

PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

Positioning Early Childhood for the Future

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

June 2012



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A message from Premier David Alward

New Brunswick is embarking on a very exciting and historic journey as we pave the way for our future. Our government is undertaking a bold and visionary strategy in redefining, restructuring and re-energizing the learning environment for New Brunswick's youngest.

Putting Children First addresses the commitments our government made in our 2010 platform for New Brunswick's future. In October 2010, we laid the foundation for fundamental change when we created the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. This set the stage for building a continuum of learning, starting from birth.

The *International Convention of the Rights of Children* emphasizes the importance of fully preparing children to have a fulfilling life in our society, raising children in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, liberty, ability and solidarity. These are not simply words. They are the source of inspiration for all those who work directly or indirectly with young children.

That is the spirit in which we present this plan.

These initiatives underscore the importance of supporting families through a childcare system that is accessible; affordable and inclusive; and within high-quality learning environments. Investments in early learning and childcare are crucial if we want to build a strong, vibrant and productive New Brunswick.

The success of this plan relies on the integration of services through collaboration from all government departments and community service providers involved in any way with early childhood development and education. This can only be successful through strong leadership. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is mandated to lead and oversee New Brunswick's early childhood services.

The plan set forth in this document reflects the provincial government's early childhood priorities. It sets the foundation for ongoing system reform and builds momentum for the continuing expansion of early childhood services. Our plan protects and promotes the vibrant linguistic and cultural elements that make New Brunswick unique—and a special place in which to live.

With this strategic direction, not only we are saying that early childhood is critical, but that it is a vital part of our plan to rebuild New Brunswick. Indeed, it puts our children and families first.



The Hon. David Alward
Premier of New Brunswick

A message from Minister Jody Carr

During the past year, it has been my privilege to meet and consult with many individuals and groups that care deeply about the development and education of our children. They brought ideas, knowledge and experience to determining a new approach to learning for New Brunswick. The plan for the future outlined in this document is a result of that collaborative effort.

For the past decade, experts in the field have been calling for a unified approach to childcare and development, from birth through to the early school years. Their research clearly shows the correlation between the quality of a child's experience in the early years and his or her success in school—even throughout life. Eventually, the broader impact of healthy development for our children is stronger families and communities and a stronger, more vibrant province.

The foundation of the plan is the integration of early childhood development services and education for children from birth to eight years of age. The quality, affordability and accessibility of childcare and other services are built into the plan. We will also focus on ensuring services and education are inclusive—that all children have the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential.

Now the work begins to make this plan a reality as it is implemented during the next three years (*Appendix: The three-year plan*). The dedication and quality of the people who work in the early childhood development and education system in New Brunswick bode well for our success. We value their partnerships and together, and we will build a system of which New Brunswickers can be proud.

I thank the members of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Early Learning and Childcare, including the two co-chairs, Dixie Mitchell and Marjolaine St. Pierre, and the action group of the Commission on Francophone Schools, chaired by Anne-Marie Gammon, which have met with key stakeholders and worked diligently to bring forward recommendations that contributed to the development of this plan. Your work has been invaluable.

Together, let's put children first and position early childhood for the future!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jody Carr". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Hon. Jody Carr,
Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development

A strong start for our children

Our vision is to have an early learning and childcare system that meets the needs of New Brunswick families, no matter where they live. This is an essential element in both social and economic policy.

— Premier David Alward

By integrating early childhood development services and the province's education system, New Brunswick is taking a major step toward ensuring a promising future for our children, their families and our communities.

In New Brunswick, much good work is being done to support young children and their families, but the overall systems of early childhood development and education operate independently. The lack of co-ordination has led to the overlapping and duplication of services while some children were left without support. We know we can do better.

In October 2010, the provincial government took the first step toward a unified approach by joining early childhood development and education services, creating the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. This also enabled the provincial government to expand the definition of early childhood to recognize that children in the earliest years of school are still developing. To that end, early childhood services now will focus on children from birth to age eight, which we believe will facilitate a smooth and seamless transition of services from one part of our system to the other.

By integrating the many early childhood services and the education system, we are changing the way we work on behalf of children. Integration will result in joint planning, service delivery will be measured, and the partners will be accountable to the public in how they address local needs. The evidence shows that this type of strong continuum of services and supports will provide children with greater opportunity to reach their potential for success and, ultimately, become productive participants in society.

In addition to the more integrated approach to service delivery, the provincial government, through its platform commitments, is implementing a number of initiatives that will reinforce the early learning and childcare system for New Brunswick's families. These initiatives will further support the accessibility, affordability, quality and inclusion of the early learning and childcare system, reinforcing the continuum of learning in the province. The result is that, for the first time, New Brunswick will have a unified, cohesive approach to early childhood development. We will have the organizational framework and the supporting administration and policies to provide the level of programming and service delivery our children and families deserve.

Making it work

The 2010 UNESCO study *Caring and Learning Together: A cross-national study of integration of early childhood care and education, within education* offers lessons for successfully integrating the two systems of childcare and education.

- The most important lesson is that it is not sufficient merely to transfer administrative responsibility to the education sector. The system must redefine what learning is and reflect that it is not simply classroom-based.
- For integration to succeed, the system must be restructured to create a seamless continuum between pre-school services and school services and between non-governmental and governmental services. In other words, the system must fit the needs of our children, not the other way around.

For integration to be successful, all partners who work with children from birth to eight years of age must collaborate and define a common frame of reference for interacting not only with children and their families but also among themselves. All partners must have a shared vision, formally accepted by all, that reflects shared outcomes and supports joint annual planning that targets local needs. This is critically important, as all partners must ensure the efficient use of resources and avoid duplication, while maximizing the quality, availability and delivery of services in a cohesive way.

Integration of the early childhood and education sectors presents the opportunity to create a developmental and learning continuum that begins at birth and has a positive, long-term impact. It is an opportunity for rethinking and reformulating service delivery within this learning continuum.

At the same time:

- We must be sensitive to any perception that linking the early childhood and education sectors could result in the so-called “schoolification” of children—the idea that there would be too much formal, curriculum-based learning at the expense of play-based learning.
- We must ensure that strong relationships are maintained with other services, particularly those that support early childhood health and wellness.
- We must consider the holistic development of our children, paying particular attention to their linguistic and cultural identity.

The plan

Creating networks of common purpose

The provincial government's approach to positioning early childhood for the future is two-pronged. First, it will establish two streams of strong leadership for its early childhood services, one for each linguistic sector. Second, it will create early childhood networks supportive and responsive to local needs.

The management structure for early childhood services at the provincial and local levels will have primary responsibility to provide strong leadership and to be committed to the promotion and protection of linguistic and cultural identities. This further means that both official language communities will plan and deliver supportive and responsive services to better meet their needs.

New boundaries will be established for early childhood service delivery, which will be consistent with the seven new school districts. This will ensure greater opportunities for linkages between the early childhood regions and school districts and establish a learning continuum from birth onward.

Each region will have a local director of early childhood services who will also sit on the management teams of the school districts. The director will ensure an integrated approach to services and a smoother transition for children into the K-12 school system.

Apart from supervisory functions, the roles of the director of early childhood services will include: creating and supporting local early childhood services networks; managing contracts with early intervention and other agencies; and interfacing between early childhood development and Integrated Service Delivery. The director will provide leadership to governmental and community agencies and to the school system in the delivery of services for children from birth to eight years of age within the context of integration and collaboration.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will establish two provincial networks of early childhood services, one anglophone and one francophone. These two networks will bring together all of the provincial partners that work with children from birth to eight years of age and their families. As a first step, the networks will be tasked with developing strategic frameworks for early childhood in New Brunswick that will chart the course to be followed locally and provincially. These networks also will be responsible for leading each of their agencies in putting these frameworks into action. They will report publicly and annually on their progress.

The partners in the regions are best placed to understand local issues in the delivery of services to families and young children. To be efficient and effective, all partners at all levels will have to work together to build links between the services and collaborate in the delivery of services.

Each school district territory will have early childhood networks responsible for identifying the needs of that area and developing joint plans to address these challenges. Leadership at the

local level will engage all partners, ensuring they work together and conduct annual joint planning.

Besides establishing an annual work plan and being accountable to the public, the local networks will join forces to target interventions according to the needs identified by their network, while endeavouring to provide the best support possible to children and their families. To that end, each person's roles and responsibilities will have to be clarified to avoid duplication and maximize limited resources to serve the public better.

Services for children who need extra support

The close connections between learning in early childhood and learning in school are undeniable. We know that the first three years in a child's life are crucial to his or her holistic development, and experts have been calling for action to address these early years. This call has been heard in New Brunswick, but many children are still entering school with developmental delays despite everyone's efforts. At present in New Brunswick, early intervention agencies are working with more than 1,800 children from birth to five years of age (and their families) who have multiple risk factors and are at risk of developmental delays.

The foundation of our plan is integrating services for children from birth to eight years of age. Early intervention agencies will have their mandate expanded from zero to five years to zero to eight years and will provide a continuum of support for children and families that need it, in co-operation with the school system.

To ensure a harmonious transition to school for children, early intervention agencies will work with schools and other community agencies to provide transition services. These agencies will be closely linked with Integrated Service Delivery, making them key components of the early childhood services.

Additionally, we will work in collaboration with the Department of Health for the transfer of the *Talk with Me* program. Integrating this preschool prevention language program will help us address language difficulties early on and support a smooth transition to school-based services for these young children when required.

Our commitment to the four pillars: Quality, Affordability, Accessibility and Inclusion

Quality

Research shows that children thrive in childcare settings when staff members are well trained and there is minimal staff turnover. To that end, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will develop and offer two introductory courses on early childhood education (one in English and one in French) for persons working with children from birth to five years of age.

In addition, the department will work with Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick to develop a certification model for the early childhood education sector. This model will strengthen the sector's capability to administer high-quality programming by its members for the benefit of young children.

In 2001, the provincial government launched its financial support program to increase the salaries of childcare educators. At that time, the average hourly wage for educators was \$7.04. In April 2011, the average hourly wage for educators with recognized training rose to \$14.67.

We will re-instate the wage improvement of \$2.75 per hour for the untrained childcare staff. This support was eliminated for new facilities that opened after March 30, 2010. We believe that this measure alone will greatly support early learning and childcare operators to recruit and retain staff.

The provincial government is committed to increasing its subsidy to improve salaries of educators with recognized training. In April 2013, and again in April 2014, the subsidy will increase by 25 cents per hour, which will see the subsidized hourly amount rise to \$5 per hour. It is hoped that this new investment will encourage staff to obtain the recognized training.

We will work in close partnership with the community colleges, Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick and the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour in exploring the implementation of a two-year program for early childhood education.

Affordability

The provincial government is committed to making childcare services more affordable by increasing the subsidies for childcare fees for working parents. Consequently, families whose annual income is less than \$30,000 will be eligible for the full amount of the subsidy.

In addition, the subsidies for families will see the eligibility ceiling rise from \$40,000 in annual income to \$55,000, phased in during the next three years.

To narrow the gap between the subsidy for parents and the fees charged by licensed childcare services, the provincial government plans to increase the subsidy by \$4 per day for infants and \$1.75 per day for preschoolers. For the average family with an infant, this will mean additional

support of \$92 per month or about \$1,100 per year. For the average family with a preschooler, this will mean additional support of \$40 per month or about \$483 per year.

Accessibility

As promised, the provincial government will continue to promote the creation of 10,000 new childcare spaces during the next three years.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in partnership with the departments of Economic Development and Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, will develop a strategy for employers to increase the number of childcare spaces in workplaces.

Furthermore, we will design an awareness campaign to promote the creation of new childcare spaces for infants, extending hours of operations, and the creation of new spaces in rural New Brunswick. As well, we will develop materials to help support parents in choosing quality early learning and childcare services.

Inclusion

Inclusion must begin in the early years. All children – children with disabilities and additional needs, children of recent immigrants – must have the opportunity to participate fully in early childhood services, especially childcare. The department will develop strategies to support children with significant needs by increasing funding for aides when required. But the participation of all children should not be dependent on more staff. It must be dependent on the training of childcare staff so that they know how to support and integrate all children. To that end, we will ensure that all childcare facilities are trained and supported to provide inclusive childcare. As well, we will continue to invest in services for preschool children with autism, recognizing that earlier interventions can have a profound and positive impact on the lives of children with autism spectrum disorder.

An Investment in our Children's Future

This plan and the many people involved in its development have been driven by our collective commitment to the well-being and success of New Brunswick's children and families. It is the foundation on which we will build the integrated services and continuum of learning that will ensure a healthy future for our province.

As we implement the plan during the next three years, it is imperative that we maintain the strong spirit of collaboration and unified purpose that has taken root during its development.

In total, a minimum of \$38.27 million will be invested during the next three years to support our early childhood action plan.

Three-year implementation plan

During the next three years, we will be engaged in supporting the positioning of early childhood for the future. This important positioning lays a solid foundation for Integrated Service Delivery in a continuum of learning for New Brunswick children.

2012-13

Investments of \$750,000 for the creation of a strong and robust provincial and local leadership to foster the bridging of early childhood and education services.

- Creating two provincial early childhood networks: one in English and one in French. This will ensure that services are supportive and responsive to the needs of each of our two official language communities. In the fall of 2012, these provincial networks will develop strategic frameworks for early childhood in New Brunswick, endorsed by all stakeholders working with young children.
- Hiring seven local early childhood services directors with the responsibility to oversee local early childhood services and to provide leadership in the integration of the delivery of early childhood services. These directors will also be part of the managerial teams of the school districts and foster the bridging between the two sectors.
- Creating local early childhood networks within the boundaries of each school district. These networks will have the responsibility to identify the needs and gaps in services in their area and to facilitate joint annual planning for Integrated Service Delivery within an accountability framework.

Increased support to children and their families.

- Transferring the Talk with Me program to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
- The foundation of our plan is integrating services for children from birth to eight years of age. Early intervention agencies will see their mandate expanded from zero to five years to

zero to eight years and will provide a continuum of support for children and families that need it, in co-operation with the school system.

- Increasing investments in services for preschool children with autism spectrum disorders.

Investments of \$1.5 million to increase supports for enhancements to quality in childcare facilities.

- Re-instating the wage enhancement of \$2.75 per hour for the untrained staff, effective September 1, 2012, and retroactive to April 1, 2012. This initiative supports the pay equity measures for early learning and childcare personnel.
- Designing two online *Introduction to Early Childhood Education* courses (one supporting anglophone educators and one supporting francophone educators) that will be available to individuals working with children birth to five years old.
- In co-operation with Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick, the department will collaborate on the finalization of a certification model for educators in childcare facilities.

Investments of \$525,000 will be made to support the affordability of childcare services for parents with limited income, starting in October 2012.

- The control point for annual family income to be eligible for a full subsidy will increase to \$25,000 from \$22,000.
- The control point for the annual family income cut-off point will be moved to \$45,000 from \$40,000.
- The maximum daily subsidy for infants (birth to 24 months) will be increased by \$2 per day, bringing the maximum daily rate to \$26.50 per day from \$24.50 per day.
- The maximum daily subsidy for preschoolers (two to five years old) will be increased by 75 cents per day, bringing the maximum daily rate to \$23.25 per day from \$22.50 per day.

Investments of more than \$2 million for the increased access to regulated childcare spaces.

- Significant investment will be made to support the creation of new childcare spaces.
- Additional funding will be provided to the Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund to support the creation of new rural childcare spaces. The grant will increase by \$500 per facility to \$5,500 per facility.
- Design a strategy to encourage employers to offer childcare services to their employees on the worksite, in partnership with the departments of Economic Development and Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour.
- Design and implement an awareness campaign to promote the creation of new childcare

spaces and materials to support parents in their selection of quality early learning and childcare services.

While affordability and accessibility of childcare is important, it must also be inclusive in a way that permits all children to take part actively in daycare activities. To that end, \$250,000 will be invested this year.

- Funding to support the design and implementation of services to support inclusion within childcare facilities through the hiring of community-based facilitators who will increase the capacity of childcare facilities to offer inclusive childcare services.

2013-14 to 2014-15

Continued integration of early childhood services and education supported by a vibrant leadership.

- Joint agreement on the terms of the early childhood strategic frameworks for New Brunswick by all partners involved.
- Implementation of the accountability framework for all early childhood services.
- Early intervention agencies will begin implementing their expanded mandate.
- Public reporting of the outcomes of the 2013-14 provincial and local networks workplans on the provincial government's website.
- Public posting of the provincial and local networks' workplans for 2014-15.
- Ongoing funding for services for preschool children with autism spectrum disorders.

Increased support for enhancements to quality in childcare facilities.

- Completion of the design of the online *Introduction to Early Childhood Education* courses and trial period for its implementation.
- Completion and implementation of the certification model for educators in childcare facilities.
- Increase of 25 cents per hour of the wage top-up for trained staff, with the top-up going to \$4.75 per hour from \$4.50 per hour.
- In 2014-15, full implementation of the online *Introduction to Early Childhood Education* courses,
- In 2014-15, full implementation of the certification model for educators in childcare facilities.
- Increase of 25 cents per hour of the wage top-up for trained staff with the top-up going to \$5 per hour from \$4.75 per hour.

There will be significant investments to support the affordability of childcare services for parents with limited income. Starting in October 2013 and in October 2014.

- The control point for annual family income to be eligible for a full subsidy will increase to \$27,000 from \$25,000. A further increase, to \$30,000 from \$27,000, will take place in 2014-15.
- The control point for the annual family income cut-off point will go from \$50,000 from \$45,000. A further increase, to \$55,000 from \$50,000, will take place in 2014-15.
- The maximum daily subsidies for infants (birth to 24 months) will be increased by \$1 per day, bringing the maximum daily rate to \$27.50 per day from \$26.50 per day. In 2014-15, this rate will be further increased by \$1 per day, bringing the maximum daily rate to \$28.50 per day.
- The maximum daily subsidies for preschoolers (two to five years old) will be increased by 50 cents per day, bringing the maximum daily rate to \$23.75 per day from \$23.25 per day. In 2014-15, this rate will be further increased by 50 cents per day, bringing the maximum daily rate to \$24.25 per day.

Increased access to regulated childcare spaces.

- Promotion of the strategy to encourage employers to offer childcare services to their employees on the worksite and ongoing public awareness activities.
- Ongoing investments in the Early Learning and Child Care Trust for the creation of new spaces.

Beyond the affordability and accessibility of childcare, it must also be inclusive in a way that permits all children to take part actively in daycare activities.

- Further investments for the continuity of the community-based facilitation of inclusion within childcare facilities.
- Over two years, provide funding for 50 additional seats for support workers/aides to support the participation of children with special needs while their parents are at work, with 25 new seats in 2013-14 and another 25 seats in 2014-15.

Highlights of Year 2 and Year 3: 2013-14 and 2014-15 investments

\$31.7 million will be invested to support the action plan in 2013-14 and 2014-15. Highlights include:

- **An additional \$3.455 million and \$3.755 million** will be invested during the next two years, respectively, totalling a cumulative **\$16.65 million** over three years, targeted to support the anticipated growth in childcare spaces during this period.

- **An additional \$940,000 and \$933,000** will be invested during the next two years, respectively, to increase subsidy levels for childcare and to ensure that more families can benefit from those subsidy levels, for a cumulative total of **\$4.388 million** over three years.
- **An additional \$570,000** will be invested in each of years 2 and 3 for staff compensation which, coupled with the re-instatement of wage enhancements for untrained staff, a cumulative total of **\$4.11 million** over three years.
- **An additional \$850,000 and \$1.3 million** will be invested during the next two years, respectively, to increase the number of trained childcare staff, for a cumulative total of **\$5.25 million** over three years.
- An additional **\$50,000** will be invested in Year 2 in community-based facilitators who will support childcare facilities in becoming more inclusive of all children and maintained at **\$300,000** in Year 3, for a cumulative total of **\$850,000** over three years.
- An additional **\$420,000** will be invested in Year 2 and maintained in Year 3 to fund additional support workers in childcare facilities, totalling **\$1.26 million** over two years.
- Ongoing funding for services for preschool children with autism spectrum disorders.
- **\$750,000** for a new director of early childhood services in each school district will be maintained.

