



**Ministry of Education**

# **Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres**

***Planning Guidelines for Service System  
Managers***

July 2016

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The province currently funds four child and family programs including Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Child Care Resource Centres, Better Beginnings Better Futures programs, which have provided beneficial programs and services to families for many years. We also know that in some communities there is limited public awareness of available programs, access barriers, shifting demographics and a lack of consistency in what is available to families across Ontario.

In 2013, the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) released the *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework* to outline the vision that Ontario's children and families are well supported by an early years system that is high quality, seamless, and accessible for children and their families. Since 2010, Ontario has taken a number of steps toward this vision, including the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten, the release of a new child care funding formula, the *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework, How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*, and the proclamation of the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*.

In alignment with the commitment made in the *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework*, in February 2016 the Ministry announced its intention to transform Ministry-funded child and family programs into an increasingly integrated, cohesive system of services and supports for children ages 0-6 and their parents<sup>1</sup> and caregivers<sup>2</sup> known as Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres (OEYCFCs). Beginning in 2018, Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) will be responsible for the local management of OEYCFCs as part of their responsibility for the service system management of child care and other human services.

These guidelines are intended to support CMSMs/DSSABs to effectively plan for and implement OEYCFC programs and services, in partnership with school boards and local service providers. They will guide CMSMs/DSSABs in:

- Ensuring that children and their parents and caregivers have access to the same suite of high-quality, core OEYCFC services regardless of where they live in the province;
- Enhancing public awareness of available programs and services;

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this guideline parents are defined as inclusive of both parents and legal guardians.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this guideline caregivers are broadly defined as all adults that care for young children including, but not limited to, home child care providers, nannies, grandparents and other family members.

- Distributing programs based on demonstrated community needs; and
- Integrating programs with other relevant early years and community services.

The Ministry recognizes that implementing this transformation will require a carefully planned transition process that engages all partners and minimizes service disruptions for children, parents and caregivers. While the expectation is that the key features of OEYCFCs are implemented by 2018, it is understood that program implementation and service integration will take time to meet the goals outlined in this guideline.

### **Key Implementation Dates**

The Ministry will continue to work closely with CMSMs/DSSABs, school boards and service providers to support local service system planning and community engagement, and to mitigate potential service disruptions. Key dates to be aware of include:

- Launch of local needs assessments led by CMSMs/DSSABs (August 2016)
- Release of new OEYCFC funding approach and allocations to CMSMs/DSSABs (Early 2017)
- Submission of needs assessment summaries and initial plans for OEYCFCs (May 2017)
- Implementation of OEYCFC funding approach (January 2018)

If you have any questions about this guideline, please contact your regional Early Years Division Child Care Advisor or Education Officer or email [elib@ontario.ca](mailto:elib@ontario.ca).

Note: An updated guideline will replace the existing program expectations for Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Child Care Resource Centres, Better Beginnings Better Futures, Data Analysis Coordinators, Early Literacy Specialists and Best Start Planning Tables effective January 2018. This program and business practice guideline will align with the expectations outlined in this planning guideline.

## SECTION 2: SERVICE DESCRIPTION

This section describes the Ministry's expectations for the programs and services delivered in Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres (OEYCFCs). It contains information pertaining to the program vision and guiding principles, intended outcomes, core services, customized community connections, service delivery methods, service providers and staffing, French language services, Indigenous programs and services, and public awareness and branding.

### Vision and Guiding Principles

OEYCFCs are intended to support all children, parents and caregivers in learning, growing and connecting – together. This supports the realization of Ontario's vision for the early years, where Ontario's children and families are well supported by a system of responsive, high-quality, accessible and increasingly integrated early years programs and services that contribute to healthy child development today and a stronger future tomorrow.

To support this vision, it is expected that CMSMs/DSSABs, school boards and local service providers will be guided by the following principles when developing, delivering and evaluating OEYCFC programs and services:

*Child and Family Centred:* All programs and services are designed and delivered to meet the unique needs of parents, caregivers and young children to support their developmental health and general well-being.

*Welcoming:* OEYCFCs provide a warm and welcoming environment based on the foundational conditions for supporting growth and long-term success (belonging, well-being, engagement and expression). See below for more information on *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* and the four foundational conditions.

*High Quality:* Programs and services are designed to foster positive outcomes and support nurturing relationships for children, parents and caregivers based on the latest evidence and research.

*Inclusive:* Programs and services are accessible and responsive to children, parents and caregivers with varying abilities and cultural, language, socio-economic, sexual orientation and religious backgrounds.

*Integrated:* Programs and services are developed, coordinated and delivered in a cohesive manner in collaboration with broader community services, school boards, early years partners, primary care providers, parents and caregivers.

*Community Led:* Communities, educators, parents and caregivers are engaged in designing OEYCFC programs and services that embrace and build on their strengths, address identified gaps and meet their unique needs.

OEYCFCs are expected to reflect the view of children, parents, caregivers and educators as competent, capable, curious and rich in potential and experience. Guided by *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (HDLH), OEYCFCs provide an environment that views parents and caregivers as co-learners and leaders in influencing positive child, family and community experiences and outcomes.

CMSMs/DSSABs, local service providers and school boards offering OEYCFC programs and services are expected to use HDLH to guide the development and delivery of local programs. HDLH supports the adoption of a common pedagogical approach among early years settings, based on the four foundations for learning: belonging, well-being, engagement and expression. The following resources are available to help strengthen program quality in early years settings including OEYCFCs:

- [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#)
- [Think, Feel Act: Lessons from Research about Young Children](#)
- [The Early Learning Framework](#)

The following resources are available for additional information on Ontario's vision for education and the early years:

- [Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario](#)
- [The Ontario Early Years Policy Framework](#)

In addition, the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs has developed a national set of guiding principles for family support. These principles, along with a series of helpful resources, can be found on their [website](#).

## **Key Goals for OEYCFCs**

OEYCFC programs and services must be designed and delivered to achieve the following key goals and objectives:

- Parents and caregivers have access to high quality services that support them in their role as children’s first teachers, enhance their well-being, and enrich their knowledge about early learning and development.
- Children have access to play and inquiry-based learning opportunities and experience positive developmental health and well-being.
- Parents and caregivers have opportunities to strengthen their relationships with their children.
- Francophone children and families have access to French language programs and gain enhanced knowledge about language and identity acquisition.
- Indigenous children and families have access to culturally responsive programming.
- Parents and caregivers are provided with timely, relevant and up to date information about community and specialized services.
- Local service providers collaborate and integrate services to meet community needs in an efficient and accessible way.

## **OEYCFC Outcome Framework**

The Ministry is developing a comprehensive OEYCFC Outcome Framework to support the implementation of OEYCFCs. This framework is intended to support OEYCFCs, CMSMs/DSSABs and the Ministry to better understand and measure the impact that OEYCFC core services have in improving the lives of children and families in their community.

The framework will identify key indicators and output and outcome measures related to the core services that will be used to assess our collective progress. It will also support reflective conversations about the achievements made and the opportunities to strengthen or revise programs and practices.

Please find below a visual representation of the framework, as well as sample indicators that may be used to measure our collective progress. The complete framework and associated outcome measurement tools will be released in 2017, following additional conversations and engagement with key stakeholders across the province.

# OEYCFC Outcome Framework

*Ontario's children and families are supported by a system of responsive, high-quality, accessible, integrated early years programs and services that contribute to healthy child development.*





## Outcome Indicators

The OEYCFC Outcome Framework will include both population and program outcome indicators. These indicators are currently in development and CMSMs/DSSABs may choose to identify additional program outcomes in alignment with local priorities and needs. Below are some examples of indicators that may be included in the framework.

Population Measures – Draft Examples	
Children Well-Being	Early Development Instrument
Family Well-Being	TBD

Program Measures – Draft Examples	
Parents/ Caregivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of parents/caregivers reporting strengthened relationships with their child(ren)</li> <li>• % of parents/caregivers who reported becoming more comfortable with different ways to support their child’s development as a result of accessing OEYCFC programs and services</li> </ul>
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of children who demonstrate an increased active engagement in play and learning opportunities (explore, focus attention, test theories, solve problems)</li> <li>• % of children who have participated in a developmental screening and/or surveillance process at the centre (when developmental concerns have been raised)</li> </ul>
Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of parents who feel the program was welcoming and inclusive of all children and families, regardless of family structure, culture, language, religious beliefs, etc.</li> <li>• % of parents who felt able to access information about community supports (employment, child care, health, speech and language)</li> </ul>

## Core Services

To achieve the intended goals and outcomes and support greater public awareness, the Ministry has identified a suite of mandatory core services for all English and French language OEYCFCs. Establishing a set of core OEYCFC services will:

- Ensure that all children, parents and caregivers have access to beneficial, responsive and welcoming programs and services;
- Establish a consistent understanding and awareness of what parents and caregivers can expect from OEYCFC programs and services regardless of where they live;
- Reinforce the use of evidence-based and reflective practices that build on the strengths and address the changing needs of children, parents/caregivers and educators; and
- Promote greater coherence across early years settings as it relates to the use of *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*.

Providing core services will also support CMSMs/DSSABs to contribute to the objectives outlined in the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* including the provision of early years programs and services that:

- Coordinate with other community and human services;
- Are flexible and able to adapt to local circumstances;
- Respect equity, inclusiveness and diversity in communities including Indigenous communities, Francophone communities, urban, rural, remote and northern communities, and for children of varying abilities; and
- Support the social and economic well-being of Ontarians.

To accomplish these goals, all CMSMs/DSSABs are required to manage the delivery of a suite of core services related to: 1) engaging parents and caregivers, 2) supporting early learning and development, and 3) making connections to other family services. CMSMs/DSSABs must ensure the provision of the core OEYCFC services at no fee to program participants, and must be able to demonstrate to Ministry staff how the core services are being provided. CMSMs/DSSABs have the flexibility to determine how these services are delivered and by which entity through local service planning (see the Service Provider section for additional information).

See below for a chart of what types of programs and services must be provided within each of these categories:

## MANDATORY CORE SERVICES

### ***Engaging Parents and Caregivers***

- Discussions and information sharing about child development, parenting, nutrition, play and inquiry-based learning, and other topics that support their role
- Pre- and postnatal support programs to enhance parent and caregiver well-being and to support them in their role(s)
- Targeted outreach activities directed at parents and caregivers that could benefit from OEYCFC programs and services but are not currently accessing services for a variety of reasons (e.g., newcomers to Ontario, teen parents, low-income families, etc.)

### ***Supporting Early Learning and Development***

- Drop-in programs and others programs and services that build responsive adult-child relationships and encourage children's exploration, play and inquiry, supported by *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*

### ***Making Connections for Families***

- Responding to a parent/caregiver concern about their child's development through conversation and observation supported by validated tools and resources (e.g., developmental surveillance, NDDS). In some cases, this may result in supporting parents/caregivers to seek additional support from primary care or other regulated health professionals.
- Information sharing about and facilitating connections with specialized community services (such as children's rehabilitation services), coordinated service planning<sup>3</sup>, public health, education, child care, and child welfare, as appropriate.
- Information sharing about programs and services available for the whole family beyond the early years.

These core services were selected due to the demonstrated positive impact they have been shown to have on the developmental health and well-being of parents, caregivers and young children. Conversations with parents and key stakeholders across the province also supported the selection of these services.

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<sup>3</sup> Coordinated service planning for children and youth with multiple and/or complex special needs is being implemented in phases beginning in 2016-17.

It is expected that CMSMs/DSSABs will ensure that OEYCFC programs and services will collaborate with, but do not duplicate, existing community programs delivered by other organizations, such as breastfeeding clinics offered by local hospitals, public health and birthing centres.

### *Responsive to Local Needs*

Core services must be designed and delivered in ways that are responsive to diverse populations in alignment with local needs (e.g., diverse cultures and languages, children of varying abilities, various family structures, and newcomers to Ontario). This includes providing French language and culturally responsive programs and services for Indigenous children and families where there is an identified need. These needs will be identified through the needs assessment process and ongoing early years community planning processes.

### *Pedagogical Framework*

As mentioned in the Vision and Guiding Principles section of this guideline, all OEYCFCs are required to use *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (HDLH) to guide the development and delivery of programs and services. Additional information about HDLH can be found on the Ministry's website at: [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#)

### *Early Identification and Referrals*

OEYCFCs are a natural place for parents and caregivers to seek information and advice about the children in their care. All OEYCFCs must be welcoming and accessible to children of varying abilities, and opportunities for early identification, screening and surveillance must be made available as required and/or requested. OEYCFCs must also provide parents and caregivers with current information about available community programs and specialized services to ensure that children have access to the supports they need.

CMSMs/DSSABs are encouraged to maintain strong partnerships with relevant community organizations to facilitate smooth transitions and referrals, including special needs coordinating agencies<sup>4</sup> and local steering committees related to coordinated service planning and the integrated delivery of rehabilitation services, key initiatives under Ontario's Special Needs Strategy.

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<sup>4</sup> Coordinated service planning for children and youth with multiple and/or complex special needs is being implemented in phases beginning in 2016-17.

## *Child Minding*

CMSMs/DSSABs are permitted to offer child minding services at OEYCFCs during parent/caregiver programs (e.g., postpartum depression support programs), provided that parents/caregivers remain onsite in alignment with requirements under the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*. OEYCFCs and associated funding cannot be used to offer child care services where the parent/caregiver does not remain onsite.

## **Customized Community Connections**

It is the Ministry's expectation that the priority is placed on the planning, management and delivery of consistent, high quality core services. In addition to the core services, CMSMs/DSSABs may collaborate with community partners to offer additional programs and services at OEYCFCs that align with the needs and priorities of individual communities.

In particular, the Ministry recognizes the importance of integrating OEYCFCs within the broader context of local community services, for example child care, public health, employment and training programs, recreation programs, public libraries and specialized services, as part of integrated local service planning. The Ministry encourages CMSMs/DSSABs to leverage opportunities to provide multiple community services through fewer service delivery mechanisms to ensure that children, parents and caregivers have easy and efficient access to the services they need (e.g., co-location and collaboration with specialized services provided by regulated health professionals; information sessions hosted by settlement services, public health or child welfare agencies).

This concept aligns with the provincial vision for community hubs, which highlights the importance of integrated service delivery and long-term local planning. The report [\*Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan\*](#) explains that "early learning centres" can be identified as community hubs, which can be located either within schools or other relevant community locations. CMSMs/DSSABs are encouraged to identify opportunities where OEYCFCs can be integrated with or otherwise connected to other programs and services for people of all ages to establish community hubs.

CMSMs/DSSABs may also choose to offer other community resources within OEYCFCs (e.g., clothing exchanges, food banks, toy lending libraries). CMSMs/DSSABs may choose to offer not-for-profit full cost recovery programs that meet an identified need in their community (e.g., infant massage session offered by specialized professionals). These services should only be considered once the OEYCFC core service expectations are being met on a regular and consistent basis.

## Service Delivery Methods – Centres, Mobile Services, Virtual Resources and Phone Lines

CMSMs/DSSABs have the flexibility to offer OEYCFC programs and services through a variety of service delivery methods including: centres, mobile services, virtual hubs and local phone lines. While the requirement to establish centres is mandatory, providing mobile services, virtual resources and local phone lines is optional and at the discretion of individual CMSMs/DSSABs. OEYCFC programs and services are intended to be community-based (including schools, community buildings/spaces, and common areas within residential areas) and should not be offered within individual homes.

The Ministry encourages the use of a schools-first approach in alignment with other child care and early years initiatives whenever possible. This includes locating OEYCFCs within schools and encouraging the integration of OEYCFCs and school communities (e.g., connected with other educators and school administration). The schools-first approach was first introduced through the Best Start initiative and reinforced in the provincial report *With Our Best Future in Mind: Early Learning in Ontario*. This approach helps to establish schools as community hubs that are located in areas that are easy to access for many families, and helps to minimize transitions for young children. However, the Ministry also recognizes that other locations within the community may be preferable for the delivery of OEYCFC programs and services for a variety of reasons (e.g., proximity to families in rural areas).

All decisions about OEYCFC program and service locations must align with identified community needs and priorities, with the goal of enhancing program accessibility and connections to broader community services. This alignment must be demonstrated in the initial plans for OEYCFC programs and services that are submitted to the Ministry (see Service Planning section).

<b>Service Delivery Method</b>	<b>Description and Expectation</b>	<b>Mandatory or Optional</b>
Centres	<p>Physical program sites where children, parents and caregivers can participate in OEYCFC programs and services in-person. Centres may be located within schools or community buildings, or may stand alone.</p> <p>CMSMs/DSSABs may choose to have several centres within their boundaries, operating at different times and on different days of the week, based on parent and caregiver needs.</p> <p>CMSMs/DSSABs must offer centre-based core services year round and at least five days per week,</p>	Mandatory

	<p>including either Saturday or Sunday. This requirement may be met by offering the core services in different centres on different days of the week.</p> <p>CMSMs/DSSABs may also consider offering evening services to expand access to working parents and caregivers. However, this is not mandatory and should be based on identified community needs.</p>	
Mobile Services	<p>Programs and services that can be offered outside of centres to further integrate OEYCFCs with broader community services and to enhance service access (e.g., mobile programs for residents living in high-density areas, weekly programs in libraries in rural communities).</p> <p>Mobile services may have regular or irregular days, times and locations of operation. CMSMs/DSSABs and service providers must establish an appropriate mechanism to communicate to parents and caregivers about these services and their locations, dates and times of operation.</p> <p>CMSMs/DSSABs may also consider coordinating transportation options to increase program accessibility where necessary and feasible.</p> <p><i>Example: Hosting a reading circle for children and their parents in a community park or in the common room of an apartment building, coupled with an open discussion about how to support early literacy skills and information sharing about relevant community programs.</i></p>	Optional
Virtual Services and Resources	<p>The provision of online resources, information and other services for parents and caregivers related to the suite of core OEYCFC programs and services (e.g., websites, social media, skype services). These may be particularly beneficial for communities with disperse populations or multiple language needs.</p> <p><i>Note: EDU will maintain a provincial website with general resources for parents and caregivers related</i></p>	Optional

	<i>to early learning, child development, mental health and well-being. It will also contain information about OEYCFC service locations.</i>	
Local Phone Lines	Information about OEYCFC programs and services, including information about child development, parenting supports and play and inquiry-based learning can be embedded in existing community phone-based information services (e.g., 211 or 311).	Optional

**Service Providers**

CMSMs/DSSABs can choose to offer OEYCFC programs and services directly or through purchase of service agreements with publicly-funded school boards and not-for-profit local service providers. School boards and local service providers funded through purchase of service agreements must follow all of the program requirements outlined in this guideline.

When selecting potential service providers, CMSMs/DSSABs are encouraged to select not-for-profit organizations that have:

- The capacity to deliver high quality early years programs that align with the pedagogical approach described in *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years*;
- The ability to collaborate and integrate services with community partners; and
- The existing capacity, knowledge and expertise to address the diverse needs of all children, parents and caregivers.

CMSMs/DSSABs should also support the continued provision of programs and services frequently used by local parents and caregivers (for service continuity) wherever possible to minimize service disruptions. However, it is understood that in some communities adjustments will be necessary to better meet the needs of children and families and to align with the vision and core service requirements for OEYCFCs.

CMSMs/DSSABs are also encouraged to communicate the selection criteria and final decisions regarding local service providers with relevant community partners to maintain open communication and enhance transparency throughout the transition process.

**Staffing**

CMSMs/DSSABs are required to ensure that qualified staff teams are responsible for delivering OEYCFC programs and services at every centre. Qualified staff teams must



include Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) to deliver mandatory core services related to supporting early learning and development. RECEs have specialized knowledge and expertise related to child development and play and inquiry-based learning that is essential to delivering high quality early years programs and services, such as drop-in programs.

Aligned with the other mandatory core services, CMSMs/DSSABs have the flexibility to determine if additional staff with specialized skill sets may be desirable. For example, staff with expertise in adult education, parenting education and family support are also highly beneficial given the importance of engaging and meeting the unique needs of parents and caregivers. It is also expected that staff will engage in professional learning opportunities to keep informed of the latest research on adult education, child development, play and inquiry-based pedagogy, and other relevant topics.

### **French Language Services**

CMSMs/DSSABs are required to provide French-language services where there is an identified need, as determined through local service planning and engagement with parents and caregivers.

Priority should be given to French-language school boards or service providers that have the capacity to deliver high quality French language OEYCFC programs and services wherever possible. CMSMs/DSSABs may also consider partnering with neighbouring CMSMs/DSSABs to enter into shared purchase of service agreements to meet the needs of more dispersed French-language communities. CMSMs/DSSABs are also encouraged to reach out to settlement organizations to establish local partnerships where possible and appropriate.

CMSMs/DSSABs located in areas designated under the *French Language Services Act* (FLSA) are required to provide French-language OEYCFC programs and services in accordance with their legislated responsibilities. Ministry of Education staff are available to discuss the various ways that CMSMs/DSSABs can fulfill their legislated responsibilities under the FLSA.

#### *The Aménagement Linguistique Framework for the Early Years in Ontario*

French-language early years programs and services play a crucial role in the development of the Francophone community. These programs and services provide an opportunity for children to strengthen their knowledge of the French language and to develop their Francophone identity. The Aménagement Linguistique Framework for the Early Years in Ontario is under development. It will provide French-language early years service providers and professionals with a framework that will allow them to set clear program objectives and areas of focus to meet the needs of their Francophone clientele, such as French-language acquisition, Francophone identity building, parent

and community engagement, and the delivery of high quality French-language early years programs and services.

### **Indigenous Programs and Services**

CMSMs/DSSABs are also required to offer programs and services that reflect local Indigenous cultures, as determined through local service planning and engagement with parents and caregivers. CMSMs/DSSABs are expected to work in close partnership with Indigenous organizations and local First Nations (if applicable) to plan for and deliver culturally responsive early years programs and services off-reserve.

Additional guidance related to the delivery of Indigenous-led programs and services will be provided in the coming months, as part of the government's commitment to responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report and Calls to Action.

### **Public Awareness and Branding**

Additional information regarding public awareness and branding activities and requirements will be provided in 2017.

## SECTION 3: SERVICE PLANNING

Municipal service system managers are responsible and accountable for managing local child care and early years programs and services, including OEYCFCs. CMSMs/DSSABs possess critical knowledge about community needs, maintain close connections with community partners, and are well-positioned to establish strong links between OEYCFCs and other relevant early years and community services (e.g., public health, settlement services, libraries, child care, child welfare agencies).

As outlined in the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA), service system managers must:

- Establish, administer, operate and fund early years programs, including providing assistance to operators and evaluating and assessing the impact of public funding;
- Deliver and administer local policies respecting the operation of early years programs and services;
- Coordinate the planning and operation of early years programs and consult with school boards and other prescribed persons or entities in accordance with the legislation; and
- Assess the economic viability of early years programs and facilitate changes to make programs more viable.

With respect to OEYCFCs, CMSMs/DSSABs are also required to:

- Conduct local needs assessments and facilitate meaningful engagement with key community partners, parents and caregivers to integrate OEYCFCs into local service system plans for early years programs and services;
- Enhance, relocate and/or reconfigure OEYCFC programs and services to meet community needs, as required;
- Manage provincial funds and any third party contracts associated with the delivery of OEYCFC programs and services; and
- Manage provincial funds related to early years community planning groups.

The intent of effective service system planning is to enhance service access and to support integrated service delivery for the benefit of all children, parents and caregivers. This can be successfully accomplished by actively engaging a wide variety of community partners to identify community needs and service gaps, determine

appropriate service delivery mechanisms, and regularly monitor and evaluate programs and services.

This section of the guideline describes the Ministry's expectations related to early years community planning processes, service planning considerations, and local needs assessments required to create OEYCFCs.

*\*Note: This section may be expanded in future to include any new requirements outlined in future policy statements related to service system planning.*

## **Early Years Community Planning Processes**

Since 2005, communities across the province have received funding for early years child development planning purposes (Best Start Networks and Regional French Language Networks) to support CMSMs/DSSABs, school boards and other local partners in coming together to achieve integrated service planning in the early years sector. The intent of this funding has been to facilitate collaborative program planning, foster partnerships and enhance public awareness related to early years programs and initiatives. These networks have evolved over the years and continue to work to achieve enhanced collaboration and service integration at the local level.

To align with the updated responsibilities of CMSMs/DSSABs, EDU will continue to provide each CMSM/DSSAB with dedicated funding to support meaningful early years community planning processes that inform early years service system planning decisions. For some CMSMs/DSSABs, this will result in new funding that was previously provided to a local agency for Best Start planning purposes. The purpose of early years community planning processes is to:

- Identify evolving community needs, service gaps, and service duplication;
- Enhance service accessibility for all children and families, particularly isolated, newcomer, and low-income families;
- Ensure the active engagement of Indigenous and Francophone partners in the planning, management and delivery of responsive programs and services;
- Solicit advice and support local decision-making to enrich programs, facilitate smooth transitions and enhance integration between early years services, schools and specialized community services; and
- Regularly collect insights from parents, caregivers and children to inform local programs and services.

These processes must involve all relevant community partners (see list below), be transparent to the community, inform service system planning decisions, and result in

publicly available and regularly monitored action plans that demonstrate the impact of community involvement. CMSMs/DSSABs will be held accountable for the use of these funds through regular reporting processes.

### *Representation*

Meaningful engagement and joint planning and coordination between CMSMs/DSSABs and local partners is essential for planning early years programs and services and achieving system integration. To ensure that service system planning decisions are informed by a wide range of early years sector partners, CMSMs/DSSABs are required to involve representatives from the following organizations in their early years community planning processes:

- English and French district school boards, including Directors of Education and Early Years Leads;
- Local public health;
- Specialized community service agencies;
- OEYCFC service providers;
- First Nations and Indigenous partners;
- Francophone organizations; Licensed child care providers; and
- Other relevant community, post-secondary and training, or government organizations, ministries and departments.

Participants are expected to regularly solicit feedback from their organizations to contribute to planning discussions. They are also expected to share recommendations and decisions with staff at their organizations to ensure that they are implemented throughout the community.

This engagement will ensure that CMSMs/DSSABs develop local service system plans that are responsive to community needs, existing service capacity, and individual community goals and priorities. There is a great deal of existing expertise across the early years system, and CMSMs/DSSABs are encouraged to leverage this expertise to provide high quality child and family programs.

### **Planning for Indigenous Programs and Services**

As part of the government's commitment to responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report and Calls to Action, CMSMs/DSSABs will be expected to work in close partnership with Indigenous organizations to plan for the delivery of culturally responsive early years programs and services. Additional information on these processes will be provided in the coming months.

## **Regional French Language Networks**

Regional French Language Networks play an important role in identifying the needs of Francophone children and families and building community capacity to meet these needs. The intent of these groups is to:

- Strengthen partnerships between French language service providers, school boards and service system managers to support the provision of high quality French language services across the province;
- Identify emerging and established promising practices related to the delivery of French language services in minority and majority language settings; and
- Identify service gaps and work within local early years community planning processes to create creative solutions to address them.

In order for these groups to have an impact on the planning, management and delivery of local early years programs and services, it is essential that regional networks have established linkages with local early years community planning processes across the province.

## **Data Analysis Services**

Funding for data analysis services will be transferred to CMSMs/DSSABs beginning in January 2017. These services are intended to support the initial planning efforts for OEYCFs, as well as enable the broader collection and mobilization of quantitative and qualitative data to inform ongoing early years community planning processes.

CMSMs/DSSABs have the flexibility to determine how to use these funds to achieve the intended outcomes, whether through in-house data and planning services or by entering into a purchase of service agreement with an external organization.

The intended outcomes for data analysis services include:

- Ensuring early years service system planning decisions are responsive to regularly reviewed community needs and priorities;
- Ensuring that local early years programs and services are reflective of relevant, current research and evidence; and
- Actively supporting knowledge mobilization and exchange within the early years sector to support service enhancements.

## **Service Planning Considerations**

CMSMs/DSSABs must consider the following when planning for OEYCFC programs and services, preparing local sector communications and selecting program sites:

- Existing lease agreements and employment arrangements;
- The location of complementary federal programs (e.g., Community Action Program for Children, or CAP-C) and specialized community services;
- The location and existence of any pre-natal, post-natal and early years community programs to prevent any possible duplication in services; and
- Any other relevant information about current programs and services.

CMSMs/DSSABs are required to embed OEYCFCs into their local early years service system plans and adhere to the standards for service system planning set out by provincial policy.

Throughout the transitional planning and implementation phases, it will be important for CMSMs/DSSABs to maintain regular communication with all relevant sector partners within their communities. Timely and regular communication will help to facilitate smoother transitions for all partners, particularly where changes to existing programs, services or sites may be anticipated.

## **Local Needs Assessments and Initial Plans for OEYCFCs**

To achieve the intended outcomes for OEYCFCs, it is essential that local planning decisions are informed by an in-depth understanding of community needs as they relate to early years child and family programs. Conducting an assessment of local needs will assist in the identification of any existing service gaps and/or duplication, and will ensure that provincial funds are used effectively to meet the needs of all children, parents and caregivers across the province.

CMSMs/DSSABs are encouraged to build on any existing processes that may already be in place, and to regularly engage and communicate with community partners throughout the assessment and initial planning process.

To conduct local needs assessments and develop an initial plan for OEYCFC programs and services, CMSMs/DSSABs are required to consider information related to:

- Location, number and language (English, French or non-official) of families with children ages 0-6;
- Existing child and family programs serving children ages 0-6, parents and caregivers including information on program offerings, locations and utilization;

- Children and/or families with identified social or developmental vulnerabilities and their approximate location;
- Number and location of children and/or families that self-identify as Indigenous;
- Available or potential program space within local schools or community buildings;
- Parent and caregiver feedback on preferred OEYCFC service locations, hours of operation and program offerings; and
- Any other information that may be relevant to local service planning for OEYCFCs (e.g., employment data, child/family risk factors such as contact with child welfare).

To support this process and to inform service system planning, CMSMs/DSSABs are encouraged to refer to the Ministry's web-based mapping tool for early years programs and associated data (will be available later in 2016), Statistics Canada, and the latest Early Development Instrument (EDI) scores. CMSMs and DSSABs may also wish to draw upon their own internal and community-based data sources. Early Years Implementation Branch staff are also available to provide information about child and family programs currently funded by EDU.

It is expected that CMSMs/DSSABs actively engage with local community partners including school boards, public health, service providers, parents and caregivers to gain a better understanding of how programs and services could be adjusted to be responsive to changing community needs, as necessary.

#### *Summary and Initial Plans for OEYCFCs*

In preparation for the implementation of OEYCFCs, CMSMs/DSSABs are required to submit the following to the Ministry of Education by May 2017:

1. A summary of the completed needs assessment; and
2. Initial plans for OEYCFC programs and services.

The summary must include a description of:

- The relevant community planning and engagement processes, data sources, and other mechanisms that were used to assess community needs;
- The approximate number and location of children ages 0-6 and a description of other relevant demographic information;



- Relevant qualitative information that has informed the initial plans for OEYCFC programs and services; and
- Initial plans and accompanying rationale for site distribution/locations, programs and services to achieve the intended outcomes for OEYCFCs.

CMSMs/DSSABs are required to share their completed summaries with all relevant early years partners (see Early Years Community Planning Processes section for a list) to ensure that all local partners are aware of the steps taken to determine community needs as they relate to OEYCFC programs and services. Summaries should also be shared with the relevant Early Years Implementation Branch regional staff.

With respect to the initial plans for OEYCFCs, the Ministry understands that these plans may shift over the course of the first few years of program implementation in response to changing community needs and capacity related to program planning, management and program delivery.

CMSMs/DSSABs are expected to regularly review relevant community data and engage with community partners to ensure that OEYCFC programs and services remain responsive to changing needs.

### **Funding Approach for OEYCFCs**

The Ministry has received significant feedback related to funding for OEYCFCs, and continues to work closely with the Provincial-Municipal Early Years Reference Group on the development of a new funding approach. As promised in earlier communications, the government is committed to maintaining its current investment of over \$100M (which includes funding currently provided for Early Literacy Specialists). This includes funding for program delivery, planning and administration, which will be redistributed to CMSMs/DSSABs using a new funding approach by 2018.

The new funding approach will be communicated to CMSMs/DSSABs in early 2017 to support local community planning. The new OEYCFC allocations and program requirements will be implemented beginning January 2018.

## **Thank you!**

Thank you for your continued commitment to delivering high quality early years programs and services in communities across Ontario. Our strong partnership will help to achieve our shared goal of establishing an increasingly integrated system of early years programs and services.

As always, the Early Years Implementation Branch regional staff are available to answer any questions you may have and to support you throughout the planning and implementation process.