

Canada-Saskatchewan Early Learning and Child Care Agreement



2019-20 Report

Funded by the Government of
Canada through the Early Learning
and Child Care Agreement

Canada 

Saskatchewan! 

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Background

On June 12, 2017, Saskatchewan signed the Multilateral Federal-Provincial/Territorial Early Learning and Child Care Framework with the federal government and the other provinces and territories. The Multilateral Framework provides the overarching principles that guide federal investment into regulated early learning and child care. The three-year bi-lateral agreement provided over \$41 million between 2017-18 and 2019-20 to Saskatchewan for Early Learning and Child Care investments to help ensure that Saskatchewan children get the best start in life.

Investments made through the agreement were in addition to provincial investments and worked to build on existing strengths and priorities in Saskatchewan. *Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan 2016-2020* and the *Education Sector Strategic Plan* are both provincial plans working toward the target that 90 per cent of children exiting Kindergarten are ready for learning in the primary grades by 2020. This included initiatives that support early learning, child care, strong families, healthy children and community planning and alignment.

Saskatchewan is extending the *Canada-Saskatchewan Early Learning and Child Care Agreement* for the period of 2020-21 in order to ensure continuity of programs and services under the existing agreement while finalizing a longer term agreement with the Government of Canada. Investments for 2020-21 made under the agreement will remain similar to the 2019-20 allocation of \$13.665 million. Investments will continue to be in the areas of quality, access, inclusion and minority language as per the Multilateral Agreement.



Over the course of the three-year bi-lateral agreement, Saskatchewan has focused on four main priorities to be achieved by 2020. In 2019-20, the final year of the agreement, Saskatchewan continued to invest in these priority areas ensuring a balanced approach that supports the province's strategic goals and aligns with the federal government's early learning and child care funding criteria outlined through the Agreement:

Quality – Enhance the experience of children in licensed child care by investing in training and resources for licensed child care providers to ensure high-quality programming. In 2019-20, training was made available for child care centre directors focusing on leadership skills and supporting staff to deliver quality programming. Training for licensed family child care providers to enhance the quality of their programs was also provided. By the end of 2019-20, 173 licensed family child care home providers and assistants and 209 child care centre directors participated in training over the course of the three-year agreement. An additional 897 individuals from the Early Years sector attended Aboriginal awareness workshops. Training related to non-clinical screening for children in areas such as speech, physical ability, social skills and problem-solving was also provided to 94 participants in Early Years community programs and those in licensed child care. Grants continued to be made available to support active play and the *Play and Exploration* curriculum framework in licensed child care.

Accessibility – Continued expansion of access to high quality child care in both centre-based and home-based sectors. Saskatchewan allocated 1,295 new child care centre spaces, exceeding the licensed centre-based target of 950 spaces. Within the licensed home-based sector, 1,032 new licensed child care home spaces were opened in 110 homes over the course of the three-year agreement. In 2019-20, Saskatchewan also invested in the opening of seven new Early Years Family Resource Centres. These are places where all families with young children can access reliable information and support, and participate in services such as parenting programs and free early learning and literacy opportunities.

Inclusion – Early learning opportunities for children experiencing disability through innovative pilots continue to expand throughout the province. The Early Learning Intensive Support pilot, the Children Communicating, Connecting and in the Community pilot, the Rural and Northern Inclusive Early Learning pilot, and the Enhanced Accessibility grant in child care continue to support children across the province.

Over the course of the three-year agreement, support to 344 preschool-aged children, who experience disability, have been provided with early learning and child care opportunities.

Minority language inclusion – Saskatchewan continues to support the Francophone community through licensed child care spaces dedicated to Francophone families. Saskatchewan had a target of 65 spaces over the course of the agreement and exceeded the target with a total investment of 75 spaces.

Activities, Expenditures and Results of the Agreement

1. Quality

Saskatchewan continues to invest in the quality of the Early Learning and Child Care system across the province. Saskatchewan invested in a wide range of new initiatives for the 2019-20 period.

Early Literacy Initiatives

Language and early literacy development are fundamental to a child's present and future learning. In 2019-20, access to early learning and literacy was enhanced with an investment of \$845,000. Over the course of the three-year agreement, Saskatchewan has invested \$2.7 million in early learning and literacy initiatives for children who would not otherwise have access to these opportunities. The exposure of young children to books and reading help prepare them to succeed in their learning and development.

The Saskatchewan Literacy Network was contracted to provide **province-wide training** for early literacy in 2018-19 and 2019-20 to a diverse audience including staff in early learning programs, child care, KidsFirst, Early Childhood Intervention Programs (ECIPs), community programs and families with children under the age of six. The Saskatchewan Literacy Network provides information, training and support to family and adult literacy practitioners in the province and aims to build a stronger foundation and a more coordinated approach to support early literacy advancement in Saskatchewan.

The **Children's Multilingual Collection** at the Provincial Library was increased by 35 per cent with approximately 8,500 books in 2018-19. Since then, while still early in the collection use, nearly 50 per cent of these books have circulated to Saskatchewan public libraries and their patrons. In the fall of 2019, over 70 per cent of the language book requests from Saskatchewan public libraries were from this collection which helps support early literacy for the culturally diverse population in the province in which English is not their heritage language. Somali, Nepali and Malayalam were just some of the additional languages added.

In 2019-20, the Ministry of Education released the **Enhancing Young Children's Language and Literacy Development Video Series** to the Early Years sector. This video series features Saskatchewan children and educators, and focusses on practices to support language and early literacy development with infants, toddlers and preschool children. The Enhancing Young Children's Language and Literacy Development Video Series contains six videos. Each video features one strategy that an early childhood educator can use to support young children's language and literacy development. The videos allow the strategies to be seen in action, easily understood and quickly integrated into the daily practice of educators.

Two separate mail outs of approximately **560 packages of children's literature** were created and prepared for distribution to support quality practices in the areas of spiritual development and inclusion. Each package contained children's literature selections appropriate for ages and number of children who attend the licensed child care facility. One package contained books that were purchased to support the domain of spiritual development and First Nations culture, aligning with the

release of new modules to support the spiritual domain of holistic development. The second package contained children’s literature and materials to support the development of inclusive practices and awareness in early learning programs. Each package contained five to 12 books, based on the size of the facility. Note that the distribution of these books is only partially completed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a number of facilities temporarily closed.



New child care centres and child care homes were provided with a **one-time literacy grant** to purchase books to support children’s early literacy development. In 2019-20, the grant was provided to five child care centres and 35 child care homes for a total of 620 licensed child care facilities over the course of the agreement. The grants were available for licensed child care centres and child care homes in the following amounts:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Care Centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$800 per centre with 30 or fewer spaces • \$1300 per centre with 31-60 spaces • \$1700 per centre with 61-90 spaces
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Child Care Homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$600/home
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Family Child Care Homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$600/home

KidsFirst Regional and Targeted programs received grants to work with literacy partners in their communities to deliver **Early Language and Literacy Programming** to families with children under six who have limited opportunities to access high-quality early learning opportunities. Due to the success of the first round of funding provided to the community, additional funding was made available. In winter and spring 2019, they hosted literacy events, early learning playgroups and early childhood fairs across the province. These events provided fun opportunities for families to experience activities they could take home to support their children’s literacy. The events also provided information to support parent and caregiver understandings of how children develop early language and literacy skills. 356 sessions were held in 195 communities. Overall, 13,757 individuals were impacted, including 7,762 children and 5,995 adults. Similar events and opportunities will be

provided to families in fall 2020, however, these will be modified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost 1,000 parents and caregivers that responded to an evaluation said that the programming had a positive impact on their knowledge of language and early literacy. Parents and caregivers reported they had a better understanding of how children develop early language and literacy skills and the steps they could take to support their child's development. Programming also had a significant impact on parent and caregiver intentions to read more frequently to their children with a significant increase in the number who intended to read to their child on a daily basis.

Training

Funding through the Canada-Saskatchewan Early Learning and Child Care Agreement provided Early Childhood Educators (ECE), Licensed Family Child Care Home Providers, Child Care Centre Directors and Community based Early Learning service providers with training on inclusion, leadership, child assessment, aboriginal awareness and quality programming. This investment enhances the capacity of the early learning sector to provide quality and inclusive play-based early learning environments for children.

In 2019-20, training initiatives were enhanced by \$1.28 million. Over the course of the three-year bi-lateral agreement, Saskatchewan has invested \$1.38 million in training initiatives for the early learning sector.

Play and Exploration Workshops for Family Child Care Homes Providers – Young children experience learning through play and exploration in a variety of ways. Therefore, child care providers must develop and deliver programs that are safe, healthy, culturally sensitive and stimulate the abilities and interests of children in licenced child care homes. The goal of the workshops is to support family child care home providers in the creation and implementation of high-quality, age-appropriate, play-based learning experiences for young children in a variety of settings.

The one day, in-person workshops for licensed child care home providers was centered on implementation of the *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Guide* with a focus on the benefits of using Play and Exploration; practical strategies for implementing Play and Exploration in a home environment; and implementation of Play and Exploration in a multi-age setting.

Continuing from the workshops held in 2018-19, 75 child care home providers and assistants participated in four Play and Exploration workshops, two in each of Regina and Saskatoon in 2019-20. Over the course of the agreement, the target for training was 115 participants (2018-19 and 2019-20 combined). In total, 173 child care home providers and assistants, participated in training from eight Play & Exploration workshops specific to the child care home sector exceeding our target.

Aboriginal Awareness Training - In support of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*, training regarding Aboriginal awareness was offered to the Early Years sector. In 2019-20, Aboriginal Consulting Services delivered the training for a diverse Early Years sector audience, including child care centre directors and staff, family child care home providers, Early Childhood Intervention Program executive directors and interventionists, and KidsFirst community developers, program managers, and home visitors. In total, 897 individuals from the Early Years sector attended 15-in person Aboriginal Awareness workshops held across the province. In addition, 100 registrations were accepted for a three-hour online Aboriginal Awareness session.

Leadership Training – The management of licensed child care facilities is critical. It can impact the quality of programs, the health and well-being of staff and children, and the overall operation of facilities. The goal of the leadership training is to provide the skills child care directors need to effectively manage their staff and facilities.

A series of five in-person leadership training modules were offered to support child care centre directors to enhance their array of leadership knowledge and skills in effective employee supervision; communication; coaching; developing high performing teams and change management.

In 2019-20, 124 child care directors participated in training. In total (2018-19 and 2019-2020 combined), 209 child care directors, over and above the target of 188, participated in training related to their leadership roles. There were 29 leadership workshops held across the province in this timeframe.

Ages and Stages Questionnaire Training – Two Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) Training of Trainers workshops were available to child care centre directors and staff and others in Early Years community programs. The ASQ is a set of questionnaires about children’s development. It is a non-clinical supportive screen that looks at how children are doing in important areas, such as speech, physical ability, social skills, and problem-solving. In November and December 2019, three-day in-person workshops were offered in Saskatoon and Regina for up to 50 participants per workshops. The workshops were delivered to 94 participants in total.

Inclusion Training – One of the critical roles child care providers play is to ensure children of all abilities have equal access to early learning and development programs. Child care programs must be inclusive and meet the needs of each child. The goal of inclusion training is to provide the skills and resources child care employees need to enhance the experience of children in licensed child care facilities. Inclusion training is focused on four key elements of high quality inclusive early learning and care programs:

- Programs are accessible to all children and their families;
- Programs are designed and carried out with consideration for the unique needs of each child;
- Programs are collaborative including family partnerships, access and collaboration with other agencies and early intervention programs; and
- Programs monitor and effectively respond to the changing needs of children, their families and communities.

In June 2019, a total of 352 early childhood professionals from across the province convened for one of two, 2-day forum focused on fostering inclusive practices within the Early Years. The first conference was held in Saskatoon (231 attendees) for participants in the central and northern regions of the province and the second conference was held in Regina (121 attendees) for participants in the central and southern portions of the province.

The forums had three primary goals; increase awareness and understanding of relationship-based inclusive practices across the Early Years sector; gain insight into current challenges in regards to inclusion; and foster relationships amongst diverse sector stakeholders working to support inclusive practices across Saskatchewan.

In addition to the forums, a video series titled *5 Key Considerations for Fostering Inclusive Practices in the Early Years* was created to provide ECE the opportunity to explore, reflect and build understanding of some key considerations for inclusion in the Early Years sector. The videos provide information and support child care workers need to create an environment in which each child and

family, regardless of their unique strengths, needs, and challenges, feels safe, heard, valued, supported and welcomed. The videos also provide information educators need to develop and deliver programs that are inclusive, and give each child equal opportunities to learn and develop. The five key considerations for promoting inclusive practices discussed in these videos will enhance the educator-child relationship, and create an avenue for effective programming, learning and development.

Grants

Funding was provided through the Canada-Saskatchewan Early Learning and Child Care Agreement for licensed child care centres and child care homes to purchase equipment, materials and resources to enhance the experience of children in licensed child care facilities.

Play and Exploration Grant – The Play and Exploration Grant was a one-time grant for licensed child care facilities and supported facilities to implement Saskatchewan’s foundational early learning framework, *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide*. A total of 627 facilities have received the Play and Exploration grant during the three-year agreement.

The Play and Exploration Grant was available to child care centres and homes licensed and in operation as at March 31, 2018. Family child care homes could receive up to \$600, group family child care homes up to \$900 and child care centres \$2,500 for the first 30 spaces and \$75 per space for additional spaces.

Active Play Grant – The Active Play Grant was a one-time grant for child care facilities to purchase equipment and materials to encourage active play in licensed child care settings. A total of 648 facilities received the Active Play grant during the three-year agreement.

The Active Play Grant was available to child care centres and homes licensed and operational as at March 31, 2018. Family child care homes could receive up to \$500, group family child care homes up to \$750 and child care centres \$1,900 for the first 30 spaces and \$60 per space for additional spaces.

Over the course of the three-year bi-lateral agreement, Saskatchewan has invested \$2.85 million through these specific grants for licensed child care homes and centres.

2. Accessibility

Licensed Child Care Spaces - Saskatchewan exceeded its target of 950 licensed child care centre spaces by allocating 1,295 spaces since 2017-18. With 571 spaces allocated in 2017-18, and an additional 724 spaces allocated in 2018-19, the province will increase the number of centre-based spaces by 1,295 by 2020. Saskatchewan will continue to support the increased spaces in licensed centre-based care. Within the licensed home-based sector, 1,032 new licensed child care home spaces were opened in 110 homes over the course of the three-year agreement.

In 2019-20, Saskatchewan spent \$4.0 million on a variety of one-time and periodic grants that were provided to licensed child care facilities to ease the financial burden, encourage new start-ups and increase the accessibility of child care. In Saskatchewan, the following grants are available to all eligible funded licensed child care facilities:

- **Start-up grants** – to assist with the expenses incurred in opening a licensed child care centre or family child care home (e.g. equipment, furnishings, fire inspection).

- **Space Development Capital grants** – to assist with the costs of developing, renovating or constructing new child care spaces in centres.
- **Fire, Health and Safety grants** – to assist new family child care homes, group family child care homes and teen student support homes with the costs of meeting fire, health and safety requirements, as part of the initial licensing process.
- **Nutrition grants** – to assist with the provision of well-balanced, nutritious meals and snacks for children in licensed child care homes. In 2017-18, as a part of the Agreement, the Nutrition grant maximum was increased from \$40 to \$60 per month per licensed child care space.
- **Equipment and Program grants** – to assist with the expense of purchasing children’s toys, equipment, furnishings and craft supplies, as well as to help with children’s activities. In 2017-18, as a part of the Agreement, the Equipment and Program grant maximum was increased from \$100 to \$150 per year per licensed child care space.

Early Years Family Resource Centres – Operations of seven new Early Years Family Resource Centres in the communities of the Battlefords, Meadow Lake, Moose Jaw, Nipawin, Prince Albert, Saskatoon and the North began in 2019-20. The coordination, planning and initial development began in 2018-19. Early Years Family Resource Centres bring services to one location and provide no cost programming for all families with young children prenatal to age five. These resources will help families access reliable information and allow them to participate in services like parenting programs and early learning and literacy opportunities that might be hard to find in their community. In 2019-20, Saskatchewan invested \$2.175 million in the development and operation of these seven centres.

3. Inclusive

Supporting inclusive early learning and child care opportunities for young children experiencing disability is a priority for Saskatchewan. The *Saskatchewan Plan for Growth* lays out the goal that Saskatchewan will be the best place in Canada to live for persons with disabilities. This goal is affirmed in *The Saskatchewan Disability Strategy* which aims to improve programs and services for people with disabilities.

In 2019-20, Saskatchewan invested \$4.67 million in inclusivity initiatives to support children who are experiencing disability through the Children Communicating, Connecting and in the Community Pilot, the Early Learning Intensive Support Pilot, the Enhanced Accessibility Grant and the Rural and Northern Inclusive Early Learning Pilot.

Saskatchewan has invested \$11.32 million to support inclusive early learning and child care initiatives over the course of the three-year agreement.

The Children Communicating, Connecting and in the Community (4C) Pilot - provides access to early educational intervention for children who are deaf and hard of hearing to reduce communication barriers when communicating with their families, other children and within their community. Children’s development is supported through inclusive environments with trained staff and appropriate technology. The pilot was launched in fall 2018 with a program in each of Regina and Saskatoon for preschool-aged children who are deaf or hard of hearing or who are connected to the deaf or hard of hearing communities. The program is based on the Ministry of Education’s Early Learning principles of children as competent learners, holistic development and learning, and strong positive relationships. In 2019-20, 23 children were served through the program. Operating funding

will continue for the two programs for preschool-aged deaf and hard of hearing children in Regina and Saskatoon.

Early Learning Intensive Support Pilot (ELIS) - allows additional children to attend existing school division selected Prekindergarten programs. These spaces provide children with intensive needs access to the program and additional supports are put in place to ensure the needs of all students are being met.

ELIS was launched in Regina and Saskatoon at the end of the 2017-18 school year and 120 spaces became fully operational in 2018-19, the. By the end of 2018-19, the program was expanded by 46 spaces, allocated to the communities of Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, Swift Current, Yorkton and North Battleford. In early 2020, an additional expansion of 76 spaces occurred, bringing the provincial total to 242 spaces. Support will continue for the ongoing operation of programs across the province for preschool-aged children with intensive needs.



Enhanced Accessibility Grant - is issued to licensed facilities monthly to support the actual cost (up to \$2,000 per month) of the additional staff required to care for a child with particularly challenging needs and/or behaviours. Needs of the children vary and are confirmed through a referring professional. The grant supported 156 children in 2019-20 and 328 children over the course of the agreement. Ongoing grant support will continue through to 2020-21.

the province in 2019-20. The Rural and Northern Inclusive Early Learning Pilot offers four-year old children experiencing disability and who live in communities with limited group-based early learning opportunities, access to part-time early learning in a licensed preschool child care space.

Rural and Northern Inclusive Early Learning Pilot - implemented in select child care centres in

4. Francophone Minority Language Inclusion

Saskatchewan had a target of 65 additional child care spaces for Francophone families over the course of the agreement, based on consultations with the Fransaskoises parent boards and the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, but exceeded the target with a total investment of 75 spaces.

The three-year agreement provided grants totalling \$1.06 million to support start-up costs for new Francophone child care centres, monthly overhead and operating costs and to assist with the costs of developing, renovating or constructing new child care spaces in a centre. Continued operating funding will be provided for the licensed centre-based spaces for Francophone families through to 2020-21.

In 2019-20, **translation of resources** was a focus with three curricula and foundational documents translated to ensure culturally appropriate, quality environments and equitable opportunities for francophone children in child care and early learning programs.

5. Other

Differential Monitoring – Saskatchewan has invested \$330,000 to help modernize its current generalized approach to licensing child care and to create a more strategic approach to monitoring. This approach will allow for a greater focus on centres that struggle with compliance and in turn, enhance the quality of programs in those centres. The province has been collaborating with experts in the field of risk-based assessment so that the new system will reflect current research and best practice. Along with policy and procedures, key indicators and weighted risk factors were developed. Initial testing and training sessions also took place as well as the start of the program quality indicator portion of the project. This change in approach to licensing will provide the opportunity to develop innovation and quality measures for child care in Saskatchewan in a more systemic way. The Differential Monitoring model is expected to be implemented in the spring of 2021.

Public Awareness – Saskatchewan has invested \$430,000 in 2019-20 in initiatives that emphasize the importance of the early years, supporting parents in navigating programs and services as well as informing caregivers of their role in the development of children zero to six.

Two public awareness campaigns were launched in 2019-20. *Play. Learn. Grow. Together!* was launched as a way to reach out to parents of newborn and pre-school aged children with tips and information on how to help them learn at home. The campaign used multiple media options, including videos, social media and experiential marketing.

In addition, increasing awareness of the benefits of becoming a licensed family child care home provider and the value they bring to the Early Years sector was also shared through the Government of Saskatchewan's social media outlets.

Saskatchewan continues to work with the United Way to build a specific portal on the 211 site to support parent and caregivers to navigate the early learning and child care sector. This Early Years portal will serve as a one-stop location for parents, caregivers or anyone looking for information, programming or services for children zero to six in Saskatchewan.

Financial Expenditures

In 2019-20, Saskatchewan expended a total of \$14.127 million through the Agreement to support the early learning and child care sector in the province.

Initiative	2017-2018	2018-19	2019-20
Quality		\$2,225,557	\$2,207,124
<i>Play and Exploration</i>	\$ 1,400,700	\$153,600	\$44,725
Active Play	\$ 1,093,910	\$121,650	\$35,800
Training		\$98,483	\$1,281,120
Literacy Initiatives		\$1,851,825	\$845,479
Accessible		\$953,563	\$5,753,501
Early Childhood Services Operating Grant		\$303,233	\$1,592,304
Start-up	\$ 89,776	\$1,063,692	\$195,557
Space Development Capital	\$ 3,402,000	\$4,932,154	\$1,322,200
Fire, Health, Safety	\$ 37,700	\$47,899	\$40,400
Nutrition	\$ 583,909	\$583,321	\$726,565
Equipment and Program Grants - Homes	\$ 98,200	\$96,775	\$126,475
Family Resource Centres		\$1,505,000	\$1,750,000
Infrastructure		\$1,003,560	-
Minority Language Inclusion	\$180,000	\$578,620	\$300,897
Inclusive	\$ 2,192,236	\$4,454,420	\$4,673,682
Early Learning and Intensive Support pilots, Children Communicating, Connecting and in the Community pilots and Enhanced Accessibility grants	\$ 2,192,236	\$4,454,420	\$4,673,682
Miscellaneous		\$564,187	\$1,191,986
Differential Monitoring		\$161,254	\$163,035
Public Awareness Campaign		\$193,545	\$430,014
Administration	\$ 9,135	\$209,388	\$598,937
Total	\$9,087,566	\$17,358,419	\$14,127,190

Results Achieved: Indicators and Targets

In 2019-20, Saskatchewan made significant progress towards our 2020 targets as displayed in the table below.

Objectives/ programs	Outputs/ outcomes	Indicators	Targets by 2020	Actual Results in 2019-20
High Quality	Enhance the quality of child care facility programming	Licensed family child care home providers participating in training	50 per cent or 115 of child care home providers	173 child care home providers (2018-19 – 98) (2019-20 – 75)
		Child care directors participating in training	60 per cent or 188 of child care centre directors	209 child care centre directors (2018-19 – 85) (2019-20 – 124)
Accessible and flexible	Increase access to licensed child care	Licensed child care centre spaces	Increase of 950	1,295 spaces (2017-18 – 571) (2018-19 – 724) (2019-20 – 0)
		Licensed group or family child care home spaces	Increase of 1,500	1032 spaces (2017-18 - 317) (2018-19 - 350) (2019-20 - 365)
Inclusive	Increase access for minority groups	Preschool-aged children served who are experiencing disability	Increase of 220	344 preschool-aged spaces
		Licensed child care spaces that support French language minority communities	Increase of 65	75 spaces (2017-18 – 30) (2018-19 – 45) (2019-20 – 0)

Impact on Families

In 2019-20, Saskatchewan invested \$2.175 million through the Canada-Saskatchewan Early Learning and Child Care Agreement into Early Years Family Resource Centres. New centres in the Battleford, La Ronge, Meadow Lake, Moose Jaw, Nipawin, Prince Albert and Saskatoon became operational in late 2019-20 and many were planning to host their grand openings when public health orders were imposed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Funding provided under the Agreement focuses on providing families who are headed by lone parents, lower income, Indigenous, new Canadians or experiencing disability with flexible, innovative options to support their child care and early learning needs. Early Years Family Resource Centres will continue to contribute to meeting these goals.



Saskatchewan's Early Years Family Resource Centres offer families with young children prenatal to age five a welcoming place where they can access no cost services in one location that support their growth and development. Centres help families access reliable information and allow them to participate in services like early learning, literacy opportunities and parenting programs that might be hard to access in their community. Families can drop-in for play-based learning, access visiting professionals in a welcoming space, access child development assessments and parent education. Skilled staff provide families with positive early learning experiences and opportunities focused on child development, which contribute to positive brain development and the building blocks necessary for children to succeed in the classroom.

Reflecting the culture and diversity of families who attend the centre and helping them feel comfortable is a foundational principle of how the centres operate. The first thing visitors see when they enter the Battlefords Early Years Family Resource Centre is the word art on the wall that has the word “welcome” written in the 32 languages spoken in the community. The centre in Meadow Lake incorporated photographs of local landscapes into their space, to reflect the importance of the land in the communities’ culture. These small gestures help families to see themselves reflected and valued by the centre.

Partnerships, including the involvement of Indigenous organizations in the planning and strategic direction of the centres, have been a priority for organizers. The opening of the nisto ihtāwina Early Years Family Resource Centre in La Ronge is a strong example of this. nisto ihtāwina means “Three Communities” in Cree and reflects the three communities of La Ronge, Air Ronge and Lac La Ronge Indian Band that the centre serves. The centre was proud to welcome more than 200 community members to their grand opening ceremony, including Saskatchewan’s Lieutenant Governor Russ Mirasty and Her Honour Donna Mirasty, who are residents of La Ronge.

The demands of the pandemic have required centres to think about services in a different way in order to respond to an unprecedented situation. Centres have remained operational during physical distancing and have been offering programming through a number of remote means. For example, centres continue to offer group programs to families through video conferencing platforms. In addition to continuing to provide access to learning opportunities, these programs encourage parents to understand and monitor their children’s development and provide peer interaction for adults and children. Centres have also developed a wide range of videos for social media that focus on ways parents, caregivers and child care home providers can engage young children using available materials, demonstrating for families that learning can happen in any environment.

While the new centres in the Battleford, La Ronge, Meadow Lake, Moose Jaw, Nipawin, Prince Albert and Saskatoon just began operation, it is anticipated that family participation in these centres will have success similar to existing sites. For example, between 2017-18 and 2019-20, the Early Years Family Resource Centres in Regina, Sandy Bay, and Yorkton received nearly 150,000 total family visits. These centres have become important resources to families with young children in their communities.

Innovation

In an effort to improve child development, Saskatchewan worked to support every child's first teacher—their parents or caregivers. Through previous consultation, the government became aware of the need to support parents and guardians in not only understanding the importance of child development but in providing them easy and useful supports in how they can do that in their own homes. The campaign is based on the key concept that early interaction with children is key to their development and it can have a profoundly positive lifelong impact - and more importantly, it's easy and it's fun!



In November 2019 the *Play. Learn. Grow. Together!* public awareness campaign was launched targeting parents and caregivers of children aged zero to six. The ministry partnered with a marketing agency to develop a website as well as traditional and social media that provided a series of informational videos and resources that helped parents and caregivers think about easy and fun ways to interact with their young children and assist in their development and education. The website includes links to other programs and services that may be of interest to parents and caregivers including child care, early literacy and community programs. The campaign was also made available in French to support the Francophone community as well. Over time, this campaign will evolve into a long-term, reliable source of Early Years educational advice and in turn support child development and growth in all domains.

This campaign was new to the ministry and required innovative thinking and development to ensure it was user-friendly and citizen focused. The social media metrics to date have been impressive with

the campaign reaching more than 35,000 people in the first month. The response to the campaign has been very positive with many parents stating how the campaign supported them in integrating opportunities to assist their child's development in their everyday activities. The overall understanding of the significance of the Early Years and what role parents and caregivers play has increased leading to future success in school and life.

Engagement

Ongoing engagement and communication with Early Years provincial organizations and stakeholders such as families and those employed in the Early Years sector is a priority for Saskatchewan. Engagement and feedback throughout the three-year agreement have been vital in helping to shape the many initiatives and programs. Engagement with Early Years stakeholders, such as the Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association and child care directors, is regular business in Saskatchewan and will continue throughout the duration of the 2020-21 extension of the Agreement.

Saskatchewan is committed to responding to local and provincial early years needs. This supports Saskatchewan’s goal of helping all children to be safe, to be healthy and to develop to their full potential in strong families and supportive communities.

