



## Guidelines on Prekindergarten Selection Criteria, Processes and Considerations

### Background:

Prekindergarten is a targeted program prioritizing three- and four- year- old children living in vulnerable circumstances in the community. Research demonstrates that high quality early learning programs, such as Prekindergarten, have both short and long term benefits in the lives of children. To provide maximum benefit to children, class size is limited to 16 spaces with a teacher and a Prekindergarten associate in the class. The lower numbers of children allows for a one to eight adult to child ratio. Currently there is more demand than available spaces in Saskatchewan.

In order to maximize early learning spaces in a community and effectively meet the early learning needs of children and families, it is strongly recommended that school divisions establish Prekindergarten selection criteria and processes. The selection criteria and processes should optimize the opportunity for children living in vulnerable circumstances in the community while avoiding duplication of services and funding.

### Guidelines for Selection Process

All applications and referrals for Prekindergarten should go through a selection process established by the school division. The process should be transparent to the community. Having a clear process will assist in explaining to families why they were/not selected. The ministry recommends a selection team to prioritize applications and waiting lists. The selection is done using the established criteria based on risk factors and vulnerabilities of the child and family. Those with the highest risks should receive priority. School divisions may wish to weight the criteria.

### Selection Criteria

In *Better Beginnings, Better Futures* (2008 edition) vulnerability is defined broadly, including:

- Family has low socio-economic status
- Mother has less than a high school education
- Home language other than English
- Mother is young and unmarried
- Lone parent
- Child abuse or neglect
- Child/family isolation
- Child experiencing challenges in areas such as social-emotional and language development.

In addition to vulnerability factors, other selection considerations include:

- Child's access to other early learning opportunities such as child care, preschool or Aboriginal Head Start
- Number of transitions in the day for the child
- Balance within the classroom, such as gender, age, abilities
- Referral from partner agencies
- Family commitment to the program and child's attendance
- Neighbourhood school of the child

School divisions may add other vulnerability factors depending on the needs in the communities they serve to create Prekindergarten selection criteria.

### **Considerations for selection**

Sometimes children in vulnerable circumstances have access to other community services or programs such as a community preschool, an Aboriginal Head Start or licensed child care. In these cases the selection team may decide that it is in the best interest of the child to stay in that program. An objective of the selection committee should be to have as many young children in the community as possible access high quality early learning experiences whether in Prekindergarten, child care, preschool or Aboriginal Head Start.

To maximize early learning spaces, the selection team will need to consider:

- How many risk factors/vulnerabilities impact the child and family based on the school division selection criteria?
- Do the parents have a strong connection to the school? Prekindergarten serves to welcome parents to the school – would this be particularly important to the child and family? If the child attends a child care or preschool located in the school and there is a strong connection between the school and child care this may not be a factor for the child.
- Are there children in the community with no access to early learning?
- Is this the most appropriate program for this individual child?
- What needs and placement preferences does the family identify?

### **Community Inventory of Early Learning Opportunities**

In developing programming and services to meet the needs of young children, it is valuable for school divisions to collaborate with community partners in the early learning and child care sector. An initial step is to develop a current inventory of high quality early childhood programs and options for early learners within the communities of the school division. This inventory could include information such as:

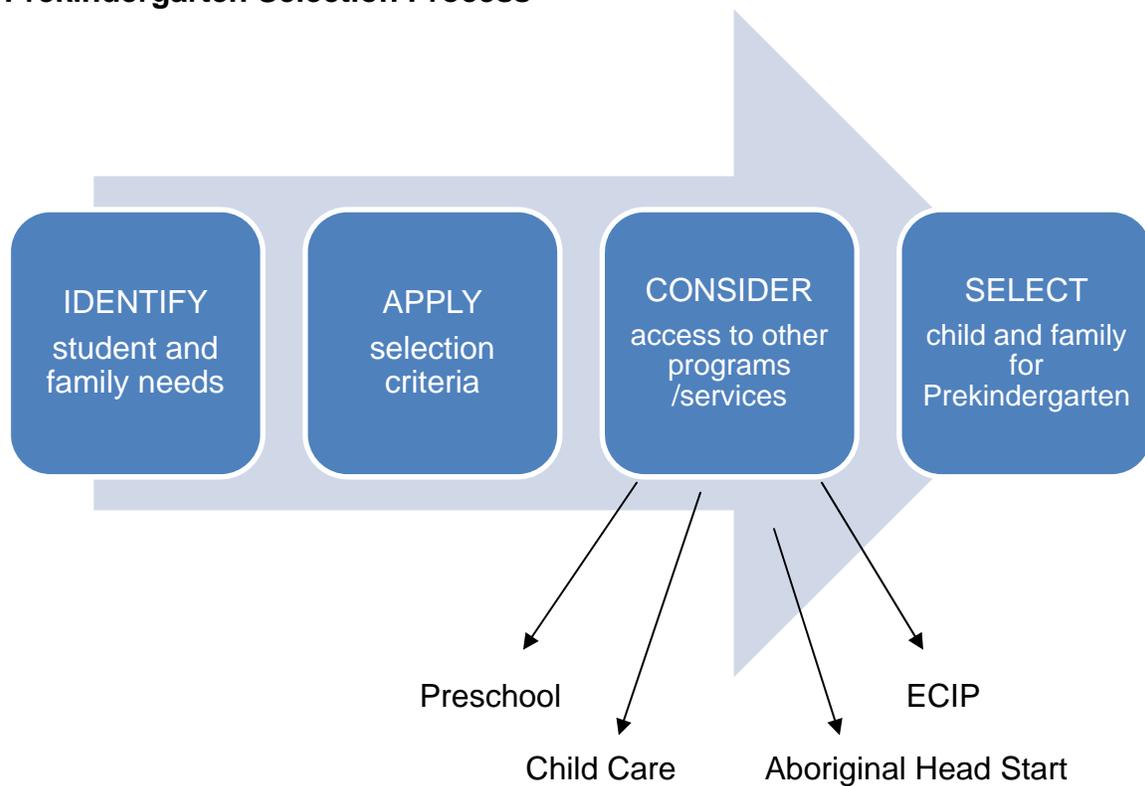
- admission criteria and mandate of programs

- physical location of early childhood programs (child care centres, community preschools/playschools, Aboriginal Head Start programs and Prekindergarten programs)
- number of spaces available in the programs,
- contact information for directors,
- services provided,
- qualification of staff
- consideration of sibling attendance/school involvement
- hours of operation,
- accessibility of the building,
- transportation available,
- other information that would assist a team in determining whether such a program would meet the needs of children.

This inventory will need to be updated regularly.

The following diagram could be used by the committee for selection and as a tool to talk to parents.

### Prekindergarten Selection Process



A clearly communicated selection process is facilitated through collaboration of the school division and other early learning services within the community to maximize early learning opportunities for children and to prevent duplication of services.

### **Early Entrance Supports**

*The Education Act, 1995* and *The Education Regulations, 1986* continue to permit boards of education the opportunity to provide educational programming for children identified with intensive needs who are three years of age or older.

The Inclusion and Intervention Planning Document (IIP) is utilized to develop programming and services for early school entrance children with intensive needs. These children have learning needs that impact on numerous areas of development and require intense and frequent supports as documented in their IIP.

Following delineation of community supports available, referrals for early entrance supports are sent to a designate of the school division. This individual, in collaboration with the family and a team of professionals supporting the child and his/her family (Health Professionals, Social Services Support Personnel, Community Supports), completes the IIP to identify the child's intensive needs. Following completion of the profile, the team continues to plan and establish goals for the child. Following the establishment of needs and associated goals, the team can review the array of community early childhood programs available to meet the needs of the child. As much as possible, the child's needs should be matched with the community support(s) available. This process is summarized in the diagram on page 5.

All children, including those who have been identified as benefitting from early entrance supports should go through the same prekindergarten selection process (see page 3). If they meet the selection criteria, further evaluation is needed to determine whether Prekindergarten is the best fit for the children.

