

A Vision for School Years in Halton

Backgrounder

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Our Kids – The School Years

May 2004

Our Kids – The School Years

The Origins of Our Kids - The School Years

The social environment of a community is a powerful force in shaping the developmental, learning and behavioural outcomes of children and youth. There is growing consensus documented by research which confirms that when children and youth feel positively connected to their community environment (whether school, home or neighbourhood), and have a strong sense of belonging, they are more likely to achieve academically, have a well defined sense of self and are less likely to become involved in risky behaviours.

A young person's ability to learn is influenced not only by what goes on in the school but by experiences within their family, peer group, neighbourhood and the wider society within which they live.

HALTON APPROACH

Coming together

In May, 2002, representatives from education, health, social services and the police came together to hear about the latest research carried out by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health on the impact of school culture on children's academic and health outcomes.

One third of students reported high levels of inappropriate or negative behaviour including theft, drug use, verbal abuse, truancy and destruction of property.

(CAMH, 2002)

This group wanted to investigate the potential of working together as a community to more proactively address the issues that challenge children's ability to make healthy choices, both academic and personal. As a result, the Halton School Culture Steering Committee - later to become known as *Our Kids – the School Years* was formed, made up of representatives from region-wide organizations serving children and families.

While the reason for coming together reflected individual organizational mandates and philosophies, the group held a common call to action in working to improve the outcomes for children and families.

Recognizing that each organization has its own separate and distinct mandate, policies, procedures, legislation, philosophy, perspective and funding mechanisms; the first step was to examine some of the practical issues involved in developing *Our Kids - The School Years* initiative. This was achieved by collecting and reviewing information on the different mandates and services currently offered. Our review clearly demonstrated the potential of *Our Kids - The School Years*.

Halton's history of working well together includes initiatives such as:

- the School Police Liaison Officers including the presentation of the Dare Program in all Grade 6 classes;
- Halton Children's Aid Society providing school based family service workers;
- Halton Child and Youth Services providing school based supports;

- the Region of Halton providing support from Public Health Nurses and Mental Health Liaison Nurses with a variety of services from the provision of 1:1 assessments to universal school based health promotion; and,
- Transitions for Youth providing Child and Youth Workers for the provision of universal school based programming.

Our Kids – The School Years Committee has closely linked with the Our Kids - The Early Years Committee in the development of the action plan. The Vision For Children in Halton: Report Card has identified twenty one neighbourhoods and provides a range of valuable planning data that will be used as we move forward.

Need for integration

Coming together we recognized that by building on these successes, more could be accomplished by finding ways of working in a more integrated and coordinated fashion.

We recognize that no single group or individual can address all the needs of any one family or one child. Children need to be seen within the context of their family and their family within the context of their community. Services are not always effective when provided to the child in isolation.

Recognizing the demands on government and community resources, it is critical to explore ways to support neighbourhoods, families and children and avoid duplication of effort. Through collaboration, gaps in service are addressed, overlaps eliminated. An integrated approach ensures the most efficient and effective delivery of service to neighbourhoods, children and families.

"Many definitions of integration include a requirement that the focus guiding the process be on a broader spectrum of service user needs than each organization could address separately"

(Building Bridges, Service Provider Involvement in Better Beginnings, Better Futures, 1995.

"The most effective programs co-ordinate universal screening, early intervention and remedial services within and between education, health, social and recreation services"

(Sewing the Seams, Effective and Efficient Human Services for School Aged Children, 2001.

Our Vision

"Together, the Halton Community works cooperatively and accepts responsibility for all children and youth to thrive in an environment that optimizes learning, growth and development."

Our Mission

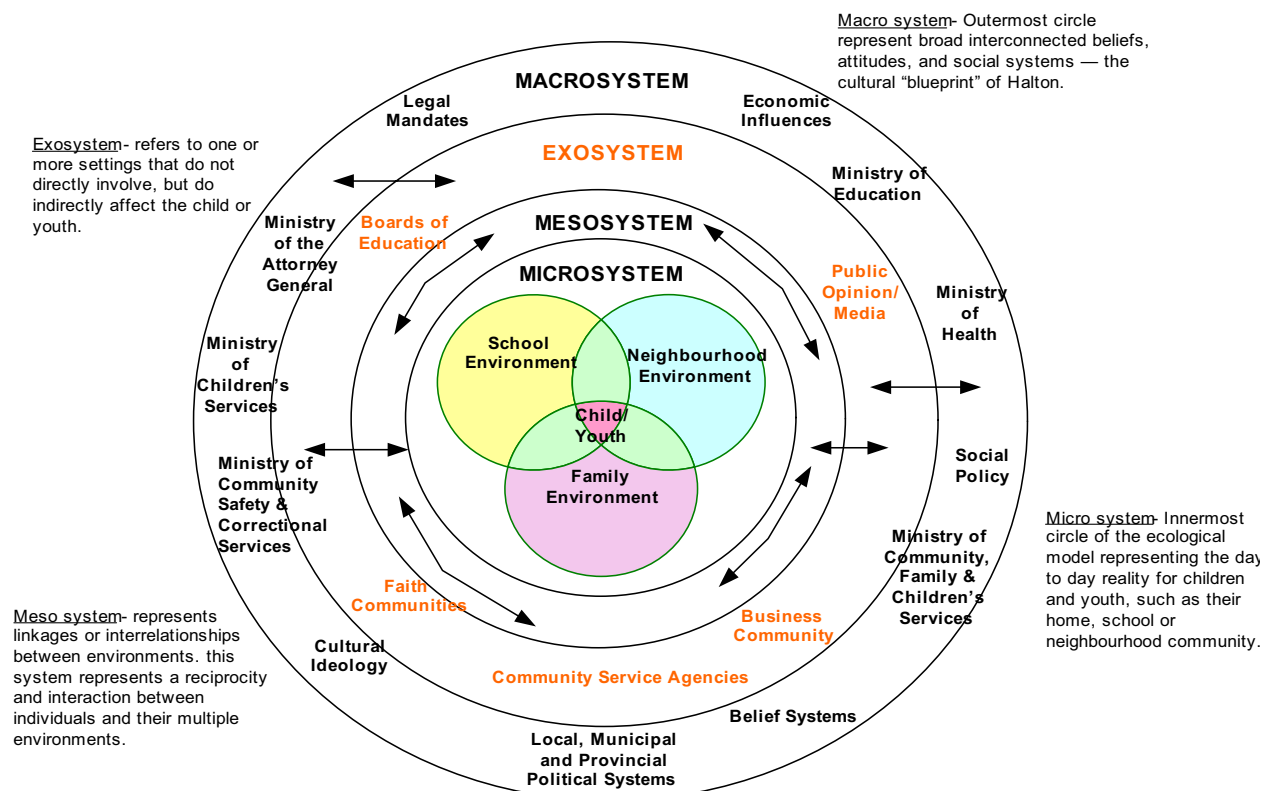
Our mission is to ensure the healthy growth and development and safety of children and youth by increasing the capacity of neighbourhoods to create a holistic system of supports and services in Halton.

THEORETICAL MODEL

An ecological systems theory ¹ was adapted as an organizing framework for understanding how an integrated learning community can impact and support a positive home – school - community culture in Halton.

Incorporating both the child/youth and their environment in efforts to promote Halton as an emotionally and physically safe place for all children to live and learn is an application of an ecological model. In addition to the target child or youth, the ecological model recognizes the importance of family, peers, schools, neighbourhood communities and the wider society in shaping the development of youth.

Children, families, schools, neighbourhoods, community services providers and society generally are interdependent players in an environmental whole and share a role both in influencing and benefiting from an emotionally and physically safe Halton.



¹ Bronfenbrenner, U. *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977.

MOVING FORWARD – Our Kids From the Early Years to the School Years

Our moving forward will be accomplished in two phases over a period of five years.

Phase I

The goal of Phase I is to promote models of service integration and collaboration which simplify access to service and rationalize the roles of our limited resources of trained, specialized services

Developing systems and structures that operationalize the model will ensure sustainability. Formal service providers need to build a system based on trust.

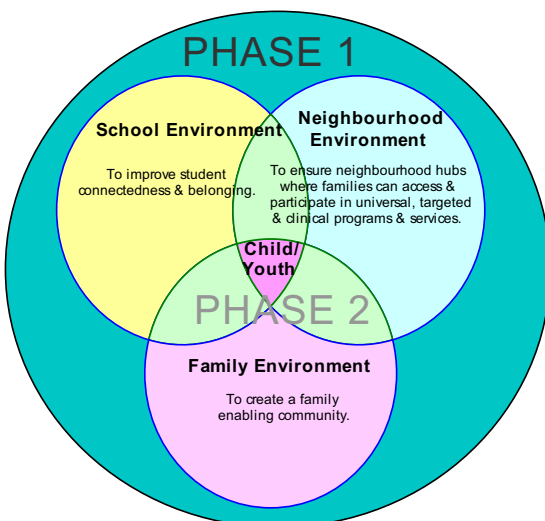
The end result will be a system of service integration and collaboration that simplifies access to services and is more in tune with the needs of children and families.

The following actions are necessary to advance the implementation of Phase I:

- Secure support from governing bodies
- Create service agreements and protocols among the collaborative members
- Secure sustained funding for infrastructure support
- Develop an overall evaluation plan

"Time is needed to develop a co-operative and collaborative culture and to ensure that the real needs of children and families are met. Changing the way we work together is a major task, one that takes time and a great deal of commitment, but the results are well worth the effort."

Integrated School-Linked
Services for Children and
Youth at Risk,
Saskatchewan Education,
Training and Development,



Principles- The standards we adopt and share as a learning community to enhance and promote the emotional and physical safety of all children and youth

Processes - How we go about working together to build sustainable institutional relationships that promote our Principles.

Practices - The activities that operationalize our Principles.

Phase II

In Phase II, an ecological, community development approach is integral to success. The programs and services offered will be responsive to neighbourhoods.

Community capacity building is based on an individual's, family's and community's assets. The integrated services model will result in positive child outcomes fostering sustainability over the long term when families, community and society are active, collaborative participants in the process.

The Phase II goals are:

- To improve student connectedness and sense of belonging
- To create a family enabling community
- To ensure neighbourhood hubs where children/youth families can access and participate in universal, targeted and clinical programming

Positive academic and behavioural outcomes are seen for students who feel strongly connected with their school. Students thrive in a school that values a diverse, inclusive school culture where all students feel a strong sense of belonging.

There is a strong correlation between parental involvement in school and the child's academic success. Parental involvement is greatest during the child's elementary school years and decreases during the secondary school years.

An important component of the integrated services model is the increased emphasis on parental involvement while developing strategies to enhance parenting skills. Service providers in Halton will be implementing a comprehensive parenting strategy as part of this initiative. Staff will be trained in the Triple P parenting program .

Within the neighbourhood community, the goal is to create a "hub". This may be the school or another site which is the natural meeting place for members of the neighbourhood (e.g. a church, a community centre, etc.). Each neighbourhood community is unique. What works in one community may not in another.

"The Better Beginnings, Better Futures story expresses how a mobilized community and collaborative network of service providers can make all the difference in the lives of families. In doing the Early Years Study, we saw and heard this directly from community participants."

Fraser Mustard, Co-Chair Early Years Study, Ontario 1999

The research findings of Better Beginnings, Better Futures strongly supports the involvement of teachers, principals, parents and project staff in the development of school and community based programs.

Better Beginnings, Better Futures (1990-2000 Study)

The hub provides one access point for all programs to families in a geographic area and there is outreach to families who cannot get to the hub site. Integrated staff teams deliver all service options and the hub locations can be schools, store front, community or recreational centre.

Early Years Study

Some underlying principles that underpin the creation of neighbourhood strategies include:

- Sensitivity to the diversity of families
- Programs and locations based on local needs
- Parental input and choice
- Programs and services enhance what is already working in the neighbourhood community and others developed to fulfil changing need
- Opportunities for shared learning be the foundation of neighbourhood/community decision making

"Raising healthier children will ultimately reduce the current pressures on the specialized service systems.

Without some new impetus for change, the systems of care and support for children and their families will continue to be inadequate to the challenges facing them."

Children First, 1990

Through the provision of integrated programs and services at a neighbourhood level the following goals will be achieved as measured by the sample indicators noted in the table below.

System Level Goals and Indicators		
School	Family	Neighbourhood/Community
Goal: Improve student connectedness and belonging	Goal : Enhance parent involvement and skills	Goal: Increase access to services through neighbourhood hubs.
Sample Indicators	Sample Indicators	Sample Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved social skills such as problem solving • Decreased risk taking behaviour • Improved academic achievement • Increase in students exhibiting values of respect, empathy, honesty • Decreased truancy • Increased parental involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased parental access to supports when they need them • Decreased involvement with child welfare • Decreased risk behaviours • Increased parental confidence • Increased number of workplaces that support parents in family role • Increased positive parent/child relationship • Decreased suicides and attempted suicides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased diverse programs in community • Increased participation in neighbourhood development • Increased number of services provided at the hub • Decreased wait times to access service • Increased citizen involvement with decision-making • Increased number of physically active children and youth

EVALUATION

An essential element of this initiative will be the evaluation of Phase I and Phase II.

Evaluation of **Phase I** will be a formative implementation evaluation which will include reviewing:

- the inter- organizational protocols and policies
- the structure, processes, activities and criteria for effective partnerships

that are involved in bringing the various Halton community stakeholders together to co-ordinate, plan and deliver the integrated ecological service model.

In addition to an evaluation of the development of the *Our Kids - The School Years* initiative will be the evaluation of the models of implementation within the pilot communities. For example, how do *Our Kids - The School Years* pilot communities develop and implement the integrated ecological model?

To what extent is the pilot community characterized by:

- Parent and community strategies to solicit input to service delivery
- Effective integrated, multi-service delivery teams
- Policies governing accountability to sponsoring organizations
- Policies governing the conduct of partners
- Policies governing the allocation and monitoring of expenditures of shared resources

Evaluation of **Phase II** will reflect the efficacy of the integrated ecological service delivery model on children/youth, schools, families and neighbourhoods. For example, what are the short-term/long-term effects and cost benefits for children/youth, schools, families, neighbourhoods in terms of?

- educational achievement
- use of health, social and correctional services
- social assistance
- drug and alcohol abuse
- bullying and victimization
- reliance on child and youth services
- involvement with Children's Aid Society
- neighbourhood engagement/connectedness

The data that informs each of these indicators will be both qualitative and quantitative. Both types of data are important to the assessment of the outcomes(s).

In evaluating the efficacy of the *Our Kids - The School Years* initiative, the evaluation will also need to consider how measures collected about children, parents and their neighbourhood communities at the pilot sites can be compared to those in the neighbourhoods that were not part of the pilot project.

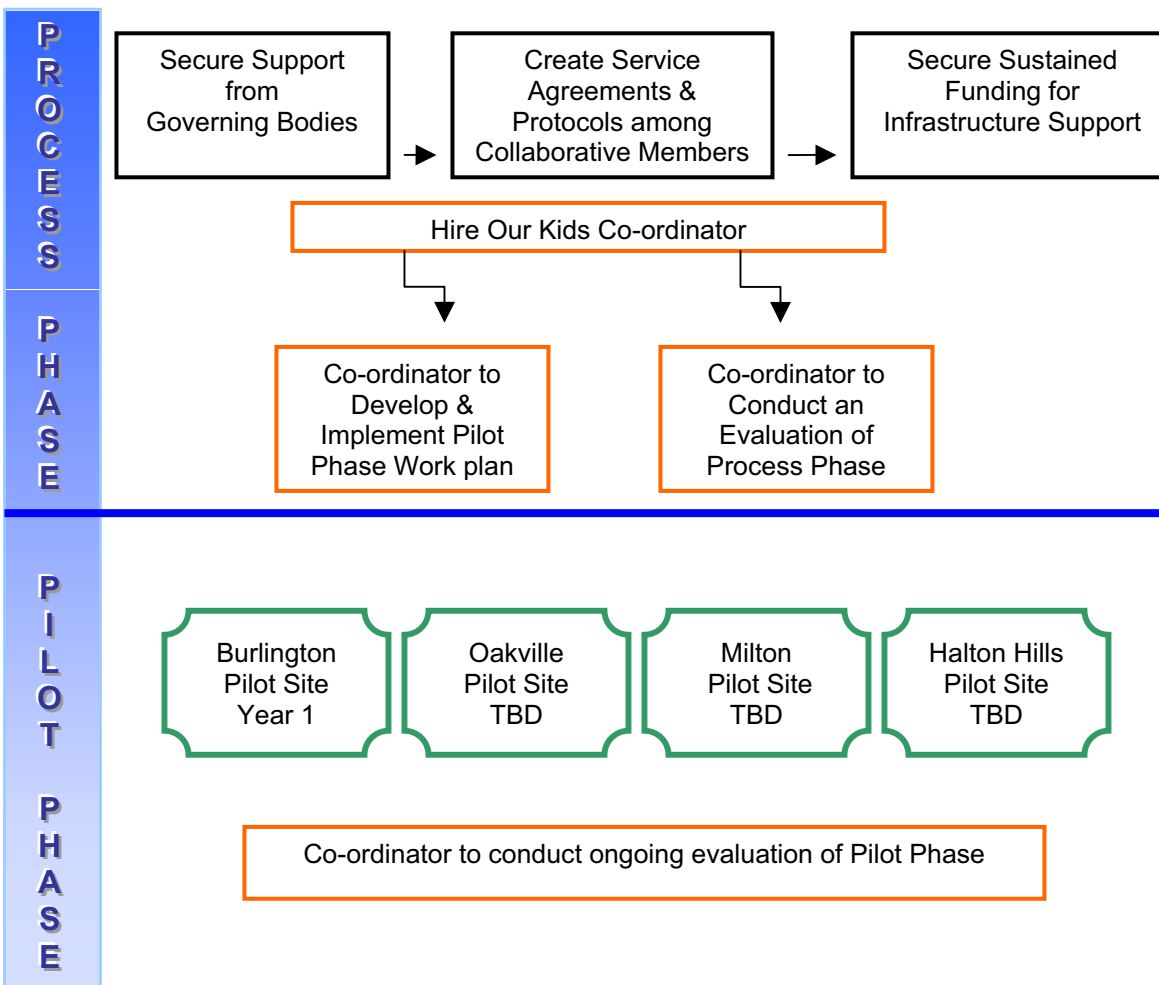
WORKPLAN

Once approval has been gained from the governing bodies of the organizations involved in this process, work will begin to look at how programs and services can be delivered in an integrated fashion and the necessary service agreements and protocols created. At the same time, options will be explored to secure the necessary resources to support the infrastructure of this initiative.

Subsequent Pilots will be determined based on the readiness of the neighbourhoods and local need.

The following chart on page 9 illustrates how the initiative will be implemented.

OUR KIDS: THE SCHOOL YEARS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN



The success or failure of the *Our Kids - The School Years* initiative is dependent on three key factors:

1. A clear and comprehensive reporting mechanism for collaborative members participating in the initiative.
2. A co-operative partnership between government, non-government organizations and the neighbourhood communities.
3. Financial resources to hire a project co-ordinator and to develop and implement both the initiative and the evaluation component of the initiative.

RESOURCES

It is proposed that a Project Co-ordinator be hired to complete Phase I and create a readiness for the implementation of the first Phase Two pilot. The individual will co-ordinate the implementation of the initiative and facilitate the movement towards an integrated service delivery model.

This person would work with the organizations in developing the protocol agreements, the overall work plan for the initiative, as well as the evaluation plan.

During Phase II, when direct services and programs will be delivered within the school, families and neighbourhood/community, this staff person would work closely with the Neighbourhood Leads who will be hired or seconded to work within the selected pilot communities.

To date, the members of the collaborative have contributed resources to the development of this initiative and will commit to the allocation of resources to the multidisciplinary neighbourhood service teams. Staff on the neighbourhood service teams will work to achieve the mandates of their organization while at the same time addressing the locally identified needs.

While a budget has to be finalized, preliminary estimates indicate that \$250,000 is required on an annual basis to facilitate this process. This amount would include staffing costs for the Project Co-ordinator, the Neighbourhood Facilitator (for one pilot neighbourhood) and the cost for evaluation. The resources needed for each additional pilot neighbourhood would be the cost of the neighbourhood lead.

SUMMARY

The Halton School Culture Steering Committee has spent the last two years doing its homework, grappling with the issues and developing a vision and sense of how an integrated service delivery model could work.

This work has taken a great deal of commitment and thought on the part of those involved, and the time has come to move from the conceptual stage to one of action. Support and approval from the respective governing Boards and Councils is now being sought in order to move forward.

This document has been developed to provide the rationale for the proposed direction and to outline the steps required to move forward in developing an integrated service delivery model for Halton.

It also builds on and complements the vision and plan developed by the *Our Kids Committee – Early Years*, which looks at the specific outcomes of children 0-6 years.

"The best integration starts within the community. The BBBF project is based on two key principles: community involvement and service provider integration.

The project co-ordinator played an important role in facilitating service provider involvement."

Building Bridges: Service Provider Involvement in
Better Beginnings, Better Futures

The vision of the Our Kids Committee - Early Years is that Halton is a vibrant healthy community in which all children thrive and reach their full potential.

Halton Vision for Children Phase 11 Report,
January, 2004

Further, it fits well with the strategic direction of the community organizations involved to partner and work collaboratively with each other.

On a provincial level, this initiative dovetails with provincial direction; for example with Choices for Action at the Ministry of Education and the mandate to provide comprehensive school health services and programs for the Regional Health Department.

Halton is also not alone in its endeavours to develop an integrated service delivery system. Other provinces, such as British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan are embarking on similar initiatives.

Working together is not new for the key Halton stakeholders involved, but this initiative is taking collaboration to the next level and will require commitment from all involved.

However, the end results will more than compensate for the effort required when our children and youth are realizing their full potential and our services and programs are delivered in a cost-efficient and effective manner, as there is a cost to staying with the status quo.

This initiative has the potential to create a win-win situation for all involved and could serve as a template for further multi-disciplinary approaches to service delivery.

In choosing community partners, schools should build on existing links with their local communities and create new partnerships in their delivery of guidance and career education, e.g. short-term counselling and community-based learning.

Choices for Action, Ministry of Education

Across Saskatchewan social workers, educators, health, justice and community workers are exploring new ways of working with their clients, communities and with one another. Their aim is to enhance the effectiveness of the services they provide by engaging the people they serve in identifying needs and solutions. As well, by working collaboratively with one another, they are seeking to provide services that are more co-ordinated and integrated.

Saskatchewan Human Services: Working with Communities, 2000

There is a cost, "in human and fiscal terms, associated with the unmet needs of school-aged children, which is at epidemic proportions (school drop outs, unemployment, welfare, crime) as is the fragmentation of services aimed at slivers of these problems."

Sewing The Seams, 2001

As Helen Keller once said, "Alone we can do so little, but together we can achieve so much."

Submitted by:

Halton Catholic District School Board
Halton Child and Youth Services
Halton Children's Aid Society
Halton District School Board
Halton Region Departments of Health and Social and Community Services.
Halton Regional Police Services
Transitions for Youth



scs@region.halton.on.ca
www.region.halton.on.ca/scs/cs/okn.htm