

# Be Ready for Success

A 10 year Early Childhood Strategy for New Brunswick -





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**A 10 year Early Childhood Strategy for New Brunswick**

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## Message from the Premier

Our government is focused on achieving self-sufficiency for our province by 2026. If we are to achieve our goal, we must work together to ensure our population is healthy, well educated, able to participate fully in the labour force and contribute to and benefit from the province's economic prosperity. We have to start with our youngest members of society and do everything to support New Brunswick families in raising healthy, happy, and curious children.



The path to self-sufficiency is profoundly tied to the education of our population. We have already begun to transform New Brunswick's education system. The health and well-being of our population is key to achieving our goal, and we have developed a new health plan to guide us in developing a first-class health care system. Our wellness strategy and public awareness campaign focus on helping parents and children develop a positive attitude toward healthy lifestyles, and these initiatives will move us forward in becoming a leader in the promotion of wellness and healthy living.

The most significant influence on our future success begins in the earliest years. The quality of a child's care and learning experiences in the earliest years has a tremendous affect on the extent to which he or she will succeed. If we are to improve the educational achievement of all New Brunswick children, we must focus on the early years as a critical first step in building a strong foundation for a child's ongoing learning and development.

*Be Ready for Success: A 10 year Early Childhood Strategy for New Brunswick*, is one of several interdependent and complementary strategies we have developed to focus our efforts and those of our business and community partners as we work together to achieve our goal of self-sufficiency.

All parents want the best for their children, to see them grow up to achieve their potential as individuals and productive members of their community, contributing to their own and New Brunswick's future prosperity. These outcomes reinforce each other. Children learn and thrive when they are healthy, safe and engaged; and the evidence shows clearly that educational achievement is the most effective route to economic self-sufficiency and well-being. It is also one of the most important protective factors against poverty and disaffection. Achieving the best

possible outcomes for children depends on the action taken by us all.

New Brunswick families want to feel confident that the care and early learning opportunities their child receives in the early years is of the highest quality. A high quality early learning and child care system supports the labour force attachment of the province's families and enriches the growth and development of children before they enter school.

This government is committed to working together with our partners to ensure New Brunswick families and families interested in returning to or settling in the province have access to quality child care and early learning opportunities and resources that meet their needs and the needs of their children. Our commitment is reflected in this strategy.

Investing in the early years is a priority for this government. But improving outcomes for children is a shared responsibility of parents, families, caregivers, communities and government. We look forward to a strong commitment and support from all our partners to support children in these important early years and set the stage for their success in school and in life.

*Shawn Graham*  
Premier

## Message from the Minister -

There is growing recognition that the right support in the early years of life creates a strong foundation for learning, behaviour and health through the school years and into adulthood.

Investments in high quality child care, early learning opportunities and resources for preschool children, and initiatives supporting parents can improve individual health, well-being and productivity, and result in benefits that accumulate over a lifetime.

Children's successes in school and in life are strongly shaped by the experiences they have before they begin school. Supporting and building advantage early in life is far easier and more effective than seeking to remedy disadvantage later.

Our goal is for every parent to have the support they need to raise healthy, happy, curious children, and for every child to have the early learning experiences they need to arrive at school ready and eager to continue learning. Certainly, these are ambitions for every child.

I am pleased to present, *Be Ready for Success: A 10 year Early Childhood Strategy for New Brunswick*, our new 10-year plan for early learning and child care in New Brunswick. The proposed plan includes a number of broad-based and targeted initiatives to support young children and their parents and engage communities in the development and



implementation of local strategies to meet the needs of families. The *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009* describes our investments in year 1.

As the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, I believe that supporting women's attachment to the workforce is an economic imperative. We must create the right conditions for families and businesses to succeed. This strategy's multi-pronged approach will contribute significantly to women's economic security. This will further close the wage gap between men and women.

The initiatives included in our plan will be implemented in phases. The initiatives described in the *Action Plan, 2008-2009* document will launch us on this journey.

I would like to thank the parents, educators, early learning and child care service providers, early childhood experts and stakeholders who participated in the recent public consultation on early learning and child care. Your suggestions and recommendations helped shape this strategy.

We would agree that the early years of a child's learning make a significant difference to the way they develop and continue to learn. Working together to get it right at this vital stage will build the lifelong foundations of success for our children and New Brunswick.

*Mary Schryer*  
Minister

# Self-Sufficiency and Early Childhood Development

## Early childhood development is vital to achieving self-sufficiency

The early years are essential to a child's future, and will set the stage for self-sufficiency, health and success in life. *Be Ready for Success: A 10-year early childhood strategy for New Brunswick*, contains seven overarching commitments and 39 action items to support New Brunswick families in raising healthy, happy and curious children who are ready for life.

A cornerstone of self-sufficiency is transformation of our workforce to be better educated, healthier and productive. Ensuring that early childhood development programs are of high quality and integrated for young children will build the lifelong foundations of success for all children in New Brunswick.

## Self-sufficiency for New Brunswick

New Brunswick is on track to experience a period of historic growth and opportunity. Such transformation requires strategic planning and bold policy changes, all aimed at helping us reach our shared goal of self-sufficiency by 2026.

The Government of New Brunswick is focusing its resources and efforts to achieve its goal of self-sufficiency through strategic initiatives in four key areas:

- **Transforming our economy** to be more competitive and be more attractive for business, investment and people;

- **Transforming our workforce** to be better educated, healthier and better positioned for success;
- **Transforming our relationships** to be a partner with governments, communities and New Brunswickers in building a self-sufficient New Brunswick;
- **Transforming our government** to be more open, accountable and responsive.

These transformations will enable us to retain and strengthen our core values, ensure continued growth and create the opportunities we need to fulfil our potential. By transforming our economy, our workforce, our relationships and our government, we will set the foundation for a better New Brunswick: a place of opportunity and hope for all. A New Brunswick that is truly a better place to be.





## Our 10-Year Strategy -

The Government of New Brunswick is on an ambitious path towards becoming self-sufficient by 2026. In moving forward with this vision, a tremendous amount of planning and change is already happening. The Population Growth Strategy strives to raise the appeal of New Brunswick as a family-friendly province to young families and those interested in returning home. The provincial Education Plan, *When Kids Come First*, lays out many initiatives and strategies for giving the province's children the best education system in Canada. The provincial Wellness Strategy and *The Get Wellness Soon* campaign promotes wellness and healthy lifestyles to parents and children. And the new provincial Health Plan, *Transforming New Brunswick's Health-care System*, sets out a vision for a first-class health-care system.

Our children's future and the future of our province are dependent on how well prepared our children for school and for life. *Be Ready for Success: A 10 year Early Childhood Strategy for New Brunswick*, lays out how we can do this. It complements our health, wellness, education, and population growth strategies and focuses on our children's earliest, most formative years – the years that set the stage for every child's future health, self-sufficiency and success in life.

We need to focus on the earliest years as a means of ensuring our children become healthy, productive adults and to prevent the developmental and health problems that can profoundly affect a child's life.

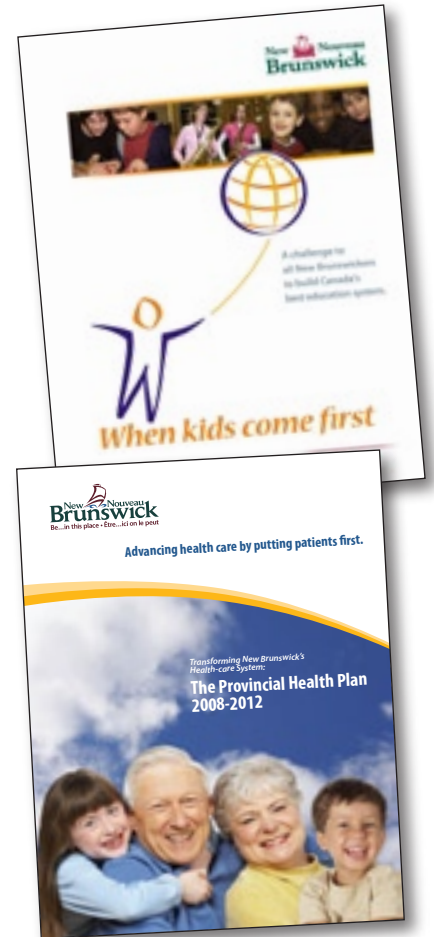
If we want a promising future we need to ensure that parents throughout the province have the tools and support they need to raise happy, healthy, confident children. We must ensure that a comprehensive network of quality child care services and early learning resources are available throughout the province. And we need this and future generations of children to be eager, curious and excited when they walk into their kindergarten classroom.


As stated in *When Kids Come First*, "a society that cares about student success in school has to prepare for student success before school." This plan is about preparing our youngest children before school.

## What is "early learning and child care"?

Most children in New Brunswick will, at some point in their preschool years, be cared for by someone other than a parent and participate in some type of early learning activity.

The regulated early learning and child care sector includes licensed day-care centres, licensed community day-care homes and licensed preschool programs. Many parents choose these types of arrangements for their children.





Many parents choose other types of child care or early learning environments, including care by a family member or friend, informal playgroups in a community family resource centre, a morning session at a local library, two mornings a week in an informal preschool activity, or anything in between.

This plan is designed to support all of the province's parents and young children, regardless of their child care or early learning choices.

## A snapshot of early learning and child care in New Brunswick

The provincial government licenses and regulates day care centers, family day care homes, preschools and after-school programs through the *Day Care Services Program*. Home-based child care settings with small numbers of children are not required to be licensed or regulated.

As of March 2008, there were 470 regulated child care facilities in the province, which translated into 15,506 regulated child care spaces.

- six per cent of regulated spaces are available for infants, 47 per cent are for preschool children and the remaining 47 per cent are for after-school care.
- Of all regulated facilities, 89 per cent are day care centres and 11 per cent are family day care homes.
- 57 per cent of regulated child care facilities provide services in English, 29 per cent provide services in French, and 14 per cent provide services in both official languages.
- 67 per cent of regulated child care facilities are private businesses and 33 per cent are not-for-profit organizations.





There are 2,600 staff employed in regulated child care facilities:

- 30 per cent have a one-year early childhood education (ECE) certificate, a BEd or a university degree in child studies.
- 70 per cent do not have recognized ECE training.

Two key requirements for high quality child care are appropriately trained staff and adequate wages and working conditions for staff to minimize staff turnover and the associated disruption for children and parents.

Government invests \$13 million annually in the *Quality Improvement Funding Support Program* for professional development and wage increases for child care service providers working in regulated child care facilities.

Since this program was introduced, average wages for child care service providers have increased as follows:

- Staff with recognized ECE training: an 85 per cent increase from \$7.04 an hour to \$13.07 an hour.
- Staff without recognized ECE training: 50% increase from \$7.04 per hour to \$10.59 per hour.

## Current investments in early childhood programs and services

To make the best possible decisions for the future, it is important to take stock of what has been achieved to date.

**The government invests more than \$80 million per year in programs, services and financial supports for New Brunswick's children and families:**

- ✓ **\$13 million** annually for professional development, equipment and materials and wage increases for 2,600 child care staff in the province's regulated child care facilities through the *Quality Improvement Funding Support Program*.
- ✓ The **\$13 million** Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund that provides funding for the creation of new child care spaces, flexible training approaches for child care staff, and the implementation of the new early learning and child care curriculum.





- ✓ Development of a new English and a new French early learning and child care curriculum by the University of New Brunswick and l'Université de Moncton to be used in every regulated child care facility and to be available to parents and caregivers.
- ✓ **\$11.4 million** annually for child care subsidies for low income and lower middle income families.
- ✓ **\$6 million** annually for one-on-one intervention services for preschool children with autism or autism spectrum disorder.
- ✓ **\$1.2 million** for training of autism interventionists working with children in the school system.

- ✓ **\$300,000** annually for community-based autism resource centres to support children with autism, their families and caregivers.
- ✓ **\$2.4 million** annually in speech language and prevention services for preschool children at-risk of developing language disorders through the *Talk with Me/Parle Moi* program.
- ✓ **\$600,000** annually in direct financial support for low-income pregnant women to improve their health and the health of their newborns through the *Prenatal Benefit Program*.
- ✓ **\$600,000** annually for community groups to design and deliver their own initiatives to support their young children and families through the *Communities Raising Children* program.
- ✓ **\$440,000** annually to support children who have witnessed family violence and find themselves in one of the provinces' 13 transition homes with their mother.
- ✓ More than **\$1 million** annually on initiatives that promote wellness and healthy lifestyles, including the *Active Kids Toolkit* for preschool children, and funding for schools, municipalities and non-profit groups wanting to promote physical activity.
- ✓ **\$13 million** annually for early intervention services, integrated day care services, the *3 ½ Year Old Screening Clinic*, and prenatal and postnatal support for at-risk children and families under the *Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI)* program.
- ✓ **\$500,000** annually for the *Special Foods Program* which offers nutritional supplements and food products to children requiring nutritional therapeutic diets.

- ✓ **\$100,000** for a new *Baby Friendly Initiative* offering information, guidance and support to breastfeeding mothers.
- ✓ **\$2 million** annually in early kindergarten registration, orientation sessions, Transition-to-school Coordinators, a new Early Years Evaluation (EYE) assessment tool, and various transition to school initiatives.
- ✓ **\$3.2 million** annually for publicly-funded childhood immunizations for infants and children up to age six as well as a school-based program for adolescents.
- ✓ **\$15 million** annually year in direct financial support to low-income families and children through the *New Brunswick Child Tax Benefit* and *Working Income Supplement*.

In addition, there is a network of 13 federally-funded family resource centres and more than 75 outreach sites offering programs and supports to at-risk preschool children and parents throughout the province. There are also VON Healthy Baby and Me programs offered throughout the province to support at-risk pregnant mothers and their infants.

In developing a long-term plan, it is important to sustain existing initiatives and investments serving young children and families well and ensure that future investments build on these successes.

## What the research tells us

A solid, innovative plan for the future of New Brunswick's young children must be grounded in research and best practices.

### Children's early development

As demonstrated in the *Early Years I* and *Early Years II* studies, children's earliest experiences have a far-reaching and significant impact on their health, their success in school and their success in life.

The earliest experiences of children reach into adulthood. The early years provide great opportunities and increased risks – they can set the course for self-sufficiency and economic productivity at one end of the continuum, or dependency, poverty and poor health at the other. If children are to have an equal opportunity to lead healthy, productive lives, we must ensure their early experiences are positive.

A child's physical and emotional health, social and interpersonal skills, and cognitive ability are interdependent and are equally important to the child's initial adjustment to school and later success in school and in life.



A child's physical and social environments contribute greatly to their overall development and wellness. A child needs to grow up in a safe environment with supportive parents able to support them and meet their needs.

- **Good physical health and age-appropriate motor development**

Healthy physical development begins with a healthy pregnancy, a healthy birth and an early childhood with good nutrition, physical activity and freedom from health problems and illness. Children must have the energy, co-ordination and motor skills to complete everyday tasks, for example, running and playing with other children or holding a book or a paint brush properly, and they need to develop healthy habits in the early years to minimize the risk of obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and other serious health problems.

- **Age-appropriate emotional health and social skills**

The foundation for a child's emotional health and well-being is to have parents who are sensitive and responsive to their needs from birth. Infants and young children learn how to deal with their stress when their parents respond appropriately to their needs. As they mature, this interaction with their parents helps them learn how to manage their emotions. The result is a secure attachment. A happy, secure child can develop trust, self-esteem, appropriate self-control, and positive relationships. This child is also far less likely to be aggressive or to experience depression, anxiety or difficulties coping with daily challenges.

- **Age-appropriate cognitive development and communication skills**

A child's cognitive ability is the way how he or she takes in and understands information. This is the foundation for the numeracy and literacy skills the child will develop in school. A child also needs solid language and communication skills to communicate ideas and feelings in a way that can be understood by others and to be able to make friends and fit in with his or her classmates.

Children entering kindergarten with strong communication skills are confident, able to make friends, are persistent and creative in completing tasks and solving problems, and are eager and excited to learn.

## **Factors influencing the quality of early learning and child care services**

Clearly, child care programs need to be organized to accommodate working parents. However, several recent reports suggest that the primary purpose of child care programs must be the optimal development of young children.

One of the most significant variables affecting young children's early development – after a child's home environment and relationship with parents – is the quality of the child care services the child receives and the quality of his or her early learning experiences. A 2005 study by Baker, Gruber and Milligan has suggested that children can be affected by poor quality child care and early learning services.

The key influences over the quality of child care services are a knowledgeable, caring workforce with training in early childhood development; adequate wages and working conditions for child care staff to minimize staff turnover and the associated disruption for children; well designed programs capable of meeting the needs of all children; and strong partnerships with parents.

As identified by the National Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, *“of particular importance to the ability of a child care system to continue to grow and develop is the need for a vibrant, stable qualified early childhood sector.”* Clearly, it is not enough simply to increase the number of child care spaces. Every effort must be made to ensure that existing and future child care spaces in New Brunswick are of high quality.

The Council also noted that the regulated child care sector faces many of the same labour force shortages as other sectors. However, it identified additional challenges in attracting and retaining skilled and educated personnel due to increasing job opportunities for early childhood educators in related positions offering better wages and working conditions. Children need stability in the early years and benefit greatly from continuity in their caregivers. The ability of a child care facility to retain its educated staff is key to maintaining a high level of quality.

## **Integration of early childhood programs and services**

In *Starting Strong II*, a review of early childhood programs in 18 countries, including Canada, the Organization for Economic and Co-operative Development (OECD), recommended a more systematic approach across early childhood programs. At least nine OECD countries have done so, with the belief that early childhood programs are essential to the preparation of children for public school, an important component of the supports for families, and a venue for identifying children and families who need special services. -



As part of its larger *Early Years Strategy*, Australia has established a number of *Early Years* sites where groups of community members are involved in the development of local strategies and initiatives to meet local needs. The group looks at what is already working well for young children in their community and then identifies the missing supports and services. As an example, they might work on improving a local park, establishing a playgroup, or creating a program for young moms. The group draws on local resources, adds to these from a range of sources when needed, and shares their progress with other community groups and sites.

England has an extensive network of *SureStart Centres* offering integrated early learning programs, child care services, pre-natal and post-natal services and outreach, parenting programs, and employment and training supports for families and young preschool aged children. The *Surestart Center* model is based on the belief that providing integrated education, care, family support, health services and employment support are key in determining positive outcomes for children and their parents.

In Canada, the recent *Early Years II* study provided compelling evidence that integrated child development programs improve outcomes for children. One of the Canadian examples cited was two neighbouring communities in British Columbia with similar socio-economic profiles but different outcomes in terms of the number of vulnerable children in each community. Over four years, one community experienced a sharp decline in the number of vulnerable children whereas the other experienced an increase. The different outcomes were attributed to the first community having a neighbourhood hub of integrated early childhood programs, while the other had a number of stand-alone programs and services.

Another example is Toronto First Duty – a universal early learning and care program model that meets the developmental needs of children to ensure they reach their full potential, supports parents to work or study, and supports parents in their parenting role. This model brings together kindergarten, child care and parenting/family supports into one program. At one site, parents can access the full range of child and family supports available in their community.

The *Early Years II* study concluded that:

*If properly linked to labour, health, and social services, early childhood programs can deliver additional outcomes: enhanced maternal employment; less family poverty, better parenting skills and greater family and community cohesion.*

*Quality early childhood programs are not only good for children and families, they are good for the bottom line. Focused public spending on young children provides returns that outstrip any other type of human capital investment.*



## What we heard from New Brunswickers



While evidence and research play a key role in shaping our future plan for young people in New Brunswick, so, too, do the opinions and ideas of New Brunswickers.

In June 2007, the Government of New Brunswick held public consultations on early learning and child care. Through surveys, focus groups, written briefs and stakeholder forums, the province's parents, early learning and child care staff, kindergarten teachers and school administrators, child care experts and other stakeholders were given the opportunity to give us their opinions and ideas for the future. The following is a snapshot of what we heard:

- Early learning and child care staff must be well-trained.
- While many parents indicated that they would prefer to have their infants cared for by family or trusted friends, they identified regulated home-based care as their next choice, particularly for children younger than age two.
- There is a need for more regulated child care spaces across the province, particularly rural spaces, off-hours and part-time spaces and regulated child care facilities must have enhanced monitoring by government staff.
- Parents want existing and new regulated child care spaces to be more affordable.
- To improve the quality of child care services, additional funding for program materials, equipment and toys, and better wages and working conditions for early learning child care staff are needed.



- Better diagnostic and intervention services are needed for preschool and school-aged children with behavioural or developmental challenges.
- Parents, educators and child care service providers must have a common understanding of school readiness and what children need to be ready for school.
- There must be improved collaboration between early learning and child care service providers and the education system in ensuring that children are ready for school and that schools are ready for children.
  - There must be improved co-ordination and collaboration between the Department of Social Development, Department of Education and the Department of Health on services supporting young children.
  - Parents want to avoid the “schoolification” of child care and early learning settings and would rather that “kids can be kids” through play-based, age-appropriate programming.
  - Early learning opportunities and resources must be available to all children to ensure they are on a more even playing field when they enter kindergarten.
  - There is a need to recognize the important work of early learning and child care staff and to support the sector professionalisation.



## Our values and principles

We must also make decisions based on a foundation of core values and principles. Based on research and what we heard from New Brunswickers, our 10-year strategy is premised on the following:

### Values:

- Children are owed the best possible start. They are born with a natural tendency to explore and learn and, with support and encouragement from their families and communities will continue to do so throughout their lives.
- Parents are their child’s “first teachers” and the sustaining force behind their child’s initial adjustment to school and later success in school and in life. A responsive, positive loving relationship with a parent or caregiver is critical for a child’s sense of security and emotional well-being and their capacity to flourish in all areas.

- A child's successful adjustment to school does not simply happen during the first few months of kindergarten, but is an on-going series of small successes. A child's ability to make a smooth transition to school and to continue to adjust successfully in later years is based in large part on the child's social and emotional well-being, which lays the groundwork for the child's healthy development in all other areas. A secure, happy child is much more likely to have the capacity to develop solid language, early literacy and communication skills.
- Children are raised by families but they grow up in neighbourhoods and communities. All play an important role in the healthy development and overall well-being of our children.

### **Principles:**

#### *Family-focused and child-centered*

Children are influenced by everything around them, so it is important that all of these early experiences be positive. Since the most significant influence in a young child's life is his or her family, families must create a safe, nurturing environment that addresses the child's physical, emotional, interpersonal and intellectual needs. Families will be supported in creating this healthy environment and ensuring their children can thrive.

#### *Inclusive*

Programs for children and families will reflect an understanding of and respect for children with special needs, the needs of children affected by family difficulties, the official language and cultural needs of children, and the needs and realities of children in rural areas.

**Play is integral to children's learning ...and early years educators in New Brunswick echo the views of their colleagues around the world in their belief that play is a critical part of young children's lives and a primary means of understanding the world.**

*Excerpt from New Brunswick's new early learning and child care curriculum*





### *Experience-based and high quality*

Programs and services for children and families will be based on research and best practices in the field of early childhood development. Research demonstrates what many parents know: that young children learn through play and a variety of everyday experiences. Through play, children build their knowledge, skills and feelings through first-hand experiences and relationships with the people and things in their environment. Early childhood and child care programs and services will reflect the importance of experience-based and developmentally appropriate activities for young children.

### *Community-based*

While parents have the ultimate responsibility for their children, community groups, volunteer organizations and employers can make an important contribution in creating supportive environments for families and young children. Communities must continue to play an important role in identifying and addressing the unique needs of their families and young children.

### *Prevention and promotion-focused*

Programs and services will promote the overall health and well-being of young children and families. Special attention will be given to promoting the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, promoting resiliency, and reducing risk for children and families coping with challenges that affect their ability to function in a healthy way.

### *Accountability*

New Brunswickers have the right to be informed about how well we are doing in supporting families and young children. We will continue to reflect the latest early childhood development research and best practices in our programs and services and report regularly to New Brunswickers on our progress toward achieving good outcomes for children.

## **Our vision**

The best network of integrated, high quality early childhood programs and supports in the country.

### **Our goals**

- All of our young children are happy, healthy, curious and ready for success in school and in life.
- Parents are able to work or pursue training, confident in the knowledge that their children are well cared for in high quality, stimulating environments.
- All communities are engaged in the implementation of local strategies and initiatives to meet the needs of their families and young children.

## Working together with our partners -

When a young child's curiosity and confidence are developed by strong families, supported by caring communities, high-quality child care services and early learning resources, he or she will enter the education system ready and able to continue learning.

To ensure this, all partners must understand the importance of children's early development and how it contributes to their initial adjustment to kindergarten and their continued success. We need to work together to achieve this goal.

### Parents

- Play the primary role in nurturing, protecting and supporting their children.
- Are important role models and must foster an environment and a mindset that promotes wellness and healthy lifestyles.
- Act as their child's "first teachers" and nurture their natural tendency to explore and learn.
- Recognize and instill in their children the value and love of learning.
- Are engaged in the early learning and child care system and advocate on behalf of their children.
- Support their children to ensure a successful transition into the education system and continued academic success.
- Are engaged in their own learning for the care and development of their young children.



### Early learning and child care services sector

- Sets high expectations for itself and the children for whom it cares.
- Pursues training and professional development that improve the quality of care it provides.
- Provides quality care and nurturing, and developmentally-appropriate programming that builds children's language and intellectual skills, and fosters healthy emotional, physical and interpersonal development.
- Works with parents and local school districts to ensure a successful transition to school and continued academic success. -





- Works towards the professionalization of the sector.

### **Communities/municipalities/ local service districts**

- Provide children and families with safe, healthy places to play, socialize and learn.
- Recognize and promote the importance of young children to the future of their community.
- Help identify the needs of families and young children and develop strategies to address these needs.
- Strive to be family friendly in their policies and by-laws.

### **Businesses and employers**

- Recognize child care as one of the key needs of employees.
- Support employees in meeting their child care needs.
- Strive to offer family-friendly workplaces that promote workplace wellness and support work-life balance.
- Work with partners to help address the early learning and child care services and supports required by their employees.

### **Early childhood service providers (agencies and associations that promote, support or deliver services to young children and their families)**

- Work with partners to ensure young children's successful transition to school and continued academic success.
- Engage in collaborative work with the early childhood centres in their communities.
- Help identify the needs of families and young children and develop strategies to address these needs.



- Provide high quality early learning services to children and families who are at risk, have developmental challenges, or may require a more specialized approach to ensure a successful transition to school.

### **Community non-profit and voluntary sector**

- Provides various community-based supports and services to families and young children
- Works with partners in the development and implementation of strategies and initiatives to meet local needs.

### **Government**

- Provides a range of well-integrated and complementary programs and services to support healthy early childhood development.
- Provides a policy and regulatory framework for early learning and child care services.
- Provides funding support to help improve the quality, affordability and accessibility of early learning and child care services.
- Works with early learning and child care service providers, post-secondary institutions, community organizations, businesses and municipalities in the development and implementation of strategies and initiatives to meet local needs.
- Helps create an environment in which all members of society understand and value the benefits of high quality child care services and early learning opportunities.
- Reports regularly on progress and continues to build knowledge and best practices and share this information with parents, communities and service providers.

## Our Commitments



Based on research, best practices and public consultation, we have developed a 10-year strategy with a combination of broad-based and targeted initiatives to achieve three goals.

With the collaboration of all our partners, this strategy will focus our efforts to build the best system of quality child care services and early learning resources in the country. To do so, we make the following commitments:

- 1 To strengthen the capacity of communities to support families and young children.
- 2 To support parents in ensuring their children have the early experiences necessary for healthy development and success in school and in life.
- 3 To ensure early learning programs and child care services are of high quality.
- 4 To improve the availability of quality child care services and early learning resources.
- 5 To improve the affordability of early learning and child care services.
- 6 To ensure that early learning and child care services are inclusive and meet the needs of all children.
- 7 To rely on research, best practices, and community partnerships in planning for children and families.

Each of these commitments will be supported by a number of specific actions, initiatives and timelines. We are committed to working with communities and our early learning and child care partners to phase in actions and initiatives and to make progress each year towards fulfilling our commitments.

### **Commitment 1:**

#### **To strengthen the capacity of communities and partners to support families and young children**

Parents who feel connected to their community are more likely to reach out for support from their community. In turn, communities must be leaders in supporting their young families and providing support networks, recognizing the vitality that families with young children bring to their communities.

Communities have their own array of challenges and assets, and a “one size fits all” approach is a missed chance to match local resources with local needs. Yet communities share common challenges and opportunities. Working together builds energy, expertise and a sense of cohesion and can make communities better able to cope with economic and social challenges.

Children who have benefited from positive early childhood experiences have a better opportunity to become well-rounded citizens who give back to their community as students, employees, parents, and volunteers.

It is important that services and supports for young children and their families are integrated, complementary and community-based. This will ensure that communities are actively engaged in supporting their families and that the best possible services are easily available to parents.


1. In consultation with parents and community stakeholders, design and implement four demonstration sites to test early childhood centres as a way to better integrate early childhood services and supports and offer a seamless experience for parents and young children.
2. Develop and implement strategies to increase the business community and local government's involvement in supporting parents of young children and promoting family-friendly policies in the business sector and municipalities.
3. Ensure there is effective information-sharing related to every child's transition to kindergarten.
4. Build on the success of the *Active Kids Toolkit* and explore additional initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles for parents and children.

### **Commitment 2:**

#### **To support parents in ensuring their children have the early experiences necessary for healthy development and success in school and in life**

Children benefit from good prenatal and postnatal care; strong emotional ties and relationships with their parents and families; and activities that support their social, emotional and intellectual development. Young children must have the opportunity to explore the world around them and engage in physical activity. They must be well nourished and healthy. They need to live in loving families with parents who engage them in early learning experiences – who talk with them, read with them, play with them and comfort them. With these types of positive early experiences, children will succeed in school and in life.

Parents are the most important influence in their child's life and are in the best position to identify and meet the individual needs of their sons or daughters. We will continue to work with parents to ensure they have access to parenting and early childhood development resources they need to support their child's social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs.

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5. Build on the *Excellence in Parenting* and the *Early Learning and Child Care* public awareness campaigns/resources which promote the importance of a child's healthy early development and the need for high quality early learning and child care services.
  6. Ensure there is consistency in the information provided to parents on what children need to be ready for kindergarten.
  7. Make the new early learning and child care curriculum available to all parents and caregivers interested in using this resource to provide stimulating learning activities to their preschool children.
  8. Create a new child care resource service to help parents find available child care spaces, access child care subsidies, and access background information on caregivers.
  9. Expand on the range of services and supports offered to at-risk children and families through the network of family resource centres and outreach sites across the province.

### **Commitment 3:**

#### **To ensure early learning programs and child care services are of high quality**

While at work or participating in training, parents must feel confident that their child is being cared for by a caregiver who is nurturing, responsive, and well-trained in early childhood development and education. The provision of a stimulating environment, in addition to an environment that is safe and nurturing, demands that the childcare workforce have the necessary skills and abilities to provide those environments.

The key influences over the quality of child care services are a knowledgeable, caring workforce with training in early childhood development; adequate wages and working conditions for child care staff to minimize staff turnover and the associated disruption for children; well designed programs capable of meeting the needs of all children; and strong partnerships with parents.

#### **Training of early learning and child care service providers**

To ensure children attending regulated child care facilities receive the best care possible, the child care workforce must be well trained. In fact, one of the key indicators of high quality relates to the need for child care staff to have a post-secondary credential in early childhood education. On-going professional development is essential so that child care staff are familiar with the latest early childhood research and best practices.

10. Support the University of New Brunswick and l'Université de Moncton in ensuring that all regulated child care staff will be trained in the new provincial Early Learning and Child Care curriculum.

## New provincial Early Learning and Child Care Curricula

To honour the linguistic and cultural diversity within the province, two distinct curricula were developed – one in English and one in French. The common vision underlying both is for all children

to grow to their fullest potential with dignity, a sense of self-worth and a zest for living and

learning. Suited for home-based and centre-based care, these curricula complement the curriculum in kindergarten and elementary school. They identify ways in which parents and early childhood educators and service providers can maximize play for children's care and learning, and they help provide the environment and resources for children to be curious, courageous and confident in their pursuit of knowledge and skills; secure in their linguistic and cultural identities; and respectful of diversity.



11. Ensure the new Early Learning and Child Care curriculum are integrated into all Early Childhood Education (ECE) training programs offered by New Brunswick Community College, the universities and private colleges.
12. Expand the *Opening the Door to Quality* project to all child care facilities across the province to support children with special needs in regulated child care facilities.
13. Continue to support the new provincial Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund in the funding of flexible training models to help regulated child care facilities meet provincial training requirements.
14. Work in collaboration with the early learning and child care sector to increase provincial training requirements for regulated child care service providers.
15. Support the early learning and child care sector in accessing training and ongoing professional development opportunities to meet and maintain provincial training requirements for regulated child care service providers.
16. Support the early learning and child care sector to develop and implement a certification model for regulated child care service providers.

## Recruitment and retention of early learning and child care service providers

Young children benefit from consistency in their child care provider; therefore, we must support the sector in recruiting the best child care staff and developing strategies to retain them.

17. Support the early learning and child care sector in the development and implementation of a comprehensive career promotion and recruitment/retention strategy for regulated child care staff across the province.
18. Work with the early learning and child care sector to build on previous wage enhancements for regulated child care staff.
19. Work with the Women's Issues Branch of the Executive Council Office in its pay equity analysis of child care staff.

## Programming and Curriculum

20. Work with the University of New Brunswick, l'Université de Moncton and the early learning and child care sector on the implementation of the new English and French Early Learning and Child Care curriculum in each regulated child care facility across the province.

Children begin learning at birth, and their experiences during the early years have critical consequences both in the present and for their own futures. To thrive as curious, confident and communicative people, they are entitled to nurturing relationships. They are also entitled to engaging and inclusive environments in which well-being is secured, exploration and play supported, home languages and literacies are honoured and advanced, and respect for diversity promoted and practiced.

*Excerpt from New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum*



21. Hire new *early learning specialists* to support the effective implementation and sustainability of the new provincial Early Learning and Child Care curriculum in all regulated early learning and child care facilities. These specialists will also support parents and caregivers interested in using this resource to provide stimulating learning activities to their preschool children.



## Safety, security and regulatory framework

22. Publish - through government's early learning and child care website - the results of inspections of all regulated child care facilities in the province.
23. Ensure the necessary inspection resources are in place to monitor the safety and security of regulated early learning and child care facilities as the number of facilities increases.
24. Revise the *Day Care Regulation* and *Child Day Care Facilities Operator Standards* to support improvements to the safety, security and quality of regulated early learning and child care services.

### Commitment 4:

#### To improve the availability of early learning and child care services

Parents must choose the child care arrangement that is right for their families. We are committed to working with our partners to offer support and resources to all families, regardless of their child care choices. For those who want to secure a space in a regulated child care facility, we will work with the early learning and child care sector to improve the availability of high quality early learning and child care services.

25. Support the ability of regulated early learning and child care facilities to improve the quality of their services through renovation or expansion.
26. Continue to support the Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund in the creation and the sustainability of infant, rural, seasonal and off-hours child care spaces.

## Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund

A provincial Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund was launched in June 2007 to offer funding to eligible child care operators, academic and training institutions for projects related to the development and implementation of the early learning and child care curriculum, training for child care service providers, and the creation of new rural, infant, and non-traditional child care spaces.

The response from the early learning and child care sector has been good and start-up funding grants offered through the Trust Fund have supported the creation of 166 new infant spaces, 116 new rural spaces, 72 new extended hours spaces, and 40 new seasonal child care spaces.





27. Explore possible incentives for small informal caregivers to become licensed or to access training to support their caregiving.

#### **Commitment 5:**

##### **To improve the affordability of early learning and child care services**

Working parents with young children often struggle to cover their child care costs, and for some families, the cost of child care outweighs the benefit of having two modest incomes. To alleviate these pressures, we are committed to improving the affordability of regulated early learning and child care services and widening the eligibility criteria to include more families.

28. Develop and implement strategies so that more New Brunswick families will benefit from the child care subsidies offered through the *Day Care Assistance Program*.
29. Create a new application process for child care subsidies to simplify and improve access to subsidies.
30. Support families transitioning from social assistance into paid employment by offering child care subsidies for an extended period of time.

#### **Commitment 6:**

##### **To ensure early learning and child care services are inclusive and meet the needs of all children**

The MacKay Report on Inclusive Education notes that inclusion is about meeting the needs of *all* children. Consistent with the goal of inclusive education, we must ensure that early learning and child care services are inclusive of and responsive to the needs of children with differing abilities, cultural and linguistic needs.

To support linguistic and cultural diversity in New Brunswick, two distinct early learning and child care curricula have been developed – one in English and the other in French. Each curriculum includes modules on inclusiveness and equity, and will assist early learning and child care service providers in offering developmentally-appropriate programming to young children in child day care facilities across the province.

31. Redesign intervention approaches and related services based on the review of the *Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI) Program*.
32. Continue funding evidence-based services for preschool children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); training of professionals and paraprofessionals offering services; and community-based initiatives to support children and families.

33. Develop strategies for supporting the recruitment and retention of community-based autism support workers working with preschool children.
34. Provide funding to increase the number of special needs children who have access to a support worker while attending a child care facility.
35. Enhance supports to early intervention agencies to ensure that effective early intervention services are available to support the healthy development of at-risk children and families.
36. Work with the Réseau francophone des services à la petite enfance to ensure increased collaboration between all partners and to address the needs of children of *les ayants droit*.
37. Support the development of flexible training models or institutes on francisation as part of the new French early learning and child care curriculum to caregivers and service providers who work with children of *les ayants droit*.

#### **Commitment 7:**

##### **To rely on early childhood research, best practices and community partnerships in planning for children and families**

One of the recommendations coming out of *Starting Strong II*, the Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD) review of early childhood programs, is the need for integration at both the ground level and at policy and management levels.

Government alone will not be able to meet the goals and commitments outlined in this plan. But together, as a community, we can. There is extensive research and best practices information available to us, and there are opportunities to do our own research here in the province, if we want to support an innovative, community-based approach to meeting the needs of our families and children and assessing our progress in improving outcomes for children.

Quality research and local expertise will help guide our actions. We are committed to being informed on the best and latest research, sharing it, and acting on it.

38. Implement an early childhood development community mapping model (using the Early Development Instrument (EDI), census socio-economic data, program and service data and various other data sources) as a community-based planning and assessment tool.

## Early Childhood Development Community Mapping

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is used by kindergarten teachers to assess children's development in five areas: physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and communication skills and general knowledge. This individual data is then aggregated up to the community level and can be linked with census socio-economic data and program and service data to help communities better understand the needs of its families and develop plans to improve outcomes for children.



39. Support the work of the newly established Ministerial Committee on Early Childhood Development and Care in its work in ensuring the improved integration of early childhood policies, programs and services across all levels of government.

## Targets and Accountability -

Parents, the early learning and child care sector, communities and our other partners need to know how well we are doing in realizing our vision of the best network of integrated, high-quality early childhood programs and supports in the country.

Our success in reaching our goals hinges on our ability – in co-operation with our key partners – to support positive outcomes for the province's young children. Our progress will be reflected in the extent to which our young children develop the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual skills necessary for success in school and in life.

One of the key accountability commitments of all provinces under the *Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care* is to report on a common set of indicators of young children's well-being and we will continue to do so. The set of indicators includes a number of measures of children's physical, social, emotional and intellectual health and is recognized by a broad range of early childhood experts as a reliable snapshot of the health and well-being of young children.

The indicators are compiled from the *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* (NLSCY), a national database of the characteristics and life experiences of Canadian children as they progress from infancy to adulthood.

To complement this information, we will compile indicators from various other data sources, including the new Early Years Evaluation, and data from our new community mapping project as described earlier.

We are committed to working with our partners to identify targets in the following areas: children’s social, physical, emotional and intellectual development and readiness for school; level of family interaction and functioning; and the quality, affordability and availability of early learning and child care services.

## Moving Forward

We hope to bring together people and resources to work towards a shared vision. We need to work together to support families and prepare our youngest children for the exciting future before them.

Our commitments are ambitious and require the combined efforts of all our partners if we are to meet our goals


## Appendix A

### Summary of Actions

1. In consultation with parents and community stakeholders, design and implement four demonstration sites to test early childhood centres as a way to better integrate early childhood services and supports and offer a seamless experience for parents and young children.
2. Develop and implement strategies to increase the business community and local government's involvement in supporting parents of young children and promoting family-friendly policies in the business sector and municipalities.
3. Ensure there is effective information-sharing related to every child's transition to kindergarten.
4. Build on the success of the *Active Kids Toolkit* and explore additional initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles for parents and children.
5. Build on the *Excellence in Parenting* and the *Early Learning and Child Care* public awareness campaigns/resources which promote the importance of a child's healthy early development and the need for high quality early learning and child care services.
6. Ensure there is consistency in the information provided to parents on what children need to be ready for kindergarten.
7. Make the new early learning and child care curriculum available to all parents and caregivers interested in using this resource to provide stimulating learning activities to their preschool children.
8. Create a new child care resource service to help parents find available child care spaces, access child care subsidies, and access background information on caregivers.
9. Expand on the range of services and supports offered to at-risk children and families through the network of family resource centres and outreach sites across the province.
10. Support the University of New Brunswick and l'Université de Moncton in ensuring that all regulated child care staff will be trained in the new provincial Early Learning and Child Care curriculum.
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18. Work with the early learning and child care sector to build on previous wage enhancements for regulated child care service staff.
19. Work with the Women's Issues Branch of the Executive Council Office in its pay equity analysis of child care service staff.
20. Work with the University of New Brunswick, l'Université de Moncton and the early learning and child care sector on the implementation of the new English and French Early Learning and Child Care curriculum in each regulated child care facility across the province.
21. Hire new *early learning specialists* to support the effective implementation and sustainability of the new provincial Early Learning and Child Care curriculum in all regulated early learning and child care facilities. These specialists will also support parents and caregivers interested in using this resource to provide stimulating learning activities to their preschool children.
22. Publish - through government's early learning and child care website - the results of inspections of all regulated child care facilities in the province.
23. Ensure the necessary inspection resources are in place to monitor the safety and security of regulated early learning and child care facilities as the number of facilities increases.
24. Revise the *Day Care Regulation and Child Day Care Facilities Operator Standards* to support improvements to the safety, security and quality of regulated early learning and child care services.
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