parenting skills they acquire, the more confident they
become in their own ability as a parent. Parents who feel efficacious experience a sense of personal empowerment in their parenting role which helps them take on the many tasks and challenges of parenting and fosters satisfaction and enjoyment in the process (Bohlin & Hagekull, 1987). Coleman and Karraker (1998) found a strong correlation between high parenting self-efficacy and high parenting satisfaction. They also reported that more highly educated mothers and those with higher family incomes had elevated self-efficacy. They proposed that compared to less educated mothers, educated mothers are likely to have acquired a broader knowledge of child development and effective parenting strategies. This in turn fosters more positive interactions with their children. These findings have implications for early learning programs that promote parent involvement. Interventions designed to build parents’ self-efficacy through modeling of positive parenting practices and opportunities to maximize success in role behaviours carry the potential to enhance parenting quality and satisfaction among parents. Simply getting parents into the schools and involved in their children’s early learning builds social networks and provides parents with positive role models, information about child development, and constructive parenting activities. Among parents who participated in school-based Parenting and Readiness Centre programs in Peel Region, those who perceived themselves as more effective were more involved in their children’s education at the pre-school level and reported feeling more confident in their parenting role (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Also, parents reported that access to community services was one of the top three contributors to their feelings of increased competence and efficacy. Teacher strategies were reported as being a key feature in facilitating parent involvement and parental self-efficacy.
In summary, this section highlighted various factors related to parent involvement that have been shown to mediate more positive outcomes for both parents and children. In particular, the section presented research evidence to suggest that parent involvement positively, and bi-directionally, influences parenting self-efficacy, home-school collaboration and social networks (e.g. Cleveland et al., 2006; Corter & Fleming, 2002; Epstein, 2001; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Pelletier, 2006; Pelletier & Brent, 2002; Reynolds, 2000). Higher parenting self-efficacy has been associated with enhanced parenting quality and more satisfaction in the parenting role (e.g. Bohlin & Hagekull, 1987; Coleman & Karraker, 1998; Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Parent-teacher collaboration and stronger links between home and school raises parents’ expectations for their children’s academic achievement and has been shown to enhance the home learning environment (e.g. Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 2001). And lastly, by being part of a social network, parents gain access to parenting information, a better understanding of children’s normative development and social and emotional support (e.g. Coleman, 1988; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Sheldon, 2002). Appendix B provides a visual representation of the parent involvement factors reviewed in this section and how they relate to improved outcomes for parents and children.
Part 5: Early Childhood Service Integration: Parenting Daily Hassles

Parenting Stress

The literature on parenting stress covers a broad range of conceptual and measurement frameworks. However, there seems to be general agreement that the central definition of parenting stress is the perceived discrepancy between the demands of parenthood and the personal resources available to the parent (Deater-Deckard, 1998; Deater-Deckard, 2004; Ostberg, Hagekull, & Hagelin, 2007). Some of the more prevalent frameworks put forward over the years include the impact of major life events on the physical and psychological adjustment of families (Homes & Rahe, 1967), the cumulative impact of minor events or parenting daily hassles (Crnic & Booth, 1991; Crnic & Greenberg, 1990), and the effects of dysfunctional child-parent processes (Abidin, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1995). Numerous studies have established that stress adversely influences the quality of parent-child relationships (see Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2000) and leads to poorer outcomes for children (e.g. Crnic & Booth, 1991; East, Matthews, & Felice, 1994; Noppe, Noppe, & Hughes, 1991). Low parenting self-efficacy (Crnic & Booth, 1991), parents’ lack of understanding of child development (Crnic & Booth, 1991; East, Matthews, & Felice, 1994; Newberger, 1980; Noppe, Noppe, & Hughes, 1991; Sameroff & Feil, 1985), unmet or ill-informed expectations (Crnic & Booth, 1991) and lack of parental social networks (Crnic et al, 1983; Crnic & Booth, 1991; Crockenberg, 1988; Levitt, Weber, & Clark, 1986; Turner & Avison, 1985) are among several pathways known to exacerbate parenting stress.
Recognizing the negative influence parental stress can have on children’s outcomes, many early childhood programs explicitly set the objective of reducing parent stress through parent education designed to foster self-efficacy and to better equip parents to manage the day-day challenges of parenting by having more informed expectations of what constitutes normative behaviour (Deemer, Desimone, & Finn-Stevenson, 1998; Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000; McCabe, 1995).

There is evidence to suggest that parents of preschool-age children can particularly use the support of social networks as a buffer against parenting stress (Crnic & Booth, 1991). Support in this age period may be more salient as children’s behavioural repertoires expand and parenting roles become more challenging. In general, social support has been linked to basic feelings of well-being and more positive mental health, and in turn, more optimal parenting (Mitchell & Trickett, 1980). In fact, social support is recognized as an important determinant of parenting quality (Belsky, 1984). Just feeling supported is a predictor of how parents believe they are coping with parenting (Mash & Johnston, 1990; Mulsow, Caldera, Pursley, Reifman, & Huston, 2002; Ostberg & Hagekull, 2000; Ostberg, Hagekull, & Hagelin, 2007; Webster-Stratton, 1990). Parents cannot parent effectively if they feel incompetent, and the idea that one is “doing things wrong” can be disempowering and disabling. This leads to heightened stress and lower self-efficacy, which further reduces their ability to parent effectively (Moran et al., 2004). Much of the literature on parenting stress has focused on child, parent and family factors but has not probed extensively into the processes that take place outside of the family context (e.g. neighbourhood and community contexts). From a developmental systems perspective, parents of preschool age children are expanding their connections, or “ecologies” and increasing their potential for social contacts.
(Belsky, 1984). It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that the parenting stress literature has largely excluded early childhood settings such as schools, early learning and care programs and child care. The relative absence of empirical studies examining the processes within these important contexts presents a gap in our understanding of the role stress plays in these settings. Integrated early childhood programs that promote parent involvement, strive to enhance parenting capacity, raise parenting self-efficacy and improve social support networks should help reduce stress on parents and families. More research is needed to evaluate the impact these programs are having on the stress levels of parents who access these services.

**Parenting Daily Hassles**

As the above section illustrates, the role stress plays in parenting processes and families in general has been well documented. Research has primarily addressed stress as a construct (see Garmezy & Rutter, 1983) or focused on context and events – poverty, divorce, single parenting, illness etc – implicitly assumed to be stressful for families (Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2000). In general, it has largely targeted major life changes – divorce, death of a spouse etcetera – or dysfunctional child-parent processes but has tended to overlook the more incessant stress caused by minor everyday frustrations and irritations that accompany childrearing and children’s typical, but often challenging behaviour. The tendency has also been to focus on high-risk or problematic populations, for example, mothers suffering from depression or families living in poverty (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982; Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981; Lazarus, DeLongis,
Folkman, & Gruen, 1985). More recently, however, researchers are approaching stress in broader terms and in contexts that are typical and common to all families (Crnic & Booth, 1991; Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Crnic & Low, 2002). Crnic and Low (2002) conceptualize parenting stress in terms of parenting daily hassles, typical events that characterize some of the everyday interactions that parents have with their children. These are either the daily stressors involved with children’s challenging behaviours, or the multiplicity of time-consuming tasks associated with parents’ routine caregiving, provision of care, or childrearing responsibilities. Either way, these events, and their responses to them, are instrumental to the dynamics of the relationship parents have with their children. Although any one typical daily hassle of parenting may be of little significance in and of itself, the cumulative impact of relatively minor events over time may become a meaningful source of stress for a parent. Indeed, it is the chronic nature of these experiences, and how the parent responds to them that may eventually have an adverse influence on the quality of the parenting (Belsky, Woodworth, & Crnic, 1996). Over time, relationships may become more antagonistic or problematic when parents are stressed by minor events. This may eventually result in somewhat less competent, less responsive, and less satisfied parents, as well as children who present more behavioural difficulties (see Belsky, Woodworth, & Crnic, 1996b). Although the research on parenting daily hassles is still somewhat limited, it appears that the cumulative impact of relatively minor daily hassles may be a better predictor of adjustment for both children and parents than major life events (DeLongis et al., 1982; Kanner et al., 1981; Lazarus et al., 1985.) In addition, daily hassles operate independently of other predictors such as depression or anxiety (Deater-Deckard, 1998; Deater-Deckard, Scarr, McCartney, & Eisenberg, 1994). Historically, the Parenting Stress Index (PSI; Abidin,
1983) has been the measurement of choice for examining stress within a major-life event framework. The PSI is well-developed, extensively used and designed to assess stress broadly within the family context. It focuses more on issues of general parental distress and children’s difficulties, as well as dysfunctional parent-child relationships. As such, its focus is appropriately more toward the pathological spectrum. In contrast, the Parenting Daily Hassles (PDH) was designed to measure parental perceptions about the minor daily hassles and inconveniences associated with parenting (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990). The PDH Scale comprises 20 items that briefly describe discrete events that involve challenging child behaviour or various tasks associated with parenting. Each item on the scale is rated for the frequency with which it occurs (a 5-point scale from “rarely” to “constantly”), and the intensity with which the parent perceives the event as a hassle (a 5-point scale from “no hassle” to “big hassle”). Items concern themselves with typical hassles experienced with young children in the family home; e.g., “being nagged or whined to,” “continually cleaning up the same messes,” “difficulty getting privacy,” and “kids resist or struggle over bedtime”.

**Parenting Daily Hassles in Early Childhood Settings**

Although early childhood settings – schools, child care, parenting programs etcetera – feature prominently in the lives of parents, very little research in terms of parenting stress and, in particular parenting daily hassles, has been done in this seemingly important context. Of the handful of studies that have included measures of parenting stress within evaluations of integrated programming, results have been mixed and there is no clear evidence as to the effectiveness of these programs in reducing parenting stress among participating families.
For example, evaluation studies of the School of the 21st Century (21C) and the CoZi model have examined the effects of integrated programming on parenting stress levels using the Parenting Stress Index (PSI) (Abidin, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1995). The PSI measures four domains of parent stress related to parenting: parental distress, parent-child dysfunctional interaction, difficult child, and total parent stress. In a pilot study of the 21C model, two 21C elementary schools in Independence, Missouri serving predominantly middle-class, white suburban communities were tracked during the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years of implementation (Finn-Stevenson et al., 1998). Two elementary schools in an adjacent school district, matched demographically to the intervention schools served as comparison schools. Both intervention and comparison schools offered before-and-after school programs. The data from the two intervention schools and the data from the two comparison schools were combined to form one intervention and one comparison group. The PSI scores for parents in both the intervention and comparison groups, across all four domains of the PSI, did not indicate any above normal stress levels. From the 3rd to the 4th year, stress levels in every domain decreased for both groups. Statistically significant decreases occurred for both intervention and comparison group parents in the total parent domain, but only the intervention group showed a statistically significant decrease in the overall PSI score. Even though these results are not conclusive, they have been cited as evidence for the effectiveness of 21C schools in reducing parenting stress (e.g. Deemer, Desimone, & Finn-Stevenson, 1998). A smaller study of a 21C program in Leadville, Colorado, however, did find that participation in year-round, full-day child care for ages 0-5 was associated with a decrease in parental stress (McCabe, 1995). McCabe compared levels of parenting stress of a group of 50 parents who had received services from the 21C Family Center to a comparison group of
50 parents who had not received comprehensive programs. Scores were significantly lower on the parent domain for the intervention group but not significantly different on the child domain or the overall PSI. A study by Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, and Henrich (2000) evaluating the impact of the CoZi model in an elementary school in the state of Virginia found no effect of the program on parenting stress. This was a one-year evaluation in a CoZi elementary school and a comparison school both of which served predominantly disadvantaged students. Once again, stress levels were measured using the PSI. Parents at both schools scored within the normal range on all four dimensions of stress, and there were no significant differences between the two groups of parents. An analysis of differences in parent stress according to whether parents had their child enrolled in CoZi after-school care indicated no differences between parents who participated and those who did not.

These mixed findings are surprising given that integrated programs such as 21C and CoZi offer parents on-site, year-round, full-day preschool and after-school care as well as a wide range of supports for parents. It would be reasonable to expect that coordinated services would lead to a reduction in stress experienced by these parents. Arimura (2008) suggests that a possible explanation may lie in the measure that is being used to assess levels of parenting stress. These studies have all used the PSI as a measuring tool. Arimura (2008) argues that the PSI is better suited in clinical contexts, and as such, may not be the appropriate measure to capture stress levels associated with having a child in various early learning and care settings. In order to measure parental perceptions about hassles specific to these settings, Arimura adapted Crnic and Greenberg’s PDH scale (1990) to address everyday, normative stressors associated with having to navigate through, or interact with, a variety of different early childhood services. This new measure, the Parenting Daily Hassles
Early Childhood Services (PDH-ECS) scale (Arimura, 2008) is comprised of 22 items normally associated with having a child in kindergarten and/or childcare (e.g., “I have a hard time getting my child ready for kindergarten”). Like the PDH scale, parents are asked to rate both the frequency and intensity of each of the hassles. Arimura’s study compared families participating in an integrated system of child and family services – Toronto First Duty – and families without access to integrated programming. Overall findings suggest that elements of integration such as the proximity of programs, working relationships between teachers and ECE staff, and school policy related to parent involvement contributed to lower levels of daily hassles experienced by TFD parents. Parents at non-integrated comparison sites showed higher levels of perceived stress, particularly if there was minimal communication between the parent, kindergarten teacher and/or early childhood educator. At comparison sites, the majority of parents had limited face-to-face contact with the kindergarten teacher. TFD parents, on the other hand, had many opportunities to interact with kindergarten teachers as they were part of the early childhood team and available at both drop-off and pick-up times. All team members were informed of the child’s progress as well as any incidents occurring during the day. Parents were also encouraged to informally visit the classroom at any time of the day and observe or participate in activities with their child. In this context, parents were able to approach any member of the team to discuss issues relating to their child without having to make special arrangements with the teacher. In contrast, a “closed-door” policy at the non-integrated sites required parents to make prior arrangements to visit the child’s classroom or meet with the teacher and as a result most comparison parents found it difficult to maintain regular contact with the classroom teacher. Arimura (2008) posits that differences in this key area of teacher support may be a
contributing factor to the higher levels of parenting daily hassles reported by parents not participating in integrated services. Based on Arimura’s proposition that teacher support may have been a key mediator of reduced hassles at TFD sites, coupled with the research literature on parent involvement and parenting self-efficacy, the current study intended to explore three areas of potential stress that may be particularly problematic for parents. These three areas were selected a priori and labeled as follows: (1) seamless day, (2) connectedness, and (3) parenting capacity. Following is a brief outline of why these areas were selected.

Disconnected early childhood services are underutilized and difficult for families to navigate (McCain & Mustard, 1999; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007). The Best Start vision integrates child care, kindergarten, and other traditionally separate preschool services in seamless school based hubs. Learning from TFD demonstration sites has informed the Best Start project in Peel Region (e.g. Corter et al, 2009). Research at TFD used a quantitative measure of integration – the Indicators of Change – to portray levels of integration graphically using five service delivery factors - early learning environment, early childhood staff team, integrated governance, seamless access, and parent participation (www.toronto.ca/firstduty). Two of the service delivery factors are particularly relevant to the current study – seamless access and parent participation. The Indicators of Change at the highest level include access to a common program for all children and parents, including early intervention, community health and social services, as well as expanded child care provision through integrated programs. The current study questioned whether having seamless access to child care, education and family support would reduce stress levels for parents. Parent participation was another key service delivery factor included on the TFD Indicators of Change measure. Included at the highest level of integration were meaningful
parental input into programming decisions, regular parent participation and involvement in ongoing activities that benefit parenting capacity. Research on parent involvement provides evidence that strong home-school connections are associated with reduced parenting stress, increased self-efficacy and stronger social networks (e.g., Cleveland et al, 2006; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Pelletier & Brent, 2002). This study examined parents’ involvement in their children’s early learning and looked at whether feeling connected to schools and supported by educators resulted in parents feeling less hassled. The third area of potential stress was parenting capacity. Research suggests that parents who are more involved in their children’s education at the preschool level feel more confident as a parent and get more satisfaction and enjoyment out of the parenting role (Bohlin & Hagekull, 1987; Coleman & Karraker, 1998; Pelletier & Brent, 2002). If consistent with these findings, parents in the current study should experience fewer hassles if they are feeling more informed and supported.

Statement of the Problem

Parent involvement in integrated approaches to early childhood services is beginning to get the attention it deserves. The body of literature associating parent involvement in early education with better achievement outcomes for children continues to grow (see Reynolds, Magnuson, & Ou, 2010 for a review). Parent involvement is correlated with children’s higher student academic achievement, better student attendance, and more positive student and parent attitudes towards education (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Fan & Chen, 2001; Griffith, 1998; Henderson, 1987; Jeynes, 2003;
Lazar, Darlington, Murray, Royce & Snipper, 1982; Shumow & Miller, 2001). However, the relationship between service integration and outcomes for parents has not been adequately explored. In one of the few studies examining this relationship, Patel (2004; Patel & Corter, 2011 in preparation) found that parents using integrated services at Toronto First Duty (TFD) sites were more likely to be engaged in the school and have higher expectations for involvement and stronger feelings of self-efficacy as compared to parents in demographically similar communities where there was no service integration at school.

Another salient argument for parent involvement in the context of early childhood settings is the notion that how a child performs in the classroom is strongly influenced by the expectations and experiences in the family home. Given the increasing evidence that ecologically-based, two-generation, models that address both the family context and the child’s learning and development seem to be the most effective, educators are beginning to recognize the challenges parents face and are building opportunities for connecting with schools into their programs (Pelletier & Corter, 2005; Zadeh, Farnia, & Ungerleider, 2006). This is based on the notion that if schools are perceived as belonging to the community, families will be more encouraged to get involved. Research indicates that strong parent-school connections build social capital and cohesive neighbourhoods (Keating & Hertzman, 1999; MCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007).

In summary, the need for a sound research base backing strategies to support parents and promote their effective involvement within integrated programs continues. This study aims to expand the somewhat limited research available on parent involvement as it relates to early childhood service integration. Within the context of an on-going evaluation study of Best Start in Peel Region, the study compared parents with kindergarten age children.
enrolled in Best Start schools where service integration was underway with parents of children in demographically similar schools where there was no service integration. In particular, the study examined whether parents who had access to integrated services at schools where kindergarten and child care were co-located would report lower levels of parenting daily hassles compared to parents who did not have access to these services. However, although service integration was underway in Best Start schools, the process was in its infancy particularly in terms of parent involvement. Therefore, the aims of the study were broadened to also explore all parents’ involvement in the early learning and care system and the hassles they may or may not be facing on a daily basis. Of particular interest was whether parents were feeling connected to schools, teachers, and early childhood educators (ECEs), and to what extent they were feeling confident in their capacity to support their children’s early learning. Another objective of the study was to evaluate whether parents were aware of, using, and satisfied with, the programs and services available to them in the community and whether integrating these services into seamless programs is something parents want and need. To add depth to the inquiry, the research questions are organized around the three areas of potential challenges for parents that have been proposed a priori, along with subsidiary questions to guide the research.

**Seamless Day**

- Does having access to care, education and family support in the same facility appeal to parents, and if so, how?
- Is there an association between parents having access to a seamless program and their perception of daily hassles related to early childhood services?
Connectedness

- To what degree are parents feeling involved in their child’s learning and connected to their child’s school and classroom teacher?
- Is there an association between feeling connected and their perception of daily hassles related to early childhood services?

Parenting Capacity

- To what extent are parents feeling confident in their capacity to support their child’s early learning?
- Is there an association between perceived parenting capacity and parents’ perception of daily hassles related to early childhood services?

Research Questions

Usage and Demographic Patterns among all Parents

A key goal of Best Start is making programs and services more accessible to parents through an integrated model of service delivery. Because implementation of the model was newly underway, a seamless system of supports was not fully realized at Best Start sites. Therefore, the first three questions examined all parents’ experiences with the still “fragmented” array of programs and services in the community to understand demographic
and usage patterns and their effects on parenting daily hassles. These questions were intended to inform the Best Start research going forward.

(1) To what extent are parents using the early childhood services and programs available to them in the community?

(2) Are there any differences in parenting daily hassles as a function of parent demographics such as language spoken at home, education or employment status?

(3) Do parenting daily hassles vary as a function of program or service usage? In other words, do parents using certain programs or supports feel less hassled than parents not using these programs?

**Differences between Best Start and Comparison Parents:**

The final two questions asked whether Best Start parents would report lower levels of parenting daily hassles compared to parents at comparison schools. Although the program was in its first year at the time of this study, child care was co-located at Best Start schools and the process of implementation was underway. No child care or service integration was available at comparison schools. These questions also looked at whether parents were feeling more hassled in any of the three areas of stress under investigation in this study.
(4) Do parents with children in Best Start schools report lower levels of daily hassles than parents in comparison schools?

(5) In what areas do parents report feeling most hassled – seamless day, connectedness or parenting capacity?
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Context and Recruitment

Families were recruited from ten schools in Peel Region that were involved in a large-scale, longitudinal research study of the Best Start program being conducted by a research team headed by Dr. Janette Pelletier and based at the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study, part of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Of the 10 schools, five were Best Start schools and as such, were operating as pilot sites for an integrated model of service delivery. The other five schools were considered comparison schools as they currently were not part of Best Start and did not have child care facilities or service integration. Comparison schools were selected by the Region of Peel in collaboration with respective school boards. Schools were selected to best match the demographic profiles of the Best Start sites. In total, 158 parents participated from Best Start schools and 170 parents participated from comparison schools. Table 1 shows the number of participants recruited from each school.
Table 1

Number of Participants from Each School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Board</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Childcare Provider</th>
<th>Best Start or Comparison</th>
<th># of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peel District School Board (PDSB)</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Region of Peel</td>
<td>Best Start</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>PLASP</td>
<td>Best Start</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Participants PDSB</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>220</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB)</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>PLASP</td>
<td>Best Start</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.</td>
<td>PLASP</td>
<td>Best Start</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Family Day</td>
<td>Best Start</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total DPCDSB</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Participants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>328</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the Best Start program in Peel Region was in its first year of implementation at the time of data collection for this thesis, differences between Best Start schools and comparison schools were expected to be minimal, particularly with respect to parents. However, Best Start and comparison schools differed in their availability of preschool services and in their level of progress towards service integration. At Best Start schools, progress towards integration was already underway at the levels of governance, administration and staffing but the progress of actual implementation varied by site. Of the five Best Start schools, only one had adjoining kindergarten and child care classrooms and shared activities and only two of
the schools had Early Years Hubs. All five Best Start schools offered child care on site and certified staff delivered the High Scope Educational Curriculum. No child care services were available at comparison schools.

**Participants**

Parents from 328 families in 10 schools were included in this study. They had consented to participate in a two-year longitudinal research study being carried out by the Peel Best Start project. All participants had 4 or 5 year old child/ren enrolled in junior or senior kindergarten; 76% of parents were mothers and 92% were married. The majority of families (69%) were living as a couple with children in the home. Families living with relatives or grandparents represented 26% of participants. The sample of children was roughly evenly split between males (54%) and females (46%) and first born (49%) and later born (51%). Parents were predominately born outside of Canada (76%) and most did not speak English as their first language (65%). Most parent participants had come to Canada from India, Pakistan or Sri Lanka and had been in Canada an average of 10 years. The number of years in Canada ranged from less than one year to 42 years with a median of eight years. Family religions were most likely to be Catholic (17.9%), Muslim (13.4%), or Hindu (10.4%). Just over three quarters of participants had completed some form of post-secondary education; community/technical college or an undergraduate degree (47%) and graduate/advanced degree (29%). The majority of parents worked full (53%) or part-time (11%) but a sizable group were stay-at-home parents (23%). Missing data across variables averaged roughly 10%. Demographic variables are outlined in Table 2.
Table 2

*Family Demographic Variables (N=328; missing data = 10%)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic variables</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>92.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common law</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Birth Order</td>
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<tr>
<td>Firstborn</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laterborn</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English (EFL)</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of birth</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed elementary/</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior/middle/secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed community</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/technical college/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed graduate/</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental leave</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay at home</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Composition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple with children</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single father or mother</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measures

The present study utilized both quantitative and qualitative measures. Quantitative measures were (1) a parent survey and (2) the *Early Childhood- Parenting Daily Hassles (EC-PDH) Scale* (Arimura, 2008), which measures parental perceptions about hassles specific to child care and early learning settings. To add richness to the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with parents.

Parent Survey

This survey was given to all families (Best Start or comparison) who had a child or children enrolled in junior or senior kindergarten. The survey (see Appendix D) had four parts: (1) demographic items (parent gender, marital status, child gender, birth order, language spoken, country of birth, cultural, religious or ethnic origin, education level, employment status, and family composition); (2) items relating to early childhood program and service usage; (3) a 10-item scale which asked parents to rate their perceptions on awareness of, and satisfaction with, programs and services. The items were answered using a five-point Likert scale indicating how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement as follows: strongly disagree, disagree, not sure, do not agree, or strongly disagree and (4) items relating directly to experiences with the Best Start program (completed only by the parents in the Best Start sample). These additional eight items were answered using the same Likert scale as above.
Early Childhood-Parenting Daily Hassles (EC-PDH) Questionnaire

This was the primary quantitative measure used in the study. It is designed to measure parental perceptions about hassles specific to early childhood settings. The EC-PDH scale was developed by Arimura (2008) and administered to parents within an evaluation study of the Toronto First Duty project. Arimura’s scale was adapted from the Parenting Daily Hassles (PDH) Scale (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990) and contained 22 items. The 20-item PDH scale assesses general everyday stress experienced by parents. It consists of items relating to typical duties or tasks normally associated with parenting. Two summary scores are computed from this measure: the frequency of parenting hassles, and the perceived intensity of the hassles. The frequency score reflects the presence of the stressors, while the intensity score represents an index of appraised level of stress. Reliability and validity data for the PDH scale are reported in Crnic and Greenberg (1990).

The current study uses a modified version of the EC-PDH, using the same basic format as Arimura’s earlier version but expanded to include 42 items. Wording on most of the items was condensed and/or simplified and the instructions were more defined. The explanatory examples were also eliminated. Like the PDH and the earlier version of the EC-PDH, parents are asked to rate both the frequency and intensity of each “hassle” (see Appendices E and F).

The items have been categorized under the three areas of potential challenges for parents under investigation in this study: seamless day, connectedness and parenting capacity. Although these factors have been proposed a priori, they are not ordered in blocks of items. Items are presented randomly and then categorized during analysis. For example,
item #4 which reads: “It’s difficult to have to interrupt my day or make special arrangements to get my child from school to child care (or from child care to school)” would be categorized under “seamless day”, whereas, item #27 which reads, “It’s difficult to find the opportunity to discuss issues of concern with the child care staff” would be classified under “connectedness”. Item #21 which states, “It’s difficult to get good advice on how to support my child’s learning at home” can be categorized under “parenting capacity”. The items break-out roughly to fifteen per area of potential stress under investigation.

**Measurement Quality of the Parenting Daily Hassles (EC-PDH) Scale and Sub-scales**

Because the EC-PDH is a new measure, it was important to first test the internal consistency of the 42-item scale. Cronbach alpha analyses were conducted on both the overall scale and the three a priori subscales of seamless day (S), connectedness (C) and parenting capacity (P). All scales were found to have a strong degree of internal consistency with Cronbach’s alphas at .80 or above. This is evidence for the fact that the items on the scale measure a consistent underlying construct (“hassles”), and that the three subscales measure consistent constructs of seamless day, connectedness and parenting capacity. Table 3 provides Cronbach’s alpha values and descriptive statistics for the overall scale and the three subscales.
Table 3

*Cronbach’s Alphas and Descriptive Statistics for Overall Scale and Three Subscales*  
(N=242)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>N of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall scale</td>
<td>75.67</td>
<td>30.94</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamless day</td>
<td>17.18</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>28.41</td>
<td>13.03</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Capacity</td>
<td>30.07</td>
<td>13.84</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor analysis was also performed to see whether the three a priori subscales were identified, and also to determine whether any other groupings, or constructs, emerged through data reduction. Un-rotated and rotated orthogonal factor analysis was conducted using the extraction method: principal component analysis with varimax rotation. Four independent factors were found, explaining 53% of the total variance. The first factor explained 33% of the variance, factor 2 explained 10% of the variance, factor 3 explained 6% of the variance, and factor 4 explained 4% of the variance. The fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth factors had eigenvalues only slightly above one and have been suppressed. See Table 7 for factor loadings for both un-rotated and rotated orthogonal solutions. Based on the factor loadings, the three a priori scales can be identified. Factor 1 appears to represent parenting capacity. Factor 2 appears to represent connectedness and factor 3 appears to represent seamless day. Factor 4 overlaps with factor 1, and appears to represent aspects of parenting capacity related to communication. These results, along with the Cronbach’s alpha
analysis, suggest that the use of the three subscales is justified – that is, they represent three
distinct and relatively independent constructs.

Table 4

*Unrotated and Rotated Orthogonal (Varimax) Factor Loadings* (EC-PDH) (N=242)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Item</th>
<th>Unrotated</th>
<th>Rotated Orthogonal (Varimax)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>**</td>
<td>F1</td>
<td>F2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. get child ready in morning</td>
<td>S .40</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. find time to make snacks and lunch</td>
<td>S .42</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. transport child to school/childcare</td>
<td>S .23</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. leave child in morning/gets upset</td>
<td>S .31</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. interrupt day/special arrangements</td>
<td>S .28</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. worry about safety</td>
<td>S .44</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. separated for many hours</td>
<td>C .41</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. focus on what need to do/ worry</td>
<td>C .53</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. rush to pick up at end of day</td>
<td>C .36</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. deal with exhausted child</td>
<td>C .29</td>
<td>- .31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. get child to tell me about day</td>
<td>C .59</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. keep track of daily schedule</td>
<td>S .62</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. deal with unexpected changes</td>
<td>S .33</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. make alternate arrangements/sick</td>
<td>S .55</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. what to do/child not feeling 100%</td>
<td>C .53</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. find time to read to child</td>
<td>P .61</td>
<td>- .20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. find time to play with child</td>
<td>P .62</td>
<td>- .25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. know what child should do at age</td>
<td>P .70</td>
<td>- .24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. know if behaviour is problem</td>
<td>P .63</td>
<td>- .27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. good advice/challenging behaviours</td>
<td>P .68</td>
<td>- .38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. good advice/support learning</td>
<td>P .74</td>
<td>- .32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. find parenting programs</td>
<td>P .61</td>
<td>- .24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. know what programs available</td>
<td>P .68</td>
<td>- .30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. feel like outsider among parents</td>
<td>C .47</td>
<td>- .22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. opportunity to talk with parents</td>
<td>C .60</td>
<td>- .21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. stay in contact/staff at child care</td>
<td>C .52</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. know if child is happy/child care</td>
<td>C .52</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. discuss concerns/child care staff</td>
<td>C .55</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. worry about quality/child care</td>
<td>C .49</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. contact with classroom teacher</td>
<td>P .73</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. know if child is happy/school</td>
<td>C .76</td>
<td>- .25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. discuss concerns/teacher</td>
<td>C .74</td>
<td>- .25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. whether child learning in school</td>
<td>P .76</td>
<td>- .32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. learning in enough in school</td>
<td>P .65</td>
<td>- .33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. school doesn’t know child</td>
<td>P .59</td>
<td>- .37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. worry about quality/school program</td>
<td>P .59</td>
<td>- .30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. communicate/English not language</td>
<td>C .25</td>
<td>-.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. multiple people care for child</td>
<td>C .51</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. participate in classroom activities</td>
<td>C .49</td>
<td>- .39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. understand how things work/school</td>
<td>C .70</td>
<td>- .30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. understand what school expects</td>
<td>P .71</td>
<td>- .28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. avoid spending money/pay for care</td>
<td>P .47</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Nb. Factor loadings < .2 suppressed*
**S=Seamless Day**  
C=Connectedness  
P=Parenting Capacity

**Parent Interviews**

Parent interviews were conducted with parents at Best Start schools only. The semi-structured interview protocol was designed to measure parents’ perceptions about their child’s early learning and care. Two interview protocols were used to distinguish between parents who had their child registered in the child care centre from those who had their child in the kindergarten program only (see Appendices G & H). Version A (Child in Best Start child care centre) delved into parents’ reasons for having their child participate in the program - i.e. why they had chosen to have their child registered in a Best Start early learning and child care centre, their goals for themselves and their child, their degree of satisfaction with the program and ideas for improvement. Version B (child in kindergarten only) asked questions related to parents’ involvement in their child’s learning and the types of experiences their child had outside of kindergarten hours.

**Procedure and Data Collection**

**Ethics and Consent**

Ethics approval was granted from the University of Toronto as part of a large scale longitudinal study funded by the Region of Peel Children’s Services and being conducted by the research team at the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study, OISE/UT. Administrative
consent to work with school boards, community partners, schools and front-line staff was established through the Region of Peel’s leadership in this project. Prior to commencing the study, principals, vice-principals, and child care supervisors at all school sites were contacted by e-mail and in person by the lead investigator and research manager to explain the study. Other research partners included staff from the research department of both school boards.

**Consent Form, Family Information Form and Parent Survey**

Consent packages were assembled and dropped off at schools to be distributed to families of kindergarten children. The kindergarten teacher was asked to send the packages home with the children to give to their parents. The package included a covering letter from the lead investigator inviting them to participate and explaining the study and the importance of the research (see Appendices I & J). The letter explained that if they chose to participate they would be asked to fill out the attached parent survey as well as a brief information sheet requesting contact information, child’s gender and age and some brief demographic questions such as language spoken at home, education and employment. A consent form was included that needed to be signed indicating that the family was willing to participate. The letter also informed them that $5 would be given to their child’s classroom library for filling out two surveys - the parent survey (attached) and a second survey (EC-PDH) to be distributed at a later date. Parents at Best Start schools were also told they would be contacted for a short interview at which time another $5 would be donated to the classroom library. Participating parents were asked to return the consent form and completed surveys to the kindergarten teacher by a certain date. These were then picked up from the schools by the research team.
Early Childhood-Parenting Daily Hassles Survey (EC-PDH)

Approximately one month later, 328 families who agreed to participate and to have their child participate in the study were given the EC-PDH, or “hassles survey”. Of these families, 242 parents returned the hassles survey for an overall response rate of 74%. This survey was sent out with a cover letter in individually addressed envelopes to the parent’s child (see Appendix K&L). The kindergarten teacher was given a list of participating families and asked to ensure that the envelope went home to the parent in the child’s school bag. The letter reminded parents that this second survey needed to be completed for $5 to be donated to the classroom library. Best Start parents were also reminded that they would be contacted at some point for a short interview. Parents were asked to return completed surveys to their child’s kindergarten teacher by a certain date. They were also given a contact name and number to call if they required help in filling out the survey. Completed hassles surveys were picked up from kindergarten teachers by the researcher.

Parent Interviews

Parent interviews were conducted only at Best Start pilot schools. At two of the schools, interviews were held in two sessions per school; one over the lunch hour and the other between 4-6 p.m. Individual interviews were conducted in an “open-house” format with refreshments and child care provided. These sessions were coordinated by the author of this thesis and interviews were conducted with the help of researchers from OISE/UT who
were already working on the larger evaluation study. Interviews were given in an informal, conversational style and because they were audio-taped the interviewer could keep note-taking to a minimum. At the start of each interview, parents were informed that their individual answers would not be shared with teachers or caregivers and their names were only being taken for tracking purposes. They were also told that the interview would be recorded unless they requested otherwise. Researchers were instructed to reword questions if needed to obtain understanding and to probe as much as was helpful to the parent. Suggested probes were indicated on their protocol sheets. They were also asked to relate answers back to parents to make sure that they had captured parents’ thoughts appropriately. Each interview took approximately 10 minutes.

Interviews held over the lunch hour were coordinated with the help of the kindergarten teachers who sent out information flyers provided by the researcher (see Appendix M) to participating parents and reminded them to attend. Schools provided a common room with enough space to lay out pizza, cookies and soft drinks for lunch and set up activities for the children. This arrangement meant that parents could maintain contact with their child during the interview and allowed them to feel more comfortable by being around other parents. The afternoon sessions were held in staff rooms in close proximity to the child care rooms and snacks and drinks were laid out for parents to enjoy. The staff at the child care centres was helpful in ensuring that information sheets about the interviews reached participating parents and verbally reminded them to attend.

Since the number of participating families at Best Start schools in the other three schools was low, an open-house format was not warranted. Interviews at these schools were
conducted over the phone. Interviews over the phone took slightly longer (approximately 15-20 minutes) as they were not being recorded and note taking was necessary.

Data Analysis and Coding

Parent Survey

As part of the larger research study, all participating children were assigned a participant number and all accompanying data were filed by school. Parent survey data were coded numerically, recorded on a spreadsheet and then entered into an SPSS database. Data from the parent survey were used to analyze parents’ use of programs and services as well as demographic differences between Best Start and comparison parents and in relation to hassles scores. Differences between Best Start and comparison parents on demographic variables were examined using chi-square analysis. Frequency data and chi-square analyses were also used to determine if program usage patterns were dependent on any demographic variables.

EC-PDH “Hassles” survey

The EC-PDH was distributed to all 328 participating families of which 242 were returned. This meant that EC-PDH data would not be available for 86 parents who had filled out the parent survey. However, 41 parents had filled out the EC-PDH survey without filling out the parent survey. The two data sets were merged for analyses by coordinating the
survey and ‘hassles’ data by participant number, however, it must be noted that this resulted in missing data from parents who had filled out one survey but not the other.

Frequency (how often it affects you?) and intensity (how much of a hassle has it been for you?) scores were recorded as (a) or (b) respectively for each parent on a paper spreadsheet. Both frequency and intensity scores were based on a 5-point Likert scale: Frequency: - never, rarely, sometimes, a lot, constantly – and Intensity: No hassle to Big hassle or N/A (item does not apply to me). To assess whether there was any variability in hassles scores among certain groups of parents, the data from the parent survey and the EC-PDH were merged and ANOVAs were conducted to evaluate the relationships between hassles scores on the EC-PDH and the demographic variables under investigation. To limit the possibility of Type 1 error with multiple tests, a conservative Bonferroni-corrected alpha level of .005 was used (.05/9). Multivariate analyses were also conducted on all demographic variables to determine whether demographic differences between Best Start and comparison parents had an impact on differences in hassles scores between the two groups.

Parent Interviews

Information from each question on the parent interviews was coded into categories to elucidate themes. This was done through an iterative process with several members of the research team. These categories were then coded numerically as either 0 = not mentioned, or 1 = mentioned. Categories for the two versions of interviews are included in Appendices N and O. The coded data were entered into a separate database for quantitative analyses.
Frequencies were calculated from the coded parent interview data to determine what proportion of parents were mentioning particular themes.

**CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

This study examined the daily experiences of parents who had a child in kindergarten and/or child care at one of ten schools in Peel Region, a municipality of the Greater Toronto Area. In the five Best Start pilot schools, kindergarten and child care were co-located at the school and service integration was underway, albeit the degree of implementation varied by school. At the five comparison schools, children attended only kindergarten and arrangements for separate, off-site child care was the responsibility of the parent. Parents in Best Start schools did not have access to fully integrated services during the first year of program implementation, therefore, they were still having to navigate a “fragmented” array of services within the community. The first three questions examined how parents were using these services and whether demographic or usage patterns influenced their levels of parenting daily hassles. The last two questions asked whether Best Start parents were feeling less hassled than comparison parents by having the process of service integration underway and whether parents were feeling more hassled in any of the three areas of potential stress under investigation: seamless day, connectedness, and parenting capacity. Qualitative data were collected from parents in Best Start schools only. Results from parent interviews are presented in terms of key themes emerging in the areas of seamless day, connectedness and parenting capacity. Field notes and observations were also recorded and analyzed.
Usage and Demographic Patterns among all Parents

(1) To what extent are parents using the early childhood programs and services available to them in the community?

The following data were collected from the parent survey filled out by both Best Start and comparison parents. Except for kindergarten and child care, awareness and usage of programs was low; however, parents were satisfied with the programs they were using. Satisfaction with the Best Start program was very high although parents did not feel that they would be more involved in their child’s learning at home and at school as a result of the program. Although the majority of families had a child in kindergarten, almost 14% of families had opted to leave their child in a child care centre instead of sending him or her to kindergarten. Canadian born, English first language speakers used more full-time, part-time and home-based child care than foreign-born English language learners.

Awareness: The majority of participating parents were not aware of all the programs and services in their community. Slightly more than 60% of parents responded with degrees of uncertainty [not sure (38%); do not agree (19.3%) or strongly disagree (3.8%)] to the statement: “I know all the programs/services in my community”. In response to the statement, “I have not been able to use many of the programs and services for children and families”, 74% of respondents either agreed or were not sure. Many parents agreed that they have not been able to use the programs and services in their community (41.1%). Although there seems to be little awareness of programs available in their communities, most parents did feel a part of their
communities (65.3%). When asked specifically whether programs and services would be better and easier to find if they were integrated, parents overwhelmingly agreed (81.2%), with about 30% strongly agreeing. They also reported being told by teachers and staff about available programs (63%).

Usage: Parents were asked which programs and services they, or their child, had used. Not surprisingly, most families had a child in kindergarten (86.4%); however 13.6% of parents had opted to leave their child in a child care centre instead of sending him or her to junior kindergarten. Besides kindergarten or child care, overall usage of programs and services was low, with usage of most services being under 10% (see Table 3). Almost half of respondents had used some form of full or part-time child care with 17.1% of parents having used full-time child care and 30.5% having used full or part time homebased care or babysitting. Of the other services available to families, the resource library was used the most at 43.1%. Parents also reported attending community events for families (20.9%).

Table 5

Frequencies by Programs/Services: Which Programs/Services Have You or Your Child Used? (N=369)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Usage</th>
<th>Frequency/%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full time (e.g. child care)</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-based care (full/part time childcare, babysitting)</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time nursery, preschool program, after school program</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>86.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent relief/occasional childcare</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Usage</td>
<td>Frequency/%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting classes/workshops</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in/Parenting programs</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre/Post-natal program</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and referrals</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community events for families</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource library</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and nutrition/wellness information programs</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and/or family counseling</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech and language services</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home visits</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Missing Data = 49

Chi-square tests of independence were performed to determine if usage patterns were dependent on any demographic variables. To limit the possibility of Type 1 error with multiple tests, a Bonferroni-corrected alpha level was set at .005 (.05/9). Being an English language learner (ELL) or native English speaker was significantly related to child care usage, \( \chi^2 (1, N=320) = 8.8, p = .003, \) Cramers V = .166. English speaking parents mentioned using full-time child care more (26%) than ELL parents (13%). Home-based full or part-time care was also found to be significantly related to language, \( \chi^2 (1, N=314) = 14.8, p < .001, \) Cramers V = .218 with 44% of English speaking parents mentioning using home-based care versus 23% for ELL parents. A significant relationship was also found between home-based care and country of origin with 50% of those born in Canada mentioning using home-based care versus 24% born in other countries, \( \chi^2 (1, N = 315) = 17.4, p < .001, \) Cramers V = .235. Although not significant at the more conservative Bonferroni-corrected alpha level of .005, more native
Canadians attended community events for families (31%) than non-native Canadians (18%). This relationship was significant at a more liberal alpha level of .01 ($\chi^2 (1, N = 320) = 6.39, p = .01$, Cramers $V = .142$). As expected, those parents employed full or part-time mentioned using full time or home-based care more often than did those who were not employed. This was also significantly related, $\chi^2 (5, N = 318) = 16.122, p = .005$, Cramers $V = .225$ and $\chi^2 (5, N = 313) = 20.96, p = .001$, Cramers $V = .259$. More parents used parent relief or occasional childcare with later born children (7%) than with first born children (2%). This association was only significant at the .05 level of significance: $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 3.94, p = .04$, Cramers $V = .115$. Overall usage was again very low at only 4%. No other usage by demographic variable relationship was found to be significant.

**Satisfaction:** As can be seen from Table 4, most parents seem satisfied with the programs and services they are using. Parents agree that their children are benefiting from programs (64.4%) with 13.3% strongly agreeing. Almost three quarters of parents (72.3%) say they enjoy these programs as do their children (77.3%). Responses on statements about quality (48.7% agree, 12% strongly agree) and having their opinions valued (42.2% agree, 12.4% strongly agree) were slightly lower with just over half of parents responding positively.
Table 6

Percentage Data for General Satisfaction with Early Childhood Services (N=369)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q.13 Child benefited</th>
<th>Q.14 Happy with Quality</th>
<th>Q.16 parent enjoys</th>
<th>Q.17 Opinions valued</th>
<th>Q. 21 Child enjoys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not agree</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Missing = 55

The final section of the parent survey was comprised of eight statements relating specifically to the Best Start program, and was given to only those parents who had a child enrolled in the child care centre at a Best Start school. At the time of the study, schools were referring to their child care centres as Best Start. However, it should be kept in mind that the Best Start vision and the move towards an integrated model among staff were underway. Respondents to this section of the survey were low at approximately 40 parents. Table 5 shows the frequencies (%) for these items. Question numbers in the table refer to the following questions from the parent survey (Appendix J):
Table 7

*Percentage Data for General Satisfaction Specific to Best Start Program (N = approx. 40)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>See questions below</th>
<th>Q22</th>
<th>Q23</th>
<th>Q24</th>
<th>Q25</th>
<th>Q26</th>
<th>Q27</th>
<th>Q28</th>
<th>Q29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not agree</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q22: Best Start helps my child get ready for school socially.
Q23: Best Start helps my child get ready for school academically.
Q24: I am more involved in my child’s learning because of Best Start.
Q25: I am more involved at the school because of Best Start.
Q26: I would like to see Best Start continue at my child/ren’s school.
Q27: Other people in my community know about Best Start.
Q28: Best Start has given me extra support in raising my family.
Q29: I support the idea of integrated services through the school.

As Table 5 indicates, overall satisfaction with the Best Start program was very high. Almost all parents (95.2%) wanted to see Best Start continued at their child’s school, with 53.7% strongly agreeing with wanting to see it continue. Almost no parents strongly disagreed with any of the statements. Interestingly, although a large majority of parents felt that Best Start was benefiting their child socially (85.5%) and, particularly, academically (91.3%), they were relatively less inclined to agree that they were more involved with their child’s learning (70.8%) or the school (48.7%) because of Best Start. Although most parents (73.1%) agreed
that Best Start has given them extra support in raising their families, almost a quarter (22%) responded as “not sure”. Also over half of responding parents (56.1%) were not sure whether other people in their community knew about Best Start and yet, they gave overwhelming support (92.1%) to the idea of offering integrated services for children and families through the school.

(2) Are There Any Differences in Parenting Daily Hassles as a Function of Parent Demographics?

This research question was analyzed using combined data from Best Start and comparison parents. To assess whether there was any meaningful variability in hassles scores among certain groups of parents, ANOVAs were conducted to evaluate the relationships between hassles scores on the EC-PDH and the demographic variables under investigation. These tests were conducted on hassles scores for Best Start and comparison parents in aggregate. Mean scores were calculated for each of the three subscales (seamless day, connectedness and parenting capacity) as well as for the overall EC-PDH scale. The means and standard deviations are provided in Table 8. Significant differences were found for parent gender, language and employment variables. Differences among mean hassle scores on all other demographic variables were not statistically significant. As can be seen from Table 8 below, parents tended to rate the frequency and intensity of hassles as relatively low. The overall mean frequency score for all parents was 1.80 with a standard deviation of .74, (median score = 1.80 and range = 0 – 4.19) meaning on average parents responded between 1 - “Never” and 2 - “rarely” on the Likert scale. Overall mean intensity score was 1.36, SD = .78 (median
score = 1.33, range = 0 – 3.45), indicating that parents also responded to “how much of a hassle” between 1 and 2 – “No Hassle”.

Table 8

Means and Standard Deviations for EC-PDH Frequency Scores as a Function of Demographic Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>.67</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common law</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>.39</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>.80</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Child Birth Order</th>
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<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Born</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.95</td>
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<td>.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>Later born</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>.69</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Language</th>
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<th>SD</th>
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<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>1.70</td>
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<td>2.04</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<td>.70</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>.63</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>N</th>
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<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>.77</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
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<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junior/high school</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>College/undergrad</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate/advanced</td>
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<td>1.88</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>.73</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
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<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental leave</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay at home</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family Composition
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple/children</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As multiple tests were used to analyze hassles scores as a function of demographic variables, a more conservative Bonferroni-corrected alpha level of .005 was used (.05/9). In terms of parent gender, fathers rated the frequency of hassles significantly higher than did mothers based on an alpha level of .01 but not at the conservative alpha of .005, $F(1, 198) = 7.18, p = .008$ (equal variances assumed: Levene’s Test of Equality of Variances not significant). Fathers also rated hassles significantly higher on the seamless day subscale, $F(1,198) = 10.47, p = .001$ (equal variances not assumed: Levene’s test significant, $F(1, 198) = 5.98, p < .05$ but the connectedness subscale was only significant using an alpha level of .05, $F(1, 198) = 5.80, p = .017$ (equal variances not assumed, Levene’s test significant, $F(1,198) = 4.84, p < .05$). These results indicate that fathers rate themselves as being hassled more often than do mothers with respect to the day-to-day frustrations of having a child or children in early learning and care settings. And, in particular, they perceive themselves as more hassled than do mothers with respect to items associated with the inconveniences of not having a seamless day of programming for their child, and to a lesser extent on items relating to not feeling involved or connected to their child’s school.

Language differences for overall intensity scores were not significant at the conservative alpha level of .005 but were significant at an alpha level of .01 with English first language speakers rating degree of hassle higher than did English language learners, $F(1, 197) = 7.14, p = .008$ (equal variance not assumed, Levene’s test significant, $F(1,197) = 5.87, p < .05$). However, the significance was not particularly robust with an effect size of $\eta^2 = .03$. Also, there were no significant differences found for parents’ country of origin.
The ANOVA conducted to evaluate the relationship between hassles scores and employment status (employed, student, at home) was significant for three of the scales as follows:

Seamless day: $F (5, 193) = 5.37, p=.000; \eta^2 = .122$

Connectedness: $F (5, 193) = 4.14, p=.001; \eta^2 = .097$

Overall Frequency: $F (5, 193) = 4.12, p=.001; \eta^2 = .097$

The following two subscales were significant only at an alpha level of .05:

Parenting Capacity: $F (5, 193) = 2.23, p = .05; \eta^2 = .055$

Overall Intensity: $F (5, 193) = 2.53, p = .031; \eta^2 = .061$

Note: For all scales, except overall frequency, Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances was not significant and equal variances were assumed.

Effect sizes were relatively small with $\eta^2$ ranging from .055 to .122. Effect size for seamless day was the strongest accounting for 12% of the variance in hassles scores (Cohen, 1969, 1988). Follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate pair-wise differences among the means. As equal variances were assumed, post hoc comparisons were made using Scheffé’s test. In the case of overall frequency where equal variances were not assumed, post hoc comparisons were made using the Dunnett C test. There was a significant difference in the means at the corrected alpha level of .005 between full-time employed and stay-at-home parents on seamless day, connectedness and overall frequency, but no significant differences in the means for parenting capacity or overall intensity. There was also a significant difference in means at a more liberal .05 level between full time parents and parents on parental leave.
(3) **Do Parenting Daily Hassles Vary as a Function of Program or Service Usage?**

The following analyses are based on combined data for Best Start and comparison parents. Use of community programs and services was low – most programs were used by under 10% of parents in this study. Besides kindergarten and child care, parents do not seem to be accessing many programs and services that are available to them in the community. To understand better whether parents who were using certain programs or supports were feeling less hassled than parents not using these programs, ANOVA tests were used to compare mean hassles scores as a function of program type. Using a conservative Bonferroni-corrected alpha level of .003 (.05/15), significant differences were only found for parents using home-based care (full or part-time) on intensity of hassles, $F(1,191) = 13.96, p = .000, \eta^2 = .068$. At a more liberal alpha, significant differences were found for full-time child care, home-based care, parent relief and occasional childcare, resource library, health and nutrition/wellness information programs and home visits. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Means and Standard Deviations for EC-PDH Scores as a Function of Program Usage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Seamless Day</th>
<th>Connectedness Connectedness</th>
<th>Parent Capacity</th>
<th>Overall Frequency</th>
<th>Overall Intensity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>M SD</td>
<td>M SD</td>
<td>M SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full-time Child Care</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>1.71 (.81)</td>
<td>1.64* (.76)</td>
<td>2.01 (.92)</td>
<td>1.79* (.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1.91 (.72)</td>
<td>2.01 (.88)</td>
<td>2.33 (.88)</td>
<td>2.10 (.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homebased Care</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>1.68* (.80)</td>
<td>1.61** (.90)</td>
<td>2.01 (.90)</td>
<td>1.77* (.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1.97 (.79)</td>
<td>1.95 (.76)</td>
<td>2.21 (.99)</td>
<td>2.05 (.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Relief-Occasional Childcare</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>1.71* (.81)</td>
<td>1.68 (.80)</td>
<td>2.04 (.95)</td>
<td>1.81 (.77)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the following results were not significant at a conservative alpha of .003, they were significant at the .05 level. Only 17% of parents reported having their child in full-time child care. These parents rated items relating to feeling connected to their school/teacher as significantly more of a hassle than parents not using full-time child care, $F(1, 195) = 5.41, p = .021$ (equal variances assumed – Levene’s Test not significant). The effect size was relatively weak at $\eta^2 = .03$. Parents using full time child care also rated how often items affected them (frequency) significantly higher than parents not using full-time care, $F(1, 195) = 4.34, p = .039$ (equal variances assumed). The effect size was also weak at $\eta^2 = .02$ (Cohen, 1969, 1988). As mentioned above, parents using home-based care rated hassles significantly higher on the intensity subscale even with an alpha of .003, however all other scales except parenting capacity were significant at an alpha of .05. ANOVA results were as follows:

Seamless day: $F(1, 191) = 4.90, p = .028 \eta^2 = .025$

Connectedness: $F(1, 191) = 6.96, p= .009, \eta^2 = .035$

Frequency: $F(1, 191) = 5.17, p=.024, \eta^2 = .026$

Levene’s Test of Equality of Variances was not significant in all four of the above tests, therefore, equal variances were assumed. While the strength of the relationships as assessed by
η² was relatively low, the effect size for intensity was slightly higher with the home-based care
variable accounting for 7% of the variance in scores.

The resource library was the most used service (43%) other than kindergarten. As a
function of mean EC-PDH scores, the resource library differed only on items relating to
parenting capacity. Those parents who reported using the library rated hassles on the parenting
capacity subscale higher than did parents who did not use the library. This relationship was
statistically significant, $F(1, 195) = 5.06, p< .026$, however not particularly strong at $\eta^2 = .025$
(equal variances assumed). Note this is not an artifact of parental education as library usage
was not correlated with any demographic factors.

The Analysis of Variance test was also significant at an alpha of .05 for health and
nutrition/wellness information programs and the intensity sub-scale; however, only 13 parents
mentioned using these programs and the effect size was low. Similarly, significant results for
home visits and parenting capacity were also based on a very small N (20) and a small effect
size (3%).

**Differences Between Best Start and Comparison Parents**

(4) Do Parents with Children Enrolled in Best Start Schools Report Lower Levels of

**Parenting Daily Hassles than Parents in Comparison Schools?**

Before analyzing differences in hassles scores between Best Start and comparison parents,
it was important to determine whether differences in demographic variables between the two
groups may have been influencing hassles outcomes. Family demographic variables for the
two groups are presented in Appendix C. Using a Bonferroni-corrected alpha of .005, only
language spoken at home differed significantly between groups. The proportion of parents
speaking English as a first language was significantly larger in comparison schools. No
significant differences were found among any other demographic variables. To determine
whether language, or any other demographic variables, had an impact on hassles scores,
multivariate analyses were conducted. Scores on each subscale and on the total hassles scale
were identified as the dependent variables. “Program” (i.e. whether the child was enrolled in a
Best Start or comparison school) was identified as the fixed between-subjects factor.
Demographic variables were considered as covariates. Using a more conservative alpha level,
only on the seamless day subscale, was the interaction between program and any of the
demographic variables significant – the interaction between program and employment status
was highly significant (F (1,182) = 9.4, p = .003). Using a less stringent alpha revealed a few
additional significant interactions: on the seamless subscale, the interaction between program
and gender was just significant (F (1,182) = 3.9, p = .049). On the connectedness subscale,
program and employment again interacted significantly (F (1, 182) = 4.25, p = .041). On the
overall hassles scale, the interaction between language spoken at home and program was
significant (F (1, 182) = 6.27, p = .013). These findings suggest that demographic factors may
have had somewhat of an effect on Best Start or comparison parents’ experience of hassles.

To determine whether differences existed for daily hassles assessed by the EC-PDH
measure, the frequency scores for all 42 items were totaled and then averaged to yield an
overall mean frequency score. An overall mean intensity score was calculated in the same
way. The mean and standard deviations for the overall scale and three subscales are provided
in Table 10. Given that child care and kindergarten were co-located at Best Start schools and
the process of service integration had begun, differences between Best Start schools and comparison schools could be expected, however, an independent-samples \( t \) test did not reveal any statistically significant differences in mean frequency, \( t(240) = -1.76, p > .05 \) between Best Start or comparison parents. Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances was not significant \( F = .77 \) for frequency and \( F = .24 \) for intensity, therefore equal variances were assumed. Independent samples \( t \) tests were conducted on the three subscales of seamless day, connectedness and parenting capacity. No significant differences were found between Best Start and comparison parents on these three scales.

Table 10

*Descriptive Statistics and \( t \) Test Values for EC-PDH Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Best start ((n=112))</th>
<th>Comparison ((n=130))</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>( df )</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall scale</strong></td>
<td>1.71 .73</td>
<td>1.88 .74</td>
<td>-1.76</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seamless</strong></td>
<td>1.65 .77</td>
<td>1.78 .81</td>
<td>-1.24</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connectedness</strong></td>
<td>1.59 .78</td>
<td>1.74 .75</td>
<td>-1.56</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parenting Capacity</strong></td>
<td>1.89 .92</td>
<td>2.10 .92</td>
<td>-1.76</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(5) In What Areas Do Parents Report Being Most Hassled – Seamless Day, Connectedness or Parenting Capacity?

This research question was analyzed using combined Best Start and comparison parent data. Frequency data were calculated for all 42 items on the EC-PDH and then categorized into one of the three subscales for analysis. Percentages are reported for the distribution across
the 5-point Likert scale for “how often it affects you” – never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), a lot (4) and constantly (5). Table 11 reports these percentages for the Items rated as occurring sometimes (3) to constantly (5) by over 30% of parents. As Table 11 underscores, many parents were reporting difficulties in the parenting capacity domain. Lack of information and support in early childhood settings appears to be problematic for many parents. In the category of seamless day, 45% of parents reported hassles as occurring sometimes to constantly for the item “it’s difficult to get my child ready in the morning”. In the connectedness category, the item rated as occurring sometimes to constantly by the most parents (42.6%) was “it’s difficult to find time to participate in my child’s classroom activities”. In the parenting capacity domain, three items were rated as occurring sometimes to constantly by over 40% of parents. These items were: “it’s difficult to find time to play with my child” (43%); “it’s difficult to know what programs/services are available in my community (42.1%); and “it’s difficult to know whether my child is learning in school” (40.9%).

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hassle It’s difficult to…</th>
<th>Sometimes (3)%</th>
<th>A lot (4)%</th>
<th>Constantly (5)%</th>
<th>Total (3-5) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seamless #</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. get my child ready in the morning.</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. rush at the end of the day to pick up my child.</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. keep track of my child’s daily schedule.</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. deal with unexpected changes to our daily routine.</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness #</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. be separated from my child for many hours during the day.</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. focus during day as I worry about how my child is doing.</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. deal with child when s/he is exhausted at the end of the day.</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. get my child to tell me about his/her day.</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. find opportunity to talk with other parents with young children.</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. know whether my child is happy while s/he is at school.</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent Interviews

Protocol A: Child enrolled in child care centre at a Best Start school. Parents whose children were enrolled in the child care centre at a Best Start school were asked questions pertaining to their experience with the Best Start program. For these parents, service integration was newly underway and kindergarten and child care were co-located at the school.

Frequencies were calculated from the coded parent interview data to elucidate which themes were most important to parents. Of the 74 interviews conducted at the five Best Start schools, 23 were parents interviewed using protocol A – child enrolled in Best Start child care centre on site, and 51 were interviewed using version B – child attends the kindergarten program only. The number of interviews conducted at each school is listed in Table 12.

Table 12

Number of Parent Interviews per School and per Version of Interview Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>BS Child Care Version A</th>
<th>Kindergarten only Version B</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parenting Capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Parenting Capacity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>find time to read with my child.</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>find time to play with my child.</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>know what my child should be able to do at his/her age.</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>know whether my child’s behaviour is a problem.</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>get good advice on how to handle challenging behaviours.</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>get good advice on how to support learning at home.</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>find parenting programs that meet my needs.</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>know what programs/services are available in my community</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>stay in contact with teacher about day-to-day things.</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>know whether my child is learning in school.</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>know whether my child is learning enough in school.</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>understand what school expects from me as a parent.</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School 1  4  30  34  
School 2  9  4  13  
School 3  6  10  16  
School 4  1  4  5  
School 5  3  3  6  
Total  23  51  74  

From a review of the responses by several members of the research team, categories of themes were derived through an iterative process. Frequency data (%) for themes revealed in interview protocol A are presented in Table 13. When asked why they had decided to participate in the Best Start program, over half of parents reported the need for child care and convenience as their primary reason (52.2%). The notion of school readiness and the acquisition of foundation skills was also a central theme emerging from the interviews. School readiness and social skills were reported by 56.5% of parents as the most important things for their child to learn in the program. Parents were asked what they were learning from Best Start. The predominant theme was parenting skills and support from staff.

In terms of what they liked best about the program, 30.4% of parents mentioned their relationship with teachers and staff. Parents were also asked about the special things that staff do to help them understand their child’s learning and support them. Parents mentioned communicating with staff most often at 73.9%. When asked if there was something else that could be included in the program that ”would be particularly helpful for you or your child,” 43.5% of parents said nothing else needs to be done. Interestingly, only 13% of parents felt that their involvement in Best Start would affect their future involvement in their child’s schooling. When probing further on this question, the current disconnect between child care and kindergarten from a parent perspective became quite apparent.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question/Themes</th>
<th>Frequency %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Why did you decide to participate?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School readiness</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need child care/convenience</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What do you hope to do/learn here?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting capacity</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursue own career/interests</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is most important for you child to learn?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation skills</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured activities</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What do you like best about the program?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with staff</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same location as kindergarten</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School readiness</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Is there something else that could be included?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subject areas, eg. ESL, French</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More parent involvement</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing else</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What are you learning from being here?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting skills/support</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning English</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to let go</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What are some of the special things the staff does?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy development</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/supportive relationship</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How do feel your involvement will affect your future involvement in your child’s schooling?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School council</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More involvement</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Who does child play with when not at school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Question/Themes</td>
<td>Frequency %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings/family members</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. **What types of activities do you do with your child outside of the home?**

- Playground/park                        | 56.5        |
- Community activities/lessons/programs/library | 82.6        |
- Religious activities                     | 13.0        |
- Shopping                                 | 8.7         |
- Trips/outings                            | 17.4        |

**Protocol B: Child enrolled in kindergarten program only at a Best Start school:** As stated above, parents who did not have their kindergarten child enrolled in the on-site child care facility at a Best Start school were interviewed using Version B: child attends K only. The frequencies of themes mentioned by these parents are presented in Table 14. The majority of parents (80.4%) reported that mothers looked after the child when not in school so this sample is predominantly stay-at-home mothers. Reading together was mentioned by 74.5% of parents, making it by far the most mentioned activity in terms of important things done at home to encourage learning. Parents were active with their children outside of the home. Three quarters of parents reported taking their child to the park or playground (74.5%). Almost half were enrolled in community activities or sports programs and were using the library.

Parents were asked what types of things the kindergarten teacher does to help them understand their child’s learning and to support them. Although almost half of parents reported communicating with the teacher (49%) this was most often done at drop-off or pick-up and initiated by the parent. Contact by the teacher was primarily done through newsletters (17.6%), as well as a home-reading program (e.g., Snuggle-up and Read) (19.6%) whereby parents record on a log the classroom books that the child reads at home. When asked how
they get involved in their child’s schooling, the most reported answer was help with learning at home.

Table 14

Frequency (%) of Themes Mentioned by Parents with Child in Kindergarten Only at Best Start School (Interview Protocol B) (N=51)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question/Themes</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Who looks after child when not in kindergarten?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>80.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparent</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babysitter/nanny/daycare</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>What are most important things at home to encourage learning?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV/computer</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework/worksheets</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations/language development</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning through play</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games/songs</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/crafts</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Who does child play with when not at school?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays alone</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>What types of activities do you do with your child outside of home?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground/park</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community activities/lessons/sports/programs</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious activities</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trips/outings</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Years/family support programs</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>What are some of the things your child’s kindergarten teacher does to help you understand your child’s learning and to support you?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal advice/talks</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sends activities home</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written correspondence/newsletters</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-teacher interviews</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Question/Themes</td>
<td>Frequency (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom reading program</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. How do you get involved in your child’s schooling?
   - Volunteer                                                | 19.6          |
   - Help with learning at home                                | 43.1          |
   - Parent-teacher communication                               | 13.7          |
   - Early Years centre                                        | 3.9           |
   - Third party communication (siblings/relatives)            | 5.9           |

7. How does your child’s kindergarten teacher encourage you to speak to him/her about activities going on in the classroom?
   - Personal communication                                     | 52.9          |
   - Written communication                                       | 23.5          |
   - Meetings/interviews                                         | 17.6          |
   - Doesn’t encourage/parent initiates                          | 19.6          |

Field Notes and Observations

Over the course of data collection, the author of this thesis visited Best Start sites numerous times and had occasion to speak with frontline staff and parents. The following impressions are based on field notes logged during the research period and reflect the opinions of the author.

Immediately apparent when visiting Best Start schools was the perception of Best Start as “child care” among the school staff. Except for one school, the child care centre was not located near the kindergarten classrooms. As mentioned earlier, at this particular school the kindergarten and child care classrooms were adjacent and separated by a sliding glass door. Communication among kindergarten teachers and ECEs and shared activities between the classrooms appeared to be further along than in other Best Start schools. The principal in particular demonstrated a strong commitment to the vision of blended care and education with integrated staff teams. This administrative buy-in was not always apparent in some of the
other schools. At these schools, there seemed to be a little more of a disconnect between child care and kindergarten.

The following impressions were gathered from informal exchanges among parents with children enrolled at Best Start child care centres. Parents seemed generally satisfied with the child care program and spoke positively about the staff and the quality of care. More than one parent said they were lucky to have their child in this type of program and particularly appreciated the conversations they have with staff when picking up their child at the end of the day. They also appreciated advice on handling problematic behaviours at home. Some parents said that they don’t have time to do activities at home with their child so they were thankful that their child had the opportunity to do all sorts of interesting activities at the centre. To quote one parent, “She gets so much more here than I could offer her at home”. A number of parents mentioned “peace of mind” with respect to having their child in one location from drop-off to pick-up.

Parents whose children attended kindergarten at a Best Start school, but did not have them enrolled in the child care centre, provided some interesting comments on parent-teacher relationships. At some of the schools, parents were not given many opportunities to participate in the classroom. Furthermore, communication with the teacher seemed to be initiated most often by the parent. Several parents used the word “bother”, as in “I don’t want to bother her” or “sometimes I bother her and ask how my child is doing”. The impression was that not to hear from the teacher was a good thing as it meant their child was doing fine. This was expressed quite often with parents saying that they don’t hear from the teacher unless there is a concern. It was not uncommon to hear that the only time the parent talks with the teacher is at the parent-teacher interview. Expectations for involvement seemed to be low for many parents
and the culture of participation somewhat lacking. At one school, volunteer opportunities were limited to the occasional field trip. At another school, only parents of senior kindergarten children could be chosen when volunteers were needed. A couple of parents said that police checks were required to come into the classroom and these were not logistically easy to obtain. When probed, parents expressed a high degree of willingness to participate and be more involved in the classroom. Some spoke almost wistfully at the suggestion. Several working parents suggested that they would take time off work if given the chance to volunteer in the classroom. In sum, parents gave the impression that they were receptive to the idea of more involvement in the school and classroom but their expectations for this type of involvement were low. For the most part, it seemed that they did not consider parent participation or teacher-parent partnerships as part of the culture of schooling.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Aim of Study and Overall Findings

The current study explored parents’ involvement in the early learning and care system and the hassles they may or may not face on a daily basis. It examined whether Best Start parents who had access to integrated services at schools where kindergarten and child care were co-located would report lower levels of parenting daily hassles compared to parents who did not have access to these services. Of particular interest was whether parents were feeling connected to schools and educators and to what extent they were feeling confident in their capacity to support their children’s learning.

Although Best Start parents did not report lower levels of parenting daily hassles compared to comparison parents, qualitative impressions at Best Start child care centres suggested that parents were feeling supported and that they were forging positive relationships with staff. This did not appear to be happening to the same extent between parents and kindergarten teachers. Findings also revealed that working parents at Best Start schools were benefiting from the co-location of child care and kindergarten by having a more seamless day. Parents in comparison schools who had to make separate arrangements for child care outside of the school were feeling more hassled by these transitions and scheduling issues. When data from all 10 schools were combined, results showed that many parents were not using programs and services available to them in the community and were also experiencing hassles in the parenting capacity domain. These findings add to the evidence that parent support strategies are needed in integrated approaches to early childhood education.
Early Childhood Service Integration and Parenting Daily Hassles

Previous research on early childhood service integration is limited and has yielded inconsistent results with regard to levels of parenting stress (Arimura, 2010; Desimone et al., 2000; Finn-Stevenson et al., 1998; McCabe, 1995). Mixed results are surprising given that programs designed to offer family support and bolster parents in their parenting role could reasonably be expected to reduce stress. Presumably, if seamless programming for children provides cohesiveness in their day and alleviates the work-family tension for families, parents should experience lower levels of daily stress. Arimura and the research team on TFD (Arimura 2008; Arimura & Corter, 2010) have posited that the mixed results found in these studies may be due in part to the measure that has been used to assess levels of parenting stress. Rather than using the PSI (Abidin, 1983), which may be better suited for clinical settings, Arimura (2008) adapted the Parenting Daily Hassles (PDH) (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990) scale to measure parental perceptions about hassles specific to early childhood settings. Using this new measure – Parenting Daily Hassles – Early Childhood Services (PDH-ECS), the TFD study assessed the frequency and intensity of hassles associated with daily activities and transitions between home-school-child care–work settings; supporting children’s learning and development at home; and communicating and interacting with early childhood professionals. Arimura found evidence to suggest that parents of young children experienced greater stress in aspects of their daily life when important parenting needs were not met by the school or child care services (Arimura, 2008; Arimura & Corter, 2010). Higher levels of stress were reported when parents were experiencing difficulty in maintaining contact with the kindergarten teacher, or accessing information on how to manage child behaviour. Challenges to parent-teacher communication
were experienced by parents in the non-integrated sites in her study. Arimura (Arimura, 2008; Arimura & Corter, 2010) contends that the limited face-to-face contact with the kindergarten teacher experienced by parents at the non-integrated sites may have been a mediating factor for the higher levels of stress these parents reported compared to parents at the TFD sites where integrated staff delivered the program together and parents had greater opportunities to interact with kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators. The current study examined the potential effects that service integration may be having on parenting stress in a new provincial initiative using the daily hassles measure. In contrast to Arimura’s TFD findings (Arimura, 2008), although this study did not yield any significant differences in levels of daily hassles experienced by parents at Best Start sites compared with parents at comparison schools on the overall scale or subscales, covariate analyses found a significant interaction between program and employment status on the seamless day subscale. This suggests that Best Start parents were indeed benefiting from having kindergarten and child care co-located. By having fewer transitions between home-child care–school–work, working parents at Best Start schools were feeling less hassled than parents at comparison schools who were still having to transition and deal with the often consequent scheduling issues and safety concerns. In parent interviews, “peace-of-mind” with respect to having their child in one location for a full day was a salient theme from Best Start parents using the child care centres.

For both Best Start and comparison parents, ratings of hassles were relatively low. On average, parents rated items as “rarely affecting them” and as “not much of a hassle”. Positivity bias may possibly be influencing hassles scores. There is evidence to suggest a positivity bias when parents self report on questionnaires relating to the care and education of
their young children. Zellman and Perlman (2006) measured relationship quality between parents and child care providers (home-based and centre-based) using an 18-item questionnaire. Their results showed high levels of positive responses with very little variation among parents’ scores on a Likert scale. This positivity was especially striking because several of these items asked parents how much their own behaviour had changed as a result of input from their child’s provider. Zellman and Perlman (2006) contend that parents’ desire, or need, to perceive their child’s caregiver as caring and helpful strongly influences the way in which they respond. When it comes to their children’s care, they do not want to admit to themselves that the quality of care could be in any way compromised. It is possible that a similar positivity bias was influencing scores on the EC-PDH, with parents not wanting to admit, or give the impression, that they are feeling hassled over the “seemingly simple” day-to-day challenges of having their child in an early learning and care setting. It is possible that a positivity bias also influenced hassles scores in Arimura’s study (Arimura, 2008; Arimura & Corter, 2010). Even though the EC-PDH detected significant differences in the levels of parenting daily hassles experienced by parents who accessed integrated and non-integrated services, the actual hassles scores were quite similar to those reported in the current study with parents rating items on average as “never” or “rarely a hassle”.

The thesis also asked about areas of daily hassles – seamless day, connectedness and parenting capacity. Analysis of the frequency data on the EC-PDH allowed for identification of those items on the scale being rated as stressful more often by parents. These items were then categorized as being - seamless day, connectedness or parenting capacity. The results indicated that more parents reported feeling hassled in the parenting capacity domain than in
the other two categories. Not getting information or advice from educators or staff in early childhood settings appears to be problematic for many parents. The current study adds support to previous research that has found that parents want to know what their child should be able to do at a particular age, or at the very least, want to know how their child is doing relative to his or her peers (Cleveland et al., 2006; Corter & Pelletier, 2005; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Higher hassles ratings were seen on items relating to the difficulty in knowing how their child is doing, what their child is learning, or whether their child is learning enough. Parents also gave higher hassles ratings to items involving advice and support in terms of learning and behaviour, finding parenting programs to meet their needs, as well as finding the time to play or read with their child. In the school-based Parenting and Readiness Centre programs in the Greater Toronto Area, parents reported that access to community services was one of the top three contributors to their feelings of increased competence and self-efficacy (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Research has shown that parenting knowledge plays a role in building the foundation for parenting behaviours and that the more involved in their child’s early learning the more positive parenting skills they acquire (Press, 2008). Studies have also linked parents’ broader knowledge of child development with more effective parenting strategies leading to more positive interactions with children (Coleman & Karraker, 1998). Current study findings in this area are based on analyses of hassles scores for combined Best Start and comparison parents. As discussed previously, no significant differences in hassles scores were found between the two groups of parents in this study during this first year of implementation. Fundamental to the Best Start vision is a parent engagement and support strategy. It would be worthwhile to continue research in this area to determine whether parenting capacity becomes less of a challenge for Best Start parents as
the program progresses. Providing parent education to strengthen parents’ knowledge and skills is an important goal in most service integration models including Best Start. Despite somewhat limited research on parent outcomes, there is evidence to suggest that participation in these programs improves parenting capacity and enhances the home learning environment (Allen, 2008; Melhuish et al., 2008). Referencing Sure Start in the United Kingdom, Melhuish (Melhuish et al., 2010) has suggested that it is the integrated nature of these programs that is an important driver of positive parent outcomes. Allen (2008) has expressed similar views with respect to Head Start and Early Head Start. Given the challenges highlighted in this study, parent education and support should continue to be given strategic importance in Best Start programming going forward. The provincial initiative to establish Best Start Child and Family Centres is a prime example of this kind of support for parents.

In terms of the other two areas, items rated most stressful on the seamless day scale included difficulties around getting children ready in the morning, rushing to pick them up at the end of the day and dealing with unexpected changes in their daily routine. As relatively few parents in this sample were using full-time child care, it seems that it is not only working parents who struggle with transitioning their children back and forth between school and home. In terms of scale items relating to connectedness, results indicated that parents were having difficulty maintaining contact with the classroom teacher and finding the time to participate in classroom activities. This finding has implications for their children’s learning as research has shown that good parent-teacher collaboration leads to better continuity between home and school. When parents communicate regularly with teachers, they gain a clearer understanding of classroom and educational expectations and what they can be doing at home to enhance their children’s education (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Parent participation
in the classroom also creates opportunities for teachers to model best practices and parents to connect with one another (Clements, Reynolds, & Hickey, 2004; Pelletier & Corter, 2005). Social relationships that parents establish at their children’s school are an important resource for information, advocacy, and emotional support (Desimone et al., 2000). In an evaluation study of Sure Start, parents reported overcoming feelings of isolation as one of their primary reasons for engaging with the program (Avis et al., 2007). Sure Start programs were also successful in involving difficult to reach parents from ethnic minority groups (Office for Standards in Education, 2009). The findings of the BBBF Enrichment Project demonstrated that outreach and connection by a core group of parents dramatically increased parent participation in family support programs (Nelson et al., 2004). These studies emphasize the need for continued efforts to connect parents to schools and educators.

This study also asked whether there would be differences in parents’ experiences of daily hassles as a function of parent demographics. The findings revealed significant differences in hassles scores for working parents, fathers, and English language speakers. Not surprisingly, working parents were hassled significantly more often than stay-at-home parents, overall, and on items relating to seamless day and connectedness. The results further uncovered a significant interaction between employment status and enrollment at a Best Start or comparison school on the seamless day subscale. Comparison parents who were working reported significantly higher hassles ratings on the seamless day subscale than working Best Start parents. Best Start parents who were not working reported the least hassles. This finding is encouraging as it means that the co-location of child care and kindergarten at Best Start schools is benefitting parents by eliminating transitions and bringing more coherence to their days. Also, given that work schedules tend to be rigid, most working parents would
have limited time or opportunities to connect with teachers or caregivers during regular classroom hours. Parent employment has been identified as the strongest predictor across measures of parent involvement, above and beyond maternal education and parents’ beliefs about childrearing behaviours (Castro et al., 2004; Driebe & Cochran, 1996; Hooker, 1993). Finding creative ways to involve working parents will be a challenge for educators as Best Start moves forward with the implementation of full-day early learning/kindergarten and the Child and Family Centres. Effective strategies that provide ways for parents to participate from home need to be considered. These may include providing parents with ideas and resources for a variety of activities they can do with their child at home, in connection with the school and the community. Perhaps conducting events that involve the whole family might generate more enthusiasm for participating in after-work activities. Results of family literacy research in the same municipality show that indeed parents are keen to attend programs with their child after school or in the evening (e.g., Pelletier, 2008). Involving parents in the planning of these activities may also enhance interest.

**Awareness and Use of Programs**

Another research question asked whether parents’ experiences of daily hassles varied as a function of type of program or service usage. Findings from both the parent survey and the EC-PDH indicated that the majority of parents in this study were having difficulty finding programs and services in the community to meet their needs. These findings reinforce the need to improve access to family support services by bringing them together into a more coherent system. One of the goals of Best Start is to ensure that parents get seamless access to supports by having resources and referrals available to them at a single access point – in
most neighbourhoods this would be their child’s school. Over a decade ago, the *Early Years Study* (McCain & Mustard, 1999) drew attention to the patchwork of programs and service silos that existed in the early learning and care system and recommended strategies to bring these programs together into a more easily accessible system. This study suggests that, although initiatives towards service integration are underway, programs and services are still disconnected and difficult for parents to navigate. In the current study, parents strongly agreed with the survey question that programs and services would be easier to find and access if they were integrated. This is consistent with findings from TFD research whereby the idea of incorporating services such as child care and parenting and family support services within the school system was supported overwhelmingly by the majority of parents (Corter et al., 2006). The TFD research found strong community support for service integration, not only among parents participating in the TFD project, but by the general public as well (Corter et al., 2006). The Early Learning Advisor’s 2009 report to the Ontario government urged the education system to spearhead the transformation towards a continuum of services for children and families (Pascal, 2009). The findings of this study support the need to connect services and not leave it up to families to bridge the gaps.

Parents in this study were also asked to what extent they were using the early childhood services and programs that were available to them in the community. Besides having their child enrolled in the kindergarten program, use of other programs and services in the community was relatively low. This held true for parents at both Best Start schools and comparison schools. Benchmarked against TFD, this finding is not surprising. In the early implementation phase of TFD, the majority of TFD parents reported that they had not been able to use many of the programs and services offered at the sites. However, by the full
implementation stage, improvements were noted, likely as a result of efforts to increase access with program flexibility and to increase channels of communication with parents (Corter et al., 2006). As Best Start in Peel Region moves forward along with full-day early learning/kindergarten, program usage should continue to be tracked to determine whether access to services improves along with progress towards service integration.

Although most families had a child in kindergarten, some families had opted to leave their child in a child care centre. The reasons why parents opted out of the kindergarten program were not explored in this study; however, this finding has implications for full day early learning/kindergarten. Kindergarten is optional for four and five year old children and will continue to be with the full-day early learning/kindergarten program. However, as full-day kindergarten rolls out across the province, some of these parents may decide to enroll their child in a blended kindergarten program. This could be simply for reasons of convenience afforded by a seamless day. Or, it may be that having an integrated staff team may be a salient factor for these parents if they feel their child benefits from the experiences that early childhood educators bring to their child’s learning and development.

Almost half of parents in this study had used some form of full or part-time child care. However, not many were using full-time, centre-based care. Even at Best Start schools with the child care facility on site enrolment of kindergarten age children in child care was low. Differences in child care use were found between language groups and country of origin. English first language speakers and those parents born in Canada used significantly more full-time centre-based or home-based child care. Findings from TFD suggest that increasing access to early childhood programs through integration reaches families that are not traditional users of such programs. They reported diversity in language across sites with
the majority of participating families having English as an additional language (Corter et al., 2006).

**Qualitative Findings**

In order to tell the story behind the findings from the parent survey and the parenting daily hassles, the thesis included qualitative findings from individual interviews with parents and field notes based on anecdotal observations. Predominant themes emerged from the parent interviews and field note impressions contextualized some of the observations not captured in the data. To recapitulate, parent interviews were conducted at Best Start schools only. Two interview protocols were used: A) parents with kindergarten age children enrolled in the child care centre and B) parents with children enrolled in the kindergarten program only. For parents with a child enrolled in a Best Start child care centre, there were fundamental differences in the types of relationships between parents and child care centre staff and parents and kindergarten teachers; this was a salient theme emerging from interviews. There was a high degree of satisfaction among parents about the child care program in general, and about the staff in particular. The predominant theme coming out of these interviews was the quality of the relationship between parents and early childhood educators (ECEs). When asked about the special things that the staff do to help them understand their child’s learning and to support them, over three quarters of the parents conveyed that the quality of the communication was key. Parents felt connected to the child care centre and relied on staff for support in terms of parenting skills and modeling. Parenting tips tended to focus on behaviour, discipline or social skills. It is important to keep in mind that although parents seemed to consider Best Start child care centres as day care and
not seamless programming integrated with kindergarten, the sense of connectedness and the quality of relationships that these parents were conveying is not necessarily consistent with other research in child care settings. Research has shown that contact between staff and parents in child care centres tend to be very brief (Endsley & Minish, 1991; Zelman & Perlman, 2006; Fletcher & Perlman, 2009). Endsley and Minish (1991) found that contact between staff and parents at drop-off and pick up averaged only 12 seconds while Fletcher and Perlman (2009) found that parents spent an average of 67 seconds in child care classrooms during drop-off. In that study, verbal exchanges between staff and parents were very limited. Staff conveyed child-related and program-related information to under 10% of parents in the Fletcher and Perlman (2009) study. This was consistent with previous reports that when parents and staff communicate during transition times, they rarely discuss child-related issues (Endsley & Minish, 1991; McBride et al., 2002). According to Zelman and Perlman (2006), although verbal communication is limited, parents still describe staff as welcoming and supportive on measures of parent involvement. They point out that positivity bias, as discussed earlier, must be taken into consideration when assessing staff-parent relationships. It is worth noting that Zelman and Perlman (2006) were using quantitative measures such as the parent involvement item found in the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R), and their own measure, the Family-Provider Partnership (FPP). Whether positivity bias would be stronger or weaker in parent interviews is unclear. Results with their own measure, the FPP, showed strong correlations with other quality indicators, suggesting that even limited variation is meaningful. They contend that to the extent that any variation emerges, parent involvement appears to be indicative of child care quality. The limited empirical data on this point suggest that parent-provider communication
is associated with higher quality care (Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994; Owen, Ware, & Barfoot, 2000; Ware, Barfoot, Rusher & Owen, 1995). Once again, Zelman and Perlman (2006) point out that the research may just be demonstrating logical correlations – parents who seek out good care are generally more involved in many aspects of parenting, and caregivers who are sensitive to children are also sensitive to parents. In the current study, the overwhelmingly strong support of parents towards staff at Best Start child care centres suggest something more may be happening. It is conceivable that the Best Start vision of integration has infiltrated the culture of the child care centres and the practices of the staff. Parent involvement and support is a strong mandate of Best Start and it may be that the staff in these centres was already reaching out to parents in more meaningful ways than one would see at traditional child care centres. One year after data collection for this thesis, research on the Best Start project in Peel has shown that ELL parents reported significantly more often that staff told them about programs and services that were available (Pelletier, 2011). Given the high percentage of ELL parents at Best Start schools, this could be an indication that parents are benefiting from staff support. Research by Pianta and colleagues (Crosnoe et al., 2010; Pianta, 2004; Pianta & Nimetz, 1991; Pianta & La Paro, 2003; Pianta et al., 2005) provides convincing evidence of the importance of forging strong relationships among the important adults in children’s lives. This is particularly germane during the transition to school when more continuity between home and school settings can make for a smoother transition (Crosnoe et al., 2010; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Open communication between parents and educators leads to a greater understanding of expectations and norms of behaviour. This sharing of information becomes even more relevant when home cultures differ from the predominant culture of the school.
An important field note observation recorded in visits to Best Start schools was the disconnect between the child care program and the school program. Informal conversations with parents uncovered that they had very little contact with the kindergarten teacher or involvement with the kindergarten program. Presumably, as working parents, they did not have opportunities to speak with the kindergarten teacher or to participate in the classroom during working hours. Even when probed, these parents had very little to say about the kindergarten program. In their minds, kindergarten is “school” and Best Start is “care” – two distinct entities. Many said that the only time they speak with the kindergarten teacher is at the parent-teacher interview. Also, these parents did not feel that their involvement in Best Start would affect their future involvement in their child’s schooling. Nor did they expect to be involved or have the same type of relationship with teachers as they do with the child care staff.

The quality of the communication between parents and staff at the Best Start child care centres has important implications for integrated staff teams in full-day early learning/kindergarten. Full implementation of full-day kindergarten across the province is expected by 2015-2016. Teachers and early childhood educators will work together to provide a seamless school day with no distinction between care and education as far as the child is concerned. The positive relationships between parents and staff at the Best Start child care centres in this study demonstrate that early childhood educators are in a unique position to foster parent-teacher partnerships and encourage a climate of communication and community. Evidence from Toronto First Duty has shown that when care and education are blended, teachers and early childhood educators become equally important to the parents’ social network (Arimura, 2008; Arimura & Corter, 2010). In the TFD study, parents from
non-integrated sites selected ECEs, but not teachers, as important to their social network. These parents had little contact with the teacher or school staff and as a result they were not part of their social support system. In the current study, parents valued the quality of relationships they had with child care staff. The study also demonstrated that parents appreciate this type of support, and although they did not expect it from the education system, they would be receptive to receiving it. Communication with child care staff was important to them and they valued the connection between the centre and the home. There is an opportunity for kindergarten teachers to reach out to parents in a similar way.

When asked about the things that the kindergarten teacher does to help them understand their child’s learning and support them, almost half of parents with a child in kindergarten only mentioned that the teacher talks to them and gives them advice. However, when probed, these “talks” were mostly initiated by parents. The main method of communication between home and school was through newsletters and class calendars. From observations and discussions with parents, in the author’s opinion, teachers could be doing more to connect with parents. According to Pelletier and Corter (2005), key dimensions for success of early learning programs include teacher buy-in and support, adapting programs with parent input and increasing interactions between parents and teachers. In the evaluation of the school-based readiness program in the GTA, the perceived quality of the relationship between parent and teacher positively affected the perceived success of the program for both parents and teachers. Parents also reported that the teachers were the best part of the program. Pelletier and Corter (2005) stated that it was evident that both teachers and parents felt supported by each other’s involvement and suggested that this parent-teacher partnership was mediating the better outcomes achieved by their children.
relative to children who did not attend the readiness centres. Other studies have also shown that a reciprocal influence between educator and parent produces the best outcomes for children (Moran et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford & McCallum, 2005).

Synergistic partnerships are not always easy when educators may be apprehensive about the cultures they are encountering. In the current study, there was a high immigrant population. Immigrants bring different beliefs about education and the role of teachers. While beyond the scope of this study, it would be interesting to explore whether cultural or language issues were influencing relationships among parents and teachers in comparison to the seemingly stronger relationships between parents and child care staff. In their school-based readiness program, Pelletier and Corter (2005) observed that the more time teachers spent with culturally diverse families, the more meaningful their relationships became. Both parents and teachers came to understand each other’s beliefs about readiness and what that meant for children at home and in the classroom. Pelletier and Corter (2005) believe that these more respectful interactions may have led to better outcomes. Once again, it is worth making the comparison between the quality of the relationships among parents and the child care staff at Best Start schools. Given the impression that Best Start in these schools refers to the child care at least at the time of the writing of this thesis, it may be that the staff in these centres have bought into service integration more fully than kindergarten teachers and are already taking steps to incorporate Best Start goals for parents into their practice. Indeed early TFD findings showed that ECEs were more supportive of integrated early learning than were kindergarten teachers (Corter et al., 2007). In this context, it merits noting that from an observational perspective, conceptual buy-in to an integrated approach seemed somewhat stronger at one Best Start school in comparison to the others. It is also worth noting that the
majority of parent interviews with child care parents were done at this school. Given the previous research on limited communication between parents and staff in child care centres (Endsley & Minish, 1991; Fletcher & Perlman, 2009; Zelman & Perlman, 2006), it is plausible that conceptual buy-in to parent goals at Best Start was contributing to the quality of communication in these schools, and at this one school in particular. In her research on Aboriginal Head Start (AHS), Ball (2004) emphasized the need for conceptual agreement at all levels within the implementation process. She argues that for integrated programs to be successful, all stakeholders need to buy-in to the importance of parents and families in these models.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study provided rich analysis of parents’ day-to-day involvement in early learning and child care settings. Although there were no significant differences in daily hassles scores on the EC-PDH between parents at Best Start and comparison schools, there were qualitative indications that the co-location of child care and kindergarten was beneficial to parents and that parents were feeling supported and connected to Best Start child care staff. As the Best Start program continues and full-day integrated care and education becomes more fully realized, it would be worthwhile replicating this study to determine whether Best Start parents experience lower levels of daily hassles as measured by the EC-PDH compared to parents at schools not offering integrated services. In particular, it would be interesting to see whether the supportive climate in the Best Start child care centres carries over into the full-day kindergarten classrooms with ECEs working alongside kindergarten teachers. The
continuation of this research would reveal potentially increased buy-in by parents of full-day seamless programming that will likely mean that differences between Best Start and comparison sites will emerge. Further, the inclusion of full-day kindergarten sites to the ongoing research will provide a unique opportunity to examine degree and type of early childhood service integration over time. The internal consistency of the EC-PDH, found using both factor analysis and Alpha Coefficients, means that the scale taps distinct dimensions in parental perceptions of daily hassles with respect to early childhood services. Researchers using this tool going forward can tap into these areas – seamless day, connectedness and parenting capacity - and more precisely identify where and how parents are feeling hassled. As Best Start is incorporated into the province’s implementation of full-day early learning/kindergarten, the EC-PDH will give researchers and policy makers a useful evaluation tool for measuring the impact integration is having on parents’ well-being over time.

In terms of the qualitative analysis, caution must be taken as to the generalizability of the findings. Interviews were only conducted at the five Best Start pilot schools and a disproportionate number of parents given protocol B (child in kindergarten only) were from one particular school, while the majority of interviews conducted with protocol A (child in Best Start child care) were done at another school. And the field notes must be viewed as only suggestive in their portrayal of the context for early implementation of this initiative.

It is best to be prudent whenever interpreting qualitative data as the potential for bias is inherent in the methodology. Parents who consent to participate in this type of research may be more inclined to be involved in their child’s learning than those who don’t. This has both theoretical and practical implications. When evaluating the effectiveness of parent
involvement strategies, consideration needs to be given to the type of parent likely to be involved in the first place. It is perhaps difficult to disentangle the effects of involvement from the effects of an “involved” parent. It is possible that more capable parents are those who respond best to parent involvement strategies. The tendency towards better child outcomes with more parent involvement may be a result of drawing in parents who are already more competent. The challenge for future research will be exploring parent involvement as a unique concept independent of other parental characteristics.

Positivity bias, as already discussed, is another factor for consideration. Stay-at-home mothers may need to convince themselves that they are receptive to involvement and may have a tendency to exaggerate their engagement in the home-learning environment. By the same token, parents using the child care centre may overstate the quality of care, or relationships with staff, to reassure themselves that they have chosen the best possible care situation for their child. Positivity bias may also surface among recent immigrants who may be reluctant to make negative comments, not wanting to seem ungrateful for the opportunities of the Canadian education system. Experiences with the care and education system in their home country, as well as cultural and religious attitudes, may influence the expectations and perceptions they report in this type of research. Although language did not appear to be a major barrier, just how much being an English language learner may have affected the quality of responses is difficult to determine.

This study represents an important step in understanding parents’ perceptions and hassles surrounding parent involvement; however, further empirical studies are needed to tease out how best to test and measure parent involvement as a concept. Are different types of involvement more meaningful than others? How best to involve working, or difficult to
reach, parents? In other words, research needs to go beyond whether parents are involved to focus on how they are involved and what happens as a result (Corter & Pelletier, 2004). While the current study supports the notion that parents want and need support, there appears to be no consensus in the literature concerning the best ways to use the limited time that parents do spend, or could spend with teachers. This study contributes to the literature by drawing attention to the areas of potential challenges for parents in early childhood settings and the role that teachers and early childhood educators play in shaping parents’ daily experiences. It lays the groundwork for studies to focus not only on child outcomes, but parent outcomes when evaluating early childhood service integration.

Conclusion

This study has provided insights into parents’ experiences with the early learning and care system, and the hassles, or challenges, parents encounter on a day-to-day basis. Parents at Best Start schools did not experience lower levels of parenting daily hassles as measured by the EC-PDH than did parents at comparison schools. It could be that one-year into the program was too early to detect quantitative differences in parenting daily hassles. However, the measure did identify that more parents were experiencing hassles in parenting capacity relative to the other two categories under investigation. Based on these findings strategies to encourage information sharing and networking among parents, as well as parent education and support should be one of the priorities for Best Start going forward.

Qualitative analysis of parent interviews and observational notes at Best Start schools did show evidence of a positive climate for parent involvement at least in the child care
centres. Parents reported feeling supported and valued the relationships they had with staff. The same degree of involvement with the classroom teacher was not particularly evident. Findings suggest that kindergarten teachers could be doing more to establish relationships with parents and be more proactive in their outreach. Positive carry-over from integrating child care with the education program should help change teacher attitudes towards parent involvement, and likewise, raise expectations on the part of parents for stronger home-school connections.

In Ontario, responsibility for early learning experiences, including child care, has now been mandated to the Ministry of Education and subsumed under the Ministry’s new Early Learning Division. Best Start, and its recent policy complement (Pascal, 2009), is being incorporated into the province’s implementation of full-day early learning/kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators will plan and deliver the program together. This research will help inform policy makers and educators as parent involvement strategies continue to be a focus in integrated school-based models of early learning and care.
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**APPENDIX A: COMPARISON OF SEVEN ECD MODELS ON KEY ELEMENTS OF SERVICE INTEGRATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Delivery Model</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Governance</th>
<th>Core Services</th>
<th>Impact on parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sure Start</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Promote healthy development through seamless holistic services for children and families in deprived communities</td>
<td>Community-based</td>
<td>Deprived communities</td>
<td>Locally driven partnerships among health, education, social services &amp; voluntary sectors</td>
<td>Child care, health, family support</td>
<td>- Improved home learning environments; improved access to services; less negative parenting&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; Increased social support&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS/EHS</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Address systemic poverty by promoting healthy development and school readiness in low income children</td>
<td>School and community based</td>
<td>Families below 100% of federal poverty guideline or on public assistance</td>
<td>Federally regulated but locally implemented by various community agencies and service providers</td>
<td>Education, health, social, and family services</td>
<td>- less negative parenting; increased parenting self-efficacy&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt; - improved family functioning&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt; (review)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21C</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Integrate learning, child care and family support for preschoolers into the public school system</td>
<td>School-based hub</td>
<td>Universal through public school system</td>
<td>National Model and guiding principles provided by the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development at Yale University But schools develop and implement their own programs</td>
<td>Daylong, year-long child care, preschool, family support, health and social services</td>
<td>- positive school community relations and parent involvement&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt; - less parental stress; improved work-home balance&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoZi</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>School reform through creation of cohesive school communities and collaboration among parents, teachers and students</td>
<td>School-based hub</td>
<td>Universal through public school system</td>
<td>National Model provided by the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development at Yale University but schools develop and implement their own programs</td>
<td>Daylong, year-long child care, preschool, family support services</td>
<td>- positive school climate - more parent and community involvement&lt;sup&gt;8&lt;/sup&gt;&lt;sup&gt;9&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBBF</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Strengthen parents, families, and the neighbourhood in responding to young children’s needs</td>
<td>Community-based</td>
<td>Universal within disadvantaged communities</td>
<td>Ontario government demonstration project; Partnerships with schools and existing services and involving local residents in project development and implementation</td>
<td>Enriched child care, family support, children’s programming</td>
<td>-increased parent and community involvement&lt;sup&gt;10&lt;/sup&gt; - increased use of family support services&lt;sup&gt;11&lt;/sup&gt; - improved parenting, less stress and increased social support&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHS</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Promote healthy child development, community wellness and social cohesion</td>
<td>Community-based hubs</td>
<td>Rural First Nations communities</td>
<td>Direct Federal funding; Federal departments support the training of Aboriginal community members and staff; integrated or co-located program delivery</td>
<td>Child development programs, child care, health, nutrition, family and social services, cultural support</td>
<td>- enhanced health and social support delivery&lt;sup&gt;13&lt;/sup&gt; - evidence of community building; high parent satisfaction&lt;sup&gt;14&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TFD</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Develop working models of integrated early learning, care and family support programs into a single seamless program</td>
<td>School-based hub</td>
<td>Universal through public school system</td>
<td>Local governance through partnerships among the city of Toronto, school boards, and community agencies</td>
<td>Seamless care, education and parenting support</td>
<td>- increased parent participation&lt;sup&gt;15&lt;/sup&gt; - expanded social networks - increased parenting self-efficacy and improved home learning environments&lt;sup&gt;16&lt;/sup&gt; - increased teacher support&lt;sup&gt;17&lt;/sup&gt; - reduced parenting daily hassles&lt;sup&gt;18&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Notes

APPENDIX B: PARENT INVOLVEMENT FACTORS AS THEY RELATE TO IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Child Outcomes
- higher academic achievement
- improve literacy performance
- improved social, emotional, and behavioural outcomes

Parent Outcomes
- improved parent-child relationships
- reduced parenting stress
- more positive mental health
- more satisfaction in parenting role

contributes to

Parenting Self-Efficacy
defined as
- improved parenting skills
- knowledge of child development
- confidence in parenting role
- understanding of normative child behaviour
- positive parent-child interactions

Home–School Collaboration
defined as
- teachers model best practices
- higher expectations for academic achievement
- strong commitment to schooling
- better understanding of educational practices
- enhanced home learning environments
- information sharing and advocacy

Social Networks
defined as
- social support
- emotional and practical support
- information sharing and advocacy
- higher satisfaction in parenting role
APPENDIX C: FAMILY DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES FOR BEST START AND COMPARISON PARENTS

Comparison between Best Start and Comparison Families on Demographic Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Best Start</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>102</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common Law</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Child Gender</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child Birth Order</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Born</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Born</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country of Origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior/high school</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/undergrad</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/advanced</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Working</td>
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<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay at home</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Composition</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple with children</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: Significant difference, $\chi^2 (1, 198) = 10.17, p >.005
### BEST START PEEL PARENT SURVEY

Parent Name: ___________________________ Child Name: __________________________
Site: _________________________  K Teacher _____________________ Date ____________

This questionnaire is for parents with a child in Kindergarten. Questions include information on your personal background, the programs/services you and your family have attended, and what you think of the Best Start Project and other early childhood and parenting programs in your community. Any information you provide will be treated confidentially.

Thank you for participating.

1. **What neighborhood do you live in?**
   - My street address ___________________________
   - Postal Code _____________

2. **Your gender?**
   - Male
   - Female

3. **Your marital status?**
   - Married
   - Single
   - Divorced
   - Common law
   - Widow

4. **Your kindergarten child?**
   - Boy
   - Girl
   - First-born
   - Later-born
   - Birth date: ______________ (date/month/year)

5. **Your languages?**
   - 1st language__________
   - 2nd language__________
   - at home we speak___________________

6. **Your country of birth?**
   - Canada
   - Other country ________________________
   - Number of years in Canada? ______________

7. **What is the highest level of education you have completed?**
   - Have not completed formal schooling
   - Completed elementary school
   - Completed junior/middle school
   - Completed secondary/high school
   - Completed community college or technical college (e.g. CEGEP, Nurses’ training)
   - Completed undergraduate university degree
   - Completed graduate/advanced university degree

8. **What is your current employment status?**
9. Who lives in your home?
- Couple with child/ren
- Single parent family (father head)
- Single parent family (mother head)
- Extended family (parents, child/ren & other relatives)
- Grandparents (with child/ren)

10. Which programs/services have you or your child used?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Time/week</th>
<th>11b. How much have you used these programs in the last month?</th>
<th>11c. Check the five most important programs for you and your family.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>full time (e.g. childcare)</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homebased care (full/part time childcare, babysitting)</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>part time nursery, preschool program, after school program</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent relief/occasional childcare</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parenting classes/workshops</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Drop-in/Parenting programs</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre/Post-natal program</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information and referrals</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community events for families</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource library (books/toys/equipment)</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and nutrition/wellness information programs</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and/or family counselling</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Speech and language services</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Home visits</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other - Please list:</td>
<td>Time/week:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What do you think about programs and services in your community?

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I know all the programs/services in my community.</td>
<td>12.</td>
<td>My child has benefited from the programs/services for children and families.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Strongly agree</td>
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<td>- Strongly agree</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Agree</td>
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<td>- Agree</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Not sure</td>
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<td>- Not sure</td>
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<td>- Do not agree</td>
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<td>- Do not agree</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Strongly disagree</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I am happy with the quality of the programs/services for children and families in my community.</td>
<td>14.</td>
<td>When programs and services work together, they are better and easier to find out about.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Strongly agree</td>
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<td>- Strongly agree</td>
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<td>- Agree</td>
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<td>- Not sure</td>
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<td>- Not sure</td>
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<td>- Do not agree</td>
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<td>- Do not agree</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>As a parent, I enjoy the programs/services.</td>
<td>16.</td>
<td>My opinion is valued and teachers/staff ask my opinion about programs/services.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Strongly agree</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Strongly agree</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Agree</td>
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<td>- Agree</td>
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<td>- Not sure</td>
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<td>- Not sure</td>
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<td>- Do not agree</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I have not been able to use many of the programs and services for children and families.</td>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I do not feel like I am part of this community.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- Strongly agree</td>
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<td>- Strongly agree</td>
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<td>- Agree</td>
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<td>- Not sure</td>
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<td>- Do not agree</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Staff and Teachers tell me about programs/services that are available.</td>
<td>20.</td>
<td>My child enjoys the programs/services.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Strongly agree</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Strongly agree</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Agree</td>
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<td>- Not sure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Strongly disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only complete this part if you have participated in the Best Start Project.
23. I am more involved in *my child’s learning* because of Best Start.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Not sure
   - Do not agree
   - Strongly disagree

24. I am more involved *at the school* because of Best Start.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Not sure
   - Do not agree
   - Strongly disagree

25. I would like to see Best Start continue at my child/rens school.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Not sure
   - Do not agree
   - Strongly disagree

26. Other people in my community know about Best Start.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Not sure
   - Do not agree
   - Strongly disagree

27. Best Start has given me extra support in raising my family.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Not sure
   - Do not agree
   - Strongly disagree

28. I support the idea of offering integrated services for children and families through the school.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Not sure
   - Do not agree
   - Strongly disagree

Thanks! Please return this form to the researcher/s at your child’s school, or to your child’s kindergarten teacher.
APPENDIX E: PARENTING DAILY HASSLES–EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES (PDH-ECS): SAMPLE PAGE

Instructions: The statements below describe events that routinely occur in families with young children. These events sometimes make life difficult. Please read each item and circle how often it happens to you (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, A lot, or Constantly), and then circle how much of a hassle you feel that has been FOR THE PAST MONTH.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW OFTEN IT HAPPENS</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Constantly</th>
<th>NO HASSLE</th>
<th>BIG HASSLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have a hard time getting my child ready for school or daycare in the morning. Examples: It takes a lot of effort to get my child up from bed and dressed, to get my child to eat enough breakfast, or to make sure that my child’s backpack contains all the things he/she needs for the day, etc.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I have a hard time getting my child to school or daycare in the morning. Examples: Taking the bus or subway is time consuming and tedious, I have to drop off my children at multiple locations which takes a lot of time and energy, or I need to leave for work early so I have to arrange for someone else to take my child/ren to school, etc.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have a hard time leaving my child at school or daycare in the morning. Examples: My child gets upset and cries when I have to leave him/her, or I worry about how my child will get along at Kindergarten or daycare, etc.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have a hard time leaving my child in care (at school or daycare facility) beyond the regular Kindergarten hours. Examples: My child has a hard time transitioning from Kindergarten to daycare so he/she gets upset and cries when I have to leave him/her there, or I worry about how my child will get along at daycare, etc.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have a hard time coordinating after school care for my child. Examples: I have to interrupt whatever I am doing in the middle of the day to get my child from Kindergarten to daycare, or vice-versa.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I have a hard time picking up my child at the end of the day. Examples: I have to rush from work to pick up any child/ren at daycare, or sometimes I am late picking up my child/ren because of bad traffic or because I had a lot to do at work, etc.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F: EARLY CHILDHOOD-PARENTING DAILY HASSLES (EC-PDH)

Today’s Date (month/day/year):________________  Parent’s Name: ____________________
Child’s Name: _____________________________  School: ___________________________
Your Postal Code: _________________________  K. Teacher: ______________ AM/PM____

EARLY CHILDHOOD-PARENTING DAILY HASSLES

INSTRUCTIONS:
• The statements below describe events or experiences that routinely affect families with young children. These events/experiences sometimes make life difficult.
• Please complete the questionnaire for your child in kindergarten. If you currently have two children in kindergarten, please select your youngest child.
• For each item please circle: (1) how often it affects you (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, A lot, or Constantly) AND (2) how much of a hassle it has been for you for the PAST MONTH.
• If the item does not apply to you please circle N/A. There should only be a few items that are not applicable to you.
• Any information you provide will be treated confidentially.

It’s difficult to...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>How often it affects you</th>
<th>How much of a hassle it has been for you</th>
<th>Item does not apply to me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To get my child ready in the morning.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find the time to make my child’s snacks and lunch.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To transport my child to school or child care in the morning.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To leave my child in the morning because s/he gets upset.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To interrupt my day or make special arrangements to get my child from school to child care (or from child care to school).</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To worry about my child’s safety as s/he is taken back and fourth between child care and the school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be separated from my child for many hours during the day.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To focus on what I need to do during the day because I worry about how my child is doing.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To rush at the end of the day to pick up my child.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To deal with my child when s/he is exhausted at the end of the day.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get my child to tell me about his/her day.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To keep track of my child’s daily schedule.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To deal with unexpected changes to our daily routine.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make alternate arrangements for child care when my child is sick.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To know what to do about school and child care when my child tells me that s/he is not feeling 100%.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find the time to read with my child.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find the time to play with my child.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To know what my child should be able to do at his/her age.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To know whether my child’s behaviour is a problem or whether s/he is behaving like other kids his/her age.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>How often it affects you</td>
<td>How much of a hassle it has been for you</td>
<td>Item does not apply to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get good advice on how to handle my child’s challenging behaviours.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get good advice on how to support my child’s learning at home.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find parenting programs that meets my needs.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To know what programs or services are available in my community.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To feel like an outsider among the parents of my child’s classmates.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find the opportunity to talk with other parents with young children.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To stay in contact with the child care staff about day-to-day things.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To know whether my child is happy while s/he is in child care.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find the opportunity to discuss issues of concern with the child care staff.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be satisfied with the child care program because I worry about the quality of my child’s experience.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To stay in contact with the classroom teacher about day-to-day things.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To know whether my child is happy while s/he is at school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find the opportunity to discuss issues of concern with the classroom teacher.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To know what my child is learning in school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To know whether my child is learning enough in school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To agree on what is best for my child because the school doesn’t know my child the way I do.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be satisfied with the school program because I worry about the quality of my child’s experience.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with the school because English is not our family’s first language.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find out about my child’s day because multiple people care for my child throughout the day.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find the time to participate in my child’s classroom activities.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand how things work at my child’s school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand what the school expects from me as a parent.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To avoid spending money on certain things because I have to pay for child care.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your participation is greatly appreciated.*

*Please provide any additional comments:*
APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – VERSION A

Date ___________________ Parent’s Name _____________ Child’s Name _______________
Site________________ K Teacher_______________ Researcher_________________

BEST START PEEL: PARENT INTERVIEW
Version A: Child in Best Start

Researcher: Introduce yourself and say to parent:

"In this interview I will be asking you some questions about the Best Start program. We will not be sharing your individual answers with teachers or staff, so please feel free to mention things you may not like about the program. We are only asking for your name to be able to track demographic information. I am recording this interview so that I don’t have to write down every word you say. This makes it much faster and easier for both of us. However, I will be writing down some key points as we go along. Keep in mind that your answers don’t need to be very long."

Researcher:
- Ensure that your tape recorder is turned on.
- Ask questions slowly and ensure parents have understood enough to answer.
- You may probe as much as is helpful to the parent. Please mark "P" to indicate when you have used probing.
- Write key messages in point form and relate them back to the parent to make sure you have captured their thoughts appropriately.

1. Why did you decide to participate in the Best Start program?

2. What do you hope to do/learn here for yourself (goals)?

3. What is most important for your child to learn in Best Start?

4. What do you like best about the program?
5. Is there something else that could be included in the program that you would find particularly useful for helping you and your child?

6. What are you learning from being here?

7. What are some of the special things the staff does to help you understand your child’s learning and to support you?

8. How do you feel your involvement in Best Start will affect your future involvement in your child’s schooling (example: volunteering in class, helping with learning at home)?

9. Who does your child play with when he/she is not at school?

10. What types of activities do you do with your child outside of the home? (not including kindergarten).
APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – VERSION B

Date ___________________ Parent’s Name _____________ Child’s Name ________________
Site________________ K Teacher_______________ Researcher_________________

BEST START PEEL: PARENT INTERVIEW
Version B: child attends K only

Researcher: Introduce yourself and say to parent:

“In this interview I will be asking you some simple questions about your child’s schooling. We will not be sharing your individual answers with teachers or staff, so don’t worry about making negative comments. We are only asking for your name to be able to track demographic information. I am recording this interview so that I don’t have to write down every word you say. This makes it much faster and easier for both of us. However, I will be writing down some key points as we go along. Keep in mind that your answers don’t need to be very long.”

Researcher:
- Ensure that your tape recorder is turned on.
- Ask questions slowly and ensure parents have understood enough to answer.
- You may probe as much as is helpful to the parent. Please mark “P” to indicate when you have used probing.
- Write key messages in point form and relate them back to the parent to make sure you have captured their thoughts appropriately.

1. Who looks after your child when he/she is not in kindergarten?

2. What are the most important things you like to do with your child at home to encourage his/her learning?

3. Who does your child play with when he/she is not at school?
4. What types of activities do you do with your child outside of the home? (not including kindergarten).

5. What are some of the things that your child’s kindergarten teacher does to help you understand your child’s learning and to support you?

6. How do you get involved in your child’s schooling? (eg. volunteering in class, helping with learning at home)

7. How does your child’s kindergarten teacher encourage you to speak with him/her about activities going on in the classroom?
Dear Parents,

I am a professor and researcher at the University of Toronto. I am excited to be partnering with the Region of Peel Children’s Services and with your child’s school board on a new research project called Best Start. This research project will try to answer questions about how early childhood services such as kindergarten, child care and parenting supports can help the families of young children. I am writing to invite you and your child to be a part of this exciting project.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey this fall about whether you think it is useful to integrate childcare, kindergarten and parenting supports, that is, to have them together in the school (10-15 minutes). You will also be asked to complete a survey on your “daily hassles”, that is on getting your child to kindergarten/child care and back home again (10 minutes). Finally you will be asked to participate in a short interview with one of our researchers (10 minutes). When you return the surveys we will donate $5 towards your child’s classroom library. When you are interviewed, another $5 will be donated.

Your child will participate in enjoyable learning activities with a trained graduate student who has experience with young children. This will happen in a familiar room near the kindergarten classroom. We would also like to have your child participate again at the beginning of Grade 1. Your child will take part in activities such as drawing a picture and telling a story about it, and playing alphabet games. Most children enjoy these activities. However, if your child is shy or unwilling, he/she will not be made to participate. You and your child may decline to answer questions and you may both withdraw from this study at any time, without consequences.

There is a “consent form” at the bottom of this letter and it must be signed in order for you and for your child to participate. All information will be held strictly confidential and will only be viewed by authorized research personnel. Your name, your child’s name and your school name will NOT be used. We will use numbers to identify people and schools. If you would like to receive a copy of the research report at the end of our two-year study, please include this request on the consent form.

I sincerely hope that you and your child will participate in this research project. The study will benefit families as we learn what is important to them in early childhood services. Results will be shared with practitioners, policymakers and scholarly audiences. Please
read and sign the attached consent form, then give it to the researcher or to your child’s kindergarten teacher. You may contact our Research Manager, Julaine Brent, at 416-934-4510 if you have any questions about the study. You may also contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office about your participation at ethics.review@utoronto.ca, 416-946-3273.

Sincerely,

Janette Pelletier, Ph.D.
jpelletier@oise.utoronto.ca

Cut here 

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information and filled out the consent form. I hereby give consent for my family (including my child/ren) to participate in the Best Start research study led by Dr. Janette Pelletier at the University of Toronto.

_____ Yes I give consent for participation in the above-named study

Child’s name: ________________________ Child’s teacher: _______________

Morning or afternoon kindergarten (please circle)

Parent name (please print): ____________________________________________

Signature: ___________________________          Date: __________________

PLEASE ALSO COMPLETE THE ATTACHED FAMILY INFORMATION FORM AND RETURN IT TO YOUR CHILD’S TEACHER WITH THIS CONSENT FORM BY FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2008.

THANK YOU!
# Best Start Peel Family Information Form

| Parent Name _____________________________ | Phone Number _________________ |
| Mailing Address __________________________ | Postal Code _________________ |

Child/ren’s Name/s and Dates of Birth *(indicate boy or girl)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Name</th>
<th>Boy or Girl</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family’s First Language *(language spoken at home)* _______________________

Mother’s highest education level *(circle)*: elementary school, some high school, high school graduate, some college or university, college graduate, university graduate, graduate degree

Father’s highest education level *(circle)*: elementary school, some high school, high school graduate, some college or university, college graduate, university graduate, graduate degree

Mother’s occupation:

*(if stay home, indicate whether you have worked and what the job was)*

Father’s occupation:

*(if stay home or unemployed, indicate whether you have worked and what the job was)*

Preschool/daycare experience of 3 – 5 year old child/ren:

Child 1:  
Child 2:  
*(indicate what kind of experience, how long)*
Dear Kindergarten Parents,

I am a professor and researcher at the University of Toronto. I am excited to be partnering with the Region of Peel Children’s Services and with your child’s school board on a new research project called *Best Start*. This research project will answer questions about how early childhood services such as kindergarten, child care and parenting supports can help the families of young children. I am writing to invite you and your child to be a part of this exciting project.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey about whether you think it would be useful to integrate childcare, kindergarten and parenting supports, that is, to have them together in the school (10-15 minutes). You will also be asked to complete a survey on your “daily hassles”, that is on getting your child to kindergarten [and childcare] and back home again (10 minutes). Finally you will be asked to fill in a simple chart about your child’s learning (1 minute). When you return the surveys we will donate $5 towards your child’s classroom library.

Your child will participate in enjoyable learning activities with a trained graduate student who has experience with young children. This will happen in a familiar room near the kindergarten classroom. We would also like your child to participate again early in Grade 1. Your child will take part in activities such as drawing a picture and telling a story about it, pointing to pictures, playing alphabet games and simple number games using coloured coins. Most children enjoy these activities and want to take part. However, if your child is shy or unwilling, he/she will not be made to participate. You and your child may decline to answer questions and you may both withdraw from this study at any time, without consequences.

There is a “consent form” attached to this letter and it must be signed in order for you and for your child to participate. All information will be held strictly confidential and will only be viewed by authorized research personnel. Your name, your child’s name and your school name will NOT be used. We will replace names with numbers to identify people and schools. If you would like to receive a copy of the research report at the end of our two-year study, please include this request on the consent form.
I sincerely hope that you will participate in this research project. The study will benefit families as we learn what is important to them in early childhood services. Results will be shared with practitioners, policymakers and scholarly audiences. Please read and sign the attached consent form, then give it to the researcher or to your child’s kindergarten teacher.

You may contact our Research Manager, Julaine Brent, at 416-934-4510 if you have any questions about the study. You may also contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office about your participation at ethics.review@utoronto.ca, 416-946-3273.

Sincerely,

Janette Pelletier, Ph.D.
jpelletier@oise.utoronto.ca

Cut here --------------------------------------------------

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information and filled out the consent form. I hereby give consent for my family (including my child/ren) to participate in the Best Start research study led by Dr. Janette Pelletier at the University of Toronto.

____ Yes I give consent for participation in the above-named study

Child’s name: ______________________ Child’s teacher: _______________

Morning or afternoon kindergarten (please circle)

Parent name (please print): ___________________________________________

Signature: ___________________________          Date: ____________________

PLEASE ALSO COMPLETE THE ATTACHED FAMILY INFORMATION FORM AND RETURN TO YOUR CHILD’S TEACHER WITH THIS CONSENT FORM BY FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2008.

THANK YOU!
# Kindergarten Parent/Child Family Information Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Name ____________________________</th>
<th>Phone Number ________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mailing Address _________________________</td>
<td>Postal Code _________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Child/ren’s Name/s and Dates of Birth (indicate boy or girl)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Name</th>
<th>Boy or Girl</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family’s First Language (language spoken at home) __________________________

Mother’s highest education level (circle): elementary school, some high school, high school graduate, some college or university, college graduate, university graduate, graduate degree

Father’s highest education level (circle): elementary school, some high school, high school graduate, some college or university, college graduate, university graduate, graduate degree

Mother’s occupation:

(if stay home, indicate whether you have worked and what the job was)

Father’s occupation:

(if stay home or unemployed, indicate whether you have worked and what the job was)

Preschool/daycare experience of 3 – 5 year old child/ren:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child 1:</th>
<th>Child 2:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(indicate what kind of experience, how long)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
January 26, 2009

Dear Parents,

Thank you for your continued participation in the Best Start research project. This is the project that will answer questions about how early childhood services such as kindergarten, child care and parenting supports can help families of young children. I am a graduate student at the University of Toronto working with our principal researcher, Dr. Janette Pelletier, and I am particularly interested in how early childhood services impact parents' lives.

When you gave your consent to participate, you agreed to fill out two surveys, one of which you have already completed and returned. Thank you, a $5 donation has already been made towards your child’s classroom library. Attached is the second survey which asks about “daily hassles” that parents face when caring for a young child who is enrolled in kindergarten and child care programs. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

I will also be contacting you at a later date to set up a time to conduct a short interview with you (about 10 minutes). I will meet with you at your child’s school at your convenience. The interviews will take place within the next couple of months. When you are interviewed, another $5 will be donated to your child’s classroom library.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this “daily hassles” survey. If you would like some help in filling it out, I am happy to meet with you at your child’s school or child care and we can go through it together. You can contact me at 416-934-4510. If you have any questions about the study in general, please contact either myself or our Research Manager, Julaine Brent, at the above number. You may also contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office about your participation at ethics.review@utoronto.ca, 416-946-3273.

Sincerely,

Caron Bell, M. Ed., Ph.D. candidate
cbell@oise.utoronto.ca

PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY TO YOUR CHILD’S TEACHER BY FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2009.

THANK YOU!
February 17, 2009

Dear Parents,

Thank you for your continued participation in the Best Start research project. This is the project that will answer questions about how early childhood services such as kindergarten, child care and parenting supports can help families of young children. I am a graduate student at the University of Toronto working with our principal researcher, Dr. Janette Pelletier and I am particularly interested in how early childhood services impact parents' lives.

When you gave your consent to participate, you agreed to fill out two surveys, one of which you have already completed and returned. Thank you, a $5 donation has been made towards your child’s classroom library. Attached is the second survey which asks about “daily hassles” that parents face when caring for a young child who is enrolled in kindergarten and child care programs. It should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this “daily hassles” survey. If you would like some help in filling it out, I am happy to meet with you at your child’s school or child care and we can go through it together. You can contact me at 416-934-4510. If you have any questions about the study in general, please contact either myself or our Research Manager, Julaine Brent, at the above number. You may also contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office about your participation at ethics.review@utoronto.ca, 416-946-3273.

Sincerely,

Caron Bell, M. Ed., Ph.D. candidate
cbell@oise.utoronto.ca

PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY TO YOUR CHILD’S TEACHER BY FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 2009.

THANK YOU!
Thank you for your continued participation in our Best Start research project. Parents' views on early childhood services are an important part of our study. We would like to ask you some simple questions about the care and education of your kindergarten child.

- $5 will be donated to your child’s classroom library
- Lunch and refreshments will be provided
- Kindergarten children and siblings are welcome to attend. We will have some fun activities set up to keep them busy
- Interviews should take about 10 minutes

Please drop by the Early Years Hub between 11:30 and 12:30 pm (light lunch provided) or The Learn. Play. Care. Child Care Centre between 4:00 and 6:00 pm (snacks and refreshments provided)

We sincerely hope you will drop by for an interview. All information will be held strictly confidential. Your name will NOT be used. If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact our Research Manager, Julaine Brent, at 416-934-4510
BEST START PEEL: PARENT INTERVIEW
Version A: Child in Best Start

Researcher: Introduce yourself and say to parent:

"In this interview I will be asking you some questions about the Best Start program. We will not be sharing your individual answers with teachers or staff, so please feel free to mention things you may not like about the program. We are only asking for your name to be able to track demographic information. I am recording this interview so that I don’t have to write down every word you say. This makes it much faster and easier for both of us. However, I will be writing down some key points as we go along. Keep in mind that your answers don’t need to be very long."

Researcher:
- Ensure that your tape recorder is turned on.
- Ask questions slowly and ensure parents have understood enough to answer.
- You may probe as much as is helpful to the parent. Please mark “P” to indicate when you have used probing.
- Write key messages in point form and relate them back to the parent to make sure you have captured their thoughts appropriately.

1. Why did you decide to participate in the Best Start program?
   i. school readiness/preparation
   ii. need childcare/convenience

2. What do you hope to do/learn here for yourself (goals)?
   i. Support
   ii. Parenting capacity/confidence
   iii. Time to pursue own career/interests

3. What is most important for your child to learn in Best Start?
   i. foundation skills/school readiness
   ii. learn English
   iii. social skills
   iv. structured activities

4. What do you like best about the program?
   i. relationship with staff/teachers
ii. integration with kindergarten
iii. curriculum
iv. skill development/readiness

5. Is there something else that could be included in the program that you would find particularly useful for helping you and your child?
   i. additional subject areas, eg. music, French ESL
   ii. more parent involvement
   iii. nothing else needs to be done

6. What are you learning from being here?
   i. parenting skills/support
   ii. learning English
   iii. how to entrust my child to others (letting go)

7. What are some of the special things the staff does to help you understand your child’s learning and to support you?
   i. literacy development
   ii. communication/supportive relationship

8. How do you feel your involvement in Best Start will affect your future involvement in your child’s schooling (example: volunteering in class, helping with learning at home)?
   i. volunteer
   ii. participate on school council
   iii. expectations of more involvement communication

9. Who does your child play with when he/she is not at school?
   i. parents
   ii. friends
   iii. siblings
   iv. plays alone

10. What types of activities do you do with your child outside of the home? (not including kindergarten).
    i. playground
    ii. community activities/lessons/programs
    iii. religious activities
    iv. shopping
    v. trips/ outings
APPENDIX O: PARENT INTERVIEW CODING TEMPLATE – VERSION B
(K-ONLY)

Date ___________________ Parent’s Name _____________ Child’s Name_______________
Site____________________ K Teacher_________________ Researcher_________________

BEST START PEEL: PARENT INTERVIEW
Version B: child attends K only

Researcher: Introduce yourself and say to parent:

“In this interview I will be asking you some simple questions about your child’s schooling. We will not be sharing your individual answers with teachers or staff, so don’t worry about making negative comments. We are only asking for your name to be able to track demographic information. I am recording this interview so that I don’t have to write down every word you say. This makes it much faster and easier for both of us. However, I will be writing down some key points as we go along. Keep in mind that your answers don’t need to be very long.”

Researcher:
• Ensure that your tape recorder is turned on.
• Ask questions slowly and ensure parents have understood enough to answer.
• You may probe as much as is helpful to the parent. Please mark “P” to indicate when you have used probing.
• Write key messages in point form and relate them back to the parent to make sure you have captured their thoughts appropriately.

1. Who looks after your child when he/she is not in kindergarten?
   1  Mom
   2  Dad
   3  Grandparent
   4  Babysitter/nanny
   5  Sibling

2. What are the most important things you like to do with your child at home to encourage his/her learning?
   1  Reading
   2  TV/computer
   3  Homework/worksheets
   4  Conversations/language development
   5  Learning through play
   6  Games/songs
   7  Arts/crafts
3. Who does your child play with when he/she is not at school?
   1. Parents
   2. Relatives
   3. Siblings
   4. Friends
   5. Plays alone

4. What types of activities do you do with your child outside of the home? (not including kindergarten).
   1. Playground/park
   2. Community classes or activities (lessons/programs/sports)
   3. Religious activities
   4. Shopping
   5. Library
   6. Trips/outings (eg. museum, theme parks ect)
   7. Early Years/family support programs

5. What are some of the things that your child’s kindergarten teacher does to help you understand your child’s learning and to support you?
   1. Personal advice/talks
   2. Sends activities home
   3. Written correspondence/newsletters
   4. Parent-teacher interviews
   5. Classroom reading program

6. How do you get involved in your child’s schooling? (eg. volunteering in class, helping with learning at home)
   1. Volunteer
   2. Help with learning at home
   3. Parent-teacher communication
   4. Early years centre
   5. Third party communication (sibling, relative)
   6. Barriers

7. How does your child’s kindergarten teacher encourage you to speak with him/her about activities going on in the classroom?
   1. Personal communication
   2. Written communication
   3. Meetings/interviews
   4. Doesn’t encourage