



SECURING THE FUTURE FOR OUR CHILDREN

Preschool Excellence Initiative



ONE ISLAND COMMUNITY



ONE ISLAND FUTURE



“Government recognizes and supports the Island belief that our future is fundamentally tied to improvements in the education system. From the very earliest years to the most advanced post-secondary education, Government will support all efforts to improve the services and programs offered to Islanders. Government acknowledges the valued role played by our skilled, dedicated teachers and staff – working with learners and their families to ensure that every Island child has the opportunity to develop and achieve at the fullest of his or her potential.”

– One Island, Working Together, Speech From The Throne, November 2009

“Children in Prince Edward Island are healthy and happy, curious and creative, playful and joyous. They are loved and respected, and are safe and secure in their families, homes and communities. Children are our collective responsibility. They are valued for who they are today, and as the future parents and leaders of tomorrow.”

– Kathleen Flanagan, “A Vision for Island Children,” The Early Years Report

SECURING THE FUTURE FOR ISLAND CHILDREN

In the coming months and years, Prince Edward Island will take a massive step forward in the education of our children.

New supports are being built with one fundamental goal in mind: As a province, we can do a great deal more to prepare young Islanders for a lifetime of education.

The first step in the process was the introduction of kindergarten as a full-day program in the public school system.

The next logical step in the plan to improve education is a system that provides support to young Island children from birth to age four, their parents and their educators.

The Preschool Excellence Initiative plan will achieve that goal by helping to build an accessible, sustainable and quality-driven system – which recognizes the need for parental choice.

Founded on extensive research and consultations, the plan provides the Island's largest ever increase in investment in early learning for children from birth to age four. Funding will grow from \$5.35 million in 2009-10 to \$8.7 million in the current year, a 63% increase.

This new investment will better prepare Island children for kindergarten – which in turn, will strengthen their ability to excel during a lifetime of educational opportunities.

THE PRESCHOOL EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE - IN BRIEF

There are five groups who will benefit from the Preschool Excellence Initiative.

CHILDREN

Currently, there are about 6,300 Island children from birth to age four. Of those, approximately 2,000 are enrolled in licensed early childhood programs across the province. Presently, the remaining children are cared for at home, or are in unregulated care.

For Island children, the plan will:

- Provide a high quality learning environment.
- Stimulate and foster creativity, discovery and a love of learning.
- Ensure indoor and outdoor play-based learning experiences.
- Ensure that all early childhood personnel are trained and certified.
- Expand early learning opportunities for Island children with special needs.

PARENTS

In today's world, many Island parents have to work – which means that their children require an environment that values both learning and care. A range of options will remain available to Island parents when it comes to their child care needs. This plan adds options to enhance their children's early educational experiences – while maintaining accessibility through regulation of costs, and provision of programs throughout the province.



For Island parents, the plan will:

- Regulate or moderate parent fees to ensure that the majority of families will see a decrease or no change in fees, and that any rate increases for remaining families are held to no more than \$1 per day.
- Provide new and expanded options for infant care in family home settings.
- Maintain access to licensed early childhood services throughout the province.
- Provide quality early learning opportunities for children, with regular feedback on progress and development.
- Give parents a voice through Parents' Advisory Committees.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Of course, the foundation of the new system continues to be the dedicated Island educators who teach and care for children. In the past, this group was often neglected – resulting in high levels of turnover and losses of experienced staff to other opportunities. The Preschool Excellence Initiative will treat these educators as the professionals they are. In turn, it is anticipated that measures taken under the plan will maintain a stable workforce – and thus enhance the educational experience of Island children throughout their earliest years.

To acknowledge and support the valued role played by our early childhood educators, the plan will:

- Increase wages for certified early childhood educators.
- Develop and deliver new entry-level and one-year training programs for all early childhood staff, creating a career ladder.
- Support ongoing professional development for all levels of early childhood staff.
- Provide a curriculum framework to support the work of educators.
- Provide a new opportunity for early childhood educators to become self-employed through the establishment of Infant Homes.

EARLY CHILDHOOD FACILITY OPERATORS

Many dedicated individuals have provided early childhood services to Island children over the years and their long-standing commitment to their communities is widely recognized and valued.

Under the new plan, operators will have several choices. Private operators who wish to retire their licenses will be offered funding to help them transition out of the sector, and will have the options of employment in an Early Years Centre or opening an Infant Home. Those who wish to move to the new model will be assisted to convert their operations to Early Years Centres or Infant Homes. Operators will also have the option of remaining in business as a private, licensed operation.

For operators, the plan will:

- Offer choices from a range of options.
- Ensure long-term quality and sustainability.
- Address operators' human resource priorities of improved wages, training and professionalization.
- Provide professional development and advisory support to supervisors and owner-operators.
- Provide one-time funding to those who wish to retire their licenses.

OUR ONE ISLAND COMMUNITY

Reliable, accessible and high quality early learning is vital to our Island future.

As the world changes, Islanders will gain access to new opportunities – and meet new challenges. Through our plan to ensure a high-quality early learning system, we are making profoundly important investments in our province's future.

By coupling improved opportunities for our youngest Islanders with substantial new supports to our public school system, our post-secondary sector, and adult learning, Government is embracing the concept of lifelong learning.

For all Islanders, the plan will:

- Ensure access to early learning in local communities across the province.
- Make it easier for people to live in the area of their choice.
- Support the growth of well-educated and successful Islanders for generations to come.

NEW OPTIONS FOR PARENTS: EARLY YEARS CENTRES AND INFANT HOMES

The new Early Years Centres and Infant Homes represent core aspects of the plan.

THE EARLY YEARS CENTRES

It is anticipated that twenty Early Years Centres and Infant Homes will be fully operational by September of 2010, with approximately a further twenty early in the new year.

Under the plan, particular care has been taken to ensure that Early Years Centres and Infant Homes will open in rural areas of the province this year – ensuring continued access to early childhood services by parents wherever they live. Under the new model, the Early Years Centres will receive funding to cover the difference between the revenues that they receive from the regulated parent fees and their costs for regulated wages and overheads – providing stable, predictable, adequate funding for early childhood learning for the first time in the Island's history.

In return for this new investment, the Early Years Centres will offer the following:

Rates at the new Centres will be set at uniform levels to ensure predictable costs. For the majority of parents, this will ultimately result in fee reductions or no change at all. For those parents who paid lower rates at their previous licensed care arrangement, transitional funding will be available to hold fee increases at \$1 per day upon moving to an Early Years Centre and to gradually bring them to the provincial norm over time.

The Early Years Centres will feature a number of other improvements:

- Programming will follow a curriculum framework.
- With Government's assistance, new training programs are being developed to allow all program staff to become certified over the next several years and to create an integrated career ladder for staff from the entry level through to post-diploma and degree training. This initiative will put Prince Edward Island at the forefront of Canadian provinces.



- Early Years Centres will serve a minimum of 40 children, with provision for smaller centres in areas where local needs must be taken into account.
- Each Early Years Centre will be required to establish a Parents’ Advisory Committee to ensure a parent voice in the centre’s operations.
- A five-year wage grid with annual increments of three percent will be put in place. This will bring wages more in line with regional averages and encourage former early childhood educators to return to the field. Further, enhanced wages will encourage new entrants to consider a rewarding career in the early learning profession – and promote more stability and continuity in Island children’s early learning. The wage grid for early childhood program staff and supervisors is as follows:

WAGE GRID FOR EARLY LEARNING CENTRES

Staff Level	Current Avg. Pay	New Start, Yr 1	New End, Yr 5
1) Director (Level 3) - post diploma	\$15.00	\$21.00	\$23.64
2) Certified (Level 2) - 2 year program	\$12.00	\$15.00	\$16.88
3) Certified (Level 1) - 1 year certificate (new)	\$10.00	\$13.50	\$15.17
4) Certified Entry - (new)	\$10.00	\$12.00	\$13.50
5) Special Needs Assistant	\$10.21	\$11.71	•

• to be determined

INFANT HOMES

One of the biggest challenges facing Island parents is the need for high-quality, accessible infant care.

A great deal of input was received on this issue, from parents and educators who want new options and increased access to licensed care for our youngest children.

Infant Homes are designed to help address those concerns, and include the following features:

- Care will normally be provided in a certified provider’s home, for up to three infants – reflecting the need to provide parents with the option of a family home setting for their children, and offering educators the option of home-based self-employment. In areas of high demand, the option will exist of an Infant Centre with a maximum of six spaces and two staff.
- Providers who are not already trained will be required to complete a 90-hour training course and be certified, to pass a background check, and to have a safe home environment.
- Providers will receive ongoing mentoring and support from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, as well as their local Family Resource Centre.
- Parent fees will be regulated to ensure stability.

In return, government will offer a start-up grant for equipment and other needs, as well as annual funding of \$1,000 per infant.





THE EARLY YEARS REPORT

OVERVIEW

The plan builds on a strong foundation of extensive consultations and research. In 2009, Government recognized that the impending move of kindergarten to the school system would create both challenges and opportunities for the early childhood sector. To define the impacts, Government closely examined the financial and human resource impacts of the kindergarten transition.

To explore the opportunities, in January 2010, Kathleen Flanagan and Associates began work to develop a comprehensive early childhood framework for Prince Edward Island. The study drew on the views and advice of parents, early childhood educators, the local, national, and international key informants; a comprehensive literature review; and an online survey completed by over 700 parents.

The Early Years Report calls for all the Island's early childhood measures to have a common focus: the child. That focus is reflected in the vision proposed by the report:

“Children in PEI are healthy and happy, curious and creative, playful and joyous. They are loved and respected, and are safe and secure in their families, homes and communities. Children are our collective responsibility. They are valued for who they are today, and as the future parents and leaders of tomorrow.”

The Early Years Report highlights the key trend in early childhood education worldwide – a shift from child care to early learning. This priority was affirmed by Island parents and others consulted for the study. Its importance is borne out by the large and growing body of evidence that investments in the early years reap lifelong benefits of health, well-being, prosperity, and learning.

THE EARLY YEARS REPORT: GOAL AND SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Early Years Report calls on Prince Edward Island to create an early learning system that is:

- High quality
- Accessible
- Sustainable
- Respectful of parental choice

Quality: To promote quality, the report recommends measures to improve access to training and certification, curriculum development, parent involvement, wages and working conditions, quality measures and research.

Access: To increase both availability and affordability of early learning, the report recommends using public infrastructure where available, addressing before and after school care, developing a network of registered infant homes, more structured planning for new spaces, revisions to the Child Care Subsidy Program.

Sustainability: To ensure sustainability, the report recommends development of a new funding model that improves affordability for parents, while providing wages and benefits for educators that more accurately reflect the education and scope of responsibilities. It also recommends a planned and coordinated approach to new development, based on community need and guided by regional advisory committees.

Parental Choice: Feedback from parents, educators and operators clearly indicates that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Reflecting these diverse views, the Early Years Report calls for continued availability of choices and options.

The Preschool Excellence Initiative provides a range of options for both parents and operators:

- Private licensed early childhood centres will continue to be an option. Operators, both private and non-profit, who do not wish to participate in the new model can choose to continue operating as licensed centres within the system. Operators must continue to meet regulatory requirements such as safety, space, staffing ratios, and staff training. These centres will differ from Early Years Centres in that they will be able to set their own parental fees and wages and select their own curriculum, but direct funding grants will be evaluated over time.
- Parents will be able to enroll their child in an Early Years Centre. These new centres will be licensed and will fulfill the key goals of the Early Years Report related to quality, access, and sustainability. In support of these goals, Early Years Centres will feature regulated parent fees, a wage grid for educators, enhanced funding, quality supports and a consistent early learning curriculum framework. All Early Years Centres will be required to have an open door policy, including spaces for infants and children with special needs. Complementing the Centres, Infant Homes will be established throughout the province to increase access and provide a home-like small group setting for children under age two.
- Some parents may choose to have their children cared for informally, where arrangements regarding payment and services are strictly between the parent and care giver and obviously this option will remain.



PRESCHOOL EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE - IMPLEMENTATION

It is anticipated that the plan will be implemented over the next two fiscal years. This year, Government will invest \$8.7 million, and in 2011/12, this investment will grow to \$9.7 million. The plan will include an evaluation, to be completed in the fall of 2011, which will guide any further refinements.

Elements of the plan are as follows:

1. WAGES

As of September 2010, Government will implement a new Wage Enhancement Program for all certified early childhood educators in the province. This wage enhancement will ensure a minimum salary of \$15/hour for all certified early childhood educators. This represents an investment of \$700,000 in wage enhancements for certified staff in existing centres for the seven months from September 2010 to March 2011. Certified staff in the new Early Years Centres will also receive \$15/hour under the wage grid.

2. TRAINING

With the support of the Labour Market Development Agreement / Labour Market Agreement, Holland College and Collège Acadie, in conjunction with Government, will develop and deliver training to ensure that all program staff in the early childhood sector are certified. This fiscal year, \$500,000 will be

invested to develop a 90-Hour Entry Level Certification Program and begin delivering it to uncertified staff currently in the sector. Upon completion of their training, these staff will also receive wage enhancements. In Year Two, funding will be maintained to continue delivery of the entry level training, and to develop and commence delivery of a one-year certificate program.

3. EARLY YEARS CENTRES AND INFANT HOMES

Government will begin the transition from child care to early learning by establishing approximately 20 Early Years Centres and Infant Homes by September, 2010. Particular priority will be placed on maintaining access in the rural areas where existing service will be most affected by the kindergarten transition.

Following this initial round, Government will reach out to all remaining early childhood service providers to explore the scope to convert to Early Years Centres. By November 2010, Government will have notified all centres of their status. Over the following months, centres will convert as they are ready, minimizing disruption for children, parents and staff. Funding of \$1.2 million has been allocated for the Early Years Centres and Infant Homes established this fiscal year.



4. GREAT PLACES TO LEARN PROGRAM

This program provides funding of \$200,000 this fiscal year to renovate and equip available school space to facilitate the establishment of Early Years Centres within public schools.

5. SPECIAL NEEDS

Government will increase funding to the Special Needs Program by 10 per cent to provide trained special needs staff with a wage adjustment. This represents an additional investment of \$100,000, taking total program funding to \$1.1 million.

6. PARENT FEE ASSISTANCE

To assist families with the cost of early childhood services, the Preschool Excellence Initiative will ultimately maintain or reduce fees for the majority of families. For remaining families moving from their previous licensed care arrangement to an Early Years Centre, fee increases will be held to a maximum of \$1 per day per child.

To further assist lower-income young families and to increase their children's access to early learning, the plan includes two significant enhancements to the Child Care Subsidy Program. Per diem rates, last increased in 2005, will rise by 10 per cent. Income thresholds, last increased in 2007, will rise by \$2,000. These measures will benefit the families already assisted by the program, and extend eligibility to additional low and moderate income young families.

Taken together, these measures represent investments of \$600,000 in parent fee mitigation.

7. SECTOR ADJUSTMENT MEASURES PROGRAM

To promote an orderly transition to the new model, a new \$940,000 Sector Adjustment Measures Program will offer the following supports:

In areas with surplus access, a License Retirement Fund will be available to centres who wish to close.

A Bridging Fund may be available for those centres who wish to become an Early Years Centre but who need time and support to make the transition. Centres will be required to hold fee increases to no more than \$1 in the interim; to agree to meet the criteria of the Early Years Centres, and to provide the financial information required to assess the need for bridging support.

A Planning Fund will be managed by the Early Childhood Development Association in collaboration with government, to assist centres with human resource planning and with legal and financial advice, and to promote collaboration among operators to jointly establish new Early Years Centres.

8. PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

To continue supporting the sector through this time of transition, government will increase its core funding to the Early Childhood Development Association of Prince Edward Island to \$160,000. Through this funding, the association will assist centres, staff, and parents to achieve a smooth and orderly transition to the new model. As well, the association will be able to draw on the sector transition support noted above to help centres access specialized or in-depth advice and expertise where required.

CONCLUSION

Government has carried out significant internal and external analysis to examine the early childhood sector. The analysis has considered both the immediate impacts of moving kindergarten to the public school system, and the longer-term approach required to promote the future success of our children through a renewed early learning system in the province. The Early Years Report provided a comprehensive review of the sector and presented recommendations for government to consider as it moves forward.

Education is a top priority of this government, as seen by unprecedented and progressive initiatives such as the George Coles Bursary and the movement of kindergarten into the school system.

Government's 2010 Budget allocated an additional \$13.6 million to be invested in early learning and education to build opportunities for Island children. Included in this is Government's investment in kindergarten that has tripled from \$3.2 million to \$10 million this year. And for children from birth to age four, the budget highlighted new funding of \$2.5 million plus additional kindergarten-related savings which will be reinvested in the early childhood sector.

Further funding of \$700,000 is also being provided under labour market programs to meet the sector's needs for further and ongoing training – in addition to the \$650,000 already provided in 2009 for the Accelerated Training program.

This is the largest one-time increase in funding for early learning and care ever made in Prince Edward Island, and reflects the following measures:

- Wage enhancements, training, and a career ladder for all staff.
 - Creation of Early Years Centres and Infant Homes.
 - Regulated parent fees in Early Years Centres and Infant Homes.
 - A Great Places to Learn program to renovate and equip available school space for early childhood use.
 - A Sector Adjustment Measures Program, including such measures as license retirement and bridging funding.
 - A Sector Planning Fund via the Early Childhood Development Association.
- Government has worked closely with the sector's associations, educators, operators, and parents to examine the early childhood sector, to transition kindergarten into the public school system and now to refocus and revitalize the early childhood sector.

The Preschool Excellence Initiative is based on the belief that our youngest Islanders deserve the strongest start possible and that government has a societal responsibility to provide all Island children with access to high quality early learning opportunities. As the Early Years Report emphasizes, children shape their parents, their families, their community and their society.





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