

March 30, 2022

Memorandum to: District School Boards, Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs)
District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs)
Child Care Licensees

From: Jennifer Morris
Assistant Deputy Minister
Children with Special Needs Division, MCCSS

Holly Moran
Assistant Deputy Minister
Early Years and Child Care Division, EDU

Clayton La Touche
Assistant Deputy Minister
Student Support and Field Services Division, EDU

Re: SmartStart Hubs: connecting families to child development services

On behalf of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) and the Ministry of Education (EDU), we are pleased to share information regarding the modernization of early intervention and special needs services funded by MCCSS, specifically the implementation of new *SmartStart Hubs: connecting families to child development services* (SmartStart Hubs).

Early Intervention and Special Needs Modernization

In 2021, the Ontario government announced new investments to support children and youth with special needs with earlier access to assessments and clinical services. In alignment with the objectives of this work, the launch of SmartStart Hubs will connect children, youth, and their families to appropriate assessments and services as early as possible.

SmartStart Hubs

Currently, Children's Treatment Centres deliver community and school-based rehabilitation services, including speech and language pathology, occupational therapy and physiotherapy, to children and youth with a range of special needs.

In the coming weeks, Children's Treatment Centres (CTCs) across the province, and Surrey Place Centre in Toronto, in collaboration with the relevant local organizations that are receiving this memo, will begin to plan for the implementation and delivery of new SmartStart Hubs functions across the province.

Once fully implemented, SmartStart Hubs, working collaboratively with local organizations, will connect families with child development services by providing a clear point of entry for families with concerns about their child's development and/or day-to-day functioning related to development. SmartStart Hubs will deliver a provincially consistent approach to understanding children's strengths and needs to inform earlier and appropriate connections to local services.

SmartStart Hubs will be available to families with concerns about their children's development who are not sure what their children's support needs are or, what services to seek, and who would benefit from an exploratory discussion about their children's development, strengths and support needs. The SmartStart Hub will not be a mandatory access point for child development and special needs services.

The SmartStart Hubs Policy and Practice Guidelines attached to this memo, outline the service delivery requirements for the SmartStart Hubs and will help to guide implementation of the SmartStart Hubs functions. Implementation of the SmartStart Hubs functions will be phased beginning in April 2022. All 22 SmartStart Hubs are expected to be fully implemented and delivering services to families across Ontario in Fall 2022.

Each CTC, and Surrey Place, will serve its respective catchment area, including Indigenous children, youth and families and other diverse communities, with culturally safe services. The SmartStart Hubs functions will use an approach that is strengths-based, and trauma-informed, and centred on the goals and needs of the child and family.

Establishing Partnerships

The implementation of SmartStart Hubs functions will require partnerships across sectors serving children and youth and their families. As district school boards, child care centres, and EarlyON centres also support children and families who may have concerns about their children's development, SmartStart Hubs are expected to work with your organizations to ensure that you have information to connect families to SmartStart Hubs when appropriate. These partnerships are expected to be informal for awareness and information sharing purposes, and not requiring the development of formal partnership agreements.

For more information about the partnership development role of SmartStart Hubs, please see pages 39-43 of the attached SmartStart Hubs Policy and Practice Guidelines. Please feel free to share the guidelines with your staff.

MCCSS has also shared these guidelines with relevant MCCSS-funded providers that are expected to establish formal partnerships with SmartStart Hubs, including agencies delivering programs including: Preschool Speech and Language, Infant Hearing, Blind-Low Vision, Infant and Child Development, Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Coordinated Service Planning, Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnostic Hubs and Local Access Mechanisms.

MCCSS is also working with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education to share information about the new SmartStart Hubs functions with cross-sectoral service providers, including child and youth mental health providers, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) diagnostic clinics, and Home and Community Care Support Services organizations and service system managers for child care and early years, who will play an important role in helping families connect to the SmartStart Hubs when they have a concern about their children's development.

In addition to sharing these guidelines with the providers listed above, MCCSS will post the guidelines in French and English on the MCCSS website in the coming weeks.

Thank you for your ongoing collaboration and shared interest in supporting families to make early and seamless connections to appropriate assessments and services. The implementation of SmartStart Hubs provides an exciting opportunity to further clarify local pathways and improve access for families with concerns about their child's development who might not otherwise know where to go for support.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Morris

Holly Moran

Clayton La Touche

Attachment

c: General Secretary, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)
Chair, Ontario Council of Educational Workers (OCEW)
Chair, Education Workers' Alliance of Ontario (EWAO)
Executive Director, Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)
General Secretary, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
Executive Director, Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
Co-ordinator, Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario (CUPE-ON)
Executive Director, Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO)
Executive Director, Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO)
Executive Director, Ontario Principals' Council (OPC)
Regional Directors, MCCSS
Claudine Munroe, Director, Special Education / Success for All Branch, EDU
Maureen Ennis, Director, Programs & Service Integration Branch, EDU
Jane Cleve, Director, Child Development and Special Services Branch, MCCSS