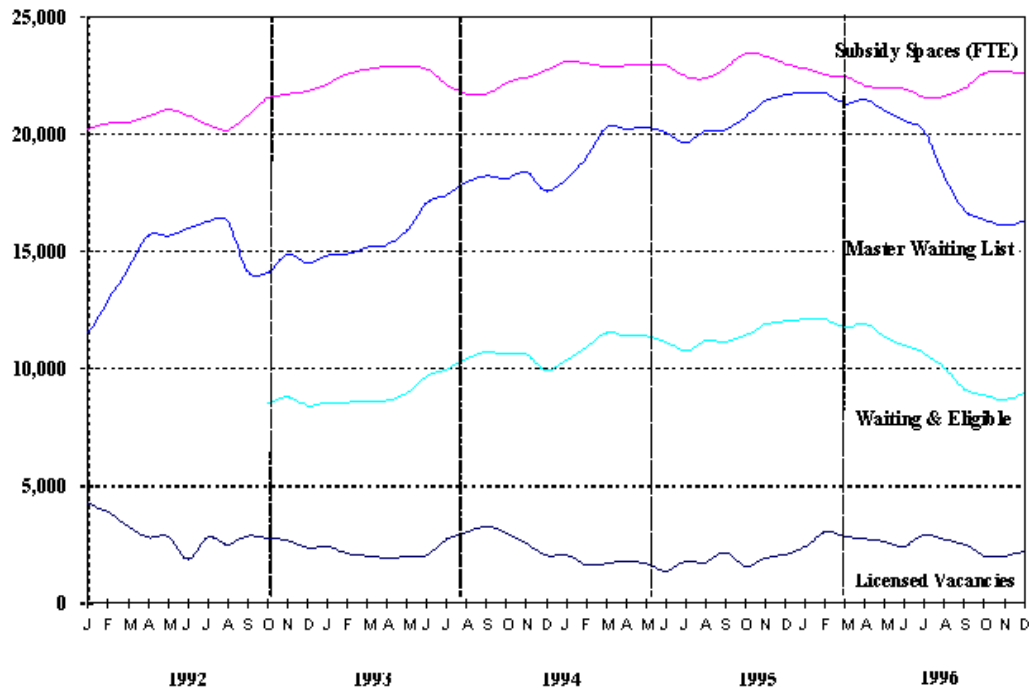

LEARNING

INDICATOR TYPE: Social

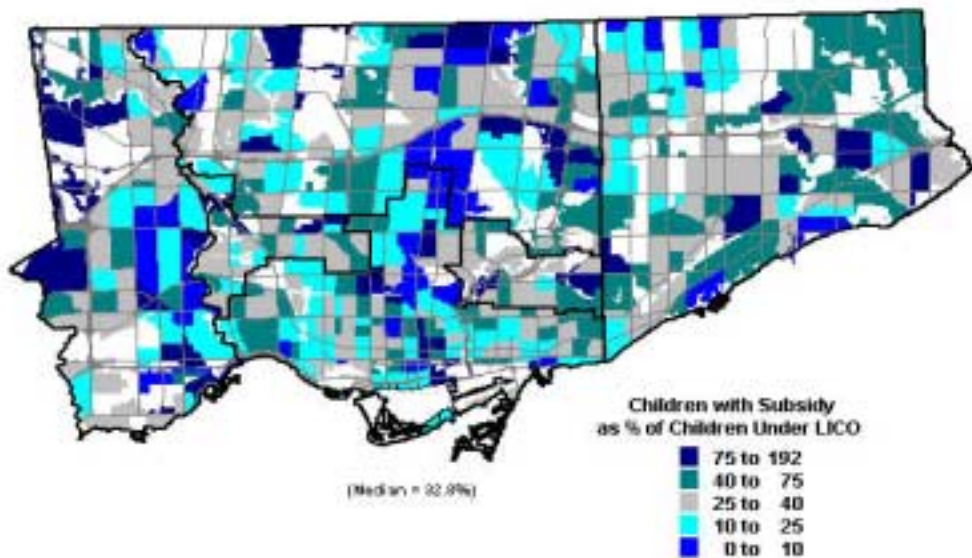
DOMAIN: Learning / Learning Supports

Approximately 37,000 Toronto area children enjoy daily access to formal childcare programs—35,000 are in licensed group centres and the remainder in supervised home childcare. In 1996 the municipality subsidized the cost of childcare for 22,916 children in over 16,000 families. By the end of 1997 the number of subsidies is expected to increase to 23,720. A large-scale survey of over 4,000 families carried out in 1993 determined that in Metropolitan Toronto area there is need for about 87,000 licensed childcare spaces and almost 47,000 subsidized spaces. Of the currently existing programs there are 265 childcare programs located in schools. Of these, 245 have school-age programs (These are programs designed for children of school going age which need supervision in the hours just before school begins or end). There are a further 126 school-age programs that are not located in schools.

Unlike other services, subsidized childcare is delivered on the basis of a service plan that was approved by the Metropolitan Council in 1993. The plan allocates subsidies on the basis of the proportions of children financially eligible for subsidy in each of Metro's 28 wards. The plan also promotes increased access for the youngest children. Infants and toddlers make the largest group on the subsidy waiting list due mainly due to an inadequate supply of licensed supply of spaces. Currently the municipality purchases services from approximately 500 childcare centers and 11 home childcare agencies. An additional 80 centres do not have purchase of service agreements with the municipality, either because they do not wish to accept subsidized children, or they do not meet Metro's operating criteria or do not fit within the parameters of the service plan. (see the table below)



Recent experience suggests that the service plan does not necessarily ensure equitable access on small-area basis. The following map demonstrates that there are widely differing levels of access within the larger Metro ward areas.



A survey of childcare needs and preferences showed that, assuming the availability of service, most parents would clearly choose licensed childcare over any other type of care (with the obvious exception of being able to care for their own children at home). In particular, only ten percent of

parents who use some form of informal childcare arrangements would do so if other alternatives were available to them. The need for childcare arrangements provided by individuals other than the parents, is often dependant on the type of supports or benefits available to parents particularly Maternity and Parental leaves, and the age at which Kindergarten programs begin.

The Federal government’s Employment Insurance Benefits program gives those who are eligible 15 weeks for maternity leave and 10 weeks for parental leave (shared between the parents or used by one parent) at 55% of wages up to a ceiling. However, job-guaranteed leaves fall under the jurisdiction of provincial governments. Combined maternity and parental leave range from 18 weeks in Alberta to 122 weeks in Quebec. The Federal government announced in 1999 that it intends to improve the parental benefits package.

Another major factor is age at which kindergarten begins in Ontario it is no longer required for school boards to provide four-year-olds with kindergarten, although some boards still do offer kindergarten to this age group.

First Preference for Child Care Arrangement (Percentage of children)

1 st Preference is	For Parents Whose Current Care is...						
	Parent	Relative	Nanny/ Babysitter at home	Informal Home Care	Licensed Home Care	Child Care Centre	Before/After School
Parent	79	49	47	54	54	38	32
Relative	2	25	2	5	2	2	5
Nanny/Babysitter	2	6	43	8	2	3	5
Informal Home Care	0	1	1	10	3	0	0
Formal Home Care	2	2	1	3	23	2	4
Child Care Centre	11	7	2	10	15	51	8
B/A School Program	4	10	4	11	2	3	46

Figure 4
Subsidized child care demand and supply

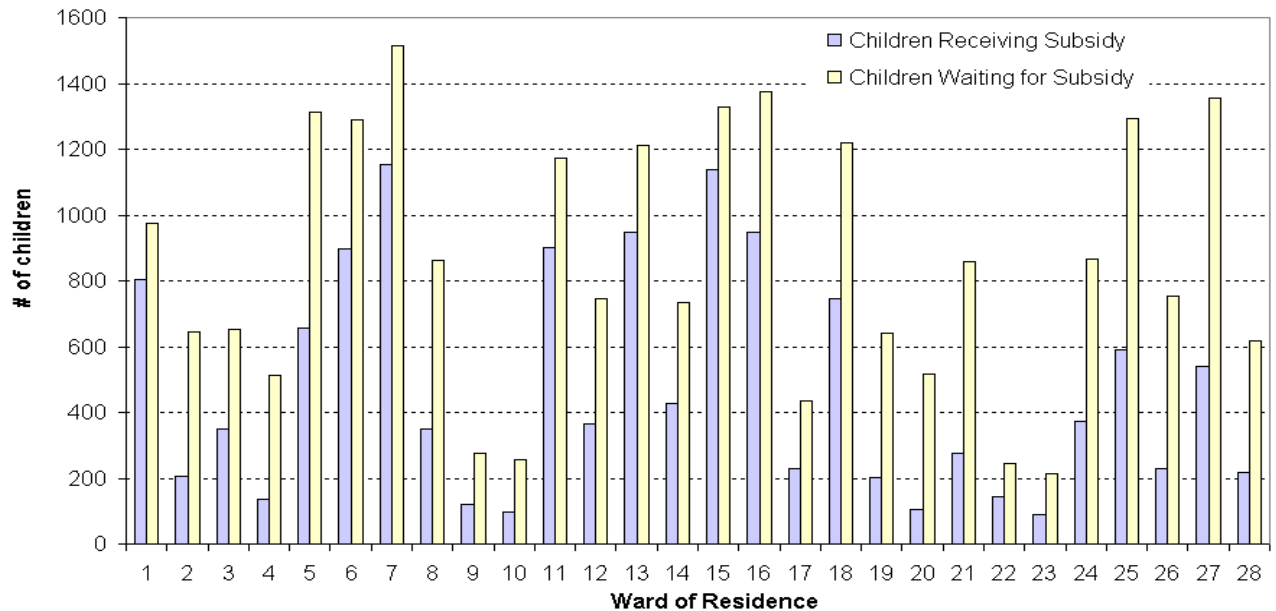
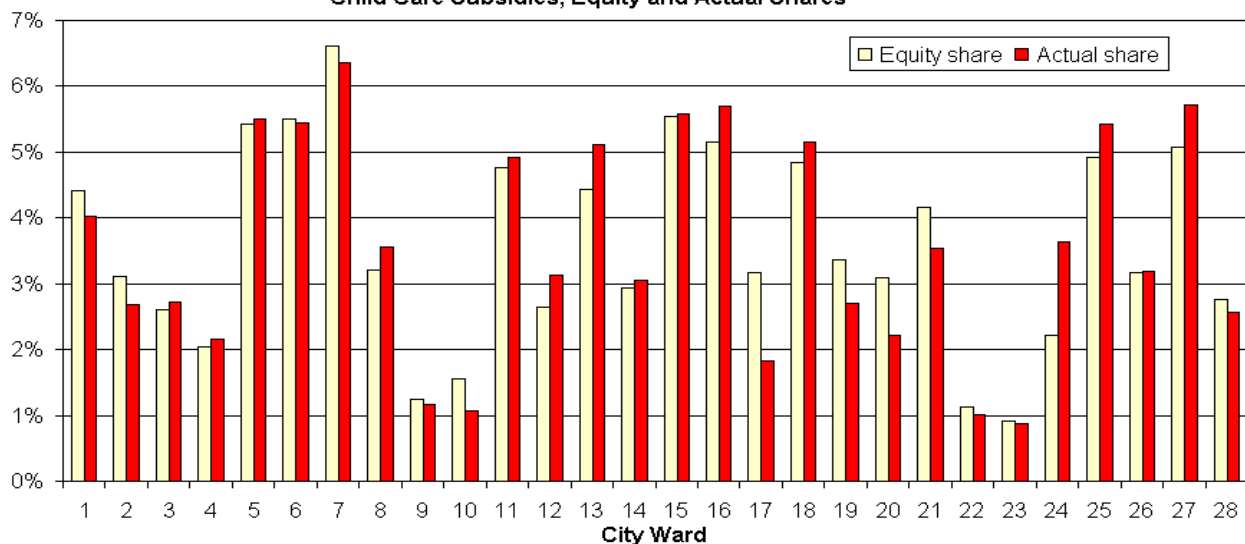


Figure 5
Child Care Subsidies, Equity and Actual Shares



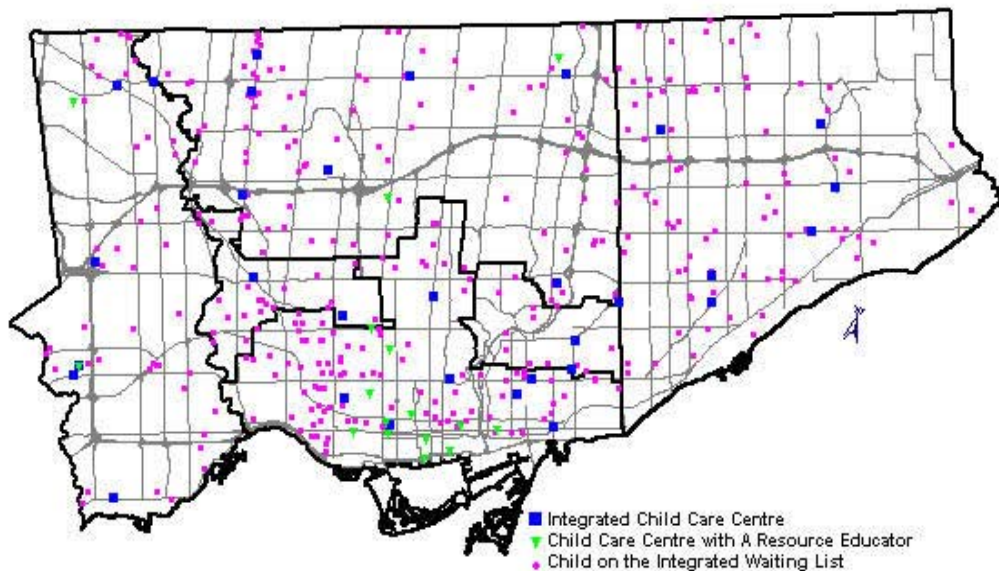
There are a large number of school-age children who require part-time care during most of the year and full-day care during the school breaks, including summer holidays and PA days. An estimated 40 percent of school-age children under 10 years of age are left unattended for at least a part of every day. Most, school boards offer some type of before- and after-school programs, and only one (Toronto Board of Education) offers these programs free of charge. In addition, these programs usually run for around 20 weeks out of every school year, leaving almost one half of school days without any programming options for parents. This type of sporadic holiday childcare can be the most difficult to find and some of the most expensive, primarily as the demand is high and facilities which offer other types of childcare programs do not keep enough qualified staff on hand to suddenly increase their numbers.

Another group whose childcare needs are being unmet are emergency or short term arrangements such as when a child is sick or if the usual care giver is unable to provide care such as in a family emergency. Jordan's 1987 study of American children, found that parents can expect an infant to be sick nine to ten times a year with a respiratory illness such as a cold or the flu and a preschool child would tend to have such illnesses six to seven times each year (Flexible Child Care in Canada, 1994, 16). Scadding Court Community Centre in Toronto is one facility which does provide this type of care on a short term emergency basis. Several European countries have attempted to deal with this issue by implementing family responsibility leave and making it a statutory right. Unfortunately in Canada there is not such general provision except for those workers who are entitled to it through collective agreements.

Similarly, both shift workers and those living on the periphery of urban centers often find suitable childcare arrangements difficult to arrange because of long commutes or demand for unusual hours. It is also noteworthy that a number of programs; including the Loyal True Blue and Orange Day Care Centre (Richmondhill Ontario) which were originally intended to offer 24-hour care, now only provide evening care, because either the demand was too low or costs were too high to continue overnight care. Metro Children's Services in Toronto does continue to run a small number of homes which offer overnight care.

Current government childcare policies often deny childcare access to many of the children who are most in need of it. Except in special circumstances such as family emergency or child protection cases, children can only receive subsidies if their parents are unemployed or going to school. Many children who would most benefit from the development aspect of the service cannot attend simply because their parents are not eligible.

In addition to the regular services, 28 municipal centres and two private centres provide integrated services to children with physical and developmental handicaps. The total capacity of these programs is 120 spaces and there is a substantial waiting list. (See the map below)



Children with minor handicaps and special resourcing needs are routinely accommodated within existing childcare centres. In some cases the Ministry of Community and Social Services or the United Way provides additional funding for resources teachers. However, there is no coordinated approach to funding services for children with special needs within the existing childcare system