

Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan 2008-2009





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Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan

2008-2009

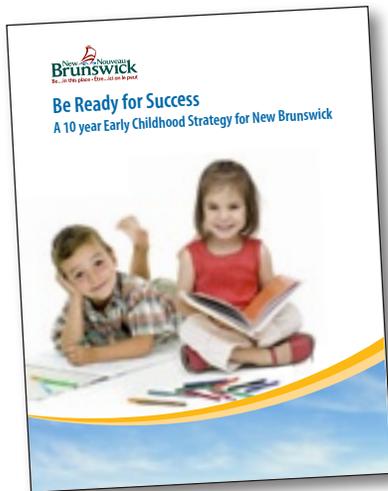
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Be Ready for Success: A 10 year Early Childhood Strategy for New Brunswick is based on early childhood research and best practices from other jurisdictions. The strategy responds to the challenges and recommendations identified during the provincial consultation on early learning and child care.

Our strategy is broader than a conventional child care strategy. It includes a number of commitments to support all New Brunswick parents with young children, regardless of their child care choices or arrangements. It complements the government's recently-released Education Plan, the provincial Health Plan and the Wellness Strategy. The strategy also focuses on children's earliest, most formative years – the years that set the stage for every child's future health, self-sufficiency and success.

Be Ready for Success: A 10 year Early Childhood Strategy for New Brunswick lays out a vision for the best network of integrated, high quality early childhood programs and supports in the country. It has three key goals:

- All 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; and,
- All communities are engaged in the implementation of local strategies and initiatives to meet the needs of their families and young children.

With the collaboration and support of parents, early childhood stakeholders, the early learning and child care sector, and community partners, this strategy will focus our efforts to meet these goals. To do so, we make the following commitments:

Commitment 1: To strengthen the capacity of communities to support families and young 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;

Commitment 3: To ensure early learning programs and child care services are of high quality;

Commitment 4: To improve the availability of quality child care services and early learning resources and child care services;

Commitment 5: To improve the affordability of early learning and child care services;

Commitment 6: To ensure that early learning and child care services are inclusive and meet the needs of all children; and,

Commitment 7: To rely on early childhood research, best practices, and community partnerships in planning for children and families

Each of these commitments is supported by a number of initiatives described in the strategy document. We are committed to working with the community and early learning and child care partners to refine and phase in each of the 39 initiatives and to make progress each year toward fulfilling our commitments and achieving our vision.

- ✓ As part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, \$5.7 million in new funding will be invested in early learning and child care initiatives above and beyond the \$5.7 million added to the Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund in 2007-08. This new funding will complement the \$80 million we are already investing in early childhood programs, services and supports for New Brunswick parents and children.

Commitment 1:

To strengthen the capacity of parents and communities to support families and young children

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 offer a seamless experience for parents and young children. (Action 1)

In the 2007 *Early Years II* study, Dr. Fraser Mustard, Dr. Stuart Shanker and Margaret Norrie McCain provided extensive evidence on the benefits of using local expertise, leadership and community support to establish integrated early childhood development and parenting centres.



The authors acknowledged that many early childhood programs and services exist but are not well integrated. They recommended that proper integration of early childhood services could be achieved through a network of school-based early child development and parenting centres which serve as an integrated hub of programs, resources and supports for preschool children and their families.

- ✓ As part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, we will invest \$400,000 annually to create four demonstration sites for a three-year pilot project to test the concept of early childhood development centres in New Brunswick.



Commitment 2:

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

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. (Action 5)

- ✓ Building on the existing Early Learning and Child Care public awareness campaign, we will invest \$425,000 to promote the importance of a child's early learning experiences, offer parents guidance in securing quality child care for their children, and encourage informal child care providers to become regulated community day care homes. This campaign, in conjunction with the work being done through the provincial Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund, will help to increase the quality and availability of regulated child care spaces in the province.

Expand the range of services and supports offered to at-risk children and families by the network of family resource centres and outreach sites across the province. (Action 9)

There are 13 federally-funded family resource centres and more than 65 outreach sites offering supports and services to children and families throughout the province. Each centre has flexibility as to the specific programs and services it offers to meet the needs of families in their particular community. But, most centres offer the following: parenting programs, drop-in programs and playgroups, parent support groups and education sessions, school readiness programs, collective kitchens and toy and book lending libraries. Through the main centres and outreach sites, more than 6,500 parents and 7,400 children receive services and supports.

- ✓ As part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, we will provide \$400,000 annually in new funding to family resource centres and outreach sites across the province to enable them to enhance programs and supports for parents and preschool children and to support more New Brunswick families.

Commitment 3:

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

Support the University of New Brunswick and l'Université de Moncton in ensuring that all regulated child care service providers are trained in the new provincial early learning and child care curriculum. (Action 10)

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. (Action 20)

During the provincial early learning and child care consultation, we heard that parents want to avoid the “schoolification” of child care and would rather let “kids be kids” through play-based, age-appropriate programming. A key ingredient in high-quality early learning and child care services is play-based or experience-based programming that responds to the unique strengths and needs of young children.

To honour the linguistic and cultural diversity within the province, two distinct curricula have been developed – one in English and the other 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 emergent and engaging curricula were designed to complement the curriculum in kindergarten and elementary school. The curricula identify ways how parents and early childhood educators and service providers can maximize the potential of play for children’s care and learning. 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.

✓ More than \$3 million has been earmarked through the provincial Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund to implement, as part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, the new curriculum in all regulated child care facilities. The curriculum will also be made available in family resource centres and to parents and caregivers interested in using the resource to provide stimulating early learning experiences for their young children.

The new curriculum has been piloted in a number of regulated child care facilities. In partnership with the early learning and child care sector, provincewide training on the curriculum will start in September 2008. By September 2009, all regulated early learning and child care service providers will be trained on the new curriculum.

Continue to support the provincial Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund in the funding of flexible training models to help regulated child care facilities providers meet provincial training requirements. (Action 13)

✓ Through the provincial Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund, grant funding is available for staff in regulated early learning and child care facilities to help them meet provincial training requirements. Staff in regulated early learning and child care facilities, working toward completing a one-year Early Childhood Education certificate, are eligible for \$3,000 toward the cost of their training.





Work with the early learning and child care sector to build on previous wage enhancements for regulated child care service providers. (Action 18)

We invest \$13 million annually in the Quality Improvement Funding Support Program for professional development and wage increases for child care service providers working in the province's regulated child care facilities.

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

- Staff with recognized early childhood education training: an 85 per cent increase from the equivalent of \$7.04 an hour to \$13.07 an hour;
- Staff without recognized early childhood education training: a 50 per cent increase from the equivalent of \$7.04 an hour to \$10.59 an hour;
- ✓ As part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, we will enhance the wages of child care staff through an investment of \$475,000. This will result in an increase of .39 an hour for child care staff with Early Childhood Education Training and .19 for staff without Early Childhood Education Training. With this new funding, total wage enhancements since 2001 will be \$4.50 an hour for staff with recognized ECE training and \$2.75 an hour for staff without recognized ECE training.

The results of the government's ongoing pay equity analysis of child care service providers will be part of future discussions with the regulated early learning and child care sector.

*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 in using this resource to provide stimulating learning activities to their preschool children. (Action 21)*

During the provincial early learning and child care consultation, we heard that there should be early learning resources and supports available to all children to ensure they are on a more even playing field when they enter kindergarten. We also heard that parents, teachers and child care service providers must have a common understanding of school readiness and what children need to be ready for school.

- ✓ As part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, \$550,000 will be invested in the hiring of new community-based early learning specialists to support the implementation of the new provincial early learning and child care curriculum. The specialists will use a coaching and mentoring approach to support staff in regulated child care facilities, staff in the 13 family resource centres and 65 outreach sites across the province, and the transition to school

co-ordinators in the school system. The early learning specialists will also provide support to parents and caregivers to stimulate early learning activities and experiences for their young children.

Commitment 4:

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

Continue to support the Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund in the creation and sustainability of new infant, rural, seasonal and off-hours child care spaces. (Action 26)

During the provincial child care consultation, we heard that there is a need for more regulated child care spaces across the province, particularly infant spaces, rural spaces, off-hours and part-time spaces.

✓ Recently, we added \$5.7 million to the provincial Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund. Through this trust fund, regulated child care facilities can receive start-up funding for the creation of new infant, rural, seasonal and off-hours child care spaces. As of March 2008, 166 new infant spaces, 116 new rural spaces, 72 new extended-hour spaces and 40 new seasonal spaces had been created with funding from this trust fund. The new funding will build on the progress to date in improving the availability of child care for New Brunswick parents and children.

Commitment 5:

To improve the affordability early learning and child care services

Develop and implement strategies so that more New Brunswick families will benefit from the child care subsidies offered through the Day Care Assistance Program. (Action 28)

Under the Day Care Assistance Program, child care subsidies are available to parents with children in a regulated child care facility. Subsidies are based on family size, child care needs of the family and family income. The net annual income at which a family is eligible for maximum subsidy is \$22,000. Partial subsidies are available for eligible families with a net income up to \$41,000 annually, based on a sliding scale.

Child care subsidy rates have not been increased since 2003.

We have listened to what New Brunswickers said in the provincial early learning and child care consultation. We heard that affordability of child care is a significant challenge for parents.

✓ As part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, we will invest \$800,000 to increase child care subsidy rates up to 12 per cent. This represents an increase up to \$2.50 per day for full-time care and up to \$1.25 per day for part-time care. This additional funding will help make child care more affordable for more than 3,700 New Brunswick children and families.

Support families transitioning from social assistance into paid employment by offering child care subsidies for an extended period of time. (Action 30)

Through the existing Day Care Assistance Program, child care subsidies are available to low income families and social assistance clients if they are working, in training, or if the child or parent has special needs or medical needs.

- ✓ As part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, we will invest \$250,000 annually to offer child care subsidies to social assistance clients who are recently unemployed or who have recently completed training and are actively seeking employment. For many families on social assistance, this will help ease the transition into the workforce.

Commitment 6:

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



Develop strategies for supporting the recruitment and retention of community-based autism support workers working with preschool children. (Action 33)

Through the Services to Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Program, the provincial government provides financial assistance to families with preschool children for evidence-based intervention services provided by approved interventionists working out of community-based agencies. We recognize recruitment and retention of autism interventionists continues to be a challenge for the province's community-based autism agencies.

- ✓ As part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, we will provide an additional \$1.3 million to these agencies to improve the wages of their autism interventionists who work with preschool children.

Provide funding to increase the number of special needs children who have access to a support worker while attending a regulated child care facility. (Action 34)

Through the existing Support Worker Program, provincial funding is provided for a support worker (aide) to support a special needs child in a regulated child care facility.

- ✓ As part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, we will increase funding to this program by \$150,000 annually to offer this support to more

families with special needs children and to improve the recruitment and retention of support workers and aides. -

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. (Action 35)

Through the provincial Early Childhood Initiatives Program, the provincial government provides funding for integrated day care and early intervention services to enhance the self-sufficiency of priority families and to foster the healthy development and school readiness of priority children. The provincial government provides \$3,250 per space per year to 17 community-based early intervention agencies that deliver these services to priority children and their parents. This funding is also used to allow priority children to attend a regulated child care facility and benefit from developmentally-appropriate programming.

During the provincial early learning and child care consultation, we heard that there must be better diagnostic and intervention services for preschool and school-age children with behavioural or developmental challenges.

- ✓ As part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, we will provide an additional \$350,000 annually to the existing network of community-based early intervention agencies and integrated day care services. This translates into an increase of \$150 per space annually - on top of the current \$3,250 per space - to strengthen intervention services to at-risk children and parents as the government redesigns the Early Childhood Initiatives Program and the child protection system.

Commitment 7:

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

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. (Action 38)

In several provinces in Canada, community mapping is recognized as an effective tool for government and communities to understand the needs of young children and families, to identify gaps and then plan services and supports accordingly, and to evaluate the effectiveness of these services and interventions.

Community mapping involves the use of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) tool – an assessment administered 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. The data are then aggregated to the community





level to provide a picture of the overall development of a community's young children. This can then be linked with census socio-economic data and data on existing programs and services to help government and communities understand the community's strengths and weaknesses and then plan services and interventions accordingly.

- ✓ As part of our *Early Childhood Strategy Action Plan, 2008-2009*, we will begin work on the development and implementation of this community mapping tool across the province.

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 at all levels of government. (Action 39)

During the provincial early learning and child care consultation, we heard that there must be improved coordination among government departments offering programs and services to children and families.

We created a new Ministerial Committee on Early Learning and Child Care to review the consultation findings, research and best practices, and develop a provincial strategy for early learning and child care. This new cabinet committee is one of only a few such forums in Canada and is, in itself, a key component of the government's plan for the integration of early childhood policy, programs and services across all levels of government to better support parents and communities in preparing young children for school and for life.

- ✓ We have also appointed Mrs. Margaret Norrie McCain as the province's Early Learning Adviser to provide guidance and support to the new committee. Mrs. McCain co-authored the ground-breaking *Early Years* study on early childhood and brain research and has worked tirelessly to share the latest research and promote the necessity and benefit of investing in the early years.

Moving Forward

Our commitments are ambitious and require the efforts of all our partners if we are to be successful in meeting our goals.

We are committed to working with all our partners to refine the remaining initiatives identified in our 10-year strategy. The new community mapping exercise we will be launching in Year 1 will provide information to government and communities as we better understand the needs of our young children and families and refine our strategies for supporting them. This information will also be useful in providing a baseline and helping us measure our success in improving outcomes for young children and helping them succeed in school and in life.