EarlyON Child and Family Centre

ON y va Centre pour l'enfant et la famille

The Regional Municipality of York

FUNDING GUIDELINE FOR EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY PROGRAMS IN YORK REGION

Effective January 1, 2026

CHILDREN'S SERVICES
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york.ca/EarlyON

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1. Introduction

The Regional Municipality of York (York Region) is pleased to release the 2026 Funding Guideline (guideline) for EarlyON Child and Family Programs in York Region. This guideline is for EarlyON agencies providing local EarlyON programs and services to families in York Region.

OVERVIEW

The 2026 Funding Guideline for EarlyON Child and Family Programs in York Region provides agencies with an overview of program expectations, operational guidelines and reporting requirements for delivering EarlyON Child and Family programs and services, in accordance with the *Ministry of Educations' Ontario Child Care and Early Years Funding Guideline 2026 Chapter 6: EarlyON Guideline*. These programs contribute to children's learning, development, and well-being.

EarlyON Child and Family Programs are family support hubs offering free, inclusive and welcoming programs for parents, caregivers and young children from birth to six years old. These high-quality programs are designed to cater to the diverse needs of families and children. They provide welcoming environments where children, families and caregivers can learn, play and connect together. EarlyON programs and services are offered through a variety of service delivery methods to meet the unique needs of families in their communities, including in-person indoor and outdoor programs, virtual programs, and phone services. Services are offered through both EarlyON centres and mobile locations.

EarlyON Child and Family Programs are supported by:

- A legislative framework that recognizes the role of service system managers
- Investments in EarlyON Child and Family Programs
- *Early Years Accommodations in Schools: Reference Guide (2018)*
- The *Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023*
- A provincial pedagogy for the early years to guide licensees and educators: *How Does Learning Happen, Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years, 2014* (HDLH)

The 2026 Funding Guideline for EarlyON Child and Family Programs in York Region includes the following updates:

- Public Holiday Closures
- French Language Services
- Child Care and Early Years IT Solutions
- EarlyON Child and Family Programs Staffing – Service Data is now documented only in the York Region Financial and Service Data Reporting Tool

If you have any questions about the information included in this guideline, please contact your Community Program Coordinator (CPC).

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY PROGRAMS

Ministry of Education EarlyON Child and Family Programs Objectives

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

- 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 from birth to six years of age engage with older siblings on school closure days, evenings or weekends
- Families 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
- Families 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
- Families are provided with timely, relevant and up-to-date information about community and specialized services
- EarlyON agencies and other community partners work in collaboration to strengthen partnerships, coordinate access to services and ensure that EarlyON Child and Family Programs are an integrated part of the Ontario Early Years System

Vision and Guiding Principles

EarlyON Child and Family Programs are intended to support children, parents / guardians, and caregivers in learning, growing and connecting – together.

It is expected that agencies will be guided by the following principles when developing, delivering and evaluating EarlyON Child and Family Programs and services:

PRINCIPLE	DESCRIPTION
Child and Family-Centred	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.

PRINCIPLE	DESCRIPTION
Welcoming	EarlyON Child and Family Programs 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, 2014* (HDLH)
High quality	Programs and services are based on the latest evidence and research and are designed to support positive experiences and outcomes and foster nurturing relationships between children, parents / guardians and caregivers.
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 and Family Programs and services that address identified gaps, embrace and build on their strengths and meet their unique needs on an ongoing basis.

Pedagogical Framework for EarlyON Child and Family Programs

EarlyON Child and Family Programs are required to provide programs that reflect the view of children, parents / guardians, 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, 2014* (HDLH), EarlyON Child and Family Programs 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.

Agencies offering EarlyON Child and Family Programs and services are required to apply the principles of 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 Programs:

- *How Does Learning Happen, Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years, 2014* (HDLH)
- *Think, Feel Act: Lessons from Research about Young Children*

Schools-Based Approach

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

early years pedagogy.

The Ministry encourages the use of a schools-based approach in alignment with other child care and early years initiatives, where possible. This includes locating EarlyON centres within schools and encouraging the integration of EarlyON within the school community. Details can be found in the *Early Years Accommodations in Schools: Reference Guide.*

Mandatory Core Services

To achieve the intended goals and outcomes of EarlyON Child and Family Programs, the Ministry of Education has identified a set of mandatory core services that must be available to children and families across the province. The Region is required to manage the local delivery of these core services related to supporting early learning and development, engaging parents / guardians and caregivers and making connections for families.

EarlyON Child and Family Programs must ensure the provision of consistent, high-quality core services at no fee to participants. The mandatory core services include:

Supporting early learning and development

EarlyON Child and Family Programs must offer drop-in programs and other programs and services that promote responsive adult-child relationships, encourage children's exploration, and promote 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

EarlyON Child and Family Programs must actively work to develop programs that cultivate authentic, caring relationships and connections that create a sense of belonging. This means that, wherever possible, engagement with parents / guardians and caregivers should occur with children present. Engaging with parents and caregivers also includes:

- Inviting conversations and information-sharing about children's interests, child development, parenting, nutrition, play and inquiry-based learning, and other topics that support their relationship with their child(ren)
- Providing targeted outreach opportunities that are responsive to community needs. This includes connecting with parents/ guardians and caregivers who could benefit from EarlyON Child and Family Programs and services, but are not currently accessing services for a variety of reasons
- Collaborating with other support programs to enhance parent/guardian and caregiver well-being, enrich adult-child relationships and support parents / guardians and caregivers in their role(s)

Parent/guardians and caregiver engagement may take place in a variety of formats, depending on the needs of individuals within the community. Engagement may include group discussions, informal one-on-one engagements, printed and electronic resources, virtual or

other engagement opportunities, as appropriate.

Making connections for families

EarlyON Child and Family Programs must continuously look for opportunities to facilitate stronger relationships within their local community and assist parents / guardians and caregivers in accessing services and supports that respond to a family's unique needs. This includes:

- Ensuring EarlyON Child and Family Programs staff have relationships with community partners and an in-depth knowledge of community resources to allow for seamless transitions (warm hand-offs) for families who may benefit from access to specialized or other services
- Responding to parent / guardian or caregiver concern(s) about their child's development through conversations and observations. In some cases, staff may direct a parent/guardian or caregiver to seek additional supports from primary care or other regulated health professionals
- Sharing information and facilitating connections with specialized, evidence-based 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 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

2. Branding, Communications and Media

BRANDING

Logos and Templates

EarlyON Service System Managers and agencies are required to follow the Ministry of Education's EarlyON branding strategy and renewed visual identity, which is designed to resonate with families and community partners. The strategy incorporates an integrated brand that includes English, French and bilingual EarlyON logos, templates and Visual Identity Guidelines, which provide direction on the use of the brand in a way that is consistent across different platforms and public communications, such as newsletters, social media and websites.

- As EarlyON programs are provincially funded, the Ontario logo and EarlyON logo must be included on all communications, in accordance with the *Visual Identity Guidelines*
- Both logos should be included on promotional advertising, flyers, etc., in accordance with the *Visual Identity Guidelines*
- Both logos should be included on social media posts where space is available, in accordance with the *Visual Identity Guidelines*
- All programs must acknowledge that EarlyON programs are funded by the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada on communications and websites

All EarlyON agencies must use the brand in accordance with the *Visual Identity Guidelines*. The Ministry of Education's EarlyON *Dropbox* contains the following information for download (in English and French):

- **EarlyON Visual Identity Guidelines**
- **Ontario Logo Guide**
- **EarlyON templates**
  - Business card, envelope, postcard, letterhead and newsletter
- **Logos**
  - EarlyON logos (stacked, horizontal) in English, French and bilingual
  - Ontario logo available in black and white
- **Promotional materials**
  - EarlyON poster
  - EarlyON bookmark
  - EarlyON brochure

EarlyON agencies are required to display the provincial EarlyON and Government of Ontario logo at sites delivering the mandatory core services and adhere to Provincial and Regional direction to ensure consistency.

French Language Services

The City of Markham is designated under the *French Language Services Act*, and therefore required to provide French-language child and family programs and services in accordance with its legislated responsibilities.

EarlyON agencies operating in the City of Markham are encouraged to display the bilingual logo at sites delivering the mandatory core services and adhere to Provincial and Regional direction to ensure consistency.

The Regional Municipality of York (York Region) Logo Use

Agencies cannot use or display the York Region logo in any communications or promotional materials as EarlyON Child and Family Centres in York Region are 100% funded by the Government of Ontario.

Ordering EarlyON Branded Products

In an effort to increase the public's awareness of EarlyON Child and Family Programs, EarlyON agencies may order EarlyON branded products. York Region must approve all EarlyON branded products before they go to production. Please send proposed EarlyON branded products to the agency's respective Community Program Coordinator (CPC). The review and approval turnaround time is **15 business days**.

Co-branding

The *Visual Identity Guidelines* state that only organizations that contribute 20% or more of their program's child and family funding can include their logo with the EarlyON logo on all signage. Organizations that contribute space to operate child and family programs that is equal to 20% or more of the program's funding, may also include their logo on EarlyON signs for those sites. Guest agencies / organizations logos cannot be used on communications.

EarlyON Signage

To increase public awareness of EarlyON Child and Family Programs, EarlyON agencies will produce EarlyON signage for their programs by using EarlyON funding to cover costs. EarlyON signage must be produced in alignment with the Ministry's *Visual Identity Guidelines*.

The Region will work with agencies to confirm and approve signage. Following approval, agencies must work with their own vendor for the production and shipment of their signs. Agencies are also required to arrange removal and/or installation of permanent signage.

York Region is required to submit mock-ups of customized signage to the Ministry for approval, prior to production.

For further information on EarlyON signage or to submit a request, please contact the agency's respective CPC, and carbon copy (cc) *EarlyON@york.ca*

COMMUNICATIONS

Websites

There are various websites that provide families with information about EarlyON Child and Family Programs, community resources and tools. There are three levels of EarlyON websites:

Provincial website: The *ontario.ca/EarlyON* webpage provides information about EarlyON programs across the province. This website is managed by the Ministry of Education and contains resources and tools connecting families to a range of early years programs.

Regional website: The *york.ca/EarlyON* webpage provides information about EarlyON programs and services in York Region; including:

- How to find an EarlyON program using the Early Years Program Finder
- Linking to the EarlyON program calendar which shows all EarlyON locations across the Region
- Providing information on how to create an EarlyON (Children's Services Portal) account
- Listing York Region and external resources to support EarlyON agencies and the public

Agencies must use the appropriate *EarlyON Business Change Request Form* found under EarlyON Resources on york.ca/EarlyON (see page 27, Changes to Service Delivery Method) to notify the Region whenever any location ends services, when a closed location re-opens, or if the agency requests to relocate or open a new location. This form enables the Region to update the Early Years Program Finder and Provincial website's calendar.

Agency website: All EarlyON agencies in York Region are required to have an EarlyON webpage on their website or a designated website associated with their agency. This webpage/website should, at a minimum, include the following information:

- The EarlyON and Ontario logos, adhering to the Ministry's Visual Identity Guide and clearly demonstrate the partnership with the Ministry of Education
- Acknowledgement of the Government of Ontario's and the Government of Canada's support as EarlyON programs are funded by the Ministry of Education
- Description of EarlyON Child and Family Programs
- A link to the Region's EarlyON webpage: *york.ca/Early ON*
- Program locations (permanent sites and mobile sites)
- Contact information (address, phone number and email address)
- Agencies are required to update their webpages/websites regularly

Pictures and Images

Agencies are encouraged to use vibrant imagery when communicating about EarlyON programs to their communities, particularly images that include diverse families who truly reflect York Region residents.

Using visually impactful, striking and memorable pictures helps communicate EarlyON Child and Family Programs as a family-friendly place for young children and their families.

- If using pictures from **websites**, please only use royalty-free pictures from websites such as:
  - Unsplash: *unsplash.com*
  - Pexels: *pexels.com/royalty-free-images/*
  - Shutterstock: *shutterstock.com/explore/royalty-free-images*

- If using pictures from **EarlyON programs** featuring York Region families, please ensure families have provided **written consent** for their pictures to be used in the agency's communications and marketing materials before production

- Agencies must ensure, when taking photos of a person or people to use in communications and marketing materials, that they have the individual(s) provide verbal and written consent. When agencies choose to share photos or videos of anyone attending an EarlyON program with the Region they may use the Region's *Photograph and Video Release Form* ,. This includes EarlyON staff. A copy of the consent form(s) should also be included with the images. (see page 34). These photos may be used by the Region for alternate promotional materials, even ones not related to EarlyON.

Outreach

Agencies can implement their own outreach and engagement strategies in their communities to increase family participation in EarlyON programs. Outreach activities involving communications (online, printed materials) must align with the provincial branding strategy.

Examples of outreach activities include:

- **Social media** posts where agencies post information about their EarlyON programs and direct families to the EarlyON webpage on their website. Remember to always

include a call-to-action in your social media posts such as:
    - "Visit your local EarlyON Child and Family Centre and enjoy free drop-in programs for you and your child."
    - "Visit our website or call us to learn more/for more information."

- **Printed communications** such as awareness-raising flyers about specific EarlyON programs
- **Open houses** where families and children can visit and learn about EarlyON programs

Agencies are encouraged to inform and work with their respective CPCs when developing outreach plans and materials for feedback and ideas.

Approval Process for Communication Materials

Agencies are required to use EarlyON branding assets (logos and templates) as stipulated in the *Visual Identity Guidelines*. All public-facing communications, particularly flyers or brochures, must be shared with the agency's CPC for review and approval. The review and approval turnaround time is **15 business days**.

MEDIA

All public announcements regarding provincial and federal investments in Ontario's child care and early years system are potential joint communication opportunities for the provincial government, federal government, Consolidated Municipal Service Manager Board (CMSM), municipalities and community partners.

To better facilitate media opportunities and special events, each agency is encouraged to designate a media person, who can:

- Act as the agency's spokesperson during media engagement opportunities and special events
- Be responsible for keeping the Region up to date regarding any media opportunities and/or special events and get the Region's approval as required

Public Communications

Specific communication protocols must be followed for media-focused public communications opportunities and special events.

Agencies must work with the Region when preparing and issuing any public announcements, press releases, media opportunities, videos or other public communication materials regarding the delivery and funding of EarlyON Child and Family Programs in York Region.

As Service System Manager, the Region will:

- Work directly with EarlyON agencies in all public communication opportunities directed at media, regarding early years investments, such as program announcements, news releases or events
- Liaise with the Ministry of Education about plans to publicly communicate early years investments (including official openings) and make sure public recognition is provided of the Ministry of Education's role in providing funding

The Ministry of Education may also choose to issue its own news release and/or hold events about investments in child care and early years projects in addition to those prepared by municipalities, school boards, Service System Managers and community partners.

Media Engagement and Inquiries

For media inquiries or engagement requests (such as interviews) related to the agency's EarlyON programs, agencies are asked to complete the *Media Brief for EarlyON Agencies Form* to identify the type of media engagement (interview with staff or clients, photography, profile of programming) and proposed date and time. This brief should be submitted to the Manager of EarlyON Programs at the Region.

When engaging the media, agencies can refer to the *Media Tips for EarlyON Agencies* for some "do's" and "don'ts".

Major Announcements and Events

For major announcements and special events, such as official/grand opening ceremonies or events involving dignitaries, including politicians and other partners, agencies will work closely with the Region to plan the event. This includes:

- Identifying dates
- Determining roles and responsibilities
- Developing the invitation list (including the province and any other dignitaries)

For media opportunities, including major announcements and special events, the Region will take the lead in following the Ministry of Education's protocol. This includes:

- Contacting the Ministry of Education about any major announcements and events
- Publicly recognizing the Ministry of Education's role in providing funding
- Inviting the Minister of Education

The Region requires at least **seven to nine weeks** (two to three months) for planning purposes. If the Minister of Education is unavailable, the invitation may be shared with a government representative who will contact the Region to coordinate the details. The primary goal is to make sure that the Minister is aware of the announcement opportunity.

A special event will only be held on a date that is mutually acceptable to the Region and the agency.

For all other media-focused, public communications opportunities, such as sod turnings, the same protocol is followed, with at least five weeks' notice.

If there are any event date changes, the Region will inform the Minister of Education.

Agencies are asked to complete the *Event Brief for EarlyON Agencies Form* to identify the event information, share the planned event agenda and the dates preferred if it is an official opening ceremony event. This form should be submitted to the Manager of EarlyON Programs at the Region. The Region will respond to agencies regarding special event requests within **five** business days.

Acknowledgement of Support

Announcements regarding EarlyON Child and Family Programs are communication opportunities for the federal government, the provincial government and Service System Managers, such as the Region.

The support of the Government of Ontario must be acknowledged in media-focused communications of any kind, written or oral, relating to new investments. This acknowledgment could include, but is not limited to, any report, announcement, speech, advertisement, publicity, promotional material, brochure, audio-visual material, web communications or any other public communications.

For minor interactions on social media, or within social media such as Twitter/X, where there is a limited restriction on content, municipalities, CMSMs and community partners are not required to include government acknowledgement.

3. EarlyON Child and Family Programs in York Region

Across Ontario, EarlyON Child and Family Programs are intended to support all children, parents/guardians and caregivers in learning, growing and connecting together. This aligns with Ontario's renewed vision for the early years and child care sector, where all children and families have access to a range of high-quality, inclusive and affordable early years and child care programs. These services must be centred on the child and family and contribute to children's learning, development and well-being.

The vision for York Region EarlyON Child and Family Programs is a system that supports children's learning and development and the overall well-being of families.

York Region EarlyON Child and Family Program's mission: Early Learning professionals have the opportunity to learn, grow and connect with one another to provide inclusive, welcoming, high-quality core services that support all children, parents/guardians and caregivers in EarlyON Child and Family Programs, through:

- Programming that is family-centred and engages parents/guardians, caregivers and children in ways that create a sense of belonging and well-being
- Building strong relationships within early learning environments that are responsive to local needs
- Supporting early learning and child development with the principles of the *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*, which are responsive to adult-child relationships, encourage children's exploration and promote play and inquiry,

York Region's *Commitment to Inclusion*

York Region is committed to a welcoming and inclusive community where diversity is celebrated and where everyone can develop to their full potential, participate freely in society, and live with respect, dignity, and freedom from discrimination.

Under the *Human Rights Code* (the Code), every person has the right to be free from harassment and discrimination. Harassment and discrimination will not be tolerated, condoned, or ignored by York

Region. If a claim of harassment or discrimination is proven, disciplinary measures will be applied, up to and including termination of funding.

The Region is committed to a comprehensive strategy to address harassment and discrimination, including:

- Providing training and education to ensure everyone knows their rights and responsibilities
- Regularly monitoring organizational systems for barriers relating to *Code* grounds
- Providing an effective and fair complaints procedure always promoting appropriate standards of conduct

Family-centred Service Delivery

Gaining knowledge about children from multiple perspectives helps educators ensure that programs also value the unique and diverse characteristics of the children's families and the communities in which they live. It's not a "one-size-fits-all" approach. In particular, programs should be reflective of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children and families they serve, including those from First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and francophone communities. *"The web of family and community is the child's anchor for early development."*[1]

EarlyON Child and Family Programs provide community drop-in and registered programs for children from birth to six years of age and their families. It is expected that programming is provided for the full age-range, and families are welcomed and supported in the program. The ages of the children should be used as a guide; programs must also consider the ability of the child attending programs. Therefore, older or younger children may attend an age-specific program due to the child's ability or the family's circumstances.

Family-centred service delivery does not mean that service is catered to the needs of unique families, but rather that the needs of all families, all compositions, are considered in the centre's policies, planning and program delivery. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Welcoming children and adults of all abilities; families from different cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds; individuals with a variety of gender identities and older caregivers (i.e., grandparents)
- Being considerate of the needs of single parents
- Acknowledging that older children in the family may need to attend programming intended for their younger siblings

Consideration of older children's attendance to programming should be anticipated, especially on scheduled school closures, including, but not limited to: PA Days, March break, summer break and weekends. Planning for family-centred service delivery might include increased use of public parks for programming on these days to accommodate limited indoor capacity or creating a welcoming environment for older children to occupy while siblings participate in programming.

Local program policies cannot contradict the Region's expectations for creating welcoming and inclusive spaces for families.

EarlyON service providers may refer to *Family Centered Service Delivery Policy f*or more information.

[1] *How Does Learning Happen, Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years, 2014*

KEY PARTNER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In York Region, the EarlyON management and delivery system includes the following partners:

- The Region, as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM)
- The Region's Community Program Coordinators (CPCs)
- Agencies providing local EarlyON Child and Family Programs

The Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) – The Regional Municipality of York

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM), York Region manages the system of EarlyON Child and Family Programs across the Region. York Region's role is to provide oversight of EarlyON Child and Family Programs to ensure that programs and services are delivered in accordance with the Ministry of Education's Management and Funding Guidelines.

Under the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, York Region is responsible for planning, overseeing and managing the system of services at the local level for children from birth to 12 years old. Required responsibilities in legislation include policy development, local system planning, administering provincial funding and accessing and supporting the economic viability of licensed child care programs.

York Region takes a holistic approach to planning services that meet the needs of children, families and service providers. The Region directly delivers a range of services that support child development and helps families better participate in their communities and the economy. York Region is people-centred and works hard to make sure its services are integrated and personalized to support families' diverse needs.

The Region's responsibilities include:

- Determining how, and by whom, services will be delivered to ensure equitable access
- Conducting an assessment to better understand community needs, identify gaps or duplication of services, and plan services that effectively meet the unique needs of children, parents / guardians and caregivers
- Engaging and consulting with early years partners, including service agencies, community partners and parents / guardians and caregivers to inform the planning process
- Managing the delivery of mandatory core services
- Integrating planning for EarlyON Child and Family Programs into a community-based, system-wide planning process for children's services
- Providing oversight and accountability of provincial funding
- Developing and implementing system-wide standards
- Reporting to the Ministry of Education and Regional Council on performance measurements
- Aligning with the Schools-Based Approach and supporting the implementation of the Early Years Capital Program
- Support programs that serve Indigenous, francophone and vulnerable children
- Co-locate with other early years or community programs

Community Program Coordinators (CPCs)

Community Program Coordinators (CPCs) are part of the EarlyON program team at the Region. Their role is to provide collaborative support and services to EarlyON Child and Family Programs to enhance access, equity and quality within York Region's early years system.

The CPCs' responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Consulting, supporting and building the capacity of EarlyON Child and Family Programs in York Region
- Acting as a resource to EarlyON agencies, facilitators, parents / guardians and caregivers attending EarlyON Child and Family Programs and connecting agencies to outside services and programs, while staying informed of current trends and research in the early years sector
- Providing program support and assisting service agencies to better understand How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years for the development and delivery of programs and to incorporate evidence-based, current research into daily practices
- Determining and developing appropriate, system-wide professional development opportunities for EarlyON agencies
- Conducting regular community visits to EarlyON Child and Family Programs to support agencies in meeting Ministry of Education requirements
- Completing all responsibilities relating to management of contracts, amendments, payments and ongoing reporting analysis
- Ensuring program progress, outcomes and results are met
- Supporting agencies with data to understand neighbourhood needs and underserved areas across the Region by using tools such as the Early Years Community Profiles
- Assisting in the promotion of EarlyON Child and Family Programs across York Region
- Supporting agencies with new and future signage orders with the Ministry of Education
- Supporting agencies with establishing program standards and enhancing inclusion and diversity in EarlyON Child and Family Programs

EarlyON Agencies

To deliver EarlyON programs, you must:

1. Be a not-for-profit organization that can enter into a signed agreement with the Region to deliver EarlyON programs
2. Meet contractual obligations
3. Meet Ministry of Education guidelines, including *Visual Identity Guidelines*
4. Deliver mandatory core services
5. Meet financial and service data reporting
6. Adhere to Regional policies, procedures, guidelines and applicable laws

EarlyON agencies play a vital part in achieving the Ministry of Education's EarlyON Child and Family Programs' goals and objectives. The role of agencies is to work in collaboration with the Region to strengthen partnerships, coordinate access to services and ensure EarlyON Child and Family Programs are an integrated part of meeting local community needs within York Region.

The responsibilities of EarlyON agencies include:

- Designing and delivering programs so children have access to play and inquiry-based learning opportunities alongside their parents / guardians and caregivers, and experience positive development, health and well-being
- Providing parents / guardians and caregivers with access to high-quality programs that support them in their role as their child's first educator. Programs are designed to enhance their well-being and enrich their knowledge about early learning and development and strengthen their relationships with their children
- Providing parents / guardians and caregivers with up-to-date information about community supports and resources for the whole family
- Implementing delivery at the local level of EarlyON Child and Family Programs and services to meet the identified needs of children from birth to age six and their parents and caregivers. It is expected agencies will use available data sources to inform their decisions on how to best serve the local community
- Creating community partnerships to support mandatory core service delivery
- Fulfilling all requirements in the EarlyON Child and Family Centres Service Agreement and Funding Guideline for EarlyON Child and Family Programs in York Region. Agencies will work in partnership with the Region to ensure that mandatory core services and the Region's service objectives are met
- Meeting Ministry of Education guidelines, including *Visual Identity Guidelines*.
- Meeting Regional commitments to inclusion and family-centered service delivery requirements
- Meeting consent policy and procedures requirements

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The EarlyON Child and Family Programs Continuous Quality Improvement Plan will serve as the overarching framework to support EarlyON agencies, educators and community partners in building consistent, high-quality programs and services that achieve the intended goals and outcomes set out by the EarlyON Child and Family Program Standards Framework, the Ministry of Education and York Region.

York Region EarlyON Child and Family Program Standards Framework

The York Region EarlyON Child and Family Programs Standards Framework provides clear and consistent program and service expectations for EarlyON agencies, educators and York Region, to ensure parents / guardians, caregivers and children have access to high-quality programs and services that support them in learning, growing and connecting together.

EarlyON Child and Family Program Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Portfolio

The EarlyON Child and Family Programs CQI Portfolio is a documentation tool designed to support EarlyON agencies and educators to record reflections, plan, and capture learning. EarlyON agencies and educators use the CQI portfolio to better reflect on and understand how their current policies and practices relate to the EarlyON Child and Family Programs Standards Framework's vision, mission, program standards, foundations, program indicators and to identify areas of growth using a goal setting process.

The CQI portfolio has three components:

Foundation Discussion Summary (FDS)

The EarlyON Child and Family Foundation Discussion Summary will support EarlyON agencies to engage in “critical reflective” practices and consider new approaches and ways of thinking about their pedagogical practices as it relates to daily work. As described by John Dewey, learning happens through ”reflective action” (action given careful consideration and justification) as opposed to ”routine action” (action driven by habit and routine).”[2] These reflection opportunities help start the process of documenting critical reflections about how services are currently being delivered, which provides EarlyON agencies with baseline data they can use to develop a learning plan for future planning and service delivery.

Program Indicator Evaluation (PIE) The Program Indicator Evaluation provides an opportunity for EarlyON agencies and educators to rate how program indicators are supported through their current policies, procedures, practices, and service delivery using a 5-point rating scale.

Learning Plan

The Learning Plan is designed to be a self-reflective tool to support EarlyON agencies in developing goals, strategies and outcomes that build consistent quality programs and services in alignment with the EarlyON Child and Family Programs Standards Framework.

York Region EarlyON Child and Family Programs (CQI) Portfolio Reporting

REPORTING PERIOD (QUARTER)	TIMELINE	WHAT TO REPORT
Q1	**January 2026**	EarlyON agency engages in the collaborative inquiry process with staff and stakeholders to introduce the York Region EarlyON Child and Family Programs Standards Framework and CQI Portfolio.
Q1	**February to March 2026**	EarlyON agencies will develop their CQI Portfolio for the current year. **Q1 CPC community visit consultation:** • Engage in collaborative inquiry regarding EarlyON Child and Family Programs CQI Portfolio and determine support required from York Region for the current year

[2] Page 20, *How Does Learning Happen, Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years, 2014*

REPORTING PERIOD (QUARTER)	TIMELINE	WHAT TO REPORT
Q2	**April to June 2026**	EarlyON agency will implement the CQI Learning Plan. **Q2 CPC community visit consultation:** • Review EarlyON Child and Family Programs CQI Portfolio: Reflection Journal, Self-Service Evaluation and CQI Learning Plan
Q3	**July to September 2026**	EarlyON agency will submit EarlyON Child and Family Programs CQI Portfolio: Reflection Journal, Self-Service Evaluation and CQI Learning Plan with the mid-year financial report by July 31. **Q3 CPC community visit consultation (August):** • CPC and agency review CQI Portfolio • Support agency to implement CQI Learning Plan
Q4	**October to December 2026**	Agency continue to implement or adjust CQI Learning Plan and begin working on the Year-End (Q4) EarlyON Child and Family Programs CQI Portfolio status reflection. **Q4 CPC community visit consultation:** • Collaborative inquiry regarding progress status on agency CQI Learning Plan
Q4	**December 2026**	EarlyON agency (all staff and key stakeholders) complete survey and reflect on the CQI Portfolio process.

MANDATORY SERVICE DELIVERY REQUIREMENTS

To meet the unique needs of families in the community, York Region EarlyON Child and Family Programs must offer centre-based, four-season outdoor programs as part of a hybrid service delivery model and based on identified community needs. Virtual programs may also be offered based on identified community needs. All guiding principles are incorporated and must be followed in each service delivery method. The Ministry strongly encourages providing families with multiple avenues to access EarlyON programs.

Centre-based Core Services (In-person Programs)

- EarlyON centres must operate at least five days per week, including a Saturday or Sunday, for program and non-program time for families and caregivers to connect with EarlyON staff regarding supports and services
- Based on parent / guardian and caregiver needs, centres may operate at different times and on different days of the week but must be open at least 35 hours per week. This aligns with the

Ministry's full-time equivalent definition of a 35-hour work week

- In-person evening services must be offered to expand access to working parents and caregivers, based on identified community needs
- **Physical program sites** where children, parents / guardians and caregivers can participate in child and family programs and in-person services must be available. In the event of inclement weather, agencies are encouraged to continue offering in-person services where possible. However, if in-person services are not feasible, programs are recommended to move to a virtual platform whenever possible and notify their CPC.
- Centres may be stand-alone or located within schools or community buildings. The Ministry of Education encourages using a schools-first approach, whenever possible, in alignment with other child care and early years initiatives. This includes encouraging the integration of child and family centres and school communities, such as connecting with educators and school administration
- EarlyON centres may remain closed on the public holidays recognized by Ontario. If a public holiday is observed on a Monday, EarlyON centres are required to offer services on the Saturday or Sunday prior. If EarlyON centres are considering closures in addition to the public holidays (i.e., winter break closure), agencies must contact their CPC, prior to that month's calendar publication for approval of closure.

  Ontario recognizes nine public holidays:

  1. New Year's Day
  2. Family Day
  3. Good Friday
  4. Victoria Day
  5. Canada Day
  6. Labour Day
  7. Thanksgiving Day
  8. Christmas Day
  9. Boxing Day (December 26)

Four-Season 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. Program adaptations and physical accommodations can be made to allow every child to participate and be challenged in meaningful ways. In addition to providing physical benefits, active play outdoors strengthens functioning in cognitive areas, such as perception, attention, creative problem solving and complex thinking.

Additional requirements for outdoor programs:

- Programs may have regular or irregular days or times and be in a variety of outdoor locations.
- Agencies must establish an appropriate mechanism to communicate with parents / guardians and caregivers about these services and their locations, dates, and times of operation, including

cancellations/rescheduling due to inclement weather

- EarlyON agencies are required to have at least one identified outdoor location for every EarlyON centre. This location will implement the “Walking Together Through the Four Seasons” framework throughout the year
- All season exposure to the outdoors must be made available to families through scheduled program offerings, accessible year-round
- Programs should be designed and delivered to be family-centered, to engage parents / guardians and caregivers in ways that create a sense of belonging and deep sustained connections to the natural world
- Agencies are encouraged to implement an environmental safety scanning procedure before the beginning of all outdoor programs
- Programs should establish community connections with experts in the field of outdoor education to develop program offerings that are pertinent to nature and the environment

Virtual Programs

Virtual EarlyON programs have become a key service delivery option for families accessing early years supports. EarlyON centres may provide virtual programs, services, resources and information for children, parents / guardians and caregivers to support the diverse needs of families, based on identified community need. These programs should support early learning and development, engage parents / guardians and caregivers and make connections for families.

A virtual EarlyON program is facilitated by staff and ensures participation and engagement with children, parents / guardians and caregivers through web-based applications. Engagement is defined as follows: The virtual program is interactive; for example, there is a two-way flow of information or conversation between two or more people.

Virtual Legal Liability

Under the EarlyON agreement, EarlyON agencies must comply with all legislation, regulations, bylaws, rules, orders, policies and guidelines, as well as any other requirements enacted or imposed by federal, provincial, municipal or other government bodies, agencies, tribunals or other authorities, which may be applicable to the EarlyON services. This includes copyright laws.

It is the responsibility of all EarlyON agencies to:

- Ensure all virtual programming adheres to Ontario and Canadian laws
- Ensure adherence to the Terms of Use of websites used as links and resources
- Ensure that copyrighted works are legally protected and not placed online without the permission from the author/creator or authorized copyright holder
- Adhere to all requirements asked by the author and/or publisher, once EarlyON agencies receive permission to use material, and at the beginning of the reading, mention the author, illustrator, and publisher of the work about to be read. Agencies must also state they are presenting the reading “with permission from the author on behalf of the publisher”. As well,

agencies should remind families they are unable to record or post EarlyON Child and Family Program story readings
- Agencies may post a reading through their EarlyON agency password-protected platform. If they wish to livestream a reading, the rights holder of the work must be contacted directly to request permission
- Have a process/policy in place for all security breaches
- Provide virtual supports through online resources, such as live online programs and pre-recorded videos, to support parents and caregivers with information related to meeting the mandatory core services

EarlyON agencies are required to ensure that best practices are followed when hosting a virtual program. The list below provides helpful tips for securing a virtual session as well as ways to exercise caution when facilitating these sessions. Please note, this list is not all-encompassing and may not apply to all online platforms.

Programs must be offered through pre-registration to ensure the virtual program link is only shared with those who have registered. The link must not be displayed on the public-facing calendar.

Helpful tips include:

- Offer pre-registered programming
- If applicable in the application, turn on pre-meeting setting features such as view and admit participants, remove participants and turn on virtual waiting room
- Disable features such as chat box, file share and screen-sharing
- Provide a password for each meeting session
- Limit the re-use of access codes

OPTIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY METHODS

In addition to the mandatory service delivery (centre-based, four-season outdoor and virtual programs), agencies are encouraged to deliver optional services based on the local needs of children and families in York Region.

Agencies must seek approval from the Region to deliver any of the optional services listed below and work with the Region to determine locations and hours of operation as applicable. To request approval, please review the Changes to Service Delivery Methods.

Mobile Services

Agencies can offer programs and services outside of centres to further integrate EarlyON Child and Family Programs with broader community services and to enhance service access, such as mobile programs for residents living in high-density areas, or weekly programs in libraries in rural communities. Mobile programs often involve set-up and take-down and operate in a shared space.

Mobile programs may have regular or irregular days, times, and locations of operation. Agencies must establish an appropriate mechanism to communicate to parents and caregivers about these services and their locations, dates and times of operation.

Local Phone Lines

Agencies may provide information and other services for parents and caregivers related to child development, parenting supports and play and inquiry-based learning over the phone.

Customized Community Connections

Community partnerships should support EarlyON Child and Family Programs core service delivery.

The agencies can work together with their CPCs to build customized community connections. Joint community-based planning supports greater integration, resulting in easier access and better client experiences for children and families.

Customized community connections include:

- **Building community partnerships to support mandatory core service delivery**
  The Ministry of Education recognizes the importance of integrating EarlyON Child and Family Programs within the broader context of local community services, to meet its core service requirements (such as child care, public health, employment and training programs, recreation programs, public libraries, schools and specialized services). Joint community-based planning supports greater integration resulting in easier access and better client experiences for children and families.

- **Leveraging partnerships to create customized programs and services**
  For EarlyON Child and Family Programs to be effective, supports 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.

  While interacting with community services such as a local clinic or group, and engaging them in programs, it is recommended you avoid using EarlyON as a platform for direct advertising of the organization's services, publications, or projects, or to solicit services under the EarlyON branding.

French Language Services

The City of Markham has received the Province of Ontario's official French Language Services Designation under the *French Language Services Act,* and is therefore required to provide French-language child and family programs and services in accordance with its legislated responsibilities.

French Language school boards and early years and child care service providers offering services in French are members of Réaseaux 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 CMSMs/DSSABs to support the provision of high-quality early years and child care French-language services across the province;
- Identify emerging and established 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

For more information regarding Réseaux Interagir, please connect with your EarlyON CPC.

Child Minding

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

Respite

Respite child care is intended to support parents who require emergency short-term and/or occasional care for their children. The Region does not engage in this option due to legal and liability concerns.

CHANGES TO SERVICE DELIVERY METHODS

EarlyON agencies are required to inform the Region about operational changes and proposed expansions to all sites. Before implementation, all changes and proposals require the Region's approval to ensure that services are responsive to community needs, located in priority geographical areas, included in external mapping tools and any potential budget implications are taken into consideration.

To inform the Region about operational changes and proposed expansions, please complete the appropriate form. For access to the forms, visit EarlyON Agency Resources.

YR EarlyON Business Change Form A

Form A is completed when there is **no impact** or changes to the EarlyON budget (Schedule B). This form is completed to request operational changes such as closing to relocate, closing and re-allocating budget, or opening an EarlyON site. Click to download form Business Change – Request Form A

YR EarlyON Business Change From B

Form B is completed when there is **an increase or decrease** to the EarlyON budget (Schedule B). This form is completed to request changes such as closing to relocate, expansion, request for emergency funding, or permanent closure of an EarlyON site. Click to download form Business Change – Request Form B

Yearly Service Delivery Analysis

York Region will use data to conduct yearly service delivery reviews. The York Region Data Analysis Coordinator will work with EarlyON agencies to review the service delivery landscape on a yearly basis, by reviewing program offerings, program locations, program ages, program availability (day and times), program hours and staffing hours to ensure families are being supported equitably across the Region and programs are well attended. In combination with the Data Analysis Coordinator and the EarlyON Child and Family Program CQI Portfolio, EarlyON agencies will use this information to support their design, development and implementation of programs and services. EarlyON agencies will also use this data to inform and create an outreach plan.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF EARLYON PROGRAMS

The following programs, services and networks are available to support the delivery of EarlyON Child and Family Programs in York Region.

EarlyON Collaborative Committee (EOCC)

The EarlyON Collaborative Committee (EOCC) is responsible for sharing information, identifying gaps in service, recommending and developing system-wide program offerings, and formal professional development opportunities to ensure EarlyON Child and Family Programs are designed and delivered to achieve the Ministry of Education's mandatory core services and ensure consistent service delivery methods across York Region, while also meeting the unique needs of local communities. This committee will leverage the Region's support and resources to ensure programs are meeting local community needs and have consistent service delivery methods across the Region.

The purpose of the EarlyON Collaborative is to:

- Ensure the Ministry of Education and York Region program requirements are being consistently implemented across all EarlyON programs
- Develop, review and recommend EarlyON system wide programs, services, and capacity building opportunities, while meeting the unique needs of local communities
- Identify trends and gaps in services
- Share resources, and experiences, provide community presentations
- Provide opportunities for the Region to share system updates

The committee will implement the requirements within the *Terms of Reference* and use the *EarlyON Collaborative Committee Program Offering/Capacity Building (system-wide) Request form*

Professional Learning and Capacity Building Competencies

Capacity building supports professional learning and development opportunities that build the capacity of educators and administration staff to provide high quality, inclusive EarlyON Child and Family Programs.

Capacity building must be locally responsive to children and families and support improving quality and alignment of programming with HDLH, reflective practice and collaborative inquiry.

Goals:

1. Capacity building will be evidence-based and responsive to children and families in consultation with the local community.
2. Capacity building will support EarlyON Child and Family Programs in promoting interprofessional learning opportunities.
3. Capacity Building will enhance current professional learning supports to include mental health information for the early years sector.
4. York Region will use consultations and evidence-based information to prioritize capacity building opportunities.
5. Support professional learning and development opportunities for educators related to core delivery and well-being of children and families, such as healthy child development, pre-post-natal care, adult and parent / guardian education, diversity and inclusion, community development and outreach, and/or cultural competency.
6. Professional learning related to EarlyON business administration.
7. Materials shared with families must be delivered while maintaining the fidelity of the training program.

EarlyON OCCMS Operators

The Ontario Child Care Management System (OCCMS) is a comprehensive software application that supports Service System Managers with overseeing and managing the system of services for children from birth to age 12. OCCMS supports the administration of provincial funding, including the Child Care Fee Subsidy, General Operating Grant, Wage Enhancement and Special Purpose funding, Contract and Financial Management and EarlyON Child and Family Programs.

EarlyON OCCMS operators enable EarlyON agencies to manage information regarding EarlyON participants, calendars, pre-registration, EarlyON attendance, as well as to set up site devices for client check ins/outs and to record staff positions.

EarlyON agencies are required to use EarlyON OCCMS operators to create a monthly calendar of program offerings for children and families in York Region. EarlyON agencies will ensure that the new calendar for the following month is generated on the third Friday of the current month, to ensure families have time to review, register for and attend program offerings.

EarlyON agencies will use the OCCMS-EarlyON Manual to support their use of the EarlyON OCCMS operator's database. Resources are located on the Help menu in the OCCMS Operators Database.

Child Care and Early Years IT Solution

The province is developing a new Child Care and Eary Years IT Solution platform, which EarlyON

agencies will be required to use upon the system's rollout. More details will be provided once available.

Children's Services Portal

York Region's Children's Services Portal is a one-stop shop where parents can access, register, manage and check-in or out for all EarlyON programs across York Region. EarlyON agencies will use the *Children's Services Portal* to support families when registering for EarlyON programs.

Virtual Resources

EarlyON agencies can post or facilitate activities and resources appropriate to children from birth to age six that support all areas of development. Activities and resources must support the needs of parents / guardians and caregivers and connect them to services in the community.

- YouTube Creator Academy: *creatoracademy.youtube.com*
- Government of Canada – Copyright: *canada.ca/copyright*
- Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) – Copyright Matters!: https://www.cdnsba.org/copyright-matters/
- EPIC!: *getepic.com*

This list of resources is not an endorsement or recommendation, but is provided for informational purposes only and intended to be a resource. You may wish to conduct your own due diligence to determine what resource(s) will meet the needs of your organization.

Early Years Program Finder Tool

The *Early Years Program Finder Tool* is a mapping tool that allows agencies to search for licensed child care or EarlyON programs in York Region. Agencies are required to update the Region regarding business changes that impact the data collected on the Early Years Finder Tool.

To access the Early Years Program Finder Tool, visit *york.ca/EarlyON*

Qualifications Upgrade Program

The Ministry of Education funds the Early Childhood Education Qualifications Upgrade Program (ECE QUP), which supports individuals working within the early years sector to pursue their Early Childhood Education (ECE) diploma and become eligible to apply for membership with the College of Early Childhood Educators.

Support is provided through education grants, travel grants and training allowances. Francophone and First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities have identified challenges recruiting and retaining qualified ECEs to deliver culturally responsive programs. In an effort to support staff in child care and early years settings in upgrading their skills, ECE QUP prioritizes applicants living and/or working in these communities in obtaining their ECE qualifications.

ECE QUP also includes a Leadership Grant Stream, which was established to support professional development opportunities for program staff, including Registered Early Childhood Educators designated to leadership positions and/or responsibilities.

For more information about ECE QUP, please visit the program's website at *ecegrants.on.ca/qualifications-upgrade*

STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) Requirement

Programming in EarlyON Child and Family Programs 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. RECEs have specialized knowledge and expertise related to child development and 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 Programs. As regulated professionals, RECEs are required to practice in accordance with a *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*, which guide their relationships with children and families.

EarlyON Child and Family Programs staff requirements are as follows:

- At every program delivering mandatory core services, a qualified team must include at least one RECE to deliver mandatory core services related to supporting early learning and development
- RECEs must be members in good standing of the *College of Early Childhood Educators*
- The Ministry of Education recommends RECE qualifications for all staff teams delivering services related to early learning and development beyond the above minimum requirement
- It is expected that 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 Exemption

EarlyON Child and Family Programs must employ at least one RECE at every program. Recognizing the current RECE shortages, when an EarlyON Centre is unable to recruit an additional RECE, York Region will review exemption requests.

This RECE exemption 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, who have let their membership lapse, or who have satisfied the educational requirements to be registered as members of the College but have not become members.

In determining whether to grant an exemption, the Region will consider the proposed action plan and whether the centre plans to actively recruit or retrain existing staff. Existing staff's experience and expertise, including previous experience in child and family programs, membership in another relevant regulated profession (such as social work and nursing) and any other factors the Region deems relevant in consultation with the centre, will be considered during the approval process.

The Region must review the conditions for these approvals on an annual basis to monitor compliance, identify challenges and develop strategies to support service providers. The Region will document the reasons for providing an exemption and is required to report the number of agencies and number of staff that have been provided an exemption to the Ministry of Education annually.

There are three categories of RECE exemption:

RECE exemption for an employee working towards obtaining their RECE credentials.

- The Region may grant a RECE exemption to an employee who is working towards obtaining their RECE
- Approved exemptions are valid for a period of one (1) year. If an exemption continues to be required beyond the year, re-application may be required, and the Region will work with the agency to identify challenges and develop strategies to support them 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, such as recruitment and staffing strategies and qualifications upgrading. Exemptions are not meant to be extended indefinitely
- To request a RECE exemption, please complete the *EarlyON RECE Temporary Exemption Request Form*

Family Support Practitioners

- At every program delivering mandatory core services, a qualified team must include at least one RECE to deliver mandatory core services related to supporting early learning and development
- To respond to community needs, staff with specialized skills may be hired to work alongside the RECE to complement the program; therefore, a new Family Support practitioner position has been created
- Family Support practitioners, must attend training and professional learning opportunities
- It is expected that all staff positions 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
- Approved exemptions are valid for a period of one (1) year. Re-application will be required yearly for Ministry tracking purposes.

Family Support practitioners' qualifications may include:

- Outdoor Educator
- Child and Youth Worker
- Social Worker
- Community Engagement/Outreach
- Service Navigator
- Infant Mental Health Educator

- Resource Educator

Please indicate the local community need driving this request and how this alternate qualification will support the community need and the expected outcomes for families.

To request a RECE temporary exemption, please complete the *EarlyON RECE Temporary Exemption Request Form*.

Legacy Provisions

- The Region may grant agencies an exemption from the RECE requirement for EarlyON Child and Family Programs, if they employ a staff member to oversee mandatory core services who is not a RECE but who has at least 10 years of experience working in a child and family program setting as of January 1, 2019.
- This legacy provision is intended to support the retention of long-tenured child and family program staff in their positions, including the rehiring of staff who have recently left their positions, but where the position has not yet been filled.
- 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 agencies are required to recruit a RECE. Where they are unable to do so, the Region may be able to grant a RECE exemption.
- In order to qualify under this legacy provision, a staff member 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, or who have satisfied the educational requirements to be registered as members of the College but have not become members.

The Region is required to report the number of agencies and staff that have been provided an exemption or qualify under the legacy provision to The Ministry of Education annually.

To request a legacy provision exemption from York Region, please complete the *EarlyON RECE Grand-Parenting Exemption Request Form*.

4. Business Practice Requirements

OVERVIEW OF THE EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES AGREEMENT

The EarlyON Child and Family Centres Agreement allows York Region to make payments to EarlyON agencies for one or more of the following expenses: operating, professional learning and capacity building and administration.

EarlyON agencies must enter into an EarlyON Child and Family Centres Agreement with the Region. The funding provided through the agreement allows agencies to operate programs for children from birth to age six and their parents / guardians and caregivers. The agency must meet all the requirements outlined in the agreement.

The priorities of this agreement are to:

- Set out expectations, terms and conditions of funding to support good governance, value for money and transparency in the administration of payment of funds
- Document the respective rights, responsibilities and obligations of the Region and agencies
- Include specific, measurable results for the funding received, reporting requirements and any corrective action the Region is entitled to take if agreed upon results are not achieved
- Subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and other relevant legislation, allow for inspection by the province and/or independent professionals identified by the province, such as the Region, of any relevant financial and non-financial documents relating to the program to verify program progress and financial information, including the recipients' allocation and expenditure of funds. In addition, the agreements do not limit the power or authority of the Auditor General of Ontario.

ADDITIONAL EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY PROGRAMS REQUIREMENTS

Policies and Procedures

Agencies must have appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure that EarlyON Child and Family Programs are delivered in a way that promotes the health, safety and well-being of children and families they serve. This includes ensuring that the following policies and procedures are in place:

- Vulnerable sector screenings
- First aid
- Emergency plans
- Sanitation and maintenance
- Workplace health and safety relating to staff
- A complaints and resolutions process
- Reporting serious incidents to York Region and processes for determining appropriate response if required
- Privacy/breach protocols
- Collecting, Storing and Sharing Client Information policy

- Regional Consent Policy and Procedure document

Collecting, Storing and Sharing of Client Information

The personal information of children and families must be kept in a secure location to maintain privacy and confidentiality. Agencies will respect the confidentiality of personal information given by children and families and not discuss individual cases with other participants or third parties without consent.

Under Section 15.2 of the EarlyON Service Agreement, during the term (or any renewal term) of the agreement, the agency is obligated to keep confidential and not disclose or release to any person, other than the Region, any information that identifies any individual in receipt of services, without obtaining the prior written consent of the individual or the individual's parent/guardian.

In some instances, exceptions to the confidentiality practice may be required by applicable laws, such as when refusing to provide personal information could endanger the safety of another individual or group of individuals; for example, if a client has disclosed to the agency that they have, or suspect that they have, a communicable disease and the client has requested medical assistance. Disclosure is required by the *Child and Family Services Act*, the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA), *or the Personal Health Information Protection Act*. Disclosure is required as per a court order or other applicable law.

Sharing Photos and Videos of Individuals with York Region

Complying with MFIPPA is a vital responsibility for EarlyON agencies and they must obtain consent from all the individuals who appear in any multimedia content before sharing it. When collecting multimedia content of individuals attending the EarlyON programs in York Region, **EarlyON educators/program staff are required to ensure that:**

- Parents / guardians and caregivers are informed about the collection and sharing of their individual or children's photos or videos and the purposes for which their personal information is being collected and shared
- Consent for uses and disclosures of personal information and personal health information is obtained from individuals by completing the *Photo/Video Consent Release Form*
- Consents are updated prior to a new use
- Consent must be obtained directly from the individual
- Consent should be clear and understandable, not obtained through deception or coercion, and relate to the information that is collected, used or disclosed

Duty to Report

Everyone, including members of the public and professionals who work closely with children, are required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse and/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 about the duty to report, what happens when a report is made and how to recognize signs of abuse and neglect can be found on the Ministry of Ontario's Child Welfare and Child Protection services webpage

Serious Incidents

The Ministry of Education requires the Region to ensure EarlyON Child and Family Programs have appropriate policies and procedures in place that ensure the promotion of children's and families' health, safety and well-being.

EarlyON agencies are required to inform the Region about any serious incidents within **24 hours** of a serious incident. **Types of serious incidents include:**

- Death of a child
- Allegation of abuse and/or neglect by a staff member(s)
- Missing or unsupervised child(ren) including any third party interference with child(ren)
- Unplanned disruption of service (not including inclement weather)
- High potential for public criticism and/or media attention
- Life-threatening injury
- Life-threatening illness (such as severe allergic reaction, threat of communicable disease)
- Cyber security incident

To inform the Region, please complete the EarlyON Serious Incident Reporting Form. If you have any questions, please email EarlyONSeriousincident@york.ca

Where an incident has occurred that may result in media attention or police investigation, agencies are required to report it immediately to the Manager of EarlyON Programs at the Region, at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 72024, or after hours at 437-770-8285.

EARLYON FINANCIAL REPORTING

The Region promotes the delivery of high-quality, accountable and cost-effective services for children and families. As stated in the EarlyON Child and Family Centres Agreement (Section 3 – Payment), agencies will provide the following submissions to the Region, per the following cycle:

- Agencies must complete the EarlyON Year-End Reporting Financial and Service Data Tool as well as the Continuous Quality Improvement Portfolio for January 1 to December 31 of each calendar year, by the date specified in the EarlyON Child and Family Centres Agreement

- Agencies must provide the Region with a copy of their annual Audited Financial Statements or a Review Engagement within 120 days of the agency's fiscal year end

- Agencies are required to submit EarlyON Mid-Year Financial Reporting and Continuous Quality Improvement Portfolio documents by the date specified in the agreement (please refer to Schedule C in the EarlyON Child and Family Centres Agreement for due dates)

- Agencies must maintain books of accounts and other financial records in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

- All financial records and client files will be maintained in accordance with Canada Revenue Agency regulations, in a secure manner in compliance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, and the *Personal Health Information Protection Act*

for audit purposes

- Agencies must report financial information using the modified accrual basis of accounting for mid-year and year-end reporting to the Region
- Modified accrual accounting requires the inclusion of short-term accruals of normal operating expenditures in the determination of operating results for a given time period. Short-term accruals are defined as payable or receivable usually within 30 days of year-end. Under modified accrual accounting, expenditures that would be amortized under full accrual accounting must be recognized as expenditures in the budget year the goods or services are received

EARLYON CHILD AND FAMILY PROGRAMS ELIGIBILITY EXPENSES

The annual EarlyON budget process is a joint planning tool to provide an overview of budgeted cost information and operations within an organization.

The following chart describes eligible expenses:

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES	
Expense category	**Description**
Direct Program Staffing	• Salary and benefit expenses that are entirely (100%) EarlyON staff to deliver core services, including Facilitators, RECEs, Family Support, Community Outreach, Program Manager/Supervisor • Hiring or acquiring the services of a special needs resource consultant to support the delivery of core services to children with special needs and their families/caregivers, specifically making connections for families to specialized services.

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES	
Expense category	**Description**
Direct Program Operating Costs	• Occupancy costs including centre lease/rental/permit fees/school board charges/utilities • Program-related supplies, equipment and resources • Staff transportation costs for employee travel, vehicle expenses to support outreach and participation in programs • Maintenance and repairs of EarlyON vehicles, if applicable, such as oil changes, gas, general repairs, wiper fluid, tires • EarlyON vehicle insurance • Translation and interpretation • Communication, advertising, branding and marketing • Office expenses – supplies, insurance, equipment, IT equipment and maintenance, branding and marketing, audit costs to support accounting for funding used for the purposes intended
Actual Administration Costs that are Head Office Related A maximum of 10% of actual expenses incurred for program administration and may not be expressed solely in terms of a percentage, which may be adjusted at year-end reporting.	• Salaries and benefits • Professional services • General office expense • Advertising costs • Finance • Insurance • Occupancy costs
Special Purpose Expenditures	• Capacity building – professional development and training costs • Repairs and maintenance (standard repairs and maintenance for general upkeep, safety and minor repairs) • Miscellaneous (signage)

Note: This is not an exhaustive list. Any other expenses not listed under the allowed expenses section are non-admissible without the Region's express permission. For questions about eligible and ineligible expenses, contact your Community Program Coordinator.

PAYMENT

Budget Schedule

The budget schedule reflects agencies' allocation related to the operation of EarlyON Child and Family Programs. Generally, the allocation is divided into 12 payments for each year.

Reconciliation

The Region's reconciliation process allows the Region to reconcile actuals against allocation, assist in recovering unused funds as indicated below and provide supporting documents for audit purposes. This process is outlined in the **EarlyON Child and Family Centres Agreement Section 3 - Payments**.

Recoveries

Identified unspent funds must be recovered from agencies within 90 days of the claim being discovered. This process is outlined in the **EarlyON Child and Family Centres Agreement Section 3 - Payments**.

5. EarlyON Service Delivery Data Reporting

York Region is required to submit reports to the Ministry of Education to ensure appropriate oversight of transfer payment activities, track achievement of program and policy objectives, support provincial level analysis and inform provincial reporting back to the Government of Canada regarding federal investments.

DATA REPORTING

In addition to reporting expenditures by expense categories set out in the EarlyON Child and Family Centres Agreement, the Ministry also collects service data to monitor the impact of EarlyON Child and Family Programs.

OCCMS Operators

The Ontario Child Care Management System (OCCMS) is a cloud-based tool with custom-built features for data management. OCCMS adheres to all applicable privacy legislation and will only store data needed to operate EarlyON programs and fulfill Regional and Provincial reporting requirements.

EarlyON Child and Family Programs – Report R131a

EarlyON agencies are required to ensure that the EarlyON Registration check-in feature is being used to ensure data collection is completed.

EarlyON agencies will use reports R131a/b and R136 at each agency quarterly meeting to reflect on local community service delivery needs.

- Number of children served - All programs
- Number of visits made by children – All programs
- Number of parents/guardians/caregivers served – All programs
- Number of visits made by parents/guardians/caregiver – All programs
- Number of children served - Virtually
- Number of visits made by children – Virtually
- Number of parents/guardians/caregivers served – Virtually
- Number of visits made by parents/guardians/caregiver – Virtually

OCCMS Report 131a has been updated to capture the number of virtual children, parents/caregivers served and the number of virtual visits made by children, parents/guardians/caregivers.

EarlyON Child and Family Programs Staffing – Service Data

EarlyON agencies are required to complete the Direct Program Staffing and Administration Cost up to 10% tabs within the York Region Financial and Service Data Reporting Tool.

FTE: Full-time equivalent is based on a minimum of 35 hours per week.

Direct program support staff are all staff who are involved in the development, design and delivery of EarlyON programs and services

Non-program staff are considered administration staff who provide administrative support and are funded under the 10% admin line, (clerical, financial staff, and staff involved in planning and data analysis services.)

- Number of FTE non-program staff (supported through the 10% admin line)
- Number of FTE management staff supporting program development, design and delivery
- Number of FTE direct program support staff supporting program development, design and delivery
- Number of FTE program staff who are RECEs
- Number of FTE program staff receiving RECE exemptions (excluding the legacy provision)
- Number of FTE program staff receiving a RECE exemption through the legacy provision

EarlyON Child and Family Continuous Quality Improvement – Service Evaluation Data

EarlyON agencies will use the CQI Portfolio tool to identify lessons learned and progress achieved in supporting the York Region EarlyON Child and Family Programs Standards Framework.

Appendix A: Data Elements and Definitions

The below data elements will be required for mid-year reporting, due June 30 of the current calendar year, and year-end reporting, due January 15 of the following calendar year, with a Review Engagement or Audited Financial Statement within 120 days of the agency's fiscal year end. As further information is provided by the Ministry of Education, financial and statistical reporting requirements may be updated. The Region will provide a form that agencies are required to use. Training on the reporting form will also be offered by the Region.

EARLYON FINANCIAL REPORTING AND SERVICE EVALUATION

Total Expenditures, Forecasting and any Non-Recoverable HST as Applicable

Definition: Total expenditures and expenditures forecast by category

- Salaries and Benefits
- Program Costs
- Administration Expenses (up to a maximum of 10%)
- Professional Learning and Capacity-Building
- One-time Funding

EARLYON SERVICE DELIVERY EVALUATION REPORTING

Service Data

- **Number of Children Served – All Programs**
  Definition: Number of children from birth to age six that received services at some point during the calendar year and are only counted once during the calendar year. This data element is collected the first time a child participates in an EarlyON program regardless of whether the early learning activity is in-person (outdoor or indoor program) or virtual

- **Number of Visits made by Children – All Programs**
  Definition: Total number of visits made by children from birth to age six to EarlyON Child and Family Programs to an in-person (outdoor or indoor program) and/or virtual program

- **Number of Parents/Guardians or Caregivers Served – All Programs**
  Definition: Number of parents/guardians or caregivers who actively participated in an in-person (outdoor or indoor program) or a virtual program, with their children or separately, and are only counted once during the calendar year

- **Number of Visits made by Parents/Guardians or Caregivers – All Programs**
  Definition: Total number of visits that parents/guardians or caregivers made to EarlyON Child and Family Programs to an in-person (outdoor or indoor and/or virtual program

- **Number of Children Served – Virtually**
  Definition: Number of children from birth to age six that received services at some point during the calendar year and are only counted once during the calendar year. This data element is used when a child participates in a virtual early learning activity

- **Number of Visits Made by Children – Virtually**
  Definition: Total number of visits made by children from birth to age six to EarlyON Child and Family Programs

- **Number of Parents/Guardians or Caregivers Served – Virtually**
  Definition: Number of parents or caregivers who actively participated in a virtual program, with their children or separately, and are only counted once during the calendar year

- **Number of Visits Made by Parents/Guardians or Caregivers – Virtually**
  Definition: Total number of visits that parents or caregivers made to EarlyON Child and Family Programs to a virtual program

Mandatory Core Services and Customized Community Connections

- **Number of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Program Staff**
  Definition: The number of FTE staff who are involved in the development, design and delivery of EarlyON Child and Family Programs. FTE is based on a minimum of 35 hours per week

- **Number of FTE Non-Program Staff**
  Definition: The number of FTE non-program staff (including cooks, drivers, housekeeping, clerical and financial staff and chief administrators) employed by EarlyON agencies. FTE is based on a minimum of 35 hours per week. This excludes FTEs that deliver planning and data analysis services

- **Number of FTE Program Staff that are Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE)**
  Definition: Number of FTE program staff who hold a RECE. FTE is based on a minimum of 35 hours per week

- **Number of FTE Program Staff who Received a RECE Exemption (excluding the legacy provision)**
  Definition: The number of FTE program staff exemptions that were granted exemptions from the RECE requirement (excluding the legacy provision). Full-time equivalent is based on a minimum of 35 hours per week

- **Number of Agencies that Received an Exemption from Requiring a RECE**
  Definition: The number of agencies that have been granted an exemption from the requirement of having a RECE at the centre to provide core services related to early learning and development

- **Number of FTE Program Staff Receiving a RECE Exemption through the legacy Provision**
  Definition: The number of FTE program staff that have been granted an exemption from the requirement of having a RECE because they have 10 or more years of experience working in one or more of the following: Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy

Centres, Child Care Resource Centres, and/or Better Beginnings, Better Futures

- **Programming Guided by *How Does Learning Happen*?**
  Definition: Confirmation that EarlyON Child and Family Programs are guided by and align with the foundations in *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years.*

- **Number of FTE Staff by Position**
  Definition: Total number of FTE staff by position supported through administration funding. FTE is based on a minimum of 35 hours per week

- **Number of Staff (head count) by Position**
  Definition: Total number of staff by position supported through administration funding

- **Service Evaluation**
  Definition: Identify lessons learned and progress achieved in meeting the York Region EarlyON Child and Family Standards Framework

Administration Definitions

- **Website**
  Definition: A location on the internet that maintains one or more webpages

- **Social media**
  Definition: A web communication tool that can be used to build awareness of EarlyON programs and support community connections. Social media includes web-based and mobile technologies used to turn communication into interactive dialogue. Social media tools include blogs, Facebook, X formerly called Twitter, Instagram, etc. Posts and tweets are terms used, for the information uploaded or shared on the social media platform

- **Post**
  Definition: A piece of writing, image, or other item of content published online, typically on a blog or social media website

- **Tweet**
  Definition: A message sent on the X (formerly Twitter) platform that may contain links, photographs, GIFs (animated image) or videos; tweets are limited to 280 characters including text, links and spacing

- **Web-based voice and video conferencing platforms**
  Definition: Cloud-based video conferencing services that allow you to virtually meet with others, such as FaceTime, Zoom, WhatsApp, GoToMeeting, Webex, TEAMS, etc.

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