

# EarlyON Child & Family Centres

Operating & Business  
Practice Guidelines

2026





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## Section 1: Introduction

The District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board (DNSSAB), as service system manager for early years and child care, is responsible for EarlyON Child and Family Centres service planning and funding. DNSSAB's role is guided by the Ministry's Ontario Child Care and Early Years Funding Guidelines for Service System Managers.

These guidelines are intended to provide EarlyON Service Providers in the District of Nipissing with key information regarding business practices and funding for EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

EarlyON Service Providers are required to provide programs and services in accordance with all terms and conditions as listed within their agreement. EarlyON Service Providers are also required to follow all guidelines and communications from the Ministry of Education with respect to operating child and family support programs.

If you have any questions about these guidelines, please contact:

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## Section 2: EarlyON Child and Family Centres Overview

### Program Statement

EarlyON Child and Family Centres in the District of Nipissing provide parents and caregivers with a warm, welcoming and inclusive environment for children in the early years. It is their goal to provide families with access to high quality services and support them in their role as their children's first teachers, enhance their well-being, and enrich their knowledge about early learning and development. EarlyON Centres are dedicated to supporting the relationships between families and their children by giving them a place where they can come together and engage in positive, meaningful experiences.

EarlyON staff know that children are competent, capable, curious, and rich in potential, and that parents and caregivers are pivotal in helping their children reach their fullest potential. They believe in a family-centred, strength-based and holistic approach to children's health and development, and work collaboratively to ensure families are informed about, and connected to, other community services they may require.

### Objectives

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must be designed and delivered to achieve the following key goals:

- Parents/guardians and caregivers have access to high quality services that support them in their role as their children's first educators, enhance their well-being, and enrich their knowledge about early learning and development.
- Children have access to play and inquiry-based learning opportunities alongside their parents/guardians and caregivers and experience positive developmental health and well-being. This could include play and inquiry-based experiences in the EarlyON program where children 0 to 6 years engage with older siblings on school closure days, evenings or weekends.



- Parents/guardians and caregivers have opportunities to strengthen their relationships with their children through play.
- Services and supports are responsive to community needs.
- 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 programs and services.
- Parents/guardians and caregivers are provided with timely, relevant and up-to-date information about community and specialized services.

## Guiding Principles

DNSSAB, school boards and EarlyON service providers will be guided by the following principles when developing, delivering and evaluating EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs and services:

### Child & Family Centres:

All programs and services are designed and delivered to meet the unique needs of parents/guardians, caregivers and young children to support their learning, development and well-being.

### Welcoming:

EarlyON Child and Family Centres 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.](#)

### High Quality:

Programs and services are designed to support positive experiences and outcomes and foster nurturing relationships between children, parents/guardians and caregivers, and are based on the latest evidence and research.



### **Inclusive:**

Programs and services are accessible and responsive to children, parents/guardians 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/guardians, and caregivers.

### **Community Led:**

Communities, educators, parents/guardians, and caregivers are engaged in designing EarlyON Child & Family Centre programs and services that embrace and build on their strengths, address identified gaps and meet their unique needs on an ongoing basis.

## **Pedagogical Framework**

EarlyON Child and Family Centres are required to provide programs that reflect the view of children, parents/guardians, caregivers and practitioners as competent, capable, curious and rich in potential and experience. Guided by [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years \(HDLH?\)](#), EarlyON Child and Family Centres provide an environment that engages parents/guardians and caregivers as co-learners and leaders in influencing positive experiences and outcomes for children, families and the community.

Service providers offering EarlyON Child and Family Centres programs and services are expected to use *HDLH?* to guide the development and delivery of local programs. HDLH supports the adoption of cohesive pedagogical approaches across early years settings, based on the four foundations for learning: belonging, well-being, engagement and expression.

The following documents are available to help strengthen program quality in early years settings, including EarlyON Child and Family Centres:



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

## Branding and Website

### Branding

EarlyON Child and Family Centres are expected to follow the provincial branding requirements and support the District of Nipissing outreach and engagement strategy. EarlyON Child and Family Centres will follow the Ministry of Education's [Visual Identity Guidelines](#) and/or any updated guidelines released by the Ministry of Education. These guidelines ensure consistency of EarlyON in all communication related activities.

EarlyON Child and Family Centre providers may order generic EarlyON posters and pamphlets in both official languages, at no cost, from the Ministry of Education using this [link](#). DNSAB Children's Services has also designed a local EarlyON brochure that can be printed by EarlyON providers as needed.

If any additional signage or promotional materials are desired (i.e. sandwich boards, outdoor signs, window decals, etc.), including custom signage (e.g.. permanent wall signs), the EarlyON provider will be responsible for the cost of ordering the materials within their allotted budget. However, all designs for EarlyON signage and promotional materials must be submitted to DNSAB Children's Services for approval prior to production. Requests must include the following information:

- Item(s) requested and purpose
- Quote (including individual cost/item and total cost)
- Mock-up

For inquiries or to submit a request, please email [report@dnssab.ca](mailto:report@dnssab.ca).

EarlyON Child and Family Centres who contribute 20 percent or more of their program's child and family funding have the option to include their brand logo with the EarlyON logo on all signage. Service providers that contribute space to operate child and family programs that is equal to 20 percent or more of the program's funding may also include their logo on EarlyON signs for those sites.



The requirement to contribute 20% of the Service Provider's EarlyON Funding shall be applicable to all forms of signage and advertising, including but not limited to:

- All exterior and interior signs.
- All printed materials such as calendars, letters, pamphlets, brochures, notices, newspaper advertisements, etc.
- All electronic materials posted on the Service Provider's website.

Providers wishing to make a 20% contribution in order to include their brand logo on all signage/advertising materials must seek the written approval of DNSSAB.

### **Website**

The DNSSAB Children's Services website has a dedicated section showcasing the EarlyON Child and Family Centres in the District of Nipissing, including site locations, hours of operation, and programming calendars. There is also a provincial EarlyON Child and Family Centre website that plays a key role in supporting outreach and awareness to parents and caregivers about child and family programs and services.

EarlyON Service Providers are expected to work with DNSSAB to maintain up to date information regarding sites, locations, and hours of operation.

### **French-Language Services**

EarlyON Child and Family Centres are expected to ensure the provision of French-language child and family programs and services where there is an identified need and in accordance with legislated responsibilities and the terms listed in the service agreement.

### **Indigenous-Led Child and Family Programs**

Indigenous organizations that operate Indigenous EarlyON Child and Family Centres are expected to meet the same EarlyON core services requirements, while providing holistic and culturally responsive programming for Indigenous children and families.



## Section 3: Framework for EarlyON Child and Family Centres

### Mandatory Core Services

To achieve the intended outcomes of EarlyON Child and Family Centres, the Ministry has identified a suite of mandatory core services that must be available to children and families at every EarlyON Centre:

- Supporting Early Learning and Development,
- Engaging Parents/Guardians and Caregivers, and
- Making Connections for Families

#### Supporting Early Learning and Development

- Drop-in programs and other programs and services that promote responsive adult-child relationships, encourage children's exploration, play and inquiry, based on the pedagogy in HDLH.
- Early learning and development programs are most effective when the context for learning is foregrounded in relationships and focused on supporting the development of strategies, dispositions, and skills for lifelong learning through play and inquiry.

#### Engaging Parents/Guardians and Caregivers

- Inviting conversations and information sharing about their children's interests, child development, parenting, nutrition, play and inquiry-based learning, and other topics that support their relationship with their children.
- Providing targeted outreach opportunities that are responsive to community needs. This includes connecting with parents and caregivers who could benefit from EarlyON Child and Family Centre 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.)
- Collaborate with other support programs to enhance parent/guardian and caregiver well-being, enrich adult-child relationships, and to support parents/guardians and caregivers in their role(s).
- Engagement may include group discussions, informal one on one engagement, printed and electronic resources or other engagement opportunities as appropriate.



## **Making Connections for Families**

- Ensuring Child and Family Centre staff have relationships with community partners and an in-depth knowledge of their community resources to allow for seamless transitions for families who may benefit from access to specialized or other services.
- Responding to a parent/guardian and caregiver concern about their child's development through conversations and observations. In some cases, this may result in supporting parents/guardians and caregivers to seek additional support from primary care or other regulated health professionals.
- Sharing information and facilitating connections with specialized community services (such as children's rehabilitation services; gender-based violence support for families), coordinated service planning, public health, education, child care, and child welfare, as appropriate.
- Early identification and connecting parents/guardians and caregivers to specialized services and resources (such as Smart Start Hubs)
- Providing information about programs and services available for the whole family beyond the early years.

Additional programming and services, including registered programs, should only be provided once the core services are in place. To support parents/guardians and caregivers in their role, organizations are expected to collaborate in the delivery of specific programs or services and link parents/guardians and caregivers to the appropriate accessible community resources.

## **Service Delivery Methods**

EarlyON service providers are required to establish mandatory centres and are expected to leverage other service delivery options to meet the unique needs of families in their service areas. This may include providing outdoor, mobile, phone, or virtual programs and services. The ministry strongly encourages providing families with multiple avenues to access EarlyON programs.

EarlyON programs and services are intended to be community-based (including schools, community buildings/spaces, and common areas within residential areas) and must never be offered within individual homes.



## Schools-Based Approach

Schools provide an environment where services can be co-located and integrated for seamless access by families within neighbourhoods. Co-location provides many benefits for families including reducing transitions, building stronger connections between children, families, and early years and school professionals, and supports a continuum of learning through a consistent approach to early years pedagogy.

A schools-based approach for EarlyON Child and Family Centres, in alignment with other child care and early years initiatives, is encouraged whenever possible. This includes locating EarlyON Child and Family Centres within schools. Details can be found in the [Early Years Accommodations in Schools: Reference Guide](#).

## Mandatory Centres

Mandatory centres are physical program sites where children, parents/guardians and caregivers can participate in child and family programs and services in-person. Centres may be located within schools or community buildings or may be stand-alone sites.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must offer centre-based core services year-round and at least five days per week, including either Saturday or Sunday, and evening services to meet the needs of working families. This requirement may be met by offering the core services in different centres on different days of the week.

## Optional Service Delivery Methods

### Mobile Services

Programs and services can be offered outside of centres to further integrate EarlyON Child and Family Centres 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). Mobile programs often involve “set-up and take-down” and operate in shared space.

Mobile services may have regular or irregular days, times, and locations of operation. Service providers must establish an appropriate mechanism to communicate information about these services and their locations, dates and times of operations.



EarlyON Child and Family Centres may also consider coordinating transportation options to increase program accessibility where necessary and feasible.

### Outdoor Programs

As stated in HDLH, children thrive in programs where they can engage in vigorous physical play in natural outdoor spaces and playgrounds that present manageable levels of challenge. While these environments need to be safe, it is also important to provide children with opportunities for a reasonable degree of risk taking.

Service providers are encouraged to offer EarlyON programs in natural outdoor settings (e.g. community park) and discuss the benefits of outdoor play with parents/guardians and caregivers.

Outdoor programs may have regular or irregular days, times, and locations of operation. Service providers must establish an appropriate mechanism to communicate information about these programs and their locations, dates, and times of operations, including cancellations/rescheduling due to inclement weather.

### Virtual Programs, Services and Resources

Virtual EarlyON programs have become a key service delivery option for families accessing early years supports. Service providers are encouraged to continue providing virtual programs, services, resources, and information to support the diverse needs of families.

DNSSAB Children's Services has developed [EarlyON Virtual Services Guidelines](#) to further support EarlyON Providers in delivering virtual services.

### Customized Community Connections

#### Community Partnerships to Support Core Service Delivery

It is important to integrate EarlyON Child and Family Centres within the broader context of local community services (e.g. child care, public health, employment and training programs, recreation programs, public libraries, schools, and specialized services) to meet its core service delivery requirements. Joint community-based planning supports greater integration resulting in easier access and better client experiences.



## Leveraging Partnerships to Create Customized Community Connections

For EarlyON Child and Family Centres to be effective, supports for parents/guardians and caregivers related to early learning and development must be developed with an understanding of the unique characteristics, needs, and priorities of the community that is being served.

Through the local service planning process, DNSSAB may identify a specific priority or need in a given neighbourhood, community or service area. In such cases, EarlyON Child and Family Centres may need to leverage and further develop partnerships with different community services to develop specific strategies or targeted approaches to support the identified priority.

For example, in a community that has many newcomers to Canada, an EarlyON Child and Family Centre may wish to work more closely with settlement services to coordinate services for families. This may include hosting a series of information sessions that relate to newcomers at the EarlyON Child and Family Centre (e.g. housing, employment, education, child care) or using the EarlyON Child and Family Centre as a hub to access other programs (e.g. language classes).

Customized community connections should only be considered once the EarlyON Child and Family Centre core service expectations are being met on a regular and consistent basis.

### Child Minding

EarlyON Child and Family Centres may offer child minding services during parent/guardian and caregiver programs or to allow parents/guardians and caregivers to access other community services (e.g., postpartum depression support programs, employment and training services), provided that parents/guardians and caregivers remain onsite in accordance with requirements under the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA).

### Registered Early Childhood Educator Staff Requirement

Programs in EarlyON Child and Family Centres should be designed to foster positive outcomes and support nurturing relationships for children, parents/guardians and caregivers based on the latest evidence and research. Registered Early Childhood



Educators (RECEs) play a critical role in delivering early years programs and have specialized knowledge and expertise related to child development as well as play and inquiry-based learning that is essential to delivering high quality early years programs and services, such as drop-in programs in EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

**Requirement:** Mandatory core services related to supporting early learning and development at every EarlyON Child and Family centre must be overseen by a RECE in good standing with the College of Early Childhood Educators.

It is recommended that all staff delivering early learning and development services:

- hold a diploma in Early Childhood Education (ECE) from an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology;
- are registered with the College of Early Childhood Education (RECE);
- hold a current standard certificate in first-aid;
- have additional training/experience/education as it relates to the programs being offered by the Service Provider which may include but are not limited to: Children with Exceptional Needs, French-language services, Indigenous services, etc.

It is expected that EarlyON staff will engage in continuous professional learning opportunities to keep informed of the latest research on adult education, child development, play and inquiry-based pedagogy, and other relevant topics.

### RECE Staffing Considerations

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must employ at least one RECE at every centre. In recognition of the current RECE shortage, where an EarlyON Child and Family Centre has tried, but is unable to recruit at least one RECE to oversee mandatory core services related to supporting early learning and development, DNSAB has the discretion to approve an employee who is not a RECE in place of a RECE. This provision does not apply to persons that:

- Have been members of the College of Early Childhood Educators in the past, but have resigned or had their membership suspended, cancelled or revoked, or who have let their membership lapse.



- Have satisfied the education requirements to be registered as members of the College but have not become members.

In determining whether to grant approval for a non-RECE employee, DNSSAB will consider the proposed candidate's experience and expertise including previous experiences in child and family programs, membership in another relevant regulated profession (e.g. social work, nursing, etc.) and any other factors deemed relevant in consultation with the Service provider.

DNSSAB may place conditions on an individual's RECE Exemption to supplement or enhance the individual's experience and knowledge. Conditions added to a RECE Exemption may include, but are not limited to:

- Enrolment in an Early Childhood Education Program (including proof of enrolment and progress through course)
- Additional mentoring and supervision of the staff by a Registered Early Childhood Educator
- Expectation to engage in continuous professional learning opportunities to keep informed of the latest research on adult education, child development, play and inquiry-based pedagogy, and other relevant topics
- Expectation to complete the Early Childhood Education Program and register with the College of Early Childhood Educators within five (5) years of the exemption being granted.

Requests for exemptions can be made by submitting the [DNSSAB EarlyON RECE Temporary Exemption Request Form](https://dnssab.ca/submit-a-temporary-exemption-request/) to [report@dnssab.ca](mailto:report@dnssab.ca).

#### Duration of Exemption

Any exemptions granted will be reviewed on an annual basis, at minimum, to monitor compliance with this requirement, identify challenges and develop strategies to support service providers in meeting this requirement. This may include transition planning, ensuring capacity to deliver core services related to early learning and development, and human resource approaches (e.g. recruitment and staffing strategies, qualifications upgrading). Exemptions are not meant to be extended indefinitely.



Providers must ensure that the duration of the educator's assignment for which they are requesting a RECE Exemption does not exceed the limit of one year. If the exemption must continue beyond one year from the date of approval by DNSSAB, service providers must submit a new application for exemption to DNSSAB at least one month prior to the date the exemption expires.

A RECE Exemption only applies to the individual and the location in which the approval was made. The RECE Exemption does not allow the individual to move from one provider to another with their exemption.

### Appeals Process

If a request for a RECE Exemption is denied, EarlyON Child and Family Centres have an opportunity to appeal the decision. Requests for appeals must be made by using the [EarlyON Service Provider Appeal Form](#) and include reasons why the appeal is being requested. The Director of Children's Services will review all appeals and may subsequently escalate them to the Chief Administrative Officer, if needed.

### Legacy Provision

To support the retention of long-tenured child and family program staff in their positions, DNSSAB may also grant an exemption from the RECE requirement for EarlyON Child and Family Centres employing a staff person to oversee mandatory core services who is not a Registered Early Childhood Educator, but has at least 10 years of experience working in a child and family program setting as of January 1, 2019.

In order to qualify under this grand-parenting provision, a staff person must have been employed for a total of 10 or more years, as of January 1, 2019 in one or more of the following child and family programs:

- Ontario Early Years Centres
- Parenting and Family Literacy Centres
- Child Care Resource Centres
- Better Beginnings, Better Futures

This provision does not apply to persons that:



- Have been members of the College of Early Childhood Educators in the past, but have resigned or had their membership suspended, cancelled or revoked, or who have let their membership lapse.
- Have satisfied the education requirements to be registered as members of the College but have not become members.

In addition, this provision does not apply to new hiring for positions that will oversee the delivery of mandatory core services related to supporting early learning and development. For any new hiring for such positions, EarlyON Child and Family Centres are required to recruit a RECE. Where they are unable to do so, DNSSAB may grant approval for staff as described in the staffing considerations section above.

Service providers must submit an application for the Legacy Provision using the [DNSSAB RECE Temporary Exemption Request Form](#) to [report@dnssab.ca](mailto:report@dnssab.ca) with sufficient notice to allow time for review.

## Additional EarlyON Child and Family Centre Requirements

Service providers are required to have appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure that EarlyON Child and Family Centres are delivered in a way that promote the health, safety and well-being of children and families being served. The following policies and procedures are required to be in place:

- Vulnerable Sector Checks
- First Aid
- Emergency Plans
- Sanitation and maintenance
- Workplace health and safety relating to staff
- Complaints and resolutions processes
- Serious Occurrence policy and process for reporting serious incidents to DNSSAB
- Anaphylactic Protocol
- Program and Philosophy Statement



- Child Guidance
- Student/Volunteer
- Professional Learning
- Inclusion
- Equitable Access
- Program Closures

All new EarlyON Child and Family Centres providers are required to submit their agency's policies and procedures for review prior to signing a service agreement with DNSSAB.

Existing service providers are required to:

- Update policies as necessary;
- Provide any new and/or revised policies or procedures to DNSSAB for review; and,
- Ensure staff are aware of policies and their responsibilities related to those policies.

### **Vulnerable Sector Checks**

All EarlyON Child and Family Centre staff, students and volunteers are required to have a vulnerable sector screen. Vulnerable sector screen documents should be kept in the staff files. Declarations are to be completed annually and screening is to be updated every 5 years.

### **First Aid**

All EarlyON Child and Family Centre program staff are required to have standard first aid and CPR training. Certificates of completion should be kept in the staff files.

### **Emergency Plans**

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must have written policies that require all staff to be aware of and comply with the following required documents and procedures:



- Written evacuation procedures that specify duties of staff members in the event of a fire and align with requirements from the relevant municipality's Fire Services;
- A procedure for testing fire equipment/alarm system on a regular basis;
- A procedure for fire drills;
- Written fire evacuation procedures should be posted in conspicuous places for parents/ caregivers;
- Program space capacity needs to comply with Fire Code regulations;
- Documented quarterly fire drills that include participants;
- Designated place of shelter;
- Emergency information collected for each staff person;
- Emergency phone numbers are posted by all phones;
- First Aid kits are accessible and well stocked; and
- Crisis Response procedures and action plan in place.

### **Sanitation and Maintenance**

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must develop, maintain, and implement procedures to address infection prevention including cleaning requirements in the following areas:

- Washrooms
- Hand hygiene
- Diapering/toileting
- Play spaces
- Toys and equipment
- Offices and meeting spaces



These procedures should identify whom, when and how often cleaning takes place. Procedures for how repairs and maintenance issues will be addressed should also be identified. Consultation with Public Health is recommended.

### **Food Preparation and Handling**

All kitchen and food preparation areas are required to be kept in good repair and maintained in a hygienic condition. In Centres that serve food, at least one staff must have attended a Food Handler course. Verification of completion should be available at the location.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must also have an allergy policy that addresses preventative measures and responses to allergies and anaphylactic allergies at the Centre. Consultation with Public Health is recommended.

### **Complaints and Resolution Process**

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must have written procedures for resolving complaints from the public that include the process to receive, assess and respond to complaints.

### **Serious Occurrence Reporting**

The serious occurrence protocol has been adapted and made to align with the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 reporting requirements around serious occurrences in licensed child care settings.

Agencies who deliver EarlyON Child and Family programs to children and families that are funded by DNSSAB are required to report all serious occurrences to DNSSAB's Children's Services department within 24 hours using the [EarlyON Serious Occurrence Reporting Form](#).

A serious occurrence is defined as:

- the death of a child or an adult who participates in an EarlyON Child and Family program;
- abuse, neglect or an allegation of abuse or neglect of a child while participating in an EarlyON Child and Family program;



- a life-threatening injury to or a life-threatening illness of a child or adult while participating in an EarlyON Child and Family program;
- an incident where a child who is participating in an EarlyON Child and Family program who has gone missing or is temporarily unsupervised; or
- an unplanned disruption of the normal operations of an EarlyON Child and Family program that poses a risk to the health, safety or well-being of children while participating in the program.

When necessary, EarlyON agencies are also required to submit to DNSSAB supporting/follow-up documentation, within seven (7) business days of the serious occurrence report.

All reports and supporting documentation must be submitted by email at [report@dnssab.ca](mailto:report@dnssab.ca).

To ensure the above policies and procedures are consistently followed, EarlyON Child and Family Centres must have in place a Serious Occurrence Policy that includes:

- Definitions in line with those outlined in the CCEYA;
- Reporting requirements and process that mirror those of the DNSSAB;
- Contact information for reporting occurrences to the DNSSAB;
- Expectations of staff and supervisor;
- Follow-up procedures; and
- Processes for review of policy with all staff.

### Duty to Report

Under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*, everyone, including members of the public and professionals who work closely with children, is required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. Anyone with reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must report it to a [Children's Aid Society](#).

More information on the duty to report, what happens when a report is made, and how to recognize signs of abuse and neglect can be found [here](#).



## Part 4: EarlyON Child and Family Centres – Supporting Programs and Services

The following details programs, services and networks that support the delivery of EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs in communities across Ontario.

### Réseaux InterAgir (formerly Regional French Language Networks)

French Language school boards and early years and child care service providers offering services in French are members of Réseaux Interagir that:

- Network with other Francophone organizations/professionals sharing resources and policies;
- Collaborate on French professional learning; and
- Collaborate with other organizations offering services in French so that providers can make connections for families towards services in French.

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 early years and child care French language services across the province;
- Identify emerging and established promising practices related to the delivery of early years and child care French language services in minority and majority language settings; and
- Identify service gaps and work within local early years and child care community planning processes to address them through innovative solutions.

### Professional Learning for the Francophone and Indigenous Sectors

Through the Canada-Ontario Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, the Ministry is investing funds to support professional learning opportunities for Francophone and Indigenous early years professionals. These opportunities are designed to better meet their needs through more targeted, differentiated cultural and regional approaches.



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Funds aim to enhance culturally relevant programs and the delivery of high-quality child care and early years programs, in alignment with How Does Learning Happen?, which will help promote Francophone and Indigenous cultures in Ontario and also create linkages to and/or develop professional learning resources that are responsive to the needs of the sector.



## Section 5: EarlyON Child and Family Centres Eligible Expenses

### Operating: Mandatory Core Services and Customized Community Connections Expense

#### Purpose

Operating funding is intended to support service providers with the costs of operating EarlyON Child and Family Centres in the District of Nipissing. Most of the funding to service providers falls under this expense category to prioritize the delivery of EarlyON Child and Family Centres and their programming, ensuring that funds are focused on serving the needs of children and their families.

#### Priorities

DNSSAB distributes funding for EarlyON Child and Family Centres using the following principles to inform priorities while balancing local needs:

- Stabilize and transform existing EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs so that they are inclusive and responsive to local needs;
- Increase access and consistency of EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs and services across the district;
- Align with the Schools-based Approach and support the implementation of the Early Years Capital Program;
- Support programs that serve Indigenous and Francophone children; and,
- Co-locate with other early years or community programs.

#### Eligible Expenses

Service providers must prioritize operating funding to deliver mandatory core services that are responsive to local need. Funding may be used for ongoing costs including:

- Salary and benefit expenditures for EarlyON Child and Family Centre staff to deliver core services.



- Lease and occupancy costs for EarlyON Child and Family Centres, rental fees for mobile services and other operating costs such as utilities.
- Service provider administration costs (up to 15% of the operating budget). Administrative costs are the administrative overhead costs that are not directly related to program delivery and include any allocation of central administration costs (i.e. rent not related to program delivery, utilities not directly related to program delivery, office supplies, auditing fees, banking fees, non-program employees, etc.). Administration costs must represent actual expenses incurred for program administration and may not be expressed solely as a percentage of program expenditures.
- Light meals and/or snacks for program participants
- IT costs to support the delivery of virtual programs (e.g. annual web-based account fees; additional costs related to security features for web-based programs).
- Branding and marketing costs for EarlyON Child and Family Centres, such as signage and promotional materials.
- Transportation services to support outreach and participation in programs. This can include costs for public transit, gas, and general auto repair and maintenance.
- Resources for families and caregivers related to early learning and development (e.g., materials for inquiry-based play), additional community services and supports, information to support parents/guardians and caregivers in their role.
- Supplies to support the delivery and daily operation of programs as well as maintenance costs related to the general upkeep, safety, and maintenance of EarlyON Child and Family Centre facilities.
- Transformation activities and/or business transformation supports such as integrating, sun-setting, establishing or relocating centres (e.g., legal fees, lease termination, moving, business planning, recruitment and onboarding of new staff, staffing transitions).



## Inadmissible Expenses

Funding cannot be used to support direct specialized services. This includes programs and services offered by regulated health professionals working within their scope of practice (e.g., registered nurse or public health nurse, occupational therapy, audiology and speech language pathology, physiotherapy).

This also includes early intervention and screening programs and services that are funded by other ministries and/or levels of government. Service providers may direct parents to:

- The [Early Years Check-In](#) developmental screening tool or other free screening tools to assess their child's developmental status;
- The [Play & Learn](#) website for suggested activities to support children's development;
- Speak with early years professionals, Resource Consultants or healthcare providers about their concerns; and or
- Visit a SmartStart Hub at a Children's Treatment Centre.

Additionally, the following expenses are considered inadmissible:

- Bonuses (including retiring bonuses), gifts and honoraria paid to staff, except for in the case that they are provided as a retroactive wage increase that will be maintained the following year;
  - \*Please note: Indigenous elder honoraria is an admissible expense for EarlyON Child & Family program allocations.
- Financing costs including principal and interest payments related to capital loans, mortgage financing, and operating loans;
- Property taxes;
- Fees paid on behalf of staff for membership in professional organizations such as the College of Early Childhood Educators; and,
- Any other expenditure not listed under the eligible expenses section.



Service Providers will be required to report on expenditures, as per DNSSAB reporting requirements.

### Reporting Changes

Approval is required prior to making any changes that impact the services delivery or outcomes, funding or service agreements with DNSSAB including:

- Service changes including hours, days, or months of operation;
- Changes to service locations;
- Changes in staffing information and main staff contacts;
- Budgetary changes; or
- Emergencies requiring program re-location or closure.

Service providers will be asked to provide supporting information or documentation that describes the context and rationale for the change, potential impacts on families, the community and the program, and a plan to implement changes and address any issues or challenges.

### Recovery

Should the service provider exceed the administration maximum allowable expense (10 percent of the total EarlyON Child and Family Centre allocation), any additional expenditure must be absorbed by the service provider. If the additional spending over and above the maximum allowable expenditure is not absorbed by the service provider, DNSSAB will recover the overspent funds equal to the amount of overspending on administration above the maximum allowable expense.

## Professional Learning and Capacity Building Expense

### Purpose

To support professional learning and development opportunities that build the capacity of program staff and non-profit volunteer board members to provide high- quality, inclusive EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs and services.



## Eligibility

EarlyON Service Providers can use this funding to engage in professional learning and development. Funding may also be provided to non-profit organizations and/or post-secondary institutions to develop and/or deliver early years professional learning and development for EarlyON Child and Family Centre staff.

Service providers can use funding to support:

- Program-related professional learning opportunities related to:
  - Implementing and practicing pedagogical approaches described in *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*.
  - Reflective practice and collaborative inquiry
- Professional learning and development opportunities for staff related to core service delivery and well-being of children and families such as:
  - Healthy child development
  - Pre- and post-natal care
  - Adult and parent education
  - Diversity and inclusion
  - Community development and outreach
  - Cultural competency
- Capacity building of staff to ensure core services support inclusion of children with special needs and their families, for example, through the support of an SNR consultant
- Establishing communities of practices to support EarlyON program staff
- EarlyON business administration (e.g. program management, human resources, budgeting, leadership, policy development)



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Note: While capacity building funding is intended to support EarlyON Child & Family Centre programs, partnerships with other community organizations and initiatives are encouraged to promote inter-professional learning opportunities.

Service Providers will be required to report on expenditures, as per DNSSAB reporting requirements.



## Section 6: Funding Approach & Reporting Requirements

### Funding Approach

DNSSAB will provide service providers with allocations for a one-year term, to be received in quarterly installments on the 1<sup>st</sup> business day of each quarter. The funding cycle will be aligned with DNSSAB's budget cycle and based on the funding received from the ministry.

### Operating Budget

The EarlyON service provider is asked to submit budget information to DNSSAB on an annual basis via the Financial Reporting database. The Approved Budget is due January 31<sup>st</sup>, the Mid-Year Check-In is due July 31<sup>st</sup>, while the agency's Actuals are due based on the agency's fiscal year end. Agencies are asked to refer to the reporting document for exact timelines.

### Reporting Requirements

#### Quarterly Reports

EarlyON Child and Family Centres will submit quarterly data to DNSSAB as per the following cycle:

Intended Period	Due Date
January 1- March 31	April 30
April 1 – June 30	July 31
July 1 – September 30	October 31
October 1 – December 31	January 31

EarlyON Service Providers are required to utilize the Financial Reporting Database for quarterly submissions, and any other reporting template provided by DNSSAB for reporting purposes.



## **Audited Financial Statements**

EarlyON Service Providers are required to submit an Audited Financial Statement and any accompanying notes. Financial Statements are due to DNSSAB no later than four months following the end of the provider's fiscal year end.

All EarlyON funds for the fiscal year must be returned to DNSSAB if they are not used for the purpose intended or a closure of an agency/site.

## **Program Audits**

EarlyON Service Providers may be required to submit detailed invoices as part of the EarlyON funding reconciliation process to verify amounts claimed. Please ensure your agency is prepared to provide this documentation in the event they are requested by DNSSAB.

As part of both the Provincial and the DNSSAB funding verification processes, EarlyON Service Providers are required to keep all original receipts/expenditure documentation for a minimum of 7 years.

## **Process for Late Submissions**

DNSSAB acknowledges that the majority of service providers submit required information on a timely basis. The intent behind the late submission process outlined below is to ensure that DNSSAB has the information required to demonstrate accountability for public funds.

DNSSAB will continue to support EarlyON Service Providers with timely data and financial documentation filing through outreach, training and resources. The process for late submission of financial reports is implemented as follows:

Where financial submission is not received by DNSSAB in the established timeline, DNSSAB will take the following action until the submission is received:

- DNSSAB will inform the service provider that the submission is overdue and allow the service provider time to remedy the situation.
- In accordance with the agreement, DNSSAB may withhold payments of any funds payable if, in DNSSAB's sole discretion, DNSSAB determines that the service provider is in breach of any of its obligations or the warranties provided.



Upon submission of the requirements, DNSSAB will revert back to the normal payment process and will include in the payment the total amount withheld up to that point.

DNSSAB reserves the right to suspend funding (in year or in the subsequent year(s)). Should a service provider have any outstanding submissions, DNSSAB may exercise its discretion by not providing funding in the subsequent calendar year.

### Service Level Reporting

In addition to the information contained in the Quarterly Reports, EarlyON providers are responsible for collecting service level data, including EarlyON Centres attendance. This information is currently being collected through the Event Registration & Attendance Manager (ERAM), a web-based information and data system, for all EarlyON Child and Family Centres in the District of Nipissing.

All EarlyON service providers are required to attend training in the use of ERAM, as well as input registration and attendance information in a timely fashion. In order to support providers in the use of the system, an [ERAM Provider Manual](#) has been created and additional technical support can be provided by the Data Coordinator by emailing [data@dnssab.ca](mailto:data@dnssab.ca).

**Note:** the Ministry is in the process of developing a new provincial IT solution to support Ontario's early years and child care system. The first release of the new solution will include features and functions for EarlyON Service Providers related to EarlyON program delivery. The EarlyON release will be phased in beginning in the Fall of 2026 and will replace ERAM. More details will be shared as they are available.

## Business Practices With Service Providers

### Standards and Requirements

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must have policies and procedures in place to fulfill all of their reporting requirements to DNSSAB.

### Major Capital

EarlyON Child and Family Centres are required to advise DNSSAB of any knowledge regarding the sale/transfer/renovation of EarlyON Child and Family Centre properties that have received capital funding.



## Section 7: Monitoring Process - Quality & Inclusion

### Monitoring Process

DNSSAB has established a monitoring process for EarlyON Child and Family Centres to promote consistent, accessible, responsive, inclusive and high quality EarlyON services that are aligned with the strategic direction of DNSSAB and the Ministry of Education, and are evidence-informed.

The monitoring process:

- Sets common expectations for all EarlyON Child and Family Centres, to promote inclusive, high quality, evidence-informed services and consistency across EarlyON programming in the District of Nipissing, while providing flexibility to respond to local community factors/needs.
- Assesses whether services are aligned with the strategic direction of DNSSAB and the Ministry of Education.
- Provides structured and regular opportunities for service provider/DNSSAB dialogue and collaborative inquiry, focused on agency-specific successes and challenges.
- Ensures ongoing assessment of programs to support service providers to reflect on and enhance their work with families and caregivers.
- Assists in identifying system-wide strengths and challenges to support system planning.
- Documents the quality of service provision, allowing the District of Nipissing to showcase its work as a leader in EarlyON programming in Ontario.

### Quality & Inclusion Support Overview

#### Quality & Inclusion Support Services

Quality and Inclusion Support Services (QISS) provides support to EarlyON Child and Family Centres across the District of Nipissing, promoting accessible, responsive, inclusive, and high-quality programs. The QISS program is grounded in the



understanding that quality and inclusion are interdependent—both must be present to create environments where all children, families, and professionals can thrive.

Quality and Inclusion Program Specialists (QIPS) work directly with programs to support early learning teams and build capacity through the ongoing implementation of How Does Learning Happen? (HDLH) – Ontario’s pedagogy for the early years. This is achieved through intentional mentorship, collaborative dialogue, and reflective practice that honours diversity of children, families and early learning teams.

Through engagement, collaborative site visits, coaching, and reflective dialogue, QIPS are committed to fostering inclusive, high-quality environments. Their work ensures that every child, family, and professional receives equitable and responsive support, contributing to a system where diversity, equity, and belonging is valued and inclusion is embedded in everyday practice.

The consistent support provided to programs is intended to build relationships and to maximize quality and inclusion practices through reflective thinking and goal setting. In collaboration with early learning teams, observations are made during site visits, open and honest discussion and interactions are had and priorities are determined.

The QISS team will support the early learning teams’ journey from identifying and developing program goals through to the achievement of goals, objectives and desired outcomes.

### **EarlyON Quality Assurance Surveys**

DNSSAB has developed an EarlyON Quality Assurance Survey that is available on the DNSSAB [EarlyON website page](#). The purpose of this survey is to gather feedback pertaining to EarlyON programs based on the values of responsiveness, accessibility, inclusiveness and high quality.

EarlyON Service Providers should promote the survey by displaying the Survey Posters at each location and sharing the social media post linking to the survey on a quarterly basis.

Survey results will be shared with service providers on a quarterly basis, or immediately if a significant concern is raised.



## Section 8: Contact Information

If you have any questions or require support, please direct your inquiry as noted in the table below:

For information related to:	Please contact:
• Service Agreement	Lynn Démoré-Pitre, Director Children's Services <a href="mailto:lynn.demore-pitre@dnssab.ca">lynn.demore-pitre@dnssab.ca</a> ; (705) 474-2151 ext. 13155
• Program/Service Level Inquiries	Jennifer Roussy, Supervisor Children's Services <a href="mailto:jennifer.roussy@dnssab.ca">jennifer.roussy@dnssab.ca</a> ; (705) 474-2151 ext. 13321
• Funding Inquiries/Payments • Financial Reporting Submission/Support	Finance Team <a href="mailto:csfundingrequest@dnssab.ca">csfundingrequest@dnssab.ca</a>
• Quality & Inclusion Support Services	Supervisors of Quality & Inclusion Support Services  Kelli Couroux: <a href="mailto:kelli.couroux@dnssab.ca">kelli.couroux@dnssab.ca</a> ; (705) 474-2151 ext. 13144  Jesse-Rae Roesner: <a href="mailto:jesse-rae.roesner@dnssab.ca">jesse-rae.roesner@dnssab.ca</a> ; (705) 474-2151 ext. 13301
• Quality & Inclusion Support Services o Site Visits/Support o Resource Library o Professional Learning Opportunities	Quality& Inclusion Program Specialist Team <a href="mailto:quality.inclusion@dnssab.ca">quality.inclusion@dnssab.ca</a>
• ERAM support or training	Data Coordinator <a href="mailto:data@dnssab.ca">data@dnssab.ca</a>



DNSSAB Children's Services  
200 McIntyre St E  
North Bay, ON P1B 8V6

Phone: 705-474-2151  
Fax: 705-474-0136  
Toll Free: 1-877-829-5121  
[data@dnssab.ca](mailto:data@dnssab.ca)

**[dnssab.ca/childrens-services/earlyon](http://dnssab.ca/childrens-services/earlyon)**