

**Ministry of Children and
Youth Services**

Minister

Ministry of Education

Minister

**Ministère des Services
à l'enfance et à la jeunesse**

Ministre

Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministre



January 23, 2013

Dear Early Years Partners,

I am pleased to announce that the government is taking another big step forward in the process of building a cohesive and coordinated system of early years and family supports in the province.

Since 2003, we have made significant progress in the early years and family supports system including implementing full-day kindergarten, taking steps to modernize child care, introducing Parenting and Family Literacy Centres in schools, enhancing early intervention and identification services, and supporting the delivery of a range of other child development and family support programs. Our commitment to Ontario's children and families is stronger than ever; together, we now have an opportunity to build on the progress made to date and drive continued transformation of the early years and family supports system.

To maximize benefits for children, parents, our school, community, and municipal partners and the province as a whole, it's time to move forward with a comprehensive plan of action. To this end, the Ontario government is releasing the *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework* which sets out the vision, guiding principles, and key areas for action for the early years and family supports system for children age 0-6 years and their parents / caregivers.

The framework responds to feedback we heard from our partners and Ontarians during discussions related to child care modernization and the concept of Best Start Child and Family Centres. We heard that families want better service experiences, easily obtainable information, and the right supports at the right times. The *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework* provides the necessary strategic direction to our partners both within and outside of government to achieve what families and service providers have asked for. The framework is attached for your reference.

One of the key areas for action within the framework is to create an effective approach to implementing Best Start Child and Family Centres, which builds on the advice of Dr. Charles Pascal and the remarkable work already underway in communities across the province. This will involve establishing a common mandate and identity by integrating family support programs in Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Child Care / Family Resource Centres, and Better Beginnings, Better Futures sites while maintaining current investment levels. By integrating these existing family support programs, we will improve outcomes and provide better service experiences for children and their families. We will continue to work with our partners to implement this approach to Best Start Child and Family Centres by September 2014 when full-day kindergarten will be available to all of Ontario's four- and five-year olds in publicly-funded schools.

In order to establish a common governance structure for family resource / support programs, child care, and full-day kindergarten, responsibility for Best Start Child and Family Centres will reside with the Ministry of Education. In addition, responsibilities related to the province's support of Data Analysis Coordinators (DACs) and the Early Development Instrument (EDI) will be transferred to the Ministry of Education from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. While the provincial funding support for Best Start Networks is also being transferred to the Ministry of Education, the Networks will continue to be expected to have broad early years representation reflecting their local communities.

The approach to Best Start Child and Family Centres will provide families and caregivers with easily accessible and responsive programs, services, and resources in convenient, recognizable locations, and will be supported by a user-friendly provincial website. Teams of qualified staff that include at least one registered early childhood educator will provide high-quality play and inquiry-based learning opportunities for children that are guided by the Early Learning Framework (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/oelf/>). Best Start Child and Family Centres will also provide access to information and timely referrals to help families access specialized services as needed.

As we move forward, we will capitalize and build on existing successful practices, collaborative efforts, and community networks and leverage the extensive knowledge and expertise of dedicated early years professionals and volunteers working in these programs.

Next Steps

It will take time to realize our collective vision for children and their families and we want to make sure we get it right. Over the coming months, we will work closely with our federal, provincial, municipal, First Nation, school board, and local community partners to ensure children and families continue to have access to services and to help inform next steps.

As a key part of the *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework*, we will continue to implement full-day kindergarten for all four- and five-year old children by 2014. The modernization of child care in the province remains a priority; we will continue to stabilize and transform the child care system. Additionally, the ministries of Health and Long-Term Care, Education, and Children and Youth Services are continuing to examine ways to improve the delivery of speech and language services for children across the province.

As Minister for both Education and Children and Youth Services, I am fortunate to work closely with school and community-based partners. I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for providing children and their families with quality care, education, and services each day in communities across the province.

We will continue to provide you with information in a timely manner as we move forward to achieve an improved Ontario early years and family supports system. We look forward to continuing to work with you to build a stronger, coordinated, and accessible system which will contribute to better outcomes for our children and a better future for Ontarians.

Yours truly,



Laurel Broten
Minister

Attachments:

- *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework-2013*

Resources:

- *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework* also available at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/index.html>
- Ministry of Education website: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/>
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services website: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/index.aspx>
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/>
- Early Learning memoranda: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/kindergarten/memosummary.html>
- Early Learning Framework: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/oelf/>
- *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario: Sharing Conversations, Strengthening Partnerships, Working Together (Released June 2012)*: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/Modernizing_Child_Care.pdf
- *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario* (released June 2009): <http://www.ontario.ca/education-and-training/early-learning-report>