

Canada-Saskatchewan Early Learning and Child Care Agreement



2017-18 Report

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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. As a result, on March 16, 2018, the Governments of Canada and Saskatchewan announced a three-year bilateral agreement to help ensure that Saskatchewan children get the best start in life. The agreement allocates just over \$41 million, over three years, to Saskatchewan for early learning and child care investments.

Saskatchewan has invested in four priority areas using 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 Canada-Saskatchewan Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (the Agreement). Over the course of the Agreement, Saskatchewan will focus on four main priorities to be achieved by 2020:

Quality – Support the sustainment and growth of the licensed child care sector through training, providing operational supports and improving the licensing system. In 2017-18 the focus was on providing grants to support active play and the *Play and Exploration* curriculum framework in licensed child care. In the last years of the agreement more focus will be on training, creating public awareness about the early learning and child care sector and creating efficiencies in the licensing and monitoring system. It is expected that by 2020, up to 115 licensed family child care home providers and 188 child care centre directors will participate in training.

Accessibility – Expand access to high quality child care programs. Work is well underway and will continue into 2018-19 to create new licensed child care spaces in Saskatchewan communities that need them most in both the centre-based and home-based sectors. By 2020, 1,500 licensed group and family child care home spaces in approximately 300 homes and 950 licensed centre-based spaces will be developed in the province. In total, it is expected that by 2020, there will be an additional 2,450 licensed child care spaces across the province.

Inclusion – Create new early learning opportunities for children experiencing disability through innovative new pilots that builds on the strengths of existing Prekindergarten programs to enhance early learning opportunities for children experiencing significant disability. The Early Learning Intensive Support Pilot began in March 2018 and will be fully operational in fall 2018. Saskatchewan will also seek to develop programming for children who are experiencing disability in rural and remote communities and for children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. It is expected that at least 220 preschool-aged children who experience disability will be provided early learning and child care opportunities by 2020.

Francophone Minority Language Inclusion – Respond to the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs' recommendations to expand access to francophone child care. Saskatchewan will continue to support the francophone community through licensed child care spaces dedicated to francophone families wanting to encourage the acquisition of the French language and continued growth of francophone culture and heritage in the province. By 2020, it is expected that 65 additional children will have access to francophone early learning and child care.

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

Activities, Expenditures and Results of the Agreement

1. Quality

Supporting the quality of the early learning and child care system has always been a priority for Saskatchewan, and this priority was reaffirmed by *Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan* and the *Education Sector Strategic Plan*. Investing in quality is important because it creates improved outcomes for children. Saskatchewan has invested in a range of quality improvement initiatives to enhance child care programs for children and families, including financial support for staff education and training, and grants and resources to enhance the learning environment and nutrition.

Play and Exploration Grant – The *Play and Exploration* Grant is a one-time grant for licensed child care facilities as a component of Saskatchewan's Action Plan for the Agreement. *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* is Saskatchewan's foundational early learning framework to guide quality practice and approaches in the early learning sector. The intent of the *Play and Exploration* Grant is to further support the licensed early learning and child care sector to implement *Play and Exploration* in their programs.

The *Play and Exploration* Grant was available to child care centres and homes licensed and in operation at March 31, 2018, in the following amounts:

- Family Child Care Homes - \$600
- Group Family Child Care Homes - \$900
- Child Care Centres - \$2,500 for the first 30 spaces and \$75 per space for additional spaces.

Eligible expenditures of the *Play and Exploration* Grant include items that support the implementation of *Play and Exploration* indoors and outdoors and may include furniture, equipment, materials and resource books.

In 2017-18, Saskatchewan spent \$1.4 million on the *Play and Exploration* Grant. Three hundred and thirty licensed child care centres received a total of \$1,210,200 in *Play and Exploration* grants, and 250 licensed child care homes received a total of \$190,500.

Active Play Grant – The Active Play Grant is a one-time grant for child care facilities as a component of Saskatchewan's Action Plan. The intent of the Active Play Grant is to purchase equipment and materials to encourage active play in licensed child care settings. Eligible expenditures include items that support active play indoors and outdoors, such as play climbers, tunnels and mats, balls, balance beams, etc.

The Active Play Grant was available to child care centres and homes licensed and in operation at March 31, 2018, in the following amounts:

- Family Child Care Homes - \$500
- Group Family Child Care Homes - \$750
- Child Care Centres - \$1,900 for the first 30 spaces and \$60 per space for additional spaces.

In 2017-18, Saskatchewan spent \$1.1 million on Active Play Grants. Three hundred and thirty-two licensed child care centres received a total of \$935,160 in Active Play Grants, and 251 licensed child care homes received a total of \$158,750.

2. Accessibility

Development of accessible licensed child care continues to be a priority for Saskatchewan. Through the Agreement, Saskatchewan has committed to an additional 2,515 new spaces including 1,015 centre-based and 1,500 home-based spaces by 2020. This continues Saskatchewan's commitment to increasing access to licensed care. Since 2007, the province has grown the number of allocated licensed child care spaces by 63 per cent, including 889 new child care spaces opened in joint-use school communities and traditional school builds in September 2017. With the addition of the Agreement and a commitment for 1,015 new centre-based child care spaces, Saskatchewan will have allocated funding for 6,839 new centre-based child care spaces in total – a 73 per cent increase in spaces since 2007.

In Saskatchewan, all centre based spaces and licensed group and family child care spaces must meet similar safety and quality expectations laid out in *The Child Care Act, 2014* and *The Child Care Regulations, 2015*. Licensed group and family child care homes are monitored on a regular basis to ensure child safety. Saskatchewan Ministry of Education consultants have a caseload that includes centres and homes and these staff work with providers to ensure adherence to regulations and provide guidance in implementing Saskatchewan's *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide*.

Saskatchewan uses a data informed approach to allocate new centre spaces. Using population-level data from the Early Years Evaluation, In-Hospital Birth Questionnaire and other data sources, the province will target new licensed programs in vulnerable communities with a sustainable population base. The approach further focuses on allocating spaces to organizations that:

- will develop a centre in a location where children and families are experiencing vulnerability;
- offer flexible child care arrangements, including infant and/or part-time care;
- support Indigenous families, new Canadians, and/or French language minority communities; and,
- have the ability to develop a child care centre by March 31, 2020.

This targeted approach helps to support holistic child development and school readiness targets identified under the *Education Sector Strategic Plan* and *Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan*. This approach will also continue to focus new programs on communities with a greater proportion of lower-income families, Indigenous families, lone parent families, French language minority communities and new Canadians.

Saskatchewan made significant progress in 2017-18 towards its commitments to develop a total of 2,515 licensed child care spaces by 2020. Licensed child care centres were allocated 597 new spaces and licensed child care homes were allocated 447 new spaces, for a total of 1,044 new spaces allocated across the province. Rural communities received 134 of these newly allocated spaces.

In 2017-18, as a part of the Agreement, Saskatchewan spent \$4,391,585 on a variety of both one-time as well as periodic grants that were provided to licensed child care facilities to ease the financial burden and encourage new start-ups and increase the accessibility of child care. In Saskatchewan as a part of becoming a licensed child care provider, the following grants are available to all eligible funded licensed child care facilities:

- **Start-up Grants** – up to \$2,250 to assist with the expenses incurred in opening a family child care home (e.g. equipment, furnishings, fire inspection). In 2017-18, as a part of the Agreement, \$89,776 was granted to new child care homes.
- **Space Development Capital Grants** – assist with the costs of developing, renovating or constructing new child care spaces in centres. In 2017-18, \$3,582,000 was provided to licensed child care centres as part of the Agreement, including \$180,000 for francophone spaces.
- **Fire, Health and Safety Grants** – 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. In 2017-18, \$37,700 was granted to new family child care homes as a part of the Agreement.

- **Nutrition Grants** – 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 and was provided to 2,233 spaces for a total of \$583,309.
- **Equipment and Program Grants** – assist with the expense of purchasing children’s toys, equipment, furnishings, craft supplies and 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 and was provided to 2,233 Saskatchewan family child care spaces for a total of \$98,200.

3. Inclusion

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 2017-18, under the Agreement, Saskatchewan invested \$2,192,236 in inclusivity initiatives and supported 144 children who are experiencing disability through the Early Learning Intensive Support Pilot and the Enhanced Accessibility Grant.

Early Learning Intensive Support Pilot – 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. There will usually be two children who require intensive supports placed in the classroom, but this may range from one to three children based on a number of factors including the unique needs and circumstances of the child, the class and the facility.

The Early Learning Intensive Support Pilot was launched in Regina and Saskatoon late in the 2017-18 school year and had 14 children enrolled. By fall 2018, the program will be fully operational and enrolment is expected to exceed 80 children.

Enhanced Accessibility Grant – 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. Through the Agreement, Saskatchewan was able to support an additional 130 children with an Enhanced Accessibility Grant in 2017-18.

4. Francophone Minority Language Inclusion

Saskatchewan has a significant and vibrant francophone culture and heritage. Based on consultation with the Fransaskois Parents' Association (APF) and the Conseil des écoles francsaskoises, recommendations were made to expand access to francophone child care, including plans to develop 65 licensed child care spaces in francophone schools.

In 2017-18, among the 597 licensed child care centre spaces allocated, 30 were allocated to the francophone community in Regina. La Coopérative française Centre éducatif Gard’amis were allocated the 30 spaces because of their priority to serve francophone families, their ability to develop into a child care centre by 2020, as well as the high need for child care in Regina.

Saskatchewan will continue to work with the Conseil des écoles francsaskoises and the Fransaskois community to develop additional child care spaces in francophone schools and communities. Saskatchewan will also continue to build curricula and foundational documents in French to ensure culturally appropriate, quality environments and equitable opportunities for francophone children in child care and early learning programs.

Financial Expenditures

In 2017-18, Saskatchewan expended a total of just over \$9 million through the Agreement to support the early learning and child care sector in the province. The remaining \$4.8 million from the \$13.8 million allocated for 2017-18 will be carried into the 2018-19 fiscal year.

Initiative	2017-18
Quality	
<i>Play and Exploration</i>	\$ 1,400,700
Active Play	\$ 1,093,910
Accessibility	
Start-up	\$ 89,776
Space Development Capital	\$ 3,402,000
Fire, Health, Safety	\$ 37,700
Nutrition	\$ 583,909
Equipment and Program Grants - Homes	\$ 98,200
Francophone Minority Language Inclusion	
Space Development Capital	\$180,000
Inclusion	
Early Learning Intensive Support Pilot and Enhanced Accessibility Grants	\$ 2,192,236
Miscellaneous	
Administration	\$ 9,135
Total	\$9,087,566

Results Achieved: Indicators and Targets

In 2017-18, Saskatchewan made significant progress towards our 2020 targets, as displayed in the table below. As a result of the Agreement being signed in March 2018, some initiatives were still being developed at the end of 2017-18 and were not able to achieve any measurable results in the first year. However, other initiatives are already on track to meet 2020 targets.

Objectives/ Programs	Outputs/ Outcomes	Indicators	Targets by 2020	Actual Results in 2017-18
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	To begin in 2018-19
		Child care directors participating in training	60 per cent or 188 of child care centre directors	To begin in 2018-19
	Innovation	Under development		
Accessible and Flexible	Increase access to licensed child care	Licensed child care centre spaces	Increase of 1,015	597
		Licensed group or family child care home spaces	Increase of 1,500	447
	Flexibility	Under development		
Inclusive	Increase access for minority groups	Preschool-aged children served who are experiencing disability	Increase of 220	144
		Licensed child care spaces that support French language minority communities	Increase of 65	30

Impact on Families

Saskatchewan is committed to allocating child care spaces that meet the priorities identified in the Agreement. To ensure this commitment, Saskatchewan has allocated child care spaces following the conditions of the Agreement including at least one of the following:

- offering flexible child care arrangements;
- supporting Indigenous families, new Canadians, and/or French language minority populations; or,
- offering services in areas where children and families experience vulnerability.

In 2017-18, Saskatchewan allocated 597 child care centre spaces, with 30 of these designated for the francophone community. The remaining 567 child care spaces were allocated to organizations who have committed to offering flexible child care arrangements, supporting Indigenous families or new Canadians, and/or providing child care services for children and families experiencing vulnerability.

Examples of this in practice:

- The allocation of 54 spaces in Souls Harbour Rescue Mission, currently located in Regina's "North Central" community. According to the 2011 Census, the rate of lone-parent families and low-income households in North Central are higher than Regina's total average (15 and 21 per cent higher, respectively). Furthermore, 44 per cent of the citizens in North Central identified as Aboriginal, compared to Regina's total average of 10 per cent. Souls Harbour Rescue Mission services are targeted at individuals and families who are experiencing poverty and addiction.
- The allocation of seven spaces in Hope's Home, located in Regina. Hope's Home offers daycare services for children with complex medical needs, their siblings as well as typically developing children from the community.
- The allocation of 90 spaces in the First Nations University of Canada. The First Nations University of Canada is a unique Canadian institution that specializes in Indigenous knowledge.
- The allocation of 51 child care centre spaces in North Battleford. According to the 2016 Census, 25 per cent of families residing in North Battleford are lone-parent families, 9 percentage points higher than Saskatchewan's overall average (16 per cent). Sixteen per cent of households in North Battleford are considered low-income households, 5 per cent more than Saskatchewan's overall average (11 per cent). Finally, 29 per cent of North Battleford's census population identifies as Aboriginal, 13 per cent higher than Saskatchewan's overall average (16 per cent).
- The allocation of 48 total spaces to three different rural towns, each with populations under 4,500 people, according to the 2016 census; Nipawin (4,401), Fort Qu'Appelle (2,027) and Leroy (450).

Innovation

Innovative ways of delivering services is a priority for Saskatchewan. Under the priority of inclusivity, Saskatchewan has introduced a new and innovative approach that builds on the strengths of existing programs to enhance early learning opportunities for children experiencing significant disability.

In 2017-18, Saskatchewan implemented the Early Learning Intensive Support Pilot in Regina and Saskatoon to be available to children with intensive needs who require a significant level of support to participate in an early learning program, including significant delays in development, and may include children who have been diagnosed with autism, cognitive delays, physical challenges, auditory issues or significant behavioural issues. The approach will allow additional children to experience a high quality early learning opportunity in existing school division selected Prekindergarten programs which is a targeted program that supports vulnerable three- and four-year old children. Specifically, Prekindergarten focuses on fostering social development and self-esteem, nurturing educational growth and school success, promoting language development and engaging families.

Federal funding will allow programs to hire additional staff and provide supports needed to meet the unique needs of these children so they can benefit from the Prekindergarten early learning environment.

The Early Learning Intensive Support Pilot was launched late in the 2017-18 school year and will be fully operational by fall 2018.

Consultation

Significant public engagement has occurred in the last three years which has informed Saskatchewan's Action Plan and priorities under the Agreement. Stakeholder engagement from *The Saskatchewan Disability Strategy*, *The Saskatchewan Poverty Reduction Strategy* and Legislative Secretary Russ Marchuk's parent and community focus groups were vital to understanding the needs within the early learning and child care sector. Feedback spoke to the need to enhance access to early learning and child care opportunities for children and families and the need for government to create services that are more coordinated, integrated and provided in child and family centred ways.

These engagement processes informed the goals of *Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan 2016-2020*, as well as the direction laid out by Saskatchewan's Action Plan under the Agreement. As the province continues to implement its Action Plan, Saskatchewan has already begun working collaboratively with various stakeholders, such as parents, child care directors, and home child care providers to determine where programs fit best, as well as responding to the local context and the diverse voices of parents and children. This will support Saskatchewan's goal of helping all children to be safe, healthy and to develop to their full potential in strong families and supportive communities.