

**Everyone at their best...
from the start**



New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan

Annual Report 2017-2018



**Everyone at their best... from the start:
Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan**

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Canada-New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Agreement

Minister's message

Our government is committed to improving early learning and child care services across the province, to help build a world-class education system. Early learning and child care services offer rich learning environments where children can gain the fundamental skills and knowledge, they need so they can build a bright future for themselves.

I am pleased facilities across the province can apply to become designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres. Learning is a lifelong process; the importance of investing in these foundational years to give every child an equal opportunity to develop to their full potential.

Parents whose children attend designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres and Homes may be eligible for improved subsidies to cover the expenses for their child attending one of the designated facilities. The Low Fee

Policy, the cornerstone of the new designation, ensures families have affordable access to high quality early learning and child care services that meet their needs, making it easier for them to participate in the workforce.

Quality Operating Grants have helped ensure facilities are able to meet the standards required to earn the New Brunswick Early Learning Centre designation. This has resulted in improvements at many early childhood education centres across the province.

This new program is aimed at improving the accessibility, affordability, inclusivity and quality of early learning and child care services for preschool-aged children, thanks to the three-year Canada-New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Agreement.



Dominic Cardy

Introduction

The Canada-New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Agreement was signed between the province of New Brunswick and the Government of Canada in August 2017. This agreement aims to improve the accessibility, affordability, inclusivity and quality of early learning and child care services for preschool-aged children. This federal-provincial, three-year early learning and child care agreement commits \$71 million to improve early learning and child care for preschool-aged children in the province.

In January 2018, the provincial government released *Everyone at their best...from the start: Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan*. It recognizes the importance of a child's first five years and outlines the steps government, and its partners are taking to enhance the quality, accessibility, and affordability of early learning and child care in New Brunswick.

The following report details the activities that the provincial government undertook to implement the *Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan* during the fiscal year 2017-2018 as required by the Canada-New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Agreement.

Consultation and engagement

The *Everyone at their best...from the start: Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan* builds on the valuable information gathered through the New Brunswick Child Care Review Task Force Report released in 2016. The Task Force report was a culmination of extensive consultations with key informants to recommend a path for creating the right conditions for *quality* early learning and child care that are accessible, affordable and inclusive and that support parents' participation in the workforce. Furthermore, parents were consulted on their opinions and preferences around financial aid to access early learning and child care services.

The new designation of New Brunswick Early Learning Centres is the result of a shared design between government, the early learning and child care sector and parents. Throughout the development as well as the implementation phases, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) actively engaged key partners to ensure that the voices of the operators, educators and parents were included in the program design. To that end, the first facilities that became designated as part of Phase 1 roll out were involved in the co-construction of the program design pertaining to the designation process.

EECD also ensured that operators were regularly informed on the progress of the action plan. A series of information and engagement sessions were offered across the province to update operators and educators. There were 29 information sessions across the province between October 2017 and March 2018 where a total of 743 participants attended.

In addition, discussions were held with key stakeholders, such as:

- Corinne Haché and Pam Whitty, Commissioners of the *Child Care Review Task Force*;
- Gino LeBlanc and Karen Power, co-chairs responsible for the development of a 10-year provincial education plan;
- Early Childhood Care & Education New Brunswick / Soins et éducation à la petite enfance Nouveau-Brunswick;
- School District Superintendents;
- District Education Councils and the Conseils d'éducation de district;
- Association des enseignantes et des enseignants francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick; and
- Association francophone des parents du Nouveau-Brunswick.

A promotional web page on the New Brunswick *Everyone at their best...from the start: Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan* was launched in January 2018. This page provides a central location to access information related to the Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan.

http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/corporate/promo/improved_early_learning_and_child_care.html

A toll-free number, as well as an email account, were created to provide information for operators and parents and respond to queries specific to the action plan.

Establish New Brunswick Early Learning Centres

The designation of New Brunswick Early Learning Centre is a recognition given to licensed early learning and child care facilities that offers services to preschool children aged five and under through a voluntary application process and commits to providing equitable and affordable access to higher quality early learning and child care services by removing barriers linked to family income, children's ability and needs, language, and minority settings.

To become designated, early learning and child care facilities must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- 1 Be in compliance with licensing requirements;
- 2 Provide services to preschool children aged five and under; and
- 3 Choose and implement one of the curriculum frameworks: New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for

Early Learning and Child Care or *Curriculum éducatif des services de garde francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick*.

Once designated, New Brunswick Early Learning Centres are required to meet the following criteria:

- Commit to implementing the Low-Fee Policy;
- Improve their capacity to serve all children including those with disabilities and diverse needs through the implementation of inclusive policy and practices;
- Create annual quality improvement plans and undergo annual quality assessments;
- Commit to the use of the provincial child care registry;
- Actively participate in on-going professional learning; and
- Work with government on data sharing
- Create and maintain a parent committee

Phase I – Designation

In January 2018, all eligible early learning and child care centres in the City of Saint John and the greater Edmundston area were invited to become designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres as part of the Phase I provincial roll out. Those that chose to do so committed to

working in collaboration with GNB in the co construction of the program design.

As of March 31, 2018, 25 centres of the 56 eligible in Phase I had been designated as New Brunswick Early Learning Centres.

Affordability, accessibility and quality

The New Brunswick Child Care Review Task Force Report described the cost of care as one of the main barriers for parents who told the commissioners that the rising costs of child care are inhibitors for some families' workforce participation and influences their decision to grow their family. Furthermore, operators expressed concern over ongoing sustainability and viability of their services, particularly the costs associated with providing higher quality services.

The Low-Fee Policy has been established to ensure families have access to quality child care they can afford that includes a Market Fee Threshold, enhanced parent subsidies and on-going operational funding for designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres.

Low-Fee Policy – Market Fee Threshold

The Market Fee Threshold is a tool used to determine the market efficient price for licensed early learning and child care services based on the age of the child and on the community type. The Market Fee Threshold was determined using the fees charged to parents by operators of licensed early learning and child care services as of December 2017.

The fees charged to parents are to be maintained at the December 2017 rates for daycares to become a designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centre. The Market Fee Threshold will provide stable rates for families and provide greater consistency in the market. The table below is the Market Fee Threshold for 2017 to 2020.

Current fee range	Large Urban	Small Urban	Rural
Infant	\$39.00	\$35.00	\$34.00
Preschool	\$33.00	\$29.50	\$29.00

However, the Low-Fee Policy includes a schedule for fee increases. For more information on the Market Fee Threshold, visit the following link: [https://www2.gnb.ca/](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/early_childhood/market-fee_threshold.pdf)

[content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/early_childhood/market-fee_threshold.pdf](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/early_childhood/market-fee_threshold.pdf).

Low Fee Policy – Funding Envelopes

There are three funding envelopes to support the Low-Fee Policy. Parents of children attending designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres may benefit from an improved parent subsidy for low and middle income families. In addition, licensed early learning and child

care services that are designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres are eligible for additional funding to offset the costs associated with meeting designation program requirements.

1) Designated Centre – Parent Subsidy

The provincial government committed to making child care more affordable to low and middle-income families with preschool-aged children. This will ensure that parents are given every opportunity to enter the workforce or pursue their studies, while having the peace of mind that their children are being cared for in high-quality Early Learning Centres across the province.

The Designated Centre - Parent Subsidy offers three categories of financial support:

- Free child care for preschool-aged children from families with a gross annual income of \$37,500 and under attending a New Brunswick Early Learning Centre, regardless of the location and fee charged by the operator;

- Subsidized child care for families with an annual income between \$37,500 and \$80,000 before taxes on a sliding scale; and
- No family in New Brunswick should pay more than 20 per cent of their gross annual family income to cover child care costs while their children are attending a New Brunswick Early Learning Centre. This will increase supports for families with multiple children five years of age and under, before they begin school.

To assist families, GNB developed an easy to use on-line subsidy calculator that provides an estimated daily subsidy available for families through the designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres. The calculator can be found at the following link:

http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/corporate/promo/improved_early_learning_and_child_care/designated_care_subsidy_estimator.html.

2) Infant Operating Grant

Designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres are eligible for an on-going Infant Operating Grant that is designed to offset the costs of providing infant care.

Designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres are eligible for \$10 per infant space per day.

3) Quality Operating Grant

Designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres will be eligible for an on-going operating quality grant of \$2.50 per preschool space per day to support the operators to meet

the quality criteria of being a designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centre as described in their annual quality improvement plans.

Implement professional learning and development opportunities for early childhood educators

Two 90 hours Introduction to Early Childhood Education on-line courses, one in English and one in French, were launched in 2017-2018 and enshrined in legislation as the minimum training requirement for early childhood educators working in licensed early learning and child care facilities. Each on-line course includes 30 hours on

the early learning and child care curriculum frameworks and 60 hours of various topics such as child development, inclusion practices, language development, to name a few. Subject matter experts were hired to support the professional learning of early childhood educators.

Implement an Inclusion Policy

In 2017-2018, EECD entered into a partnership with the New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL) to support designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres to develop and implement facility-based inclusion policies based on a provincial inclusion policy.

Early Learning Inclusion Facilitators from NBACL will work with facility operators to assess the current inclusion practices and to develop their centre's inclusion policy. The model was developed as part of a prior pilot program created by NBACL and EECD.

Develop guidelines for language acquisition and cultural identity learning environments

EECD entered into an agreement with *l'Association francophone des parents du Nouveau-Brunswick* (AFPNB) with the objective of working with the early learning and child care sector to recommend guidelines for supporting early childhood educators to integrate language acquisition and cultural identity learning environments within New

Brunswick Early Learning Centres that use the *Curriculum éducatif pour la petite enfance francophone du Nouveau-Brunswick*. The guidelines are meant to be tools for educators to provide proven teaching practices in language development and cultural identity for preschool-aged children living in linguistic minority communities.

Introduce requirements for annual quality improvement plans for designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centres

In addition to the on-going operating grants, all licensed early learning and child care facilities offering services to children aged five and under and not attending school, were eligible to receive a One-Time Quality Improvement Grant. This fund was created to increase the quality of both indoor and outdoor learning environments.

Operators are required to use 50 per cent of the funding to enhance or create more natural outdoor play spaces

or facilitate outdoor experiences that align with the Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum or the *Curriculum éducatif des services de garde francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick*.

In total, approximately \$3.1 million were distributed to 506 facilities. All facilities were required to report back to EECD by the end of September 2018 on how these funds were used by their facility.

Financial update

In 2017-2018, the federal contribution from the bilateral agreement was \$4,866,450

Initiatives	2017-2018
Early Learning and Child Care Improvement Grant	\$3,072,160
Quality Assessment and Inclusion Policy	\$770,000
Guidelines for Language Acquisition and Cultural Identity Learning Environments	\$51,000
Administrative Costs (Personnel, Reporting, Evaluation, etc.)	\$973,290
TOTAL	\$4,866,450

Next steps

The next phases of the provincial rollout for the designation of New Brunswick Early Learning Centres are described below:

School District	Child Care Centres Designation Request	Parents Can Apply for Subsidy
Phase 1		
Early Learning and Childcare Centres	February 2018	April 2018
District scolaire francophone Nord-Ouest		
Anglophone South School District		
Expansion of Phase 1		
Early Learning and Childcare Centres	August 2018	September-October 2018
District scolaire francophone Nord-Ouest		
Anglophone South School District		
District scolaire francophone Sud (Quispamsis)		
Phase 2 - Provincial Roll Out		
Early Learning and Childcare Centres	November 2018	December 2018-January 2019
District scolaire francophone Sud (Greater Moncton)		
Anglophone East School District		
District scolaire francophone Nord-Est	January 2019	February-March 2019
Anglophone North School District		
District scolaire francophone Sud (Miramichi)		
Early Learning and Childcare Homes		
District scolaire francophone Sud		
District scolaire francophone Nord-Ouest		
Anglophone South School District		
Anglophone East School District		
Phase 3 - Provincial Roll Out		
Early Learning and Childcare Centres	February 2019	March-April 2019
Anglophone West School District		
District scolaire francophone Sud (Fredericton/Oromocto)		
Early Learning and Childcare Homes		
District scolaire francophone Nord-Est		
Anglophone North School District		
Anglophone West School District		
District scolaire francophone Sud (Fredericton/Oromocto)		

Develop online resources for parents (i.e. Early Childhood Services Portal)

Parents are invited to register on the new Early Childhood Services Portal that is part of the Child Care registry: <https://www.nbed.nb.ca/parentportal/en/>. The Early Childhood Services Portal allows parents to search for licensed early learning and child care services based on their choice of location and language. Parents accessing a designated New Brunswick Early Learning Centre can also access the application form for parent subsidies through the portal and submit their request via email.

The portal will eventually include a registry that aims to be a one-stop shop for families to register their children for available child care spaces. It will allow families to determine whether spaces are available in a facility or if there is a wait list. This expansion of the Early Childhood Services Portal is currently under construction with a 2020 release date.