The Program

What is EarlyON Child and Family Centre (EarlyON CFC)?

EarlyON Child and Family Centres offer free, drop-in programs for children up to six years old and their parents/caregivers. EarlyON centres are places to engage and connect with others in the community and feel a sense of belonging. Children, parents and caregivers are welcomed by qualified early-years professionals who can provide support, advice and helpful resources. EarlyON centres are where children and their parents/caregivers can learn, play, laugh, be curious, make friends and engage with others.

EarlyON centres offer children, parents and caregivers a friendly environment that fosters positive learning with a wide range of quality programs and services to help children reach their full potential, with:

- Programs designed especially for children up to six years old
- Play-based learning experiences that are fun and engaging – such as painting, drawing, building, creating, reading, storytelling, singing and much more
- Advice from professionals trained in early childhood development
- Information or referrals to specialized programs and services within the community
- Opportunity to meet and make connections with families with young children

~ taken from the EarlyON Child and Family Centre brochure, Ontario.ca/EarlyON

Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB) is home to fourteen EarlyON Centres and responsible for the overall operation of five centres. These centres are located at Roseville Public School, John Campbell Public School, West Gate Public School, Begley Public School and Queen Elizabeth Public School.

Goals of the Program

EarlyON Child and Family Centres must be designed and delivered to achieve the following KEY GOALS and OBJECTIVES as prescribed by the Ministry of Education:

- Parents and caregivers have access to high quality services that support them in their roles as their children's fist teachers, enhance their well-being and enrich their knowledge about early learning and development.
- Children have access to play and inquiry-based learning opportunities and experience positive developmental health and well-being.
- Parents and caregivers have opportunities to strengthen their relationships with their children.
- Parents and caregivers are provided with timely, relevant and up to date information about community and specialized services.
- Local service providers collaborate and integrate services to meet community needs in an efficient and accessible way.

Vision and Guiding Principles

As prescribed by the Ministry of Education, EarlyON Child and Family Centes are intended to support all children, parents and caregivers in learning, growing and connecting – together. This aligns with Ontario's renewed vision for the early years and child care, where all children and families have access to a range of high-quality, inclusive and affordable early years and child care programs and services that are centres around the child and family and contribute to children's learning, development and well-being.

Service providers will be guided by the following principles when developing, delivering and evaluation EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs and services:
Child and Family Centered: All programs and services are designed and delivered to meet the unique needs of parents, caregivers and young children to support their leaning development and well-being.

Welcoming: EarlyON Child and Family Centers provide a warm and welcoming environment based on the foundational conditions for supporting growth and long-term success (belonging, well-being, engagement and expression).

High Quality: Programs and services are designed to support positive experiences and outcomes and foster nurturing relationships between children, parents and caregivers and are based on the latest evidence and research.
Inclusive: Programs and services are accessible and responsive to children, parents and caregivers with varying abilities and cultural, language, socio-economic sexual orientation and religious backgrounds.

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

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

Pedagogical Framework for EarlyON Child and Family Centres as prescribed by the Ministry of Education:

EarlyON Child and Family Centres are expected to provide programs that reflect the view of children, parents, caregivers and educators as competent, capable, curious and rich in potential and experience. Guided by *How Does Learning Happen*? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years (HDLH), EarlyON Child and Family Centres provide an environment that engages parents and caregivers as co-learners and leaders in influencing positive child, family and community experiences and outcomes.
The following documents are available to help strengthen program quality in the 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

Core Services:

1) Engaging parents and caregivers,
2) Supporting early learning and development, and
3) Making connections for families.

Engaging Parents and Caregivers

- Inviting conversations and information sharing about child development, parenting, nutrition, play and inquiry-based learning, and other topics that support their role;
- Offering responsive prenatal and postnatal support programs to enhance parent and caregiver well-being, enrich adult-child interactions and support them in their role(s);

- Providing targeted outreach opportunities designed for 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.)

As noted above, parent and caregiver engagement may take place in a variety of formats depending on the needs of the community. Engagement may include group discussions, informal one on one engagement, printed and electronic resources or other engagement opportunities as appropriate.
Whenever possible, engagement with parents and caregivers should occur with children present. Differentiated adult learning opportunities may be considered and planned on an as needed basis.

Supporting Early Learning and Development

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

Early learning and development programs are most effective when the content of learning is grounded in relationships and focused on supporting the development of strategies, dispositions, and skills for lifelong learning through play and inquiry.

Making Connections for Families

- Responding to a parent/caregiver concern about their child's development through conversations and observations that can be supported by validated tools and resources (e.g., developmental surveillance, Nipissing District Developmental Screen (NDDS), and most recently, the HEADS-ED screener). In some cases, this may result in supporting parents/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), coordinated service planning, public health, education, child care, and child welfare, as appropriate.
- Ensuring Child and Family Centre staff have relationships with community partners and an in-depth knowledge of their community resources to allow for simple transitions (warm hand-offs) for families who may benefit from access to specialized or other services.
- Providing Information about programs and services available for the whole family beyond the early years.