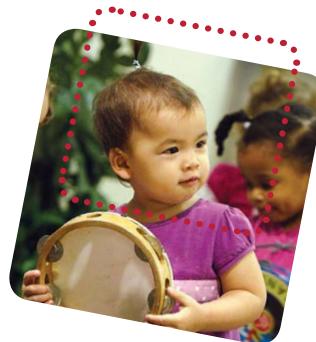
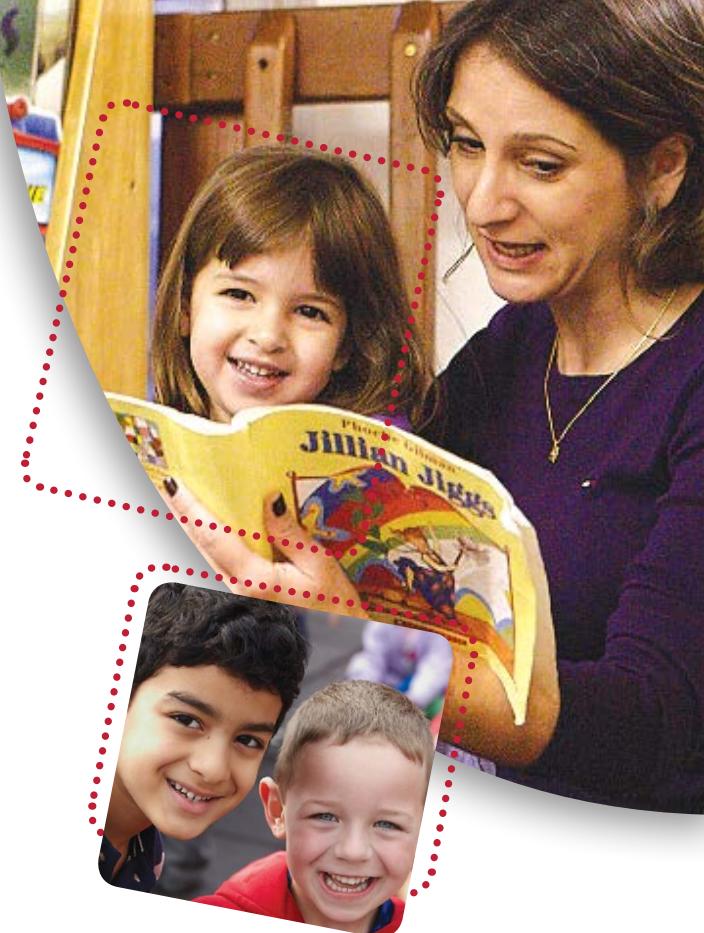


2013

# Ontario Early Years Policy Framework





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## Introduction

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### *Our Vision for the Early Years*

*Ontario’s children and families are well supported by a system of responsive, high-quality, accessible, and increasingly integrated early years programs and services that contribute to healthy child development today and a stronger future tomorrow.*

Ontario is emerging as a leader in the delivery of early years programs and services. With the province-wide introduction of full-day kindergarten, Ontario is at the forefront of a global transformation in early learning. Efforts to modernize child care and to create Best Start Child and Family Centres are also transforming the way programs and services are delivered, leading to better outcomes for children and a more seamless experience for families.

Ontario’s current early years services are robust and responsive. Every day, thousands of children and their families receive quality care and support from early years professionals in diverse communities across the province. While there is still fragmentation among and between services and service gaps, we are moving in the right direction. Now is the time to build on the positive steps we have taken over the last ten years to ensure we are harnessing the full capacity available to provide the best services and respond to the busy lives of Ontario families.

The Ontario Early Years Policy Framework builds on our collective progress and provides a vision for the early years to ensure children, from birth to age six, have the best possible start in life. The framework is supported by a set of principles and is meant to provide strategic direction to our early years partners both within and outside of government. Moving forward, the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework will guide our collective approach to the development and delivery of early years programs and services for children and families.

This framework also identifies priority areas for action.

Our immediate focus will be to:

- continue with the implementation of full-day kindergarten by September 2014;
- create an effective approach to implementing Best Start Child and Family Centres by September 2014;
- improve the delivery of speech and language services;
- stabilize and transform the child care sector.

A common framework and approach will have far-reaching benefits for children, parents,<sup>1</sup> families and caregivers, and early years partners, including municipalities, First Nations, school boards, and other community partners, as well as for Ontario as a whole.



Children will benefit from:

- being engaged in meaningful exploration and play-based learning;
- forming relationships with one another as they develop physical, emotional, and social skills;
- reflecting and valuing their culture and individual abilities as they develop cognitive and language/communication skills;
- participating in high-quality programs and services that provide stimulating, healthy, and nurturing environments from the earliest stages in life;
- easier and more timely access to other community programs and services;
- having their developmental progress monitored and programs adapted to meet their needs.

Parents, families, and caregivers will benefit from:

- receiving supports that enhance their confidence and ability to nurture their children's healthy development;
- forming connections with other parents and caregivers in their community;
- knowing that their children are in high-quality programs, delivered by qualified staff and leaders;

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<sup>1</sup> In this document the term "parents" is intended to include all individuals who provide the primary love, care, guidance, and support to children.

- easier access to information and timely referral to other community programs and services;
- knowing where to go to get the help they need, when they need it;
- receiving quality support in language acquisition, cultural identity, and respect.

Early years partners and service providers will benefit from:

- utilizing their skills and training to provide environments and experiences that support children and families;
- a coordinated and integrated approach that ensures programs and services are more responsive and adaptable to local needs;
- greater collaboration, expanded networks, and reduced silos and duplication;
- strong and purposeful partnerships that help maximize financial and human resources;
- contributing to the vitality of Ontario's diverse communities including newcomers, francophones, Aboriginal people, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

Ontarians will benefit from:

- coordinated investments, planning, and services that maximize value from public spending and increase responsiveness;
- improved data collection, reporting, and accountability of programs and services;
- investments in the early years that improve life for Ontarians today and in the future, promote sustainability, and contribute to the growth of the economy.

## Why Are the Early Years Important?

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*Children's experiences early in life have a profound and long-lasting impact on their future development and well-being.*

**T**

he early years are a period of intense learning and development, when tremendous changes occur in the brain over a short period of time. In the first year of life, the architecture of the brain takes shape at an astounding rate – approximately 700 new neural connections are being built *per second*. Scientists now know that this process is not genetically predetermined, but is in fact

dramatically influenced by children's early experiences with people and their surroundings.<sup>2</sup>

Studies show that positive early years experiences lead to improved determinants of health, resulting in better social, economic, and health outcomes throughout the life cycle. The economic benefits of investments in the early years are also well-documented. Economist and Nobel laureate James Heckman calculates a seven-to-one return on public investment in programs for young children.<sup>3</sup> More recently, TD Bank Chief Economist, Craig Alexander, noted that the widespread and long-lasting benefits of early childhood education programs far outweigh the costs.<sup>4</sup>

With so much potential to make a positive difference in the early years, it is imperative that we take a coordinated and thoughtful approach to the programs and services we provide. The Ontario Early Years Policy Framework builds on the immense progress made to date to support Ontario's children and their families in the early years. The framework:

- outlines a shared vision to help us better support children's learning and development from birth to age six;
- focuses on easy access to quality programs and services;
- moves towards an increasingly seamless service experience for children and families.

## Building on Progress to Date

**S**ince 2003, Ontario has made great strides in the effort to create a comprehensive early years system. In 2009, Dr. Charles Pascal, then the Premier's Advisor on Early Learning, released the report *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, which provided recommendations to move Ontario towards a more integrated, seamless early years system. Building on the advice presented in the report, the government took action to introduce full-day kindergarten for Ontario's four- and five-year-olds – the biggest transformation in our education system in a generation.



<sup>2</sup> Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2009). *In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Cambridge, Ma.: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Retrieved from <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>.

<sup>3</sup> Heckman, J. (2008). The case for investing in disadvantaged young children. In First Focus (Ed.), *Big Ideas for Children: Investing in Our Nation's Future*. Washington, DC: In Focus. pp. 49–58.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander, C. and Ignjatovic, D. (2012, November 27). Early Childhood Education Has Widespread and Long Lasting Benefits. TD Economics Special Report. Retrieved from [http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/di1112\\_EarlyChildhoodEducation.pdf](http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/di1112_EarlyChildhoodEducation.pdf).

The government also took initial steps to move forward on Dr. Pascal's recommendation to integrate child and family services and develop Best Start Child and Family Centres. Over 2010–11, the government consulted with a wide variety of individuals, communities, and stakeholder groups to seek input on a framework for Best Start Child and Family Centres. As well, an action research program was implemented to learn how to implement the Best Start Child and Family Centres concept in select Ontario communities. An innovations fund was also established to foster experiments in how to improve aspects of service delivery province-wide.

### ***The College of Early Childhood Educators***

In 2007, the Ontario government created the College of Early Childhood Educators – the first self-regulatory body in Canada overseeing a professional membership of early childhood educators. In addition to overseeing a public registry of early childhood educators, the college has succeeded in helping to professionalize the sector by establishing registration requirements, developing a professional code of ethics, and setting standards of practice that all registered early childhood educators are expected to meet.

To build better connections and improve coordination between early learning programs (such as full-day kindergarten) and child care, a new governance structure for early learning and child care was created under the Ministry of Education. This aligns Ontario with other cutting-edge jurisdictions around the world and supports the seamless and integrated provision of child care and education programs and services.

Most recently, the government made a commitment to modernize the child care system through the release of the *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario: Sharing Conversations, Strengthening Partnerships, Working Together* discussion paper in June 2012. Building on the feedback we received, we are actively taking steps to strengthen and transform the sector.

The Ontario Early Years Policy Framework is the next step in building a cohesive and coordinated early years system across the province. The framework complements other key government priorities and initiatives currently in place across a number of sectors. These include the Politique d'aménagement linguistique, Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Aboriginal Education Strategy, the Youth Action Plan, and the Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, as well as our work on bullying prevention and the reduction of childhood obesity.

# Guiding Principles to Support the Vision

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To support Ontario's vision for the early years, this framework is driven by four guiding principles:

- Programs and services are centred on the child and the family.
- Programs and services are of high quality.
- Strong partnerships are essential.
- Programs and services are publicly accountable.

## Child- and Family-Centred Programs and Services

Children and families always come first. Programs and services must be easy for parents to access, and the need for transitions between programs and services should be minimized. Early identification and intervention services must be available for children in need of supports. Programs and services must be culturally responsive and adaptable to local community needs.

### *Our Commitment to All Children*

*“What we want is to see the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child.”* – George Bernard Shaw

We view children as competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential. They grow up in families with diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. Every child should feel that he or she belongs, is a valuable contributor to his or her surroundings, and deserves the opportunity to succeed. When we recognize children as capable and curious, we are more likely to deliver programs and services that value and build on their strengths and abilities.



## Quality Programs and Services

High-quality programs and services can have an extraordinary and long-lasting impact on children's development. To achieve this, program approaches must be attuned to children's development; value children as creative, active learners; and demonstrate respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Also, early years professionals must be knowledgeable, responsive, and reflective, and continuous professional learning opportunities should be encouraged.



## ***Our Commitment to Quality***

Quality is a central component of the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework and programming will be guided by the principles of the *Early Learning Framework*:

- Early childhood sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour, health, and well-being.
- Play and inquiry are learning approaches that capitalize on children's natural curiosity and exuberance.
- An intentional, planned program supports learning and smooth transitions.
- Partnerships with families and communities are essential.
- Respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion is vital.
- Knowledgeable, responsive, and reflective educators are essential.

## **Strong Partnerships**

A common provincial framework can guide action, but change will not be possible without the shared commitment and participation of many different partners. Strong and sustainable partnerships must be built on a commitment to recognize unique strengths and work towards common goals and outcomes. In the French-language minority setting, strong culturally sensitive partnerships are a cornerstone of the community's vitality. Strategic collaboration among all levels of government, First Nations, school boards, and other community partners must be led by a commitment to provide high-quality programs and services for children and their families. Collaboration must also seek to maximize financial and human resources.



## ***Our Commitment to Partnerships***

### **The Role of Municipalities**

At the municipal level, Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards act as system managers to plan and deliver community-based early years programs and services governed and funded by the Ministry of Education.

As local experts, municipalities are attuned to the complex and often differing needs of the communities they serve. They provide leadership to local service providers, school boards, and community partners; break down barriers; and establish connections between programs and services. Many guide local planning tables and find other innovative ways to connect and work with community partners.

Today, and even more so in the future, our ability to improve system integration will depend on municipalities taking a lead role in working with partners, including school boards and community service providers, to initiate and sustain locally based planning and development under the shared vision of the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework.

### **The Role of First Nations**

Many First Nations in Ontario administer locally relevant early years services within their communities. As experts on the cultural and political landscape of their communities, it is important to ensure that First Nations play an active role in the development and approach to early years programs that meet their local community needs.

The provincial and federal governments play a significant role in First Nations early years programming on reserve. Making progress for the benefit of First Nations children requires active partnership between First Nations and the provincial and federal governments. This is why the Ontario government has committed to a formal tripartite process with First Nations and federal partners to discuss child care and early learning programs on reserve and ensure that First Nations children can access the supports and services they need to succeed. Significant progress, however, cannot be achieved without our federal partners.





## The Role of School Boards

With full-day kindergarten soon to be available in all of Ontario's publicly funded schools by September 2014, school boards are increasingly becoming active agents of early years program planning and delivery. With the introduction of the government's Schools-First Child Care Capital Retrofit Policy in 2012, school boards are playing an even greater role in integrating and coordinating early years programs and providing an environment where services can be co-located for the convenience of parents and families.

As important community hubs, schools play a key role in identifying local needs and priorities. This is especially the case in French-language school boards that have a unique mandate under the Politique d'aménagement linguistique. In francophone communities across the province, early years programs are instrumental for the acquisition of culture and language. For many years, French-language school boards have offered full-day programs for four- and five-year-olds and led the development of programs designed from a community perspective to reach children at the earliest stages in life. With creative partnerships underway, many early years programs in francophone communities promote a schools-first approach and provide an excellent example of what program integration can look like. An increase in student enrolment and consistent improvement in student success bear witness to the importance of a coordinated approach to the early years.

Moving forward, school boards, working with other early years partners, will continue to play an important role in shaping local early years services and advancing the vision of the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework.

## The Role of Community Partners

In addition to municipalities and school boards, other community partners continue to play an important role working both inside and outside school settings. Many long-standing community organizations provide dedicated, caring, and quality services for children, including children with a range of abilities. As a result of their day-to-day interaction with families and other service providers, they are experts in the needs of their communities and knowledgeable about the programs and services available. In some instances, as is the case in francophone communities for example, organizations have formed collaborative partnerships to design and deliver programs that address gaps in services.

Community organizations also offer unique perspectives, as they understand the specific needs of the unique populations they serve. For example, our Aboriginal, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit partners are best positioned to understand the unique landscape and needs of Aboriginal early years settings.

As we move forward, early years partners must continue to come together to engage in dialogue and partnerships with the goal of creating a shared culture and commitment to quality and convenience – for families first – regardless of where the program or service is physically located.



## Public Accountability

A shared accountability framework supports partners and service providers by establishing common language and progress measures for early years programs and services. The collection of meaningful data is an important feature of an accountability framework and enables evidence-based planning, decision making, and program evaluation. It also facilitates a regular cycle of public reporting to highlight achievements, value for money, and areas for improvement.

### *Our Commitment to Accountability*

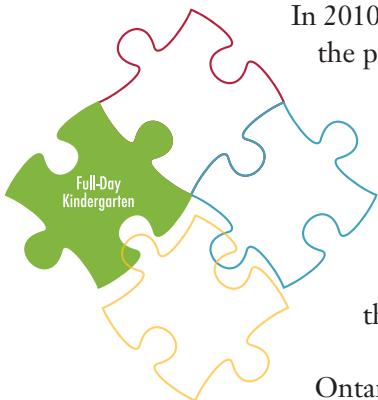
We will work to build a shared accountability structure for early years programs and services and set the groundwork for program monitoring and public reporting. This will allow us to better document child outcomes across programs and services and understand what is and what is not working, so that programs and services can better meet the needs of children and families.



## Priority Areas for Action

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### 1. Continue with the implementation of full-day kindergarten



In 2010, the government began transforming Ontario's education system with the province-wide introduction of full-day kindergarten. The program is designed to give children a stronger start in school and in life by helping them develop valuable skills that give them every opportunity to succeed. Supported by provincial investments, full-day kindergarten is being phased in over a five-year period and now reaches approximately 122,000 children or nearly half of Ontario's four- and five-year-olds. When fully implemented by 2014, the program will reach approximately 250,000 children.

Ontario's full-day kindergarten program is unique. For the first time in the history of education in this province, teachers and early childhood educators are working together in teams to deliver a full day of play-based learning guided by the principles set out in *The Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten Program* (Draft Version, 2010–11), which incorporates the concepts presented in the *Early Learning Framework*. Full-day kindergarten also involves integrated before- and after-school programs (subject to parental demand) delivered on school sites by school boards or licensed child care providers. This unique feature is convenient for parents and provides them with the peace of mind that their children are well looked after in rich, stimulating environments.

So far, we are seeing a strong impact from full-day kindergarten. Preliminary results indicate that full-day kindergarten is contributing to improvements in children's language and cognitive development, social competence, as well as communication and general knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Moving forward*

As a key part of the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework, we will continue to implement full-day kindergarten and ensure that all four- and five-year-olds are able to attend the program by 2014.

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<sup>5</sup> These findings are consistent with the findings of researchers in the field of education. See J. Pelleter, *Key Findings from Year 1 of Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten in Peel* (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 2012).

As we move forward, we will continue to work with school boards to ensure that teachers and early childhood educators are well supported in their roles. We will also revise *The Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten Program* to incorporate learning from the first three years of implementation.

### **Full-day kindergarten milestones at a glance**

Full-day kindergarten for all four- and five-year-olds in Ontario is being phased in over a five-year period from 2010 to 2014.

- *September 2010:* 35,000 four- and five-year-olds – approximately 15 per cent of the province’s total kindergarten population – participate in the first year of the program.
- *September 2011:* 50,000 four- and five-year-olds – approximately 20 per cent of all kindergarten children – participate in the program.
- *September 2012:* 122,000 four- and five-year-olds – approximately 49 per cent of all kindergarten children – participate in the program.
- *September 2013:* 184,000 four- and five-year-olds – approximately 75 per cent of all kindergarten children – participate in the program.
- *September 2014:* Full-day kindergarten is fully implemented and available to all of Ontario’s four- and five-year-olds.



## *With Ontario leading the way, the Council of Ministers of Education endorses play-based learning*

The Council of Ministers of Education believes that purposeful, play-based early learning sets the stage for future learning, health, and well-being. In the Council of Ministers of Education Statement on Play-Based Learning (2012), the council describes the benefits of play, as recognized by the scientific community, early learning experts, and children and families alike.

### **Learning through play is supported by science**

- Scientific evidence demonstrates that neural pathways in the brains of children are built through the exploration, thinking, problem solving, and language expression that occur during play.

### **Learning through play is supported by experts**

- Experts such as Lev Vygotsky identify play as a leading source of social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive development. Intentional play-based learning allows children to investigate, ask questions, solve problems, and engage in critical thinking.

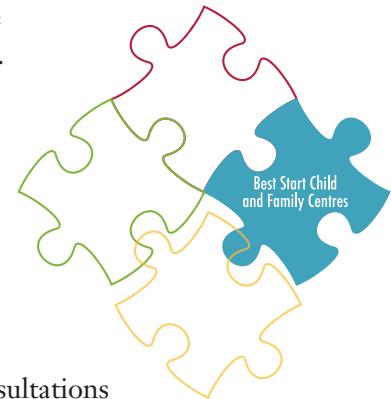
### **Learning through play is supported by children and families**

- Children themselves are naturally driven to play, and early learning through play often takes the form of manipulating objects, acting out roles, and experimenting with different materials.
- Parents also understand that play is valuable to development, allowing children to construct, challenge, and expand their understanding of the world around them.



## 2. Create an effective approach to implementing Best Start Child and Family Centres

The government is committed to helping give children the best possible start in life and helping parents balance the demands of work and family. That's why the government has invested approximately \$90 million per year in family support programs such as Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Child Care/Family Resource Centres, and Better Beginnings, Better Futures. These programs are an important part of local communities. They offer opportunities for children's early learning through play, support parents and families in their role as primary caregivers, and provide a variety of other services.



Despite the many benefits of family support programs, through our consultations on the concept of Best Start Child and Family Centres, we heard from parents and caregivers that they:

- find it difficult to navigate the current set of programs and services for young children;
- want a more streamlined and efficient service experience and want the resources in the system to be better utilized;
- have serious concerns about waiting for services and want access to consistent services regardless of where they live;
- rely on internet resources for information about programs and services and want timely access to a wide variety of community resources through an easily identifiable physical location or an up-to-date virtual website.

### *Moving forward*

As a key part of the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework, we will work with our partners to create an effective approach to implementing Best Start Child and Family Centres by September 2014. Informed by the advice in *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, this will involve:

- establishing a common governance structure for family support programs, child care, and full-day kindergarten by transferring responsibility for implementing Best Start Child and Family Centres to the Ministry of Education;
- establishing a common mandate and identity by using the current levels of investment to integrate family support programs in Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Child Care/Family Resource Centres, and Better Beginnings, Better Futures;
- creating a core set of expectations that identifies expected outcomes and services that families can expect to access;
- developing and maintaining strong and effective partnerships between early years service providers and ensuring communities have the flexibility they need to adapt services to meet local needs;

- working with First Nation partners and the federal government to build on existing programs and services on reserve;
- developing strategies and resources that support parents in making informed and timely decisions about services and supports for their children.

As we move forward with an effective approach to implementing Best Start Child and Family Centres, we will capitalize and build on existing successful practices, applicable action research and innovation fund results, collaborative efforts, and community networks, while leveraging the extensive knowledge and expertise of dedicated early years professionals and volunteers working in these programs. This is an important step in the development of an integrated and seamless early years system that meets the unique needs of diverse communities, including newcomers, francophones, Aboriginal people, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

### ***The Best Start Child and Family Centres will:***

- provide families and caregivers with universally accessible programs, services, and resources in easily accessible locations, and will be supported by an easy-to-use provincial website;
- provide quality programming that supports play and inquiry-based learning opportunities for children, guided by the principles of the *Early Learning Framework*;
- deliver programs led by qualified staff teams that include at least one registered early childhood educator;
- provide access to information and referral to help families access screening, assessment, and other specialized services in the community as needed;
- offer programs that are flexible and adaptable to local community needs.



## ***What families can expect from Best Start Child and Family Centres***

When parents, families, and other caregivers enter the doors of a Best Start Child and Family Centre, they will be welcomed into an intentionally structured, drop-in, play-based learning environment where all families can meet, share, play, and feel supported. Registered early childhood educators and other early years professionals will facilitate relationships and connections with children and their families. They will provide environments and experiences that engage children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration and play-based learning, and that help parents continue these experiences at home.

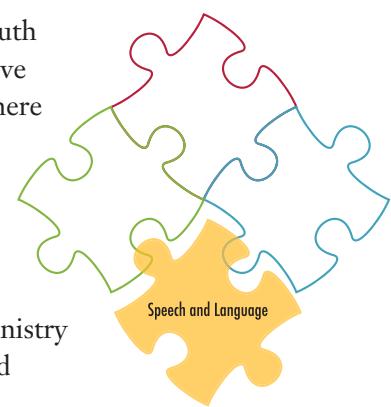
Trained staff will also support parents by providing them with the right information and supports at the right time. They will be available to answer questions and provide more specific direction on how to access various resources and services that can help them in the community, such as libraries, health care, family counselling, and children's development programs.

For families who need more intensive, specialized, or focused support in parenting or other assessment and intervention services, staff at the Best Start Child and Family Centres will provide information about, and help broker access to, other programs and services throughout the community.

## **3. Improve the delivery of speech and language services**

Currently, speech and language services are provided to children and youth through five different programs run by three different ministries. We have heard from parents and professionals that these services are fragmented, there are waitlists for both assessment and intervention services, and there are difficult transitions between community and school-based services.

We know that more can be done to improve the service experience for children and families accessing speech and language services. Last year, the three ministries responsible for the delivery of these services, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services together with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Education, launched a number of demonstration projects that will identify strengths, challenges, lessons learned, effective practices, and emerging considerations, which will help to improve the delivery of speech and language services for children across the province.

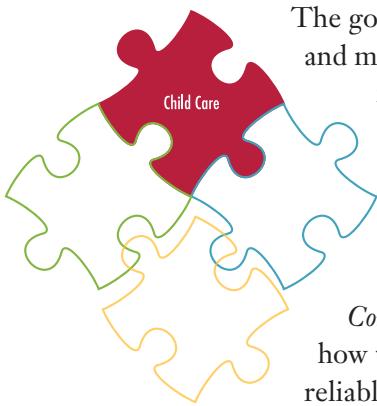


## Moving forward

As we move forward, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, working with partners across ministries and in communities, will re-engineer speech and language services to:

- improve service access for children and families;
- reduce unnecessary duplication of assessments;
- reduce fragmentation of services;
- create improved service continuity for children and families, for example, as they enter school.

## 4. Stabilize and transform the child care system



The government is committed to working with partners to transition and modernize the child care sector. While the provision of child care in Ontario has many strengths, we need to continue to develop a stronger, higher quality, and accessible system. That is why we recently announced additional investments to support the child care sector, bringing Ontario's investments in child care to more than \$1 billion – an increase of 90 per cent since 2003–04. We also released the discussion paper *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario: Sharing Conversations, Strengthening Partnerships, Working Together* to seek input on how to strengthen the child care sector to provide families with access to safe, reliable, and high-quality child care services. From this discussion paper, we received excellent advice on how to move forward.

The government is taking the next steps to modernize the child care sector. The release of the government's Schools-First Child Care Capital Retrofit Policy in 2012 is aimed at helping child care operators retrofit and convert their existing child care spaces in schools to serve younger children and improve seamless service and convenience for families. Most recently, the government also introduced a more equitable, transparent, and streamlined child care funding formula and funding framework starting in 2013. The new funding approach better responds to demand for services and more effectively meets the needs of municipalities, child care operators, and families. The government also announced significant new investments in 2012 and 2013 to support First Nations child care on reserve.

## Moving forward

As a key part of the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework, the government remains committed to the other important components of child care modernization to stabilize and transition the child care sector, mitigate closures, and ensure families have access to high-quality child care. Following feedback received during the consultation process, work is underway to:

- develop a comprehensive framework to guide programming in licensed child care and family support settings, building on the work of the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning and the principles of the *Early Learning Framework*;
- develop and implement an “Aménagement linguistique” framework for the early years within the French-language education system;
- review the Day Nurseries Act, Ontario’s child care legislation, to strengthen the safety and quality of licensed child care and support more providers to become licensed to ensure parents have access to high-quality child care choices;
- better support children with a range of abilities in licensed child care;
- work with Aboriginal, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit partners to understand the child care landscapes on and off reserve and to explore culturally sensitive and locally relevant approaches to child care in First Nation communities, and in off-reserve Aboriginal settings;
- continue to strengthen the capacity and leadership of the child care sector, including child care supervisors, early childhood educators, and other professionals who work with children to deliver high-quality programs for families;
- develop resources to help parents understand the key elements of high-quality child care.

As we move forward with these efforts, we look forward to continued collaboration with our partners in building a more robust, high-quality, and coordinated child care system for children and families.



## *Supporting transitions for children in the early years and beyond*

Based on the work of the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, the *Early Learning Framework* guides curriculum development for early childhood programs from birth to school age, including full-day kindergarten. The development of a comprehensive framework to guide programming in licensed child care and family support settings will help make transitions from early childhood programs to kindergarten, the primary grades, and beyond easier and more seamless for children. This will ensure that children are ready for school and that schools are ready for children.

## Conclusion

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The Ontario Early Years Policy Framework represents the culmination of advancements made over the last decade. The dedication and expertise of our early years partners is evident, and there are many examples of local partnerships that have resulted in better outcomes for children and families. With this foundation to build on, the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework provides strategic direction to all early years partners by setting out a clear vision and principles to guide our collective efforts in developing and delivering services to families across Ontario. It also supports our efforts to break down barriers to achieve that objective, both inside and outside government. With the demonstrated dedication and expertise of our early years partners, we are confident that together we can work towards our vision and make progress in the priority areas identified in the framework to create a high-quality, seamless service experience for children and families.

