

# **Making Children A Priority: Saskatchewan Listens**

**Report**

**Early Learning and Care Discussion Forums**

**2004**

for

Department of Community Resources and Employment  
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## **Foreword**

The information in this report represents the results of discussion meetings with parents, caregivers and professionals around the province of Saskatchewan. This document is a summary of what people have said in those meetings. Participants spoke and wrote freely and expressed their opinions based on their own experiences and perceptions. However, it was not within the mandate of the facilitators to verify the perceptions as they relate to existing programs and personal experiences.

## Synopsis

The findings from the 26 focus groups - parents, human service providers, organizations and professionals - confirm that the draft policy framework developed by the Department of Learning and the Department of Community Resources and Employment (DCRE) is heading in the right direction. The participants identified: the potential for this policy framework, the barriers that have to be overcome to move it forward, and the strengths that already exist at the provincial and local levels that can support this policy approach.

A few of the core concerns of participants about the current issues in early learning and care were expressed in terms of the need to address the:

- difficulty in accessing programs and services
- unique needs for delivery of services in the North and rural areas
- perceived inconsistency or lack of coherence in policies
- need for local information and assistance to help access programs and services
- need for accountability mechanisms to ensure quality programs and trained personnel to deliver them
- need for a consistent approach to track the growth and developmental needs of children, especially those with special needs.

At the same time, participants were able to name a whole host of programs they felt were helpful and moving in the right direction. They also saw evidence of government movement toward collaboration and commitment to learning and care. Some saw the discussion forums as an indication of commitment. The strengths (see Appendix A-1) provide a comprehensive list of positive indicators that include the local community as source of solutions and support.

Participants also addressed priorities for action that they thought were important to further develop this policy area. Fifteen priority themes emerged from the discussion forums, which were organized into five categories:

1. Valuing Early Learning and Care
2. Universality of Learning and Care
3. Quality of Learning and Care
4. Working Together and
5. Family Supports and Education.

The themes that emerged from the discussion forums are similar to the policy themes found in the report, *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care*, of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This report was a comparative study of 12 countries that volunteered to participate in a thematic review of early childhood education and care policy. The context issues and policy lessons from the executive summary of this report are found in Appendix D.

The amount of information about this social policy area in the literature and on the Internet is significant. In an Internet search exploring early learning and care and its effect upon children, the facilitators found 51,000 sites. There is no doubt that there is a wealth of

information available on the effects of this social policy area. Forum participants saw a need to make information about the benefits of quality early learning and care widely available and to turn that awareness into understanding that leads to action. They see this as crucial to ensure public support for the sustained public and private funding that will be needed to make quality, universal early learning and care available for all children and their families.

### **A Systems Approach to Early Learning and Care Policies**

Taken together, the information and experiences shared in the discussion forums lend themselves to a systems approach to illuminate this social policy area. A systems approach involves painting the large landscape that reflects the context in which this social policy area operates. It allows for subsystems within the larger system that not only function internally but also with each other and with the environment. A systems approach is unified in its mission but adaptable in its search for synergistic approaches to solving problems. Figure 1 incorporates the theme areas reported in the categories of findings, which are organized under a systems umbrella to clarify how those themes could come together to form a total approach to early learning and care. In a systems approach, mechanisms are put in place to keep planning and action fluid and interactive across the subsystems. A central characteristic of a systems approach is the use of goal-directed energy and shared power that is found in collaborative organizations.

Figure 1 is a series of concentric circles that illuminate a systems approach to learning and care based upon the themes from the discussion forums. The themes are organized into policy areas as a way of summarizing the work to be accomplished in creating a consistent approach to early learning and care. This systems approach is comprised of five circles that work together to form the larger context of a blended policy approach to early learning and care.

The five circles, beginning with the inner circle and moving outward, are:

1. Children and Families
2. Community Involvement and Coordination
3. Policy Subsystems
  - (a) Clear Definition of Learning and Care
  - (b) Quality Assurance
  - (c) Building Capacity – Working Together
  - (d) Coherent Social Policies
  - (e) Engaging Public Support
4. Systematic, Integrated Planning
5. Listen and Act

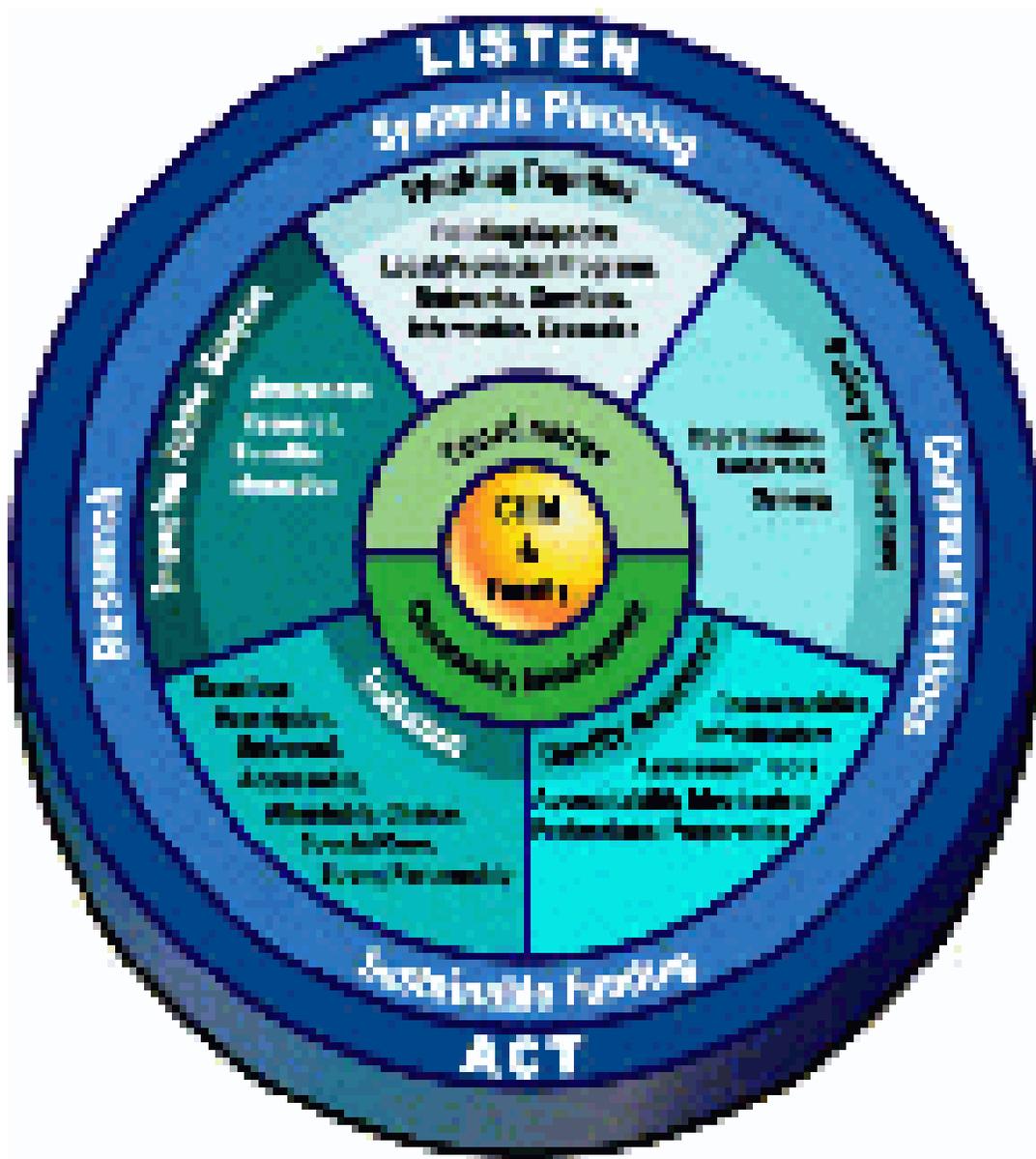


Figure 1. Systems approach to early learning and care.

### 1. Children and Families at the Centre

The inner circle - Family and Child - represents the focus of this social policy area as expressed by the central question in the Draft Policy Framework “What do families need to help them raise healthy children?”

This focus was shared and reinforced by the participants in the discussion forums as evidenced by their emphasis on parental involvement and support and their concern

about meeting the needs of every child and their family, including those with special needs and those on and off reserves.

## **2. Community Involvement and Coordination**

The next circle indicates the importance of the local community and the expressed need for a central place to access information and find appropriate supports. A hub approach to delivering services was another suggestion for solving the service-delivery problems. While participants want strong provincial leadership and coordination, all groups want to be involved in dialoguing, planning, providing supports, and finding solutions for their own area of the province. This calls for a strong coordinating mechanism at this level to act as a boundary spanner between provincial, inter- and intra-community problem solving and sharing. Support for this approach was expressed in the evaluation forms where participants indicated their pleasure in finding out what was going on in their area and in meeting people who shared their thoughts and opinions and affirmed their beliefs and experiences.

## **3. Policy Subsystems**

The third circle describes five intersecting subsystems that could enable a systems approach to develop policy for early learning and care. The first two areas to be addressed are a clear definition of *learning* and *care*, followed by quality assurance. These two areas (see following discussion) provide a structure and a foundation to address the rest of the system.

### **(a) Clear Definition of Learning and Care**

The definitions of the concepts *learning* and *care* need agreement with regard to what they mean and how they relate to one another. The blended approach, while seemingly simple to understand, has many sublayers - such as philosophy and approaches to both learning and care, as well as past history - that have kept them as two separate policy and practice areas. Blending the two requires a strong partnership between learning and care at the provincial, professional, and practice levels. It also requires that the definitions be grounded in a developmental continuum that gives concrete, understandable descriptions of what those levels might look like in practice.

### **(b) Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance entails identifying the layers of quality that flow from the definition of *learning* and *care* for the purpose of developing assessment and accountability mechanisms. Participants mentioned many aspects of quality. These included infrastructure, to provide broad coordination and coherence, and specifics such as group size, ratio of children to teacher/caregiver, physical setting, health, and safety. Other aspects of quality assurance that were mentioned included

learning styles, specific needs of children, cultural inclusion, and pedagogy. All groups addressed the human resource aspect, which includes recruitment, training, compensation, working conditions, and ongoing in-service education for early childhood workers. An important theme was the need for assessment tools that describe levels of quality, allowing individuals and groups to determine where they are in relation to quality learning and care. Saskatchewan Learning has developed similar tools for School<sup>PLUS</sup> effective practices and for Community Education. Assessment tools can bring concepts down to a clear, understandable level. When these tools are combined with examples of quality practice, people can begin to take ownership of their own progress.

Parents expressed a strong desire to know more about the look of quality learning and care, so they can recognize it when they see it and apply it to their own parenting practices, and make more informed choices. Accountability measures vary from country to country and from province to province and can include standards, regulations, monitoring, licensing and accountability mechanisms that involve the participants. Decisions have to be made about the pros and cons of those mechanisms so that quality assurance is accounted for in a democratic way.

#### **(c) Building Capacity - Working Together**

A third area concerns building the capacity of local communities and parents to work in concert with the government to provide supports within their community to meet family needs. The discussions emphasized the importance of working together at the community level. The principles that evolved from the participants' ideas can be found in the section, "Working Together." These ideas cross sectors and boundaries to include joint, long-term, transparent planning, consistency, seamless services, assessment tools, and a hub model that includes health, as well as care and education. The coordinating mechanism (found in the second circle) was seen as crucial to help communities learn how to work together. This mechanism was the primary vehicle for working across provincial, regional, and local boundaries. Another major area, often mentioned, is engaging and involving parents by providing single points of entry and outreach workers and by ensuring that minority voices are heard. Parent education ideas focused on new, innovative ways to learn about quality learning and care through interactive opportunities with their children, access to specialist information, and support groups. The approach to building the capacity of parents and families to care for their children is well developed in many current programs; however, at this point most of those programs are targeted. Participants asked for recognition and further development of those successful programs, rather than beginning new programs that only meet the needs of targeted groups.

#### **(d) Coherent Social Policies**

A fourth area involves integrating the relationship of other provincial social policy areas with learning and care. In a systems context, all social policies interact and affect one another. It is possible for some policies and practices to act as a barrier

to other policy areas. It is also possible for different policy areas to act in a synergistic way to benefit all areas. The findings from the discussion forums indicate that providing a seamless approach to learning and care requires a review of policy supports and services in light of possible competing messages. The findings also support organizing government structures around the child and aligning policies so that families and children experience a coherent approach. An area that was raised is the importance of working toward a partnership between the federal government and the province that would enable a way to address reserve and off-reserve Aboriginal children and families so that access can be truly universal and inclusive.

**(e) Engaging Public Support**

A fifth area is engaging public support for the social policy of early learning and care. The type of engagement envisioned went beyond reports to include media, prominent spokespersons, and convincing information about the long-range benefits for all members of society. Some suggested a national campaign that fits with the federal government's platform on early learning and care. However, some participants cautioned that, without a nonpartisan approach to the long-term plan, there is a fear that this policy area will not flourish.

**4. Systematic, Integrated Planning**

The fourth circle draws the five intersecting subsystems and inner circles together into a coherent plan that addresses short- and long-term planning and sets structures in place for communicating across areas and levels. This circle also contains a research framework to inform direction and provide data about the progress and success of initiatives. Indicators of child well being that provide a research framework are already under development for both learning and care.

Overall, the participants gave the impression that, by itself, the government will not be able to provide all of the sustainable, long-range funding needed to sustain this policy area. Some spoke about the importance of business, corporations, industry, labor and NGOs working together to find affordable solutions. Participants mentioned other countries and provinces dealing with accessible, affordable approaches to learning and care that can shed light on viable options to consider. Again, they expressed their desire to be included in providing solutions to these and other issues. While this agenda is comprehensive and long range, the structures for working in a systemic way are already developed at many levels. There is evidence of collaborative planning in some of the discussion-forum communities. Collaboration mechanisms are in place for School<sup>PLUS</sup> and other cross-department initiatives. An agenda that includes short- and long-term planning, constantly impacted by feedback from the local communities through the coordinating mechanism, is not a new idea in Saskatchewan.

## 5. Listen and Act

The final and fifth circle, “Listen and act,” was a reoccurring theme across the meetings and was mentioned more often in the final participant evaluation forms than any other final words of advice. The systems approach to listening, planning and acting are consistent with the history of successful movements in this province. It was recognized by the participants that the government is addressing many of these subsystem areas.

The findings from the discussion forums affirm the expertise, knowledge, and common agenda that exists among parents, professionals and policy makers. ***Society may not be able to afford tomorrow’s cost if we do not invest in the future of our children today.***

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## Introduction

It has often been said that children are our most precious resource. When anything is precious, there is a desire to place it in a protected, safe place – so, too, it is not surprising that parents hope their children will be safe wherever they may be. And, with a valuable resource, we try to develop it to its full potential. So, too, with children: As the most valuable of all resources, it is natural to want children to develop so that they become fully functioning adults who reach their potential in every way.

In recent years, there has been greater knowledge of how the human brain develops and of how early stimulation is important for its full future development. Children learn as soon as they are born and the more they are stimulated, the more they learn, not only as children, but also throughout their adult lives.

Having children safe, well cared for, and learning at an early age is not new in Saskatchewan. However, the mechanisms to provide *childcare* and *learning* have developed separately. Until now, *childcare* has been the parents' responsibility, with the assistance of a broad range of childcare providers. Parents have paid for the service, and for lower income families, childcare has been subsidized. Licensed childcare providers must meet required standards for initial licensing, but many childcare providers are not licensed and parents must

make the decision about standards. Licensing childcare homes has been the responsibility of the Department of Community Resources and Employment (DCRE).

Children have always *learned*, but parents have not always been aware of how to best stimulate their children. In some cases they have used nursery and preschools to provide assistance. In all cases, such schools have only been available to those who could afford to send their children. Pre-kindergartens that have developed through community schools operate without fees, but access is limited and only those who meet certain criteria can enrol. Pre-kindergartens are administered through the Department of Learning.

These situations are not unique to Saskatchewan or to Canada. *However, it is commonly recognized that childcare and learning cannot be separated.* That is, wherever care is provided, there is learning; wherever learning is formalized, there is childcare. Whether children are at home, or in a setting outside the home, they need quality care and developmentally appropriate learning programs and activities.

For this reason, many countries recognize the need for standards of care and learning so that both are recognized, regardless of the setting. This is a blended approach to early learning and care.

## Discussion Forums: The Process

DCRE and the Department of Learning have collaborated to develop a draft policy framework for a blended approach to early learning and care. To determine the support for such an approach and the priorities of service providers, professionals, and parents, these two government departments contracted the Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit (SIDRU), at the University of Regina, to conduct a series

of discussion forums around Saskatchewan. Cabinet approved the proposal for these forums and a news release was distributed to the press on May 3, 2004 (see Appendix C-1). The release stated, in part,

The Government of Saskatchewan is launching a series of discussion forums with key stakeholders as an important step in the creation of a strategy and an action plan that

will address preschool learning, childcare and parenting supports in the province.

## Goals

The discussion process had four goals:

1. improve public understanding of a blended approach to early learning and care.
2. encourage stakeholder input into the development and shared responsibility for a blended approach.
3. seek input on strategic priorities
4. collect ideas for actions based on those priorities.

In addition, participants were advised that the discussion forums had the following objectives (group norms).

Every individual will:

- have an opportunity to speak
- listen and hear the views of other stakeholders
- understand and respect differences of opinion.
- participate in all the group processes.

## Study Design

This study consisted of focus groups with early learning and care stakeholders, including parents and primary caregivers (family or others who provide primary care, e.g., grandparents) to build understanding about a blended approach to early learning and care. The forums engaged participants in dialogue about the blended approach and the goals for the policy framework on early learning and care. The consultation posed

key questions to elicit participants' opinions regarding priorities for the future of early learning and care in Saskatchewan. There was also an opportunity to suggest actions that would move the province in the direction of the priorities. The central question addressed by the policy framework was: *What do families need to help them raise healthy children?*

The study involved conducting 26 focus groups in eleven urban, rural, northern, central and southern centres throughout Saskatchewan during the 4-week period between May 13 and June 10, 2004. In each location, the Coordinator of the Regional Intersectoral Committee (RIC) was responsible for the meeting arrangements and for the invitations. A list of locations can be found in Appendix B-1.

In each setting, a meeting was held in the afternoon with service providers, including caregivers, early childhood educators, school and school division personnel, community organizations and RIC representatives. Evening meetings were held for parents and other primary caregivers.

There were four meetings with other groups. In Prince Albert, there was a separate meeting for teen mothers. In Saskatoon, meetings were held with two professional groups: Aboriginal organizations and postsecondary and early learning and care professionals. In Regina, a fourth meeting was held with the staff from DCRE and the Department of Learning.

All the information gathered from each site was returned to the RIC coordinators so they could make it available to the participants and use it in local planning. Participants' anonymity was protected in the session reports, so that the ideas were presented, but no names or information associated with any one person were included.

## Discussion Process

The process was structured as a low-key discussion, with a short presentation of information and opportunities for all participants to be heard and to hear the opinions of others. A combination of small- and large-group discussion was used to capture the thoughts and opinions of each group. The discussion was recorded on flip charts and posted during the session (see Appendix B-2 for the agenda of the discussion forums).

In each session, following introductions, the facilitators gave a brief presentation of the history of childcare in Saskatchewan since 1992. This included a fact sheet about programs that currently exist, the results of a parent survey in 2001, and available funding. The presentations concluded with a summary of the draft policy framework. Copies of the material provided to participants can be found in Appendices B-3 to B- 7.



In all groups, the facilitators managed the process and the environment so that the topic of the workshop could be explored from many points of view. They maintained objectivity and did not advocate for a point of view during dialogues. If questions arose about government policy or action, participants were advised to contact an appropriate government official. However, when participants realized the facilitators were conducting a focus group designed to hear and record what they had to say, most were satisfied that their message would reach the government. This was borne out by the

### Summary of Draft Policy Framework Regarding Early Learning and Care

Following is the information presented to all forum groups as a basis for discussion.

#### Definition

- recognizes the need for quality childcare so that all families can support themselves and participate in the community
- recognizes the need for high-quality learning opportunities for all children wherever they are
- provides a family-focused approach that stresses positive child-development experiences, whether the child is at home or in another setting.

#### Goals for ELC

- Children have the best possible learning experiences.
- Families are confident that their children are safe and secure when in the care of others.
- Families have support and assistance from the people and communities around them to raise healthy children.
- Families have practical solutions to barriers.

#### Vision for ELC

- All Saskatchewan children enjoy a good start in life and are nurtured and supported by caring families and communities.
- Children benefit from good care and learning wherever they are.
- Families benefit from choosing learning and care opportunities that meet their needs.
- Communities benefit from strong and healthy

individual evaluations of the meetings that were completed by the participants.

## Participant Demographics

Personnel at Learning and DCRE and RIC coordinators determined who should be invited to the meetings. Because the time between the beginning of the process and the meetings was very limited, not everyone invited was able to attend. The goal was to have a balance of people with different involvement with respect to children in the target age group. The original plan was for 23 meetings, with a projected attendance of about 20 at each, for a total of 460 people. The actual number who attended the 26 meetings was greater than 435. Not everyone

who attended signed the registration form, so an exact number is not available. Those attending included:

Parents	141
Academic & Training	7
Family Support	
General	48
Health	42
Home visit	38
Learning	43
Policy	44
Childcare Centres or homes	33
Pre-schools, pre-K, Headstart	39



## Data-Collection Process

Five kinds of data were collected in the discussion forums. The first was an opportunity to comment on the concept of a blended approach to early learning and care. Three other kinds of data focused on setting goals for action, combining those goals in the large group into priority statements, and determining their rankings. A fifth source was the evaluation form that encouraged participants to give one last piece of advice to the government.

### Response to Framework

The first data collection occurred around the Draft Policy Framework. Individuals responded to the framework through a small-group process. Three sheets with questions were posted around the room. The instructions were to brainstorm answers to three questions related to (a) the potential for the draft framework, (b) barriers to moving it forward, and (c) strengths in the community and in the province that would help to move it forward. Each group rotated around the room and discussed and replied to all three questions.

The answers for each question were transcribed and synthesized to form themes, a summary of which can be found in Appendix

A - 1, “Group Responses to the Draft Framework.”

### Goal Cards

Each group was asked to focus on what was needed in their community, and in the province, to support children, their families, and the community around them. They were specifically asked to think about what has to happen if the blended approach to early learning and care is to move forward. They were also encouraged to look at the question without the bias of their experiences or any affiliations they might have.

Every participant was given a set of cards and asked to record three to five goals for action. After completing individual cards, small groups were formed to group the cards and to arrive at a series of goal statements for the group. However, the individual goal cards were collected and analyzed for policy themes. A representative summary of the individual cards is found in Appendix A – 2, “Summary of Individual Goal Cards by Themes.”

### Priorities For Action

After the small groups had combined similar cards, and the group arrived at a list of goal statements that represented the ideas of that

group, the facilitators recorded the statements on flip charts as priorities for action. Some discussion occurred as the priorities were recorded and other statements were added that were not on their individual cards. In some cases several group ideas came together to form another more comprehensive statement. These priorities for action were compiled around subthemes and a complete listing was presented to the symposium on June 17, 2004. Since that time, more analysis has been done and a summarized compilation of the goal statements can be found in Appendix A – 3, “Goals/Priorities as Established by the Discussion Groups.”

### **Highest Ranking Priorities**

This process provided opportunity for participants to choose their top priorities for action. Their individual responses were tallied and a ranking of priorities for each

group emerged. Six groups were not able to advance to the prioritization procedure because of the size of the group or because the time that was set aside had elapsed.

For each group that went through the prioritization or voting procedure, there were two to five goals that weighed more heavily. The top two goals from each group are combined in a document, in Appendix A – 4, “Highest Ranking Priorities.”

### **Evaluation Forms**

The evaluation form allowed each participant to give one last piece of advice to the government departments. The summary of that advice can be found in Appendix A-5, “Evaluation of Discussion Process by Participants.”

## **Summary of Findings: Early Learning and Care Discussion Forums**

All five sources of data were used to create the Summary of Findings. In addition there were private conversations between participants and facilitators. Some participants were comfortable enough to tell the group their personal stories. While this information was not recorded on flip charts, it has been considered in the writing of this report. The findings use the language of the participants as much as possible and are organized into two sections: (a) “Response to the Draft Framework” and (b) “Categories of Priorities for Action.” It is important to note that, while there were specific themes that received more attention in some groups than others, the facilitators found that whether parent, professional, or provider, all participants had similar goals and priorities for action.

Parents viewed early learning and care through the lens of their specific situations, based on their own experiences. They were able to look at the larger picture, however, without being

inhibited by their own current situations and were able to see how things could be better for their own and other families. They were able to think creatively.

Human service providers and professionals contributed their knowledge about program and coordination issues from their experience and employment perspectives. They had knowledge of the ‘big picture.’

Regardless of the group, the themes that emerged were common to all. While all suggested similar priorities, what they emphasized varied slightly as is shown in a later section, “Frequency Distribution.”

### **Response to the Draft Framework**

The first questions asked at each meeting gave participants an opportunity to give their opinion about the proposed policy framework

for early learning and care. There was general agreement about the direction proposed by the draft framework. Participants saw the potential and the common sense inherent in this approach to early learning and care. Among the many comments were statements that the policy recognizes that learning and care are intertwined and holistic and that the concept recognizes the continuity and connection that should exist between caregiver and family. Others said it is consistent with research and would serve to increase the value and professional status of care. Some groups had difficulty thinking about what the potential might be and how it might improve learning and care from a provincial perspective. Their responses focused on barriers and what they would like to see happen.

A second question asked participants for their individual views about barriers or challenges to the policy implementation. Among the many barriers mentioned were:

- access to care and services
- lack of monitoring, accountability and supervision
- unclear definition of *quality*
- lack of funding
- rural and northern demographics
- not enough human resources
- lack of choices and support for parents (e.g., stable housing, education)
- attitudes and knowledge about vision, planning, understanding realities within communities
- fragmentation of the system, competing policies
- lack of programming standards for unregulated care
- lack of specialists.

The barriers are addressed in the focus group priority statements and are reflected in the categories of findings. This question elicited the most responses as people thought about the issues and problems they face as providers or as parents.

The third question asked participants to give their individual views on strengths that exist in

the province or in their own communities that would support the integrated or blended approach to early learning and care. Participants could see many strengths in existing programs and services, both provincially and locally.

One strength, expressed in different ways, was the movement that has already begun toward collaboration, partnerships, and inclusion as seen both in the School<sup>PLUS</sup> initiative and in the developing intergovernmental and community partnerships. Some seeds of the solutions appear to already have been sown and are existing in some areas, but are not universally available to all who need them. Comments were also made about community strengths, including local programs, local partnerships, and the people involved in programs.

Strengths include areas of government action and support, the good human resources that do exist, strong community interest in some areas, and vocal, knowledgeable parents. A representative list of the potential, the barriers, and the strengths can be found in Appendix A-1.

### **Categories of Priorities for Action**

The categories of priorities present a picture of potential actions that could move the blended approach to early learning and care, forward. However the ideas, opinions and experiences that were shared are treated not as recommendations for action, but rather as a reflection of the scope and breadth of the discussions that took place in the forums. In some cases there were differences of opinion on courses of action but, true to the goals of the discussion forums, all ideas were collected and respected and the categories paint a broad picture of what people said.

The raw data were taken to a *theme level* and *the themes were connected to develop five categories of priorities:*

1. Valuing Early Learning and Care

2. Universality of Learning and Care
3. Quality of Learning and Care
4. Working Together as Community
5. Supports for Families and Parents.

It should be noted that the categories do not stand alone. Together, they form the larger picture of what parents, caregivers and professionals said about a blended approach to early learning and care. Each of the five categories is summarized on the following pages. Two participant goal statements in the data ask that we:

*Find a way to honour the strengths of parents and community.*

*Have the opportunity to have meaningful employment, holistic care and community involvement.*

These two statements encompass, in a brief but meaningful way, the collective hopes of the participants who attended the 26 meetings.

### ***Valuing early learning and care***

*Three themes* form this first category:

1. *public education*
2. *sustainable funding*
3. *government commitment to coherence and collaboration.*

The themes are oriented toward government actions that participants felt were necessary to proceed with early learning and care.

#### *Public education*

Public education elicited animated discussion in some forums where people saw the need to change public perception about the importance of learning and care in the early years as it relates to the healthy development of children. Some noted there is ample evidence in the literature about the relationship of brain development in the early years to success later in life. The focus groups recognized the need for a major effort to educate the general public.

A priority mentioned in every group, whether parents or caregivers, was to raise the status of caring for children so it is recognized as important and of value to society. An important indicator of how society values learning and care is the wage disparity between care workers and other comparable professionals. All groups thought this disparity and the need for more access to professional development and training programs, with a tie to job classification and wages, was essential to change the status of parenting and care of young children. A top priority for two groups was making everyone aware (education) of the blended approach (i.e., parents, teachers, people whose 'kids' are grown, service groups, grandparents, community agencies, employers and government).

Participants felt that parents need to be educated about the importance of quality early learning and care experiences, how they can provide them, and what they look like. There were strong findings about the need for education for all members of communities so that they understand and support the vision of a blended approach to early learning and care.

The public education approach they envisioned took many forms including media, spokespersons, various types of advertisements, and education. All were deemed essential to provide the information and research necessary to convince people of the social and economic benefits that quality early learning and care can provide for the whole of society. This public education strategy calls for the necessary information to be provided to the general public using everyday language, so as to create a clear picture of what quality care and learning look like. This information would be readily available and accessible within the local community. Some suggested a national campaign much like the campaigns for some of the major health and safety issues.

Many also felt that the effects of poverty are not well understood and that politicians and the

business community should educate themselves about the reality of trying to raise healthy children without access to adequate supports and resources. *All participants representing many sectors saw the importance of an holistic early learning and care approach for all children as an investment in the future of Saskatchewan and Canada.* Some expressed concern that existing learning programs (i.e., nursery schools and preschools, with the exception of pre-kindergarten) have a cost attached and are, therefore, not available to children of poverty.

### *Sustainable funding*

Four groups placed long-term commitment of money for sustainability as one of their top two priorities. Another group's top priority was putting children first, not politics (lack of money). An idea expressed by some groups was that all political parties need to support the initiative. It was felt that decisions relating to funding need to be based upon values that are held across political lines, so that the movement forward is not compromised by change in government or administration.

A *second theme*, and most often mentioned in all groups, is *the need for sustainable funding* to accomplish the goals. It was thought that start-up funding, without follow-up funding, creates fragmentation and leaves many programs underfunded.

Providing stable, sustainable funding is critical if successful programs are to increase and flourish. As well, it is the basis for making quality learning and care accessible and affordable to meet parent needs and allow them informed choice.

Participants also noted the importance of the federal commitment of dollars but thought that involving local communities in the decision about the implementation of actions was critical.

### *Government commitment to coherence and collaboration*

In order to move the blended approach to early learning and care forward, all groups spoke about the necessity for government commitment to provide coherence in policies and practices. In some meetings it was noted that the government had made some gains in addressing this area.

Many participants felt, especially as noted in the evaluation forms distributed at the end of each meeting, they were being heard in the discussion forums and some thought the government is to be commended for moving in the direction of the policy framework. After the meetings, many told the facilitators they wanted to see more opportunities to meet with others, locally, regionally and provincially, to share and develop common goals. Several evaluation sheets indicated they would have liked the meetings to last longer.

The focus groups saw government commitment taking several forms. Two subthemes emerged from this part of the discussion: (a) review of policy, supports and services and (b) restructuring government around the child.

### *Review of policy, supports and services*

One idea was to have a central, coordinating mechanism fully knowledgeable of all resources available that provides this information to all agencies and communities.

There were many expressions of the need to review the delivery of supports and services in light of the effect that competing government policies and practices have on the individual parent and child. Often the individual on the receiving end is confused about what is available and find they lose eligibility for programs because:

- The child is either beyond, or has not reached, a designated age.
- There is a small rise in income.
- The child has not yet been labelled.

- The waiting lists are long.
- They are unaware of what is available.
- Policies or practices in government departments, branches or offices are seen to be in conflict with one another and are barriers to meeting needs.

It was suggested that identifying and reducing the 'red tape' involved in the delivery of current programs and services, as families and caregivers experience it, would be a move in the right direction.

Another, more frequently mentioned approach, and a top priority for one group, was providing a central place in each community where parents can go to find out about resources and get information about what is available and how to access it. This centre would have the necessary staff, including health-care personnel, to help make that happen. Others saw a central place within the local community serving as a parent centre where several services could be gathered together to simplify access to information and supports. Another request is that messages, programs, and services be seen as coherent and coordinated by the people who experience them.

#### *Restructuring government around the child*

A number of priorities and strategies emerged from the forums that suggested ways for government to restructure so as to *put the needs of children first*. For four groups, this was a top priority.

One suggestion was that *government departments should be merged* to reduce government bureaucracy. Others spoke of the need for a *children's branch* in every department involved with children and families. Still others saw the need to have *one department assume responsibility - Health and Learning were specifically mentioned*. Finally, some groups suggested *a new Ministry, the Department of the Child*. The concern was raised that it is difficult to monitor progress when responsibility and action are spread across departments.

The message seems to be dissatisfaction with the current structure because it does not provide a seamless approach as children move along the continuum, from infants to school age and when circumstances require moving from one service program to another. The need for a seamless approach was expressed often and in different ways.

A third top priority suggests that structures and funding be set up to reduce competition among government departments and branches and to increase collaboration/cooperation.

Another subtheme of commitment is the need to restructure government so it is organized around the child. A common expression was that the focus should be on the child, not the institution. It is felt that policies across government departments affect access to resources and need to be aligned so that a coherent plan is presented to the public, with understandable language.

People are aware that some programs reach the same target group, but with different names that reflect the initiative or the funding source. The discussions identified other departments where a review of policies that affect access to early learning and care, beyond Learning and Community Resources and Employment, should occur. Those other policy areas may include Health, Justice, Labour, Saskatchewan Property Management, and the medical community.

#### ***Universality of learning and care***

This category encompasses statements about a universal approach to learning and care, accessibility and affordability, and parent choice.

#### *Universal approach*

A finding across all groups, and a top priority for seven, is *the need for a universal early learning and care approach in Saskatchewan*. The universal approach, as participants described it, includes providing access for every child and family, not just at risk children. It is thought that quality learning and

care should be available to all, regardless of income, and that the vision should ensure flexibility, inclusion, and offering more services.

For two groups, it was a top priority that parents who stay home to parent also have a need to access learning environments, parent education, and respite and learning resources outside the home, and this must be considered part of the universal approach. In some groups, an important aspect of the universal approach was a need to work to incorporate reserve and off-reserve Aboriginal children and families into the vision. In several meetings, it was recognized that funding for First Nations' children is a federal responsibility, but it was also noted that a seamless approach to universal care and learning cannot occur without some means of providing parallel services to those who live on and off reserves.

The current practice of identifying at risk children and families and providing targeted services to them was criticized. Participants spoke in favour of a universal service and it was suggested that this could:

1. eliminate the discrimination and stigma of being the recipient of "at risk" programs
2. foster the philosophy that "all families need support"
3. provide a vehicle for full community development and support.

It should be noted that participants understood that targeted program funding allowed some programs to be developed where universal funding was not possible. They felt that successful programs could now be brought together and made accessible to more children and families. This would increase access for some and reduce overlap and duplication. One group had as its top priority to recognize and strengthen existing programs before adding new ones – "keep the good but change what isn't."

Some proposed by that making pre-kindergarten programs available in all schools to all children might be a way to begin. At one meeting it was shared that the criteria for selection in pre-kindergarten programs leads to isolation of children and does not create the rich, inclusive environment that contributes to learning for all. Another participant expressed the view that only children who meet the criteria should be served.

### *Accessibility*

In all groups, accessibility was mentioned as an essential feature of a universal approach. The challenge posed by demographics was noted, as were the difficulties of finding appropriate delivery mechanisms.

Transportation was mentioned, not only from the rural and northern perspective of isolation and distances, but also from urban parents who cannot access services and basic living needs because they lack transportation between home, day care, learning programs, recreation and basic living needs.

Discussions about accessibility included meeting parent needs by increasing the number of quality spaces for all ages in the target group and by providing flexibility and longer hours for childcare for parents who work different hours. In some parts of the province, access to quality day cares is unavailable. Spaces for infants and toddlers are difficult, if not impossible, to access. Others would like to see children with special needs welcomed in day care programs.

Despite the barriers to overcome, there was consensus of all participants of the importance of access for all children, and their parents, to learning and care that meet their needs. Participants spoke of creativity and innovation - involving the community and different types of delivery of services - as ways to overcome these barriers.

### *Affordability*

To ensure access to learning and care, affordability is a major factor. Participants referred to other countries and provinces where universal access is provided and affordability is managed in many ways. Some participants suggested that such models be explored and that we can learn from the experiences of others.

For two groups, the top priority was support for parents, such as better employment opportunities, better wages, better subsidies, or raising the subsidy ceiling above \$1900. One of the top priorities for two groups was incentives for parents who choose to stay home.

It was suggested that subsidies could increase affordability from two differing points of view. One type of subsidy would follow the child and give the parent choice in that way; the other type would provide the funding directly to the care or learning program. Some parents, just over the line in qualifying for subsidy, talked about the hardships of trying to pay for quality childcare. The small increase in salary that makes them ineligible for a subsidy actually reduces their disposable income for other family needs. Many people spoke of the need to support parents with tax benefits, parenting leaves, and money for extraordinary expenses for families of children with special needs.

### *Parent choice*

Parent choice was raised in the discussions in several ways. The first was the right of every child to quality care and learning, and it was evident that there were different points of view about what parents wanted as their choice. Some want to stay at home during the early years and receive emotional, societal, and financial support. Several expressed fear of a government push toward employment as a goal that would not honour their wish to stay home or would place nurturing second to earning a paycheck.

Others want to see quality day care and infant care *at the school or workplace* to improve accessibility and allow opportunities to contact children during the day. Access to childcare that was *licensed and affordable*, giving their children quality care *in a group environment*, was an expressed need. Often the options are limited for parents who not only want to stay at home but also want to provide enrichment opportunities for their young children.

Some participants expressed the need for access to small, private care homes or individuals, such as nannies, to come to their homes so they can get to personally know the caregiver. In addition, the need was expressed for *care to be recognized financially*, in the form of tax credits or childcare allowances. One of the highest priorities was that *resources should be available for all caregivers, including those who provide care in their homes*.

Parent choice was also discussed in terms of access to services with flexible hours, where all children in a family are welcomed. It was pointed out that farm families are part of the workforce and also need access to quality childcare and learning.

Another link to choice, expressed by some parents, was their need to better understand and recognize quality care and learning which would help them select quality facilities. It was clear that for many participants parental choice was vitally important. It was also evident that the choice would vary according to the parent's needs and preferences.

### ***Quality learning and care***

A third category of themes describes *quality* in several ways: raising the status of childcare workers, providing accountability at the provincial and local levels, providing for children with special needs, and some other elements of a quality program.

### *Status of childcare workers*

*Almost every group talked about the need to raise the prestige of childcare workers in early learning and care.* Recognition can only take place with greater access to training and a solution to the wage disparity between caregivers and other comparable service professionals. It was striking to note that participants related this lower status to the low value that society places on parenting and the care of young children.

Concern for the status of childcare workers was a strong finding in most groups. In fact, it was a top priority for five groups. Within the overall concern, two subthemes were noted: wages and status, and preparation and training. Participants believe there is a direct relationship between increased training and wages and the quality of care and learning.

#### *Wages and status*

In order to address this problem, several ideas emerged. A *classification system* was suggested for caregiver positions: associate, assistant and professional. It was suggested that these classifications be tied to training and compensation and, further, that standards be developed related to staff development, hiring, screening, and wages. Licensing could include the levels of preparation of the staff and the in-service attended.

#### *Preparation*

The top priority of one group was to provide more and better education and training and more incentives for early childhood education providers to access training. Many participants cited preparation of caregivers as important and that it include developing standards for training and making that training accessible and affordable. Many would like to see training include understanding and skills for working with special needs children and families. Conferences were seen as providing opportunities for networking, sharing resources and measuring progress. One idea put forward

was a joint venture among regional colleges, high schools, and communities, using day cares in the schools as training sites.

The opportunity to access preservice and in-service education, similar to teachers in the K-12 system, was proposed as a model for childcare workers. It was thought that such a model could go far in raising the status of the caregivers. A 4-year program with specialties was proposed as another way to raise the status of childcare workers.

#### *Accountability*

To ensure quality, many participants spoke of an accountability system, with suggestions that ranged from provincial standards, regulations, and outcome measures, to the development of assessment tools that would allow for meaningful local improvement. Assessment approaches that ensure each child is followed through transition periods were also seen as important tools for human service providers and parents.

Evaluation of childcare workers and programs was mentioned, as was a monitoring system to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

One important accountability finding was the need to license and regulate all kinds of care situations. At the same time, there was a fear that regulation would increase fees and make small-care situations less affordable. Several spoke about regulating private daycares to ensure that all programs meet a high standard. It was also suggested that *current regulations be reviewed* in light of best practices, derived from research and professional expertise. Taken together, the findings support provincial standards and monitoring, as well as the creation of tools for local assessment.

The goal is to empower people to take ownership of their own programs, and thus work towards program improvement. Parents expressed a need to be involved in describing *good nurturing and care*. It was thought that the universal criteria for all programs should be transmitted to parents so they know and

understand what to expect. It was also suggested that if parents know about quality programs and expected outcomes, they could be partners in monitoring quality.

#### *Access to special care*

A top priority for three groups was strong medical support and more professional staff to provide diagnostic and treatment services (e.g., Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and speech and language) to reduce wait lists in every area of the province. It was suggested that incentives be provided for specialized services to train and remain in Saskatchewan.

Another top priority in this area is regular communication between parents and caregivers, and better communication across programs, especially in periods of transition. It is also important for some that children and families receive support while data is being collected for diagnosis, in order to eliminate gaps in treatment and service.

Early detection of special needs, beginning with a first screening in the hospital at birth, should be available for all children. There is also a recognized need for specialists to come to childcare settings to help with understanding and knowledge and with setting up appropriate programs. Both suggestions underline the importance of building a relationship with the medical community. The importance of developing a larger group of generalists and paraprofessionals, and using specialists to do consulting and training, was also highlighted. The paraprofessionals could carry out the treatment/therapy program as prescribed by the professional.

A top priority of quality programs for some participants includes using a system such as IWRAP. In this approach, all involved meet with the family, at the same time, to discuss needs and develop solutions together.

#### *Quality programs*

Two subthemes summarize the discussions in this category: pedagogy and space.

#### *Pedagogy*

A significant part of *quality* is the development of a curriculum for early learning and care. A top priority for one group was providing holistic childhood programs enhanced by attention to language and culture. Many aspects of a curriculum were mentioned: nutrition, a balance between play and structure, language development, good health practices, and creating an environment of inclusion. The development of appropriate best practice, in their opinion, is based on research and the expertise of professionals and families.

*While there was agreement that learning and care go together, learning does not mean the same to all people.* To some, *learning* is associated with formal teaching, but many others fear this approach for young children. They want learning to be developmentally appropriate and to occur in the context of play. Some expressed the need to allow children to be children. Others commented on the need for a low adult-to-child ratio in programs.

It was suggested that a framework be developed which private caregivers could follow. The importance of involving parents in the design of preschool programs was also stressed.

The need to commit money, resources and qualified people to enhance the programming provided by in-home caregivers was the highest priority for one group.

#### *Other program elements*

For some, part of a universal quality program included community recreational programs for

parents and children. Some parents mentioned programs for recreational activities and opportunities for parents and children to interact together. Some thought these programs should have an instructional component so that parents can learn how to best play with their children so that play becomes a learning experience. Other parents want to see that programs are available for children with FAS, ADD, and other special needs. For another group, the top priority was the need to recognize and strengthen existing programs before adding new ones.

### Facilities

Clearly, an essential component of quality, from the perspective of parents and caregivers, is adequate facilities.

Funding for buildings for childcare programs, especially in the North, was a top priority for one group. Although being an important part of quality care, such facilities are simply unavailable or inadequate in some areas of the province.

It was evident that *quality* was broadly defined and that parents and providers had many ideas, but no clear consensus or definition about the constituent elements of *quality*.

The accountability section refers to the need to define *quality* through standards, regulations, and monitoring tools. The pedagogy section states the need for a clear curriculum or approach to early learning and care. The special care section raises the need to provide diagnostic and treatment services to those who need them. The facilities section talks about the concern for adequate space to deliver programs. Taken together, all highlight the importance of defining *quality* so that everyone has a common understanding and a shared vision.

### ***Working together***

Throughout the discussions, the importance of working together was emphasized often and in many ways. Two themes to be explored in this

category are (a) community action and involvement and (b) engaging and involving parents.

### *Community action and involvement*

Some stated it was time to work in partnership to be effective in meeting the goals of the framework. A top priority is the need to engage in *long-term planning*, rather than expending valuable energy by working on a year-to-year basis.

Some of the ideas presented were among the top priorities and could form a guide for action to use when working across sectors or boundaries, both provincially and locally. Some participants' ideas are presented below.

*Joint government, agency and community consultation – no top-down attitude.*

*Focus on a family-oriented approach. Root the change in the community with a focus on the child.*

*Develop processes for closer contact between service providers and parents for establishing outcomes and monitoring progress.*

*Develop partnerships between and among agencies, communities and parents so that they understand each other, share turf and communicate by changing structures for planning, evaluation and funding.*

*Provide consistent, seamless services for special needs children and their families from birth to adulthood.*

*Create assessment tools to follow the child through the health and education system.*

*Consider a community hub model or family resource centres so one place can offer all services: health, care and education.*

*Recognize that conflict is inherent in working together and provide a dispute*

*resolution process to manage/resolve issues as they arise.*

*Reduce fragmentation of programs and initiatives to provide an approach that builds on research and successes and is perceived as coherent and seamless by parents and service providers.*

*Learn from the past and work on prevention.  
Support community programs and planning by blending government initiatives with local expressed needs.*

*Establish a joint long-term transparent plan for all agencies and players based upon shared vision and goals.*

A common message was the need for a coordinating mechanism to promote inter- and intracommunity communication. Participants saw communities as benefiting from the opportunity to learn from one another.

#### *Engaging and involving parents*

*School<sup>PLUS</sup> was mentioned in several areas as an appropriate model for moving towards working together.* Schools and school divisions were seen as having a role in educating young people about parenting and in being a hub in the community for daycares and community programming.

Some aspects of that development include listening to, and involving parents and the community in, planning, needs assessments and monitoring, and evaluation. Parental involvement was seen as difficult, but absolutely essential at the local level. Suggestions included identifying parent responsibilities, getting fathers involved, and presenting parents with choices and opportunities for making decisions.

Providing a single point of entry, with flexible hours for families, is a way to provide information and involve them in decisions. It was thought that emphasizing outreach would yield more involvement than paperwork.

Participants recognized the need for creating a common/shared vision with parents and for assisting with collaborative decision making, as communities learn how to work together. Many supported local coordination and joint planning; others reminded planners to take direction from the community.

Several participants suggested working more closely with the schools and that parenting classes be available in schools, beginning with the middle years.

It was also important to many that the Aboriginal voice be listened to and respected.

#### ***Family supports***

This goal category contains ideas for supporting families and providing parent education. It should be noted that the preceding categories all suggest ways of supporting parents, from restructuring and simplifying the system, to providing choice and accessible, affordable quality care and learning.

However, parents also see the need for access to learning programs, parent education, and respite care, including parents of children with special needs. Parents want to be included in crafting the vision for early learning and care and in assessing and monitoring quality care. In other words, as parents and community members, they have a great desire to be consulted, listened to, and involved in the planning for early learning and care.

#### *Parent support*

A top priority for two groups was providing adequate funding and emotional support for stay-at-home parents. Special mention was made of those with special needs children.

A top priority for another group was educating parents about available services, for example, a family advocacy worker. In this category, *support* was described as all agencies providing a consistent approach for families to

feel comfortable in accessing services that are friendly. This same theme was suggested for communities, highlighting the need to provide child- and parent-friendly access to buildings. The importance of making it comfortable for nursing mothers to breastfeed in public buildings, for example, was stressed.

It was evident that many forum participants would like to see more regular home visits by Public Health nurses.

Concern was also expressed about basic living needs being a high priority, so that housing does not become an incentive to have babies. Parents want to be good providers. The support they need was in terms of building their capabilities and confidence to provide quality care for their children. In the North, the fear was expressed that children are sometimes taken away from parents instead of using the available resources to work towards building the family's parenting capabilities.

Teen mothers said they benefit from adult support and understanding, and this does not always have to be the parent. These mothers saw a strong need for fathers to be engaged and involved in both supporting and spending time with their children. They need access to inexpensive furniture and equipment, such as car seats, to care for their children.

Teen mothers also saw the need for access to recreation and evening programs that provide an opportunity for a family to play, as well as giving parents time to share responsibilities. Access to clean, safe play areas is difficult to find, but could be provided by evening and weekend recreation programs in community or school buildings.

#### *Parent education*

Many groups mentioned the need for funding and incentives for parent education. Parents and caregivers expressed the need to see more emphasis on education that involves parents in interaction with their children. One example was respite care or babysitting, combined with all-day workshop or overnight sessions. This

would allow for programs and sharing, without worry about their children.

Another need was for family-parent resource centres that are accessible, approachable and friendly, with multilearning techniques and programs that include literacy and parenting, prenatal classes, parent/child programs (e.g., Families and Schools Together – FAST). Teen mothers suggested new and innovative approaches to parent education such as meeting with fathers in a site where they are comfortable, for example, a gym or a bowling alley, and that parenting and play can be combined, making it fun to learn about parenting.

Participants want to see the knowledge and expertise of parents honoured. Although parents have much to contribute, there was a desire to educate parents about how to provide quality care and what to expect in care and learning situations outside the home. In this way, parents could make good choices and monitor their child's progress in an informed manner.

The isolation, often associated with rural and northern parts of the province, can also be found in urban areas, where it is created by a lack of transportation and of information and awareness about resources.

As has already been noted, all parents need education. It will come as no surprise, therefore, to learn that participants expressed the need to see parenting classes offered *for all parents*, not just those who are at-risk. They felt this approach would remove the stigma associated with parenting education and help raise the prestige and profile of parenting classes.

Parents would like to see workshops, meetings, or classes where specialists can share information, expertise, and new ideas with parents and families.

The top priorities for five groups centred on the importance of quality education, resources, and support groups for new, single, prenatal and parents with special needs. It was noted on

several occasions that, for example, if a baby is born on the weekend, the parents do not receive the same information and resources as parents whose baby is born during the week. Mandatory communication guidelines between childcare workers and parents was another top priority. Some suggested that a cumulative record of care and growth begin at birth and follow the child into the school system.

### **Frequency of Categories Across All Groups**

A frequency distribution was calculated for the priority statements by categories for the 26 focus groups. For the purposes of this analysis, three areas in the province were designated *northern* and the others, *central* and *southern*. The northern sites included Beauval and the northwest, La Ronge and Prince Albert (including teen parents). The other sites were considered central and southern.

The 26 meetings were sorted into three groups: parents, professionals and organizations, and human service providers. The number of groups by category were:

- **Parents:** 4 northern, 8 central and southern
- **Professional groups and organizations:** government professionals, early learning and care professionals, and Aboriginal organizations
- **Human service providers:** 3 northern, 8 central and southern.

The priority statements were sorted into five categories of findings for each group and counted to determine the frequency of statements in each category for each group. The prioritizing procedure used in most groups gave participants the opportunity to choose their top priorities. The numbers assigned to the top priorities in those sites indicated the number of people choosing the statement, which increased the count for that statement. Where there was no prioritizing procedure

used, each statement counted as one (1) and was assigned to a category. The prioritizing process was not used in some meetings because of lack of time and the size of the group.

This frequency distribution should be viewed with caution for two reasons:

1. Not all of the groups used a prioritizing procedure to influence frequency.
2. The facilitators used their judgement to sort the statements by category and, in some cases, a statement could fit into more than one category.

The exercise sheds some light on the type of priority statements mentioned most frequently by groups. Table 1 is a visual representation of the frequency of priority statements by category and by groups.

#### ***Frequency of priority statements by category and group***

##### *Parents*

Parent groups, whether northern, central or southern, had similar rankings for categories, putting Quality of ELC and Family Supports at the top, followed by Valuing ELC, and Universality and Working Together. There were no differences between northern, central and southern parent meetings in the ranking of categories.

##### *Professional groups and organizations*

All three professional groups and organizational meetings had similar rankings for the top two categories: Valuing ELC and Quality of ELC. The third ranking was Working Together [government and Aboriginal organizations], and Family Supports [professional groups].

##### *Human service provider groups*

Human service provider groups had similar rankings for the top two categories: Changing the Status and Quality of ELC.

Table 1

*Frequency of Priority Statements by Category and Group*

Human Service Providers		Professional Groups/Organizations			Parents	
Central and Southern	Northern	DCRE and Learning	Aboriginal	ELC Professional	Central and Southern	Northern
Valuing ELC	Valuing ELC	Valuing ELC	Valuing ELC	Valuing ELC	Quality of ELC	Quality of ELC
Quality of ELC	Quality of ELC	Quality of ELC	Quality of ELC	Quality of ELC	Family Supports	Family Supports
Universality	Family Supports	Working Together	Working Together	Family Supports	Valuing ELC	Valuing ELC
Working Together	Universality	Universality	Family Supports	Universality	Universality	Universality
Family Supports	Working Together	Family Supports	Universality	Working Together	Working Together	Working Together

**General description of frequency distribution**

1. All groups mentioned all five categories in their priority statements: Valuing of ELC, Quality of ELC, Family Supports, Universality, and Working Together.
2. The top two categories across all groups included Valuing ELC, Quality of ELC, and Family Supports.
3. Quality of ELC was among the top two categories across all groups.
4. Valuing ELC was among the top three categories across all groups.

Supports category followed, containing themes about parent education and supports that would assist parents.

Some specific ideas from the northern experience discussion groups focused on family health. Ways that family health could be addressed included home visits by public health nurses and outreach workers, as well as better recreation programs, libraries, nutrition programs, intergeneration addiction counselling and seamless programs for reserve and non-reserve children and families. Access to diagnostic services was another area of great need.

Housing was another priority area. The need for facilities suitable to learning and care programs for young children is quite evident in some communities. Participants’ perception was that government housing does not allow care and learning programs on these properties.

**Northern, Rural and Aboriginal Perspectives**

**The North**

Northern parents and human resource providers had priority statements in all categories, including childcare programs; the status of childcare workers, as well as wages and education; pedagogy; accountability; and children with special needs. The Family

Another conspicuous need in the North relates to providing support so that expectant mothers can stay in their own communities to have their babies. The training and licensing of midwives and granting hospital privileges were suggested solutions to the problem. Another

was providing specialist services at a regional level, for example, in the La Ronge area.

There was an expressed need for standards and accessible training for childcare workers, as well as culturally based programming that honours traditional forms of parenting and First Nations languages.

Long-term planning appears to be an issue, which is compounded by a perception of confused mandates among agencies, as well as apathy on the part of parents.

In some northern areas, there is no daycare or access to 24-hour care for parents who work night shifts or days at a time in the mines or other similar northern industries. In other areas, it was noted that the cost of some programs in schools, as well as the lack of transportation, keeps some children and families from accessing programs. One quite interesting suggestion involves the creation of a *pre-kindergarten outreach program*.

The teen mothers were quite specific about what programs would increase their opportunity to become independent, contributing members of the community. The top need was *daycares in schools* that would solve some of their transportation difficulties and allow them contact with their children during the day.

The teen mothers would also like access to recreation and other programs in the evening and on weekends. Such programs would encourage parent-child interactions and provide opportunity for others to share in their children's lives, especially the fathers. It is quite evident that these young women take their parenting responsibilities seriously, and the strength of their suggestions and ideas are a measure of their leadership and willingness to plan and solve problems.

Concern was expressed about the use of language in the draft policy framework and its impact on parents. Some potential pitfalls were noted. For example, because of the history of the Aboriginal community, the word

*blended* could be interpreted as *assimilation* and the word *care*, as *taking children away* from their parents and families.

Another concern was that what the draft framework lists as *values*, some Aboriginal people view as *principles*. To the Aboriginal participants, *values* are deeply embedded in how people are treated.

Obviously, more opportunities for discussion are needed to clarify the goals and direction of the policy framework, and to develop concrete examples of learning and care to clearly define the meaning of the concepts.

### ***Rural perspectives***

In the many meetings across Saskatchewan, both rural and urban residents were invited to attend. Rural communities were seen as places where isolation and demographics make it difficult for parents to access programs that are centered in cities, towns and larger communities. When identifying themselves at these meetings, rural residents had stated the same goals and priorities as others, including flexible hours for childcare and access to learning programs and respite care. They emphasized that delivery of services to rural areas must be innovative and creative: Some areas may look different, but the goals are the same.

It was made clear that farm parents are part of the workforce, both on and off the farm, and need access to the same supports and services as urban parents. Human service providers who serve rural areas were well aware of the great need and difficulty of providing services in sparsely populated areas.

### ***Aboriginal organizations***

The Aboriginal organizational meeting added to the discussion on quality by affirming the need to access diagnostic services and specialists, with the suggestion that First Nations' youth could be trained to fill these roles. There was a stated need for accountability regarding outcomes: to review

whether, and to what extent, programs reflect the values of those giving and receiving them (i.e., the dominant society and the Aboriginal community). This group had the greatest number of statements in the category Valuing Early Learning and Care, which includes public education, sustainable funding, and government commitment and collaboration. The Aboriginal group's major criticism of the discussion forum process was *the short timeline*, feeling the restricted timeline ignored the necessary protocols between governments. They spoke of a need for a formal consultation that would allow discussions among their communities before an opinion was given and look forward to the opportunity for this sort of discussion to happen in the fall. They see a policy of this magnitude as involving both reserve and nonreserve children and families, suggesting that federal funding should come from both INAC [to First Nations], and the federal government [to the province], so that joint planning and seamless delivery of services could be forged for the benefit of children and families.

In the category of Working Together - including Community Action and Involvement, Planning, and Engaging and Involving Parents - the Aboriginal group spoke of the need for more meetings and consultations with those who are affected, including youth. They also suggested that resources be directed toward family development.

The Aboriginal group affirmed School<sup>PLUS</sup> as the right direction for communities. It was noted that older youth cannot be left out of a comprehensive policy, pointing out that the new youth justice act still allows youth to be used by gangs. There was a call for supports for parents that would enable more interaction between parents and children to prevent developmental delays and to ensure that schools and teachers are respectful of Aboriginal children and their needs.

### Final Participant Advice to the Government

At the conclusion of each meeting, evaluation forms were provided to the participants to determine whether the process goals of the discussion forums were met. The form gave participants one last opportunity to advise DHRE and the Department of Learning. This evaluation process occurred after participants heard the discussions and different points of view. Participants had many pieces of advice; however, seven areas called for special attention. The areas are consistent with the rest of the findings. *The two most often repeated responses were:*

- ***listen*** to what we said in the discussion forums
- ***take action*** to move the agenda forward.

More information on the advice is found in Appendix A – 5, “Evaluation of Discussion Process by Participants.”

## Symposium

In the week following the last focus group, the facilitators prepared a summary of the data to present at a Symposium in Saskatoon on June 17, 2004. The Symposium created an opportunity for stakeholder and government representatives to respond to the initial findings of the consultation process.

The facilitators presented a summary of the priority statements, from all the meetings, related to 14 themes.

1. Public Awareness
2. Accessibility /Universality
3. Cultural/gender sensitivity

4. Community involvement/Collaboration
5. Childcare Services
6. Quality
7. Funding
8. Government
9. Helping Children/Families
10. Helping Children/Families/Special Needs
11. Planning and building on strengths
12. School/School divisions
13. Education/Training
14. Engaging Parents/Education.

In addition, each participant received a draft copy of all the priority statements from all the meetings.

The first discussions occurred in heterogeneous groups, with one or more

representatives from each sector in each group. The groups focused on discussion of the implications for each government sector, parent group, service provider, and professional. The recorders then posted the implications for the sectors in the plenary meeting room, by sector, so the sheets could be reviewed.

After the first discussion group, the cochairs summarized the threads of the sector sheets and participants met in homogeneous groups, by stakeholder sector. These role-alike groups reviewed the implications for their sector as listed from all the morning groups. Each sector reported to the plenary possible actions for their sector and advice for the government.

## Symposium Discussions

### Morning Groups

The heterogeneous groups met in the morning to suggest actions that each sector could take to move the blended approach forward. Following is a summary of those suggestions.

#### *Advice to government/policy developers*

Those present affirmed that which had been said by the previous discussion forums: a need for long-term investment and funding for the education and compensation of caregivers. The government's role is to provide support and work toward eliminating stigmatization. The mandate for ELC needs to be clear and allow for a seamless approach to working with children and families – “a lifespan approach.”

It was suggested that Health, Justice, Economic Development and the Treasury Board need to be involved and that partnerships within government and among government, communities, and business are needed. There were suggestions for a separate ministry for ELC or an ELC branch within a department, or some form of single administration. More coordination is needed between the provincial and federal

governments in supporting on- and off-reserve First Nations' children. Where there are regional authorities, it was suggested that coterminous boundaries would help enhance the role of RICs or some other regional, coordinating bodies. Part of working together could mean integrating databases and a common information-gathering system.

There were many suggestions about things government can do, including:

- develop policy that respects choice and values care
- coordinate services
- review and develop regulations, including ratios
- clarify mandates
- review labour legislation to ensure it protects parent choice
- develop services – information and registration – on-line
- ensure single points of entry for services for parents
- provide a place where parents can go when resolution is required for difficulties between daycares and parents
- ensure services in all areas of the province
- build links to other programs such as School<sup>PLUS</sup>

- develop and administer standards
- develop policies to promote choice
- conduct public education programs
- support training initiatives of many types.

### ***Advice to communities***

Groups recognized that many people and groups have a role in supporting children and families. The community can commit to community development, provide places for parents to meet and talk, and assist parents in establishing networks.

With respect to services, communities can develop a directory and lobby for services that are needed. Before that occurs, however, the community can determine what already exists and then develop a coordinated, integrated support plan for parents.

The community can listen to parents and involve them in community organizations (e.g., Regional Economic Development Authority, RIC, and others). The community can organize partnerships and coalitions and, where necessary, assist parents with political action.

The community needs to recognize that all parents need help and a roadmap through the maze of services. The community can support parent education programs and help parents work together to provide each other with respite time.

### ***Advice to academic/training sector***

Suggestions from the groups were for institutions to work to make programs accessible and affordable for all Saskatchewan residents, where ever their location. Curriculum needs to be reviewed and developed to ensure a current ELC emphasis. The focus needs to be on the specifics of ELC and child development.

There were specific suggestions regarding parent education and training programs, and the need for the universities and SIAST to

work together so there is recognition for prior learning and training.

### ***Advice to the family support sector***

There were suggestions about programs and the need for fewer targeted programs to increase accessibility. The groups also spoke of the need for:

- transportation to support access to programs
- a seamless approach across programs, especially as a child grows and matures.

With respect to agencies and service providers, there were suggestions regarding hours of operation, mandates, family/parent centres, valuing parental input, and working to reduce stigmas. *Parents need to know where to go to access services.*

There was discussion of barriers and the need for a common vision - under which programs operate - *of greater cooperation and collaboration among agencies.*

### **Afternoon Groups**

In the afternoon, sector groups met to review the morning groups' advice to them. They were asked to determine where their sector should begin and provide advice about how collaboration could be facilitated.

### ***Parents***

Parents suggested that government needs to recognize that it works for parents and, therefore, must work with them. Organizations need to come together to create an integrated approach, beginning with a directory of services. Accessibility needs to be addressed early so there is universal access to existing programs and services.

### ***Early learning and care providers***

ELC providers suggested beginning with public and parent education and advocacy.

They also favoured collaboration, beginning within government departments, so that programs are funded equally, regardless of which government department they are in. There were suggestions, too, about investing in the education of staff to raise the value of the profession. ELC providers recommended increasing grants to licensed childcare centres and preschools. They also spoke about changing the subsidy system.

### ***Education and training sector***

The education and training sector recommended beginning with an examination of the content of the formal training programs, public awareness, and parent education classes. They looked at the need for continuing education for workers and at the components of formal training for all human service providers. Everyone who works with young children should have some training around ELC.

### ***Family support sector***

This group suggested the idea of family service hubs, beginning with training and development. Such hubs could provide the kind of support required to help communities work together, promote public education, and provide assistance in identifying current, effective practise so that families can build on proven strengths.

### ***Government sector***

The policy developers group used a quadrant concept to examine potential policy initiatives. On one dimension the quadrant ranged from *low* to *high impact* while on the other, it ranged from *not difficult* to *challenging*. Their discussion was rather unique and the results are, therefore, included in Appendix A – 6.

## **Other Results of the Discussion Forums**

Although there were goals for the forums with respect to gathering information about the framework and priorities for the future, there were also other unanticipated results. Some of these are highlighted below.

### **Recognizing History**

As each RIC coordinator or representative reviewed the history of early learning and care, there was a realization of *a rich history in each region*. Often, communities do not have an opportunity to look back at what has been attempted or to assess what has, and has not, worked. Some community members are not aware of everything that has occurred in the past or of what is happening at present.



This review of history helped communicate some information about what is currently happening and allowed groups to examine activities that worked in the past but disappeared or never reached their full potential. Often, conversations began by considering what could happen, how some existing activities could be renewed, and how some could fit together to provide better services for children and families.

### **Recognizing the Roles of Others in the Community/Collaboration**

Even in smaller communities, service providers were not necessarily aware of others in their focus group and, even if they knew the people, were not always familiar with their roles. These meetings allowed people to begin discussions about what they do and what they can do for children. These were important conversations that could carry on in the future and benefit children. However, it was evident that some effort to formally facilitate and coordinate such conversations may be necessary. In order to provide a beginning, some asked for a list of participants so that more sharing could take place.

This same desire for communication occurred with the parent groups, especially the parents of children with special needs. One of their requests was for more support groups. The opportunity to come together to share and converse was positively viewed by many.

### **Possibilities for Action**

In some groups, the RIC coordinator took note of the suggestions, with a view to implementing some of them locally. Most

communities recognize they cannot rely on someone outside the community to do everything for them; some action would have to take place at the local level.

### **The Stories**

Participants told personal stories, sometimes to a small group with which they felt comfortable, sometimes to the large group, and sometimes only to the facilitators. In many cases participants indicated they had been unable to tell their stories before: stories about difficulties in accessing services and stories about successes that had changed their children's lives.

Some stories were quite moving and compelling. One story concerned an individual's thoughts of suicide related to the lack of services for FAS children and especially that FAS children cannot receive services unless the mother admits to alcohol abuse. Students told the stories too. A single mother related how she had been counselled to quit school and get a job to support herself and her baby. One father spoke of how few role models he had in his life, of leaving school early, but now, as a single parent, he has returned to school. He went on to tell us that the role model he now provides for his children has so much effect they do not want to miss school – not even if they are ill!

## **Submissions**

In addition to the data gathered at the discussion forums, organizations and individuals were invited to send submissions to SIDRU. Seven submissions were received

and the information has been considered in the preparation of this report. A list of the submissions is found in Appendix A - 7 "Submissions Summary."

## **Considerations**

This section provides 12 areas to consider to move the blended approach forward. The considerations flow from the data collected

and from the facilitators' discussions and reflections as they analyzed and synthesized the data from the discussion forums.

## 1. Defining Concepts

In presenting a blended approach to early learning and care to many audiences, the facilitators discovered that there are long histories and entrenched public attitudes toward both *learning* and *care*.

Participants had to overcome ‘the baggage’ of each concept when they were called upon to combine the two concepts and understand them in a different context. They stated many of these attitudes as barriers to the policy framework.

*Changing attitudes about learning and care, as well as blending them into a coordinated single initiative, is a challenge that awaits policy planners.*

Making changes to *learning* is difficult because people tend to insist that ‘schooling’ be done in much the same way as when they were in school. Opening schools to the community, as well as other major changes associated with School<sup>PLUS</sup> and earlier reform initiatives, are examples of large-scale change that takes time to accomplish - time to build relationships and to alter practices. Both are vital if social policy is to be transformed.

By the same token, the general public views childcare and babysitting as much the same thing. The concept of *care* has also been influenced by the conventional impression that it is woman’s work. Some argue that this stereotype accounts for the lower status and lack of fair compensation accorded to the work of caregivers.

A submission from the Canadian Association of Young Children, the Regina Early Learning Centre, and the Early Childhood area, in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina, addresses these issues very well. The brief suggests that *the terms need to be defined separately* and the relationship

between the two areas needs to be developed carefully. In addition, the definitions and the relationship need to be grounded in examples of quality practice, supported by current research.

## 2. Recognizing Quality

Other terms need to be defined as well. While most spoke about *parent choice* and *quality*, it was evident they did not define these terms in the same way. For example, for some, *quality* means standards; for others, regulations; for some, the two terms are synonymous, but for others the terms mean quite different things. Achieving clarity and consensus around a notion such as *quality* will likely be essential to move forward with a blended approach. Both quality care and quality learning are at the heart of what everyone wants for children.

When there is agreement on a description of *quality*, then it will be possible to determine how quality is maintained. There were suggestions that quality can be externally monitored, that providers can monitor the provision of quality or that parents, if given the description of *quality*, can monitor it for themselves. Regardless, the starting point is in the definition and description of *quality*.

## 3. Education for All

A clear vision, definitions and assessment tools, along with concrete examples, are the foundation for educating others about the effects and benefits of early learning and care for society. Education for all, from policy makers to parents, is necessary to raise the status of early learning and care. There is awareness about the importance of early learning and care; what is lacking is an understanding that, to raise the status and effect change, a cooperative educated approach by politicians, policy makers, employers, parents, educators and the public as a whole is required.

*Education for all - from policy makers to parents - appears to be foundational to raising the status of early learning and care.*

#### **4. Central Leadership and Community Involvement**

The findings from the discussion forums certainly pose a paradox for policy makers who will attempt to address the twin issues of *learning* and *care*. On the one hand, *there was a strong call for government leadership and commitment*. Participants were passionate about the needs of families and children: They expressed an urgent need for leadership and a desire to see things happen. There was widespread general agreement that the policy framework outlining the blended approach is headed in the right direction. Several participants complimented the government for making this policy work a priority.

*Participants expect a strong, integrated, long-range government plan for this policy area. The plan is expected to include a way to develop standards, provide access, eliminate duplication, meet accountability needs, and make the whole approach coherent and easy to access and understand. A huge task!*

*On the other hand, the findings also highlight a clear expectation that the implementation of the policy will be accomplished in partnership and consultation with the local community.*

Participants want to have ownership for meeting the needs of the children and families in their area. Local communities see themselves as a resource for assessing their own needs, as well as for solving them. The creative challenge for the government is to provide *centralized* leadership for educating the public, defining direction, and providing resources, while at the same time, allowing for a *decentralized* approach to

policy planning and implementation that includes local community expertise and resources.

*The challenge seems to be thinking provincially but acting locally.*

#### **5. Sharing Power**

*One of the most difficult aspects of combining a centralized and decentralized approach is determining how power can be shared and how coordination across the province can take advantage of local involvement.* Participants expressed both scepticism - about the likelihood of government succeeding in its efforts to integrate its departments more fully - and hope - that government policies can be aligned and more coherent. Many discussion forum participants have a vested interest in their own programs and approaches to learning and care. Meeting those expectations, and reducing fragmentation and duplication, presents a dilemma for policy makers.

Spanning the many boundaries and reducing the fragmented approach to services is a difficult task for government, but achieving coherence and reducing fragmentation will be equally difficult for community-based agencies and organizations. They will need to be as flexible as the government policies they envision. Everyone will need to “think outside of the box”!

#### **6. Listen and Act**

A common sentiment was that there has been enough consulting and papers written about this policy area. *Many expressed the opinion that early learning and care is a well-documented field and that the process of asking people about their priorities should end in favour of action.*

At the same time, many mentioned (in the evaluation forms and in conversation with the facilitators) a wish that there had been more time to talk and share with each other

and to develop strategies for action. People felt they had been listened to in the discussion forums. Some professionals and community agencies had never met before and enjoyed sitting down and sharing with one another. *The finding supports the paradox that, as policy development unfolds, people want to be listened to and they want action and forward motion.*

## 7. Policy Coherence

Early learning and care place a strong emphasis on family, parent education and support for the first and primary caregivers – the parents. It also emphasizes quality care for children when parents are engaged in the workforce, in education, in community work, or in meeting family needs. This important social policy area is influenced by other policies and practices at both the provincial and federal levels of government.

If the early learning and care agenda is to move forward, it is vital that discussion be broadened to include provincial departments outside those involved with this public conversation process (e.g., Health and Justice). It will also be important that conversations with the federal government educate them about how their policies impact early learning and care initiatives, especially at the community level.

## 8. Policy Consistency

The findings described in this report directly correspond with the themes reported in *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care* (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001). Although there are unique features about the Saskatchewan situation, and participants identified a great need for public awareness and parent education, the findings are quite congruent. The policy

needs identified in this report are consistent with those identified by the OECD, the rest of Canada, as well many other countries.

The goal of both *the blended approach to early learning and care* and *School<sup>PLUS</sup>* is to ensure that all Saskatchewan children have the support they need for learning, well being, and life success. Both the blended approach and *School<sup>PLUS</sup>* involve the community-development approach to working with local areas.

*It makes sense, therefore, to see these two policy initiatives as part of the same coherent government approach to children and families.*

## 9. Looking Beyond Programs

*There are many excellent programs in Saskatchewan to serve children. Many were developed to meet specific needs and, therefore, were targeted for specific children. Funding for these programs came from different provincial departments, local agencies, and the federal government. What participants said is that with past development, which occurred program by program, there are overlaps and gaps. Therefore, there is a need to look at the whole system, with the child and family at the centre. Looking at the whole system means looking at all Saskatchewan's children - urban-rural, reserve-nonreserve, and north-south. The challenge is to design a system to meet the needs of every child, not just all children.*

## 10. Universal Access

Many participants stated that every family needs help, but in different ways and to different degrees. Parents also want to be able to choose the type of care or, most importantly, to be able to stay home to provide care themselves. For that to happen, *there needs to be learning and care programs in all areas of the province, for all ages of children, and during the workday of parents, which may differ from the current*

hours of operation of care facilities. Only if learning and care programs are available can parents choose to access them, or not, whether in an urban or rural setting, on a farm, or in the North.

When participants spoke of the need for greater availability, the caveat was that *quality cannot be sacrificed in the attempt to provide quantity*. They were not suggesting that universal access mean total government support, but rather that government funding and policies ensure that people can afford the type of care they need.

*Universal access also means having a seamless approach to learning and care throughout the day, throughout the child's early years, and as the child with special needs moves to required services.* Smooth transitions require a clear means of tracking the history and information about the child so that parents and professionals are not starting over when accessing services and supports.

Universality means that the needs of all families be met, but it also recognizes that the ways of meeting those needs may differ, depending on the demographics and the size of the community.

## 11. Sharing the Costs

The fact sheet, prepared by the government for use in the forums, recognized the financial contribution of both the federal and provincial governments. Participants also spoke of their own financial contribution, of monies raised through fundraising and of contributions by community groups. It was recognized that many groups are involved in financing learning and care.

There was a connection for some between educating the public and sharing the costs. There was a realization that corporations, employers, and the general public have to support both public and private funding sources for this important social policy area.

*There was a common feeling that the current subsidy system is not meeting the needs of many families.* While not asked for suggestions about how a subsidy system might work, participants felt it was important to provide subsidies according to need, in order to access services that support the family in their effort to make a living, contribute to the community, and provide the best possible start for their young children. To many this meant that a subsidy based on only one level of salary is not effective because when a family reaches the salary ceiling, all subsidization ceases. *The suggestion of those present was to examine what works in other jurisdictions and learn from the successes and failures of others.*

## Summary

*What do families need to help them raise healthy children?* The challenge in Saskatchewan is to ensure that parents, government, and community agencies work together to provide a seamless, integrated affordable approach. We know that what happens in the first years of a child's life may be the best predictor of long-term cognitive, physical, psychological and emotional growth. Children are precious and it is so important to their own future, and to the future of society, that they be given quality care, quality learning opportunities, and, when required, quality therapeutic services. Society may not be able to afford tomorrow's cost if we do *not invest* in the future of our children today.

## **Appendices**

**Appendix A**  
**Data**

## Appendix A –1

### Group Responses to the Draft Framework

One of the goals for the discussion groups was to provide information about a draft policy framework for early learning and care and to have individuals respond to the framework. In general, the participants were not only in agreement with the draft framework as presented, but they also identified many strengths, either programs or attitudes, which now exist and which will contribute to moving a blended approach to early learning and care forward. However, they also were easily able to identify barriers that must be overcome. In many cases, the barriers became the basis for goals and priorities for future action.

In some groups, the questions also asked for possible action to move the blended approach forward. That data has not been included here but has been considered with the other data regarding suggestions and goals. The following list was compiled from the 26 meetings and duplication was eliminated. It represents all of the major ideas put forward by participants with respect to potential, barriers and strengths.

#### Potential

Participants in discussion groups were asked to give their individual views on the draft policy framework with respect to a blended approach to early learning and care. Most, if not all, participants saw potential in the approach and in the draft framework, albeit with reservations. Following is a summary of the responses, in their own words.

#### Regarding Philosophy

- Good idea – times have changed
- Makes sense to have learning and care combined – KIDS LEARN EVERYDAY!!
- Develops a common vision for what will help families and children
- Recognition that learning and care are intertwined and holistic
- Recognition that children learn 24 hours a day in all environments
- Children learn through role models
- Uses the community development approach
- Equality for all involved
- Focus on whole child
- Everyone working on common goals
- Recognizes continuity and connection between caregiver and family
- Children have individual needs – the approach is more adaptable
- It is consistent with research
- Consistent with lifelong learning concept
- Would increase value/professional status
- Recognize need to reach more families and children
- Fits with intersectoral approach
- Provides an integrated approach
- Approach recognizes that working with children at an early age yields long term benefits
- Potential is there for
  - In-home therapy
  - More educated workers
  - Specialized teaching
  - More respite care
  - Toy library
  - More support
- Government agencies are listening to what people have to say
- Recognizes that we can do more and better together
- Can provide for Northern uniqueness
- Shared goals and vision
- Another piece to School<sup>PLUS</sup>
- Recognizes the importance of family involvement

- Promotes even a stronger community partnerships
- The first 3 years are recognized as being critical for learning, development
- Child development should be the focus regardless of the place the children are
- Helps the community raise a child
- Supports collaboration and respect between families and agencies
- Hub model – removal of obstacles

#### **Regarding Focus**

- Focus on younger ages
- Places child and family needs at the centre
- Provides a more needs based support to individual children and families
- Complements parenting and enhances and supports parenting
- Keeps children stimulated
- Helps parents get involved with children
- All children have a right to quality learning environments from birth (social, emotional, physical, creatively, intellectually)

#### **Regarding Supports**

- Parent and learning support
- Universal approaches provide more choices for parents of early childhood educators
- Easier for families to know it is all in one place
- Supports parenting skills
- Flexibility
- One care situation for infants, toddlers and children

- Can relieve parent stress
- Provides support for single parents
- Building healthy families helps them raise healthy children
- Can make high quality programs available to all families
- Improved communication between parents and caregivers

#### **Other Benefits**

- Will eliminate hierarchy
- Eliminate duplication of services
- It will work if all services are included from the beginning – health as well. Share the knowledge.”
- Less chance of child slipping through
- Interventions can be applied earlier
- Learning skills earlier
- Developmental milestones are maximized
- Team approach
- Shared values and goals
- Children are more ready for school
- Parents can receive education and work
- More effective use of available resources
- Seamless delivery of services (for child and family)
- An umbrella of children’s services with one entry point
- Opportunity for various agencies to work together

### **Barriers**

Participants in discussion groups were also asked to give their individual views on barriers or inhibitors that have to be overcome if the integrated or blended approach to early learning and care is to become a reality in Saskatchewan and in their own communities. Following is a summary of the responses, in their own words.

#### **Access**

- Poor access to regulated care – low number of spots, low subsidy, inadequate location/proximity
- Red tape
- Accessible transportation
- Information availability
- People, parents and providers don’t know about standards – no monitoring unless there is a complaint
- Access to services is limited once child is in education domain unless you pay for it
- Low access to coordinated healthcare (specialized services)

**Accountability/Quality**

- Lack of accountability
- Are we serving those who need it most? Is it happening as it is supposed to be? As targeted?
- Repercussions for not adhering to licensing guidelines. Where is the accountability?
- [Not] regulated preschools (ALL)
- Unlicensed/unregulated preschool programs
- Need clear definition of healthy child development determinants
- Lack of supervision of caregivers in small daycares/home setting
- Lack of monitoring of already regulated daycare (once a year is not enough)
- Staff to child ratio is important factor in good “quality” care
- No quality control
- How would you ensure accountability for informal care?
- [Lack of] definition of quality – What is quality care? What is quality learning?

**Costs/Funding/Resources**

- Cost for part time programs
- Lack of funding for supports
- Not enough funding for in home daycare
- Financial
- Our taxpayer base isn’t here to support accessible childcare
- Resources
- Difficulty in sharing resources
- Cost of healthy food
- Ounce of prevention (spend \$1.00 now or more later)
- Multiple funding sources – no provincial, Canadian strategic plan
- Healthcare- cost of medications
- Tax structure

**Universality**

- Lack of an umbrella organization to facilitate access for all programs
- Cost of childcare is disincentive to come to Saskatchewan
- Waiting lists
- Jurisdiction – on/off reserve? Health? Education?

- Only 8 fully inclusive centres in province – all centres should be inclusive

**Rural/Northern**

- Distances - Location – urban vs. rural program availability
- Nothing available rurally – small communities do not have access to as many resources as urban – maintain quality program in rural areas
- Rural (and Northern) isolation – sparsity
- Geographical barriers – geography of Saskatchewan
- Lack of trained people in the North
- Equipment/material/nutrition costs in the North
- Funding in the North (geographical, social, medical)
- Northern uniqueness
- Money to troubleshoot capacity at rural level
- Rural – distance, population, isolation
- No existing partnership or agreement with on-reserve children. Separate systems

**Staffing**

- Pay levels of daycare workers
- Lack of special needs training for childcare workers
- Nor enough range of services
- High staff turn-over
- Lack of qualified caregivers/staff
- Lack of interdisciplinary training programs
- High job stress for workers
- Lack of training opportunities
- Management skills

**Meeting Parent Needs**

- Lack of support for stay at home mothers
- Lack of choices – flexible, affordable options
- Parents need training (funds)
- [Lack of] classes in high school for child development
- Parents need capacity to keep their children cared for
- Lack of stable housing for families
- No licensed care for infants
- Road map into the maze! And out of the maze! – How do parents get to care?
- Bureaucracy, boundaries, vague programs

- Parental literacy issues
- Lack of flexibility in parent workplaces to participate fully in child-care needs
- [Not] providing for special needs of children and families
- Flexibility of hours is important, as strict 8 daytime hours are difficult for evening/shift work.
- Increasing numbers of children with challenges, higher needs
- No play areas – park unsafe (needles etc.) – Hard to find safe play areas
- Social assistance doesn't always cover everything – have to hound the worker
- Some families don't fit in current structure
- Diagnosis takes too long
- Respite not available for higher needs children

### **Knowledge and Attitudes**

- Awareness
- Misconceptions
- Lower understanding of importance of learning and care
- Lack of knowledge about parenting and childcare
- Parenting needs to be valued – as much as careers in the work force
- Employers and corporations need to be more involved and responsible
- Prairie agricultural values that families should care for their own
- Learning is universal and childcare is not
- Parents willing to pay for education but not for care
- Lack of male perspective – feminized profession
- Custodial vs. quality – childcare is not just babysitting
- [Lack of] shared vision
- Misunderstanding of “All”
- Lack of volunteers, parental involvement – apathy
- Spreading mistrust among agencies – no long term planning, mandates muddled
- How do we break the cycle?
- Label the child to get funding
- “Old school” way of thinking

- People in government don't understand realities within communities and what children/families need.
- Worker counselling [teen mother] to quit school
- Confidentiality issues
- Don't value childcare workers or parents
- Fear of external agencies

### **Working/Planning Relationships**

- Getting everyone TOGETHER – systems are fragmented
- Not letting go of control – need to come together for benefits of all - Not broad Intersectoral collaboration
- Competing policy initiatives (Health care vs. social services)
- Vulnerable to political climate – initiatives driven by political will
- Municipal government policies
- Cooperation with government groups
- Gaps in services and duplication in services
- Undefined mandates
- Stove piping and territorialism
- Too much government control
- Government still develops policy in isolation without parents and agency involvement
- Traditional separation between caregivers/educators
- Communication between agencies
- Health issues
- Sask Housing – can't run a Day Home in its housing
- Establish Canadian policy – not just provincial
- Childcare system does not have an equal partnership with learning

### **Programming**

- No standards for unregulated care
- Too much television results in spelling and language delays
- Reaching the average parent
- Challenge – all children
- Common understanding of needs of children
- Duplication of services
- Prekindergarten program should serve people intended to serve: stick to criteria
- Lack of/no specialists (pediatrician, speech therapist, child psychologist)

**Care/Learning Centres/Programs**

- Space – limited building space
- Lack of support for current programs
- Hours of services/programming don't meet families needs
- Lack of understanding of cultural issues and acceptance (both ways)
- Cooperatives/parent-run preschools need a voice
- Kids in more than 1 daycare – as many as 3 care programs for one family to access

**Conditions/Situations**

- High teen pregnancy
- Poverty
- Chemical dependency
- Culture and language differences
- Transient population
- Government regulations – some are too rigid/non bending
- Both parents working
- Racism
- Behaviour of children
- Children fall through the cracks

**Strengths**

Participants in discussion groups were asked to give their individual views on strengths that exist in the province or in their own communities that will support the integrated or blended approach to early learning and care becoming a reality. In many cases, participants identified existing programs and supports that currently exist, and they also identified attitudes that currently exist. Often acronyms for programs were used. Following is a summary of the responses, in their own words

**Existing programs, initiatives and services such as**

- Community Action Plan for Children
- Canada prenatal nutrition program
- Successful mothers support program
- Teen and young parent program
- In home support
- Kid Sport
- Story Hour
- Child Action Plan
- Early Childhood Intervention program (ECIP, NECIP, PECIP)
- ESSP
- Kids First
- MOM
- TYPP
- FAST (Families and Schools Together)
- IY
- Children's Action Plan (CAP)
- SMSP
- Early Learning Network
- Literacy education – story sacks, Come read with Me
- SCEP
- Prekindergarten
- Aboriginal Headstart
- Early Learning Centre
- SDSS
- Good Food Box
- Nutrition programs
- CHADD
- YMCA day camps
- Public Health Nurse
- Family Resource Centres
- Churches provide EC programs
- Community schools
- Social skills programs
- Fits with School<sup>PLUS</sup>
- Elders Program
- Early entrance program
- Childcare for healthy kids
- Community kitchen
- After school programs
- Turning pages together
- Breakfast programs
- Preschool, prekindergartens offered in schools
- Community association programs
- Libraries offer affordable programs
- “The Incredible Parent Directory”
- La Leche League – opportunity for mothers to connect and build support network of like minded individuals or those with similar experiences

- Twins and triplets groups
- Prince Albert AHS program
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters
- Community Networking Coalition
- Family Futures – Children’s Haven
- Well baby clinics
- Immunization programs
- Read Along Program
- Coordinators and outreach workers at schools
- Community rooms in community schools
- SUNTEP
- School parent councils
- The HOPE Program
- DEAL
- Family Advocacy Program
- Regina Area Early Children Network (RAEC Network) – up to date services
- Access for high risk/special needs after age 3 years
- Successful pilot programs from around the province

#### **Knowledge/Attitudes**

- Greater opportunity for creativity with this approach
- Everyone agrees it should happen
- Family focus
- Validated by research
- Shared vision
- Recognizing the importance of Early Learning
- One major strength is we are stubborn and committed
- We are creative, spend considerable time brainstorming independently, often on our own time to enhance, incorporate and partner effectively within the existing framework
- Less territorialism and higher prairie mentality to survive
- Willingness to address issues and think outside the box
- Respect among agencies
- Inclusion Principle
- Commitment of service providers
- Recognizing that framework is outcome based and accountable; however, who will train people to set up measuring outcomes

and provide the resources to measure outcomes?

- Increasing knowledge

#### **Government Action/Support**

- Early learning and care are policy priorities for politicians
- The attention being given to the subject – government seems to genuinely want to make a change
- Daycare standards/legislation
- Assessments by Child and Youth Services
- Subsidies for child care
- Funding – have some but need more
- Some transportation services now exist
- Willing to work together – interdepartmentally within all levels of government
- Regionalization in DCRE
- Federal commitment – federal/provincial networking to promote the vision
- Longer parental leave

#### **Working Together**

- Recognition of gaps in services
- Existing partnerships
- Supportive family, friends, child-care workers
- We have many interested individuals/groups willing to work together/common values/value children and early learning
- Some school board support
- Local/ organization of groups and organizations/provincial – working together
- The beginning of a collective approach
- Interagency cooperation
- Strong network between organizations and government
- Community willingness to work together
- Aboriginal presence and input: partnerships

#### **Program Features**

- Cooperatives
- Parental involvement
- Parenting classes
- Focus on children’s outcomes
- Effective childcare in place
- Regulated daycares have supports to flag/target high-risk children
- Accountability
- Respite care

- Educated staff in childcare centres
- Breastfeeding support
- Some good daycares
- Open door policy in schools

#### **Training/Information**

- Teachers are being educated well
- Training opportunities are increasing
- Better informed professionals and public
- SIAST program for Early Childhood Educators

#### **Community Support**

- Commitment from agencies
- School boards have available facilities to house care programs
- Good people in the field (caregivers, directors, health nurses, doctors)

- Counsellors for parents/children together
- Volunteers
- Strong community based programs
- Vocal parents/knowledge

#### **Others**

- Community facilities such as recreation complexes
- Models exist for quality ELC
- Accepting diversity in families
- Concept of an investment to ensure our future society
- Proactive approach

## Appendix A–2

### Summary of Individual Goal Cards by Themes

This document summarizes the themes from 1500 individual goal cards from twenty discussion forum focus groups. The cards were sorted according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development cross national policy development themes, as reported in *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care, 2001*. The policy development themes provided a guide for an initial card sort after each meeting. The summary provides a general representation of the many ideas from the twenty sites.

#### 1. Expanding Universal Access

- Make a significant government commitment to ELC with identified deliverables
- Provide affordable, equal access to quality childcare and learning for all children and families regardless of: socio-economic status, culture, special needs, demographics
- Offer subsidies for childcare and learning to all families
- Make Pre-K available for all 3-4 year olds with day care where needed
- Provide infant spaces and spaces for 12 to 18 month children
- Provide access to special support and services for all children with disabilities and their families
- Provide access to transportation where needed for accessibility
- Provide access for all to early learning resources and specialists for diagnosis, programs and therapy
- Provide an approach that does not work against parents who choose to stay at home to provide nurturing environment for children
- Take care that work force attachment doesn't devalue the work of caring for our children
- Provide services that fit the needs and the conditions of the community even though it may look different.

**“Step back, decide what is developmentally appropriate for all children at (target) age; look around community to see what already exists, add a few dollars, stir in parental involvement and nurture!”(Saskatoon Human Service Provider)**

#### 2. Providing Quality Learning and Care

- Develop assessment tools that follow each child throughout childhood and are available during transition periods
- Ensure accountability at provincial and local levels: government, caregivers, educators, agencies
- Develop desired outcomes focused on the child and tie to funding
- Develop standards for care and for learning: curriculum, care, facilities
- Provide subsidies for supplies and programming for day cares
- Provide formal and informal support system for all childcare providers, both centre based and home based.
- Create a classification system for caregiver positions: associate, assistant, professional and tie to wages
- Create a staff licensing body
- Develop an evaluation system for childcare workers
- Review daycare regulations based upon best practices
- Regulate private childcare; create monitoring system

- Provide culturally diverse programs
- Programs should be accountable to families they serve – implement outcomes with each family
- Review Human Service policies for family to ensure they are child friendly, family friendly policies and practices
- Develop standards around staff development, hiring, screening and pay.

### 3. Coherence and Co-ordination

- Create a common/shared vision that includes the views of the community
- Provide clear direction from government that will support local initiatives
- Establish a long term plan for all agencies and players to reach goals
- Coordinate service delivery for families that incorporates respectful policies and approaches
- Create a team approach locally and provincially
- Understand each other: roles, mandates, responsibilities
- Improve coherence and coordination by moving all learning and care to one Department OR create a children's unit in all departments involved with accountability OR create a new department
- Reduce fragmentation of programs and initiatives to provide a seamless approach that is not top heavy
- Create networking opportunities: conferences, shared educational opportunities.
- Choose leaders who are open and innovative
- Recognize and analyze current successful programs and initiatives and expand them rather than create a series of new programs
- Create an effective central coordinating service that is fully knowledgeable of all resources available – a directory that is known and accessible to all families and providers
- Develop cooperation between education and childcare centres and daycare providers
- Align policies and mandates across departments so that they present a coherent plan to the public
- Above all focus on the child, not on the institution.

### 4. Exploring Investments

#### Funding Options

- Pay moms to stay at home if they choose to
- Allow daycares in Saskatchewan Property Management homes
- Provide tax benefits for stay at home caregivers
- Provide subsidies similar to Quebec for all families
- Provide a way to offset cost of lost income if a parent stays at home
- Involve employers in blended approach to provide additional support to employees

#### Structural Options

- Create babysitting agencies for those who want to know the caregiver
- Provide family daycares where all siblings are welcome
- Daycares and preschools housed in schools
- Establish parenting centres where specialists and consultants and preschools can be integrated to provide information, service, education opportunities for parents and staff, transportation
- Government surrender some controls and let us network together without the boundaries and restrictions.

- Local reference panels to work with DCRE
- Committee of stakeholders representing every local program both on and off reserve
- Regular scheduled meetings of local stakeholders
- Structure hub towns for larger areas with a coordinator to facilitate and communicate
- Build in and around local structures
- Organize government services around the child
- Look at the School<sup>PLUS</sup> model, determine what works and expand it.

#### **5. Staff Training and Working Conditions**

- Create a four year degree program with specialties
- Create joint ventures between regional colleges, high schools, communities where daycare facilities are used in schools for training
- Licensing must include levels of preparation and in-service
- Make affordable education for caregivers available in all parts of the province including the North
- Education for caregivers to include training to work with children with disabilities and their families
- Develop a larger group of generalists and rely on specialists to do consulting and training
- Ensure better child/caregiver ratios
- Make incentives for further training available
- Address variance between daycare workers and other jobs that command more pay: aides in school, babysitters, secretaries, house cleaners, waitresses, etc.
- Recognize caregivers as teachers, not babysitters
- Need to feel valued/ have job satisfaction
- Treat family childcare homes that are licensed and qualified with respect – be aware of qualifications and dedication
- Recognize that quality early care is learning
- Recruit and stabilize quality staff
- Change the thinking and philosophy regarding the importance of early learning and care.

#### **6. Pedagogy Frameworks For Young Children**

- Regulate learning
- Create a framework that private caregivers can follow
- Develop curriculum to support learning through play that can also be support to the family
- Ensure developmentally appropriate best practice based on research and expertise of professionals and families
- Create a shared vision of what should happen in pre-schools
- Provide a universal set of criteria for all programs to follow that parents would know about and understand
- Review current curricula in day care and learning
- Provide resources for gifted children
- Provide opportunities for stay at home parents
- Provide access to a variety of resources and tools for care givers
- Hold group meetings in the community to develop guidelines, themes and ideas for use at home by all parents
- Focus on language development and good health practices.

#### **7. Engaging parents, families and communities**

- Involve families in the vision – take direction from the community

- Recognize and respect the Aboriginal voice
- Provide family focused activities for interaction and learning
- Understand and provide support to families that want to stay home and take care of their own children
- Hold regular meetings between agencies, caregivers and parents
- Involve parents in designing programs
- Identify parent/family responsibilities – family tasks
- Give special needs parents a voice
- Start involvement at birth or before and gently guide, making it fun
- Schools need to work with parents to identify needs
- Get fathers involved
- Provide easily accessible local information about resources: one place to go for all information you need
- Present parents with choice and let them make the decision
- Advertise, teach every new mom what we know about early learning and the importance of talking to your baby.

## **8. Parent Education**

- Offer new and innovative approaches to parent education
- Families need programs that show them how to interact/play with their children
- Create parent support groups for sharing learning about quality care
- Provide a variety of learning programs to suit their needs: childcare, education for themselves, parenting and family literacy, family planning, quality time with children
- Pre-natal classes in parenting
- Include parent education in parent centres
- Provide supports for all families regardless of risk level
- Develop more inter-generational programs in childcare
- Use school system to teach parenting right along with other practical courses
- Promote parenting as being fun – use parenting camps
- Provide education about FAS and its effect on the child, family, community
- Promote the “every family needs help” philosophy
- Provide funding to parent programs in mental health
- Recognize the expertise of every parent and honour that in the programs
- Educate parents about what quality care looks like and what they should expect in care and learning situations
- Provide education support for teens, single parents, grandparents
- Provide family literacy centres in each community
- Build capabilities in families – don’t assume they can’t provide care if supported and given confidence
- Provide incentives for parents to get an education
- Begin with birth to 3 years in communities for all parents and caregivers
- Professionals and trained specialists share their knowledge with parents regularly in workshops
- Use parenting programs as respite for parents.

## **9. Public Awareness/Education**

- Educate society about the importance of early learning and care

- Find a dynamic person or idea to spread the seed with enthusiasm: “Dr. Philisms” and parenting 101 shows
- Market the idea like a wonderful new product. Use successful campaigns like MADD
- We brought the “Brier” to Saskatchewan; let’s bring the ECD approach to SK the same way. Bring everyone together with excitement and enthusiasm
- Get business sponsors to run ads
- Involve the business community in supporting early learning
- Promotion can be done by school boards, religious communities and cultural organizations
- Advertise it as the most important time in a child’s life
- Recognize the benefit of valuing children for everyone
- Helping one child has a ripple effect that helps the community in positive and lasting ways.
- We are responsible for all the children not just our own
- Gather a group of parents from across Saskatchewan who have a child with a disability – hear their voices
- Bring forward the facts and the research about the immense possibilities of investing as a society when children are young
- Let people know what value is, what it looks like so they will value it and expect it – give concrete examples
- Discuss this need across political lines
- Work for buy in for all segments of the population
- Provide understanding for what “It Takes A Community” really means
- Use billboards, radio, TV –public level of understanding becomes heightened as the level of understanding about seat belts, smoking risks.
- “Parents on Board” community education about brain development in early years
- Provincial recognition nights.

## Appendix A – 3

### Goals/Priorities as Established by the Discussion Groups

After working as individuals and in small groups, the goal statements of all members of each discussion group were combined into a list of priority statements. The list below is a compilation of those priority statements arranged by themes with duplications removed.

#### Awareness

- Make the public aware of the importance of early learning and care in order to change societal attitudes to early learning and care. This would include the needs of young children and the changing demands of parenting. This awareness would include the importance of quality early learning and care including information about brain development. Those who need to be more aware includes parents, teachers, service groups, grandparents, police, government, doctors, public health employees, employers – everyone.
- Work to create a sense of the value of parenting.
- Decrease the emphasis on jobs for young mothers unless nurturing is taken care of.
- Clearly define the terminology – what is care? What is a caregiver?
- Educate parents about the importance of quality early learning and care, how they can provide them, and what quality looks like.
- Have cabinet ministers, and government workers spend time in places of poverty or on a bus touring places of poverty to gain an understanding of the needs

#### Specific Suggestions for Awareness

- Suggestions
  - a. Give information out at the hospital
  - b. Use the media
  - c. Hold community meetings
  - d. Find a dynamic spokesperson
  - e. Put ELC in places that people frequent

#### Accessibility

- Determine who is not being served, determine the barriers, and then ensure access for all children and families.
- Everyone should have access to and be able to afford top quality care – regardless of income.
- Reduce red tape for accessing programs to make them parent friendly and shorten waiting times so that services are impartially provided to all who need them
- Provide free nursery and pre-school for all children.

#### **Transportation**

- Provide access to parents so they can access programs.

#### Childcare Programs

- Need flexibility and longer hours to meet the needs of all parents including shift workers.
- A package of information including the qualifications of the workers needs to be given to parents when their children first enter the daycare.

- More spaces are required – decrease ratios
- More infant care spaces are needed.
- Quality facilities for daycares

### **Childcare Workers**

- Address wage disparities to raise status, prestige and attract more and better-educated workers

### **Pedagogy**

- Develop curriculum for daycares – including life skills and based on what's best for children.
- Access to good, safe daily diet programs
- Age appropriate resources for early years
- Children have time to play – balance between informal play and structure

### **Accountability**

- Childcare workers and programs should be evaluated and accountable.
- Accountability at the local level and provincial level (review of services and providers)
- All programs regulated - Develop standards, outcome measures and accountability for all programs.
- Better universal standards for early learning around hiring, pay and staff development.

### **Funding**

- Need stable, sustainable, sufficient funding.
- Need continuation of funding of successful programs, not just seed money.
- Funding for pay equity, operating costs, capital costs and wage increases.
- Make funding available to private and non-profit programs.
- Provide support for workers with day homes, especially with part-time care provisions.
- Fund NGO's such as SCEP.
- Flexibility in resource allocation to meet local community needs.

### **Subsidies**

- Subsidy for parents for non-licensed childcare
- Subsidy follows the child to give parent choice.
- Pay money for care/housing directly to the provider, not the parent.
- Fees set so all parents have access to quality daycare regardless of income.
- Raise the subsidy ceiling above \$1900.

### **Parent Incentives**

- Provide tax incentives or other supports and incentives for parents who stay home and recognize the value of parents staying home.
- Provide the tax benefit to whomever provides the parenting
- More money for expenses, particularly those with children with disabilities.
- Provide paid leave to new mothers, working or not, who breast feed for more than 18 months.
- Provide supports to parents who choose home care in their own homes.
- Provide assistance to single parents to access daycare and nursery schools. Even if they are not working, the children benefit from a learning environment outside the home.
- More support (medical/dental) for the working poor.

### **Government Action**

- Need continuity, consistency and commitment in approach, independent of party politics with decisions based on values, not politics
- Need understanding by DCRE financial workers to treat people with dignity and respect.
- Respect the direction of the multilateral agreement.
- Cut government bureaucracy – merge departments and put the money in the hands of those who work with children.
- Provide health plan benefits for whomever provides the parenting
- Have licensed midwives available with hospital privileges.
- Begin now on provincial standards for learning and care. (Less talk – more action)

### **Government Collaboration**

- Involve the Department of Health
- Have one government department handle funding for the needs of the targeted group.
- Government departments work together for children (including ministers collaborating)
- Government departments involved in human service delivery need to work together to avoid duplication.
- Give up turf, think outside the box, and clarify mandates in government.
- Listen to the people working in the field.
- Close loopholes, but have flexible government rules and regulations

### **Helping Families and Parents**

- Provide better tracking of families and children
- Provide a seamless approach (both horizontal and vertical – that is as children grow older and also as they move from place to place and program to program). Just because children are in school doesn't mean their care needs are met. SchoolPLUS is heading in the right direction.
- Provide a single point of entry for families to enter the system and gain information. This point of entry should have flexible hours.
- Place emphasis on outreach, not paperwork.

### **Parenting Supports**

- More emphasis on parenting involvement with children
- All agencies have a consistent approach in dealing with families
- Community organizations and agencies become more family friendly (e.g. breastfeeding, elevators)
- More home visits by Public Health Nurses
- Respite services for families, especially those with special needs
- Make families feel comfortable in accessing services
- Need to meet basic needs (so that housing is not an incentive to have babies) and help parents to become good providers – build capabilities and confidence.
- Support for parents, especially single parents – work with them and not just take their children away.

### **Parent Choice**

- Supports for parents to have choices.
- Parent Involvement/choices/options to select what is best for them.

### **Supporting Teen Mothers**

- Need people around them to understand them
- Need adult support person besides parents
- Need fathers involved – programs for fathers in a place where they feel comfortable
- Retreats for parents
- Inexpensive place to access cribs, car seats.
- More access to positive programs – recreation night for parents and children – a time for parents to visit

### **Planning**

#### **Build on Strengths**

- Build on what's already successful – stop the duplication of services and provide funding for already established programs – enhance what's there before adding new ones
- Apply research to practice
- Learn from the past and work on prevention
- Support community programs
- Use successful experiences from other provinces.

#### **Planning Processes**

- Clear transparent process
- Realistic goals that all parties can support
- Develop programs based on what's good for children – focus on family and child
- Common sense approach with choice
- Do needs assessments and continue to monitor and evaluate
- Involve and listen to parents in planning
- Change must be family and community rooted.
- Long-term planning, not year to year
- Programs should run year round

#### **Planning - Program Suggestions**

- Register baby-sitting and nanny services to provide in-home care
- Provide more programs for infants and toddlers
- Support more interaction between parents and children to prevent developmental delays.
- Develop a cost-shared pilot with DCRE and Learning to test the vision.
- Close the gaps – between infant care and maternity leave (12 mo and 18 mo) and between pre-k and kindergarten.
- Physical activity as part of all programs.

### **Children with Special Needs**

- Funding for special needs around the clock care.
- Better intervention – better early detection of special needs with complete first screening in the hospital at birth.
- All early education environments focus on inclusion
- Program funding for gifted
- Ensure programming for FAS, ADD and others
- More specialists to support children and parents
- More parent aids – resources, information and transportation
- More education for caregivers on disabilities, emergency care, and ELC

- Monthly meetings of everyone involved with a child
- Better communication and referral between programs
- More support groups for parents of children with special needs.
- Availability of resources/assistance to help children with special needs move into regular classrooms.
- Support while collecting data for diagnosis.
- People with specialities come to home or childcare setting to help with understanding and setting up program

### **Schools and School Divisions**

- Pre-kindergarten in all schools
- Supportive teachers who take an interest (in ELC)
- Decrease fragmentation and combine services
- Encourage pregnant girls to stay in school
- Include classes on parenting – begin in Middle Years
- Have young mothers talk to young girls (why not to get pregnant)
- Daycares in schools – before, during and after – can be used in conjunction with parenting classes and operated in conjunction with ELC staff training programs
- More infant cares in schools

### **Training and Education**

- Provide incentives to help train specialized services in Saskatchewan and encourage them to stay in Saskatchewan
- Sponsorships for First Nation youth to become specialists.
- Education for caregivers in the community on a continuing basis
- Training and professional development for all staff
- Standards for training and funding tied to standards – training for everyone
- Accessible, affordable training for childcare workers (free?) to increase their numbers
- Make workers and parents aware of training opportunities
- Shorter time periods for ELC correspondence courses.
- Funding for training for caregivers for children with special needs
- Semi-annual or annual conferences to encourage networking, share resources and measure progress

### **Parent Education**

- More government funding for parents to educate themselves.
- Provide funding to parent programs
- Mandatory parenting classes
- More support groups for parents – help parents be better role models
- Opportunities for parents to learn in a setting with their own children.
- Family-parent resource centres – accessible, approachable, friendly multi-learning techniques
- Parent education classes to include literacy classes and parenting
- Remove the stigma around classes and raise the prestige and profile of parenting classes.
- Programs to run in the evenings
- Professionals share information they gather at conferences with parents and families

### **Working Together**

- Government and community consultation – no top-down attitude

- All service providers outcome oriented – working together – less red tape – place the needs of children first
- Focus on a family oriented approach: childcare case conference partnership and constant contact between service providers and parents
- Assessment tool to follow child through health and education system
- Partnerships between agencies and parents – understanding each other and give up turf
- Consistent, seamless services for special needs children from birth to adulthood.
- Real cooperation among agencies and organizations including health and education with a structure so it happens and so they have to work together
- Communities cooperating to share resources and equipment
- A community hub model so one place can offer all services – health, care and education
- A dispute resolution process to manage/resolve issues as they arise
- Open lines of communication among all parties so no misconceptions/hidden agendas.
- Government support local initiatives, including the informal

### **Community Action and Involvement**

- Do community needs assessments
- Individualism for communities, choice
- Hands on local involvement
- United community approach and decision-making
- More cooperation, joint planning between communities- criteria for funding
- Local coordination of programs to avoid duplication
- Family resource centre
- Start play groups to increase literacy, motor, social skills

### **North/Rural Needs**

- Create an awareness of childcare needs in Northern communities and how they are different from the rest of the province.
- Provide daycares in areas that don't have them – in every community to overcome isolation.
- Equalize opportunities between urban and rural (recognize cost differentials)
- Expand services to rural areas and smaller communities to match urban areas.
- Have mobile programs that go to where the children are.
- Need more funding in the North for geographic and social reasons.
- Funding for buildings for childcare programs in the North.
- Funding for childcare options in rural areas.
- Sask Housing allow home day cares.
- More home visiting programs in rural areas.
- Recruitment of specialists for the community, especially rural areas and the North (more aboriginal specialists)
- Access to specialists in rural areas including mental health
- Toy and book lending library to be shared by all agencies in the North.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

- Provide seamless programs between reserve and off-reserve settings
- Remove cultural bias and barriers
- Promote understanding of urban First Nations people – educate people that they pay taxes and have difficulty obtaining support from either bands or white bureaucracy.

- Respect the demographics of Saskatchewan
- Focus on positives that are happening on Reserves and in other communities
- Teach traditional methods of parenting to First Nations parents.
- The values on the sheet are principles, not values – Elders need to be involved in discussions about values
- Provide more cultural experiences in the health system and justice system.

#### **Gender Sensitivity**

- More fathers need to be involved in ELC and feel welcome.

#### **Older Youth**

- Change the Criminal Youth Justice Act – it allows children to do criminal activities for adults and puts youth at risk
- Treatment centres for addicted youth – need more than ‘detox’
- More supervised activities for young teens
- Sage places for children under 16 to go
- More recreation and sports programs for age 6 and up (after school, week-ends, summer), especially for children with disabilities – they are isolated.
- Need more programs for youth to prevent problems, particularly Aboriginal youth

#### **Regarding First Nations and Métis Nation Consultations**

- Input needs to be at the beginning so that it can be taken back to people for a response. Then the representatives can speak with more knowledge. More time will be needed for this process. Then formal consultations need to be between governments – First Nations and the Federal Government, the Métis Nation and Governments.

## Appendix A – 4

### Highest Ranking Priorities

At many of the meetings, the group was asked to establish priorities from among the goals that they had established. Following is a combined list of the top two priorities established by the groups.

- Put children first not politics (lack of money)
- Central place for parents to go to find out about resources, staffed by workers (including health care workers) and make information known to parents.
- Adequate funding & emotional support for stay-at-home parents, especially with special needs (2)
- Fund buildings for childcare programs, especially in the North
- Raise subsidy ceiling above \$1900
- Long-term commitment of stable money for sustainability (4)
- Better recognition and wages for care-givers - Government funding so daycare wages match the education requirements (5)
- Mandatory communication guidelines between childcare workers and parents
- Agencies providing service/support must work together – needs of kids first (3)
- Recognize & strengthen existing programs before adding new ones – keep the good but change what isn't
- Support parents who choose to stay home (incentives) (2)
- Strong medical support and more professional staff to provide diagnostic and treatment services (e.g., PT, OT, SLP) to reduce wait lists in every area of the province - Provide incentives to specialized services to train & remain in Sask (Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and Speech and Language Pathologists) – ask students what it would take to keep you here (3)
- A common vision and access for all, regardless of income, to ELC – criteria that allows all families to be served – flexibility, inclusion. Meet needs of all children in all communities – not just at-risk (4)
- Quality education & resources for all caregivers (parent, family & other) (3)
- Accessible quality, affordable childcare for all children - All children 0-5 included - Access for all children/families & care (everything early learning can offer), more services available (3)
- More support groups for parents: new parents, single parents, prenatal, kids with special needs
- Better wages or subsidies for parents
- Cut government bureaucracy, merge departments & put the \$\$\$ in hands of those who work with kids
- Structures & funding to reduce competition and increase collaboration /cooperation
- Make everyone aware (education) of the blended approach (parents, teachers, people whose kids are grown, service groups, grandparents, police, government) - Educate parents about importance of quality early learning experiences & how they can provide them and what they look like (meaningful play) (2)
- Educate parents, caregivers, about what's available in terms of services (e.g., family advocacy worker)
- Commit money, resources, and qualified people, including for in-home caregivers

- Use IWRAP with child & family at centre so services adapt to family needs
- Long-term planning, not year to year
- Work to provide more & better education & training & more incentives for early childhood education providers (target population)
- Holistic childhood programs enhanced (e.g., language & culture)
- Creating a sense of the value of parenting.

## Appendix A – 5

### Evaluation of Discussion Process by Participants

At the conclusion of each meeting evaluation sheets were provided to the participants in order to determine whether the process goals of the discussion forums were met. Participants were asked to comment on their comfort level with the process and provided the opportunity for their views to be heard. Three hundred forty-one goal sheets were returned. All but four participants expressed a positive response about comfort level with the process and whether that process allowed them to be heard. The four participants who disagreed would have preferred a face-to-face meeting with government officials to present their views.

The evaluation form also gave participants the opportunity to give one last piece of advice to the Department of Human Resources and Employment and to the Department of Learning. There were many pieces of advice suggested by participants; however seven areas of response were repeatedly voiced across sites and stood out in relation to all of the comments:

- The largest area of response asked that the decision makers listen to the results of the consultation and the information provided by participants. Many felt that the information and ideas expressed were excellent and provided good information for planning next steps.
- The second largest response to the call for advice was a simple assertive request to take action and move the agenda forward.
- A third area advised that the government should recognize and support what is already there. Existing programs were thought to be worthy of replicating to all children and families and that there was no need to reinvent the wheel.
- A fourth area - working together- was mentioned often and was expressed as more frequent communication, and involving parents and the community as partners in meeting the needs of parents and children.
- A fifth area was the importance of including Health in moving Early Learning and Care forward. Several of the participants who attended Human Service Provider meetings were from the health sector.
- A sixth area was a need to see more supports for families of children with special needs from funding expenses to providing emotional supports and the need for more specialists.
- A seventh area was providing more support for stay at home parents.

Other areas mentioned more than once were:

- A simplified vision that shows what nurturing and care looks like
- The need to see the Department of Human Resources and Employment workers understand and support community development and respect and extend friendly support to parents

Several evaluation sheets congratulated the Departments on what they already do, encouraged them not to give up and wished them luck in carrying on the good work.

## Appendix A – 6

### Symposium – Policy Discussions

#### PM – Gov't Policy Group

##### Low Impact/Not Difficult:

- ELC website – user friendly (across literacy levels), quality check list, services available, applications (entry, subsidy), rural accessibility
- review human service legislation for ELC friendliness
- develop a toll-free info/helpline with links to education and case management, supports
- clarify for parents an appeal/conflict resolution process
- bring all human services departments to the table ie: Health, Justice, Learning
- create dep't of children and families
- single ELC/ECD administration
- ensure both economic and social policies are considered
- establish coterminous boundaries

##### Low Impact/Challenging:

- establish a parent advocate office
- amend and enhance labour legislative to: support families with the choices to work, study at home, encourage child friendly work places
- sharing of info on a need to know basis – NGO's and gov't
- funding should be made available for community planning to determine the types of ELC services needed
- identify programs and gaps to ensure every child has access and no programs are duplicated
- develop communication strategy for families re: services
- develop a framework for a strategy/forum for dialogue between child care educators and school and gov't
- set program quality standards, ongoing monitoring and review regularly based on best practice and research
- all early childhood programs regulated and monitored based on best practices
- set up integrated policy development mechanisms
- policy frameworks are based on the principal of value children and parents

##### High Impact/Not Difficult:

- provide more money and stability
- materials and programs offered in multiple languages
- integrate databases
- minimum wage for nannies
- resolve on/off reserve funding issues
- build mechanisms for co-ordination of policy and program development with FNIB
- develop legislation re: licensing of care workers
- subsidy follows child and parent (allows parent choice)
- develop business partnership strategies re: incentives, grants, public recognition, etc.

##### High Impact/Challenging:

- family friendly labour standards and policies – longer paid mat leave, family leave in SK, flexible work hours
- establish service delivery standards re: frequency and geographic access
- use prevention focus not acute care!
- establish accountability requirements for gov't funded service providers to ensure co-ordination and collaboration
- don't use minimum standards, use Best Practices instead
- develop realistic funding for infant child care

## Appendix A – 7

### Submissions Summary

The Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit (SIDRU) of the University of Regina received seven submissions. The submission documents will be sent to the Department of Community Resources and Employment and the Department of Learning for consideration, along with this report.

Following is a list of the submissions:

1. Mother and Primary Care Nurse
2. Family Literacy Coordinator/Facilitator, Mother, Grandmother.
3. The Canadian Association of Young Children (CAYC), the Regina Early Learning Centre and the Early Childhood area in the Faculty of Education, University of Regina.
4. Mini Go/Tiny Go School at the Family Place, Weyburn, Saskatchewan.
5. Family Service Saskatchewan, an umbrella organization for eight family service organizations in Saskatchewan.
6. SCEP, A program for young children with Socialization, Communication and Education Problems and their Families
7. Childcare Advocacy Association of Canada: Seeing and Solving the Childcare Crises: Options for Progress.

**Appendix B**  
**Meeting Information**

**Appendix B – 1****Early Learning and Care Meeting Schedule**

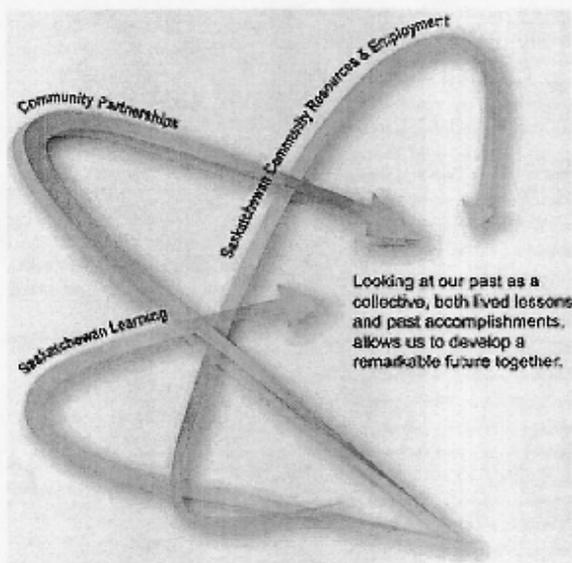
<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Morning</b>	<b>Afternoon</b>	<b>Evening</b>
May 13	Regina		Service Providers	
May 17	North Battleford		Service Providers	Parents
May 18	Beauval		Service Providers	Parents
May 19	LaRonge		Service Providers	Parents
May 20	Tisdale		Service Providers	Parents
May 25	Prince Albert	Teen Mothers	Service Providers	Parents
May 26	Saskatoon		Service Providers	Parents
May 27	Saskatoon	Provincial Aboriginal Group		
May 28	Saskatoon	Provincial Professional Groups		
May 31	Swift Current		Service Providers	Parents
June 1	Yorkton		Service Providers	Parents
June 2	Carlyle		Service Providers	Parents
June 8	Moose Jaw		Service Providers	Parents
June 9	Regina			Parents
June 10	Regina	Provincial DCRE and Learning Group		
June 17	Saskatoon	Symposium		

**Appendix B – 2****Early Learning and Care  
Discussion Meetings  
May and June 2004****Agenda**

- **Welcome**
  - Introduction
  - Purpose and Goals for the session
  - Overview of the day/expectations
  - How the information will be used
- **ELC Presentation**
  - Definition
  - History/context
    - Provincial
    - Local
  - Framework goals
  - Key messages
- **Response to Framework**
  - Discussion questions
- **Moving Forward**
  - How can people/groups work together to take action
  - Setting priorities – first steps
- **Planning**
- **Next Steps**
  - Symposium
  - Final report
- **Closing**
  - Evaluation

## Appendix B – 3

### *The Momentum is Growing* Looking At Our Past - Provincial *Early Learning and Care* Policies and Programs



- **1992 – Child Care Review “Breaking New Ground in Child Care”** – this review combined information from consultation with communities, research and literature, and sharing of programming knowledge and experience to identify child care needs and service directions.
- **1993 – Preschool Support Pilot Projects** in LaLoche and Prince Albert.
- **1993 - Saskatchewan’s Action Plan for Children** - policy framework introduced laying the ground work for working together across sectors and advancing a province wide children’s agenda.
- **1996 – Prekindergarten Program** – 26 programs initiated in Community Schools. By 2004, expansion has led to 100 programs in 45 communities.
- **1996 – Initiation of Wage Enhancement for Child Care Workers.**
- **1997 – Early Childhood Development** was identified as one of the top social priorities for the province.
- **1998 – “Building on Community Success: Creating a Long Term Plan for Saskatchewan’s Youngest Children and Their Families”** policy framework released and community consultations begun.
- **2000- Saskatchewan’s Early Childhood Development Unit** is created.
- **2000 – Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement** signed by First Ministers.
- **2001 – KidsFirst** program launched with funding from the Early Childhood Development Agreement.
- **2003 – Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care** agreed to by Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services.
- **2003 – Childcare Saskatchewan** – the largest expansion of child care in the history of the province takes place. 500 new child care spaces are created in 2003, with plans to develop 1200 new spaces over 4 years.
- **2003 – The Ministers Advisory Board on Early Learning and Care** newly formed to advise jointly the Minister of Learning and the Minister of Community Resources and Employment.

## Appendix B – 4

Government of  
Saskatchewan

## FACTSHEET

## Early Learning and Care in Saskatchewan

### *What does early learning and care look like in Saskatchewan?*

- ♦ **Licensed child care centres and family child care homes** — For the 75,000 children in the province under 6 years of age, there are about 5,800 licensed child care spaces (centres and family child care homes), spaces for approximately 7.7% of children not yet in school full-time. About half of all licensed child care spaces are used by families who receive a subsidy to help pay for the services, 87% of whom are single parent families.
- ♦ **Prekindergarten Programs** — target three and four-year-old children living in vulnerable circumstances. Primarily located in Community Schools, there were approximately 1500 Prekindergarten spaces in the province in 2003-04. Prekindergarten focuses on children's self-esteem, language and social development and includes extensive family involvement.
- ♦ **KidsFirst Program** — is the first new program implemented under Saskatchewan's Early Childhood Development (ECD) Strategy. In 2002-03, *KidsFirst* provided services to 850 vulnerable families, including pregnant women and children up to age five. *KidsFirst* provides universal screening of all newborns and their families, intensive home visiting, child care and enhanced early learning opportunities and a range of community-based parent supports including literacy, parenting and nutrition education.
- ♦ **Early Childhood Intervention Program (ECIP)** — provides home-based support to families of children with disabilities including screening, identification and assessment, home visiting, developmental planning and family support. Approximately 614 children, birth to school age, and their families benefited from ECIP in 2003-04.
- ♦ **Early Entrance Program** — is available for three and four-year-old children with low incidence disabilities through Boards of Education across the province. In 2003-04, approximately 273 children benefited from this program.
- ♦ **Aboriginal Head Start** — this federally funded early intervention program addresses the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical needs of three and four-year-old children. The program includes extensive parental involvement. Approximately 754 urban and northern Aboriginal children benefited from this preschool program as of January 2004.
- ♦ **Informal Early Learning and Care Supports** — It is estimated for every child involved in a regulated or licensed care and learning arrangement, another 9 are in informal arrangements. These informal care and learning arrangements include preschools (sometimes referred to as nursery or play schools) library, music and recreation programs. Many families choose private child care arrangements or babysitters for the care of their children, many of whom may be friends, other family members, or neighbours.

### What have parents told us?

In 2001, Community Resources and Employment conducted a broad-based survey (*Saskatchewan Child Care Needs and Preferences Survey*) of 1,273 parents from across the province on their child care arrangements needs and preferences. The survey showed that:

- ♦ Parents' views are quite similar regardless of income, Aboriginal ancestry, and lone parent status or rural/urban location.
- ♦ Parents strongly prefer child care arrangements in their home by a parent, relative or other person (63%). About 12% prefer licensed centre-based or family day care.
- ♦ Half of the parents surveyed are using their preferred method now. Those not using their preferred arrangement say that availability is the reason. Parents rated the following as important:
  - Caregiver's experience;
  - Healthy environment;
  - Good quality food;
  - Educational activities;
  - Style similar to parent; and
  - Families able to stay together.

The Saskatchewan Child Care needs and Preferences Survey is available at: [www.dcre.gov.sk.ca/publications/pdfs/Child\\_Care\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.dcre.gov.sk.ca/publications/pdfs/Child_Care_Report_Final.pdf)

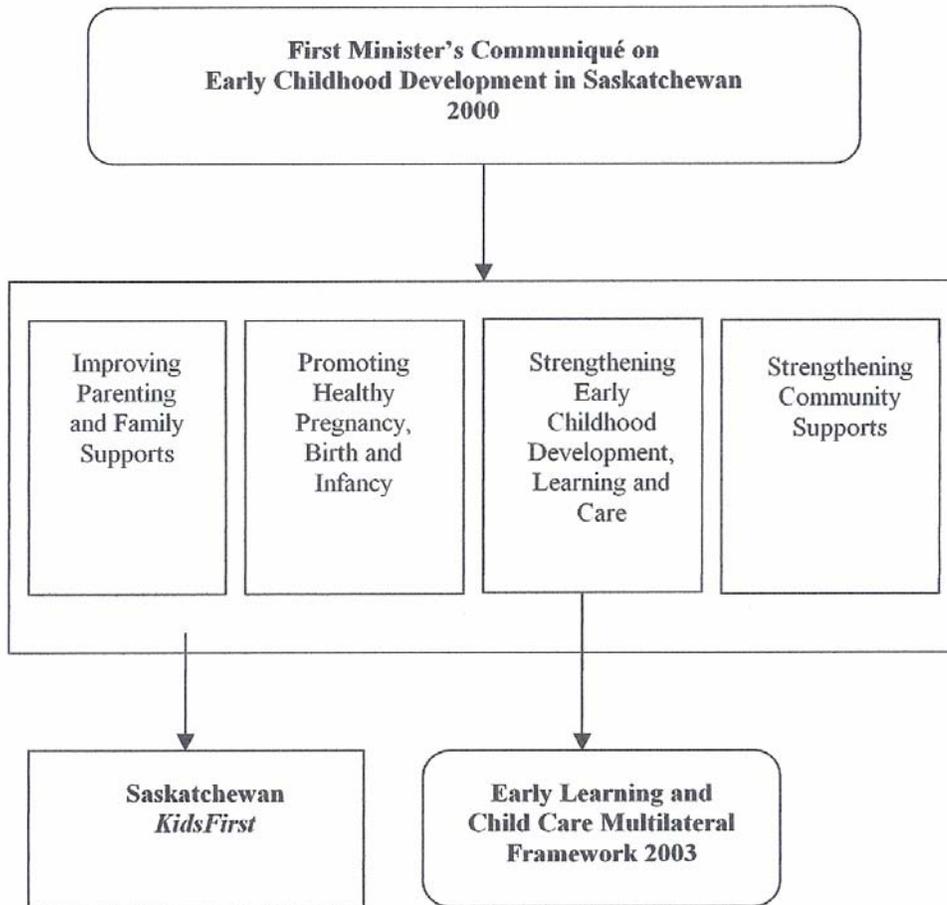
### What are the investments available to support a more comprehensive and coordinated approach?

- ♦ Strengthening early childhood development, learning and care is one of components of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Early Childhood Development Initiative which began in September 2000.
- ♦ In March 2003, Federal/Provincial/Territorial Social Services Ministers agreed to a Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care. Under this Framework, the federal government provides Saskatchewan with approximately \$32 million from 2003-04 to 2007-08.
- ♦ Saskatchewan announced in 2003 a four-year child care space development plan called *Child Care Saskatchewan* to support labour force attachment and early childhood development. Government committed to developing 1200 licensed childcare spaces over 4 years at a cost of \$4.79M. This is the largest increase to child care in the province's history.
- ♦ The following chart illustrates federal investments, new child care spaces and uncommitted funds:

Four Year Plan	Fed. ELC Funds	Committed Child Care Sk	New Spaces Child Care	New Spaces KidsFirst	Total Spaces	Uncommitted Funds
2003-04	\$ .800	\$ 2.8	500	81	7,896	
2004-05	\$ 4.7	\$ 3.8	200	22	8,118	\$ .900
2005-06	\$ 6.9	\$ 4.5	250		8,368	\$ 2.4
2006-07	\$ 9.2	\$ 5.3	250		8,618	\$ 3.9
2007-08	\$10.6	\$ 5.4	--		--	\$ 5.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$32.2 M</b>	<b>\$21.8</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>8,618</b>	<b>\$12.4</b>

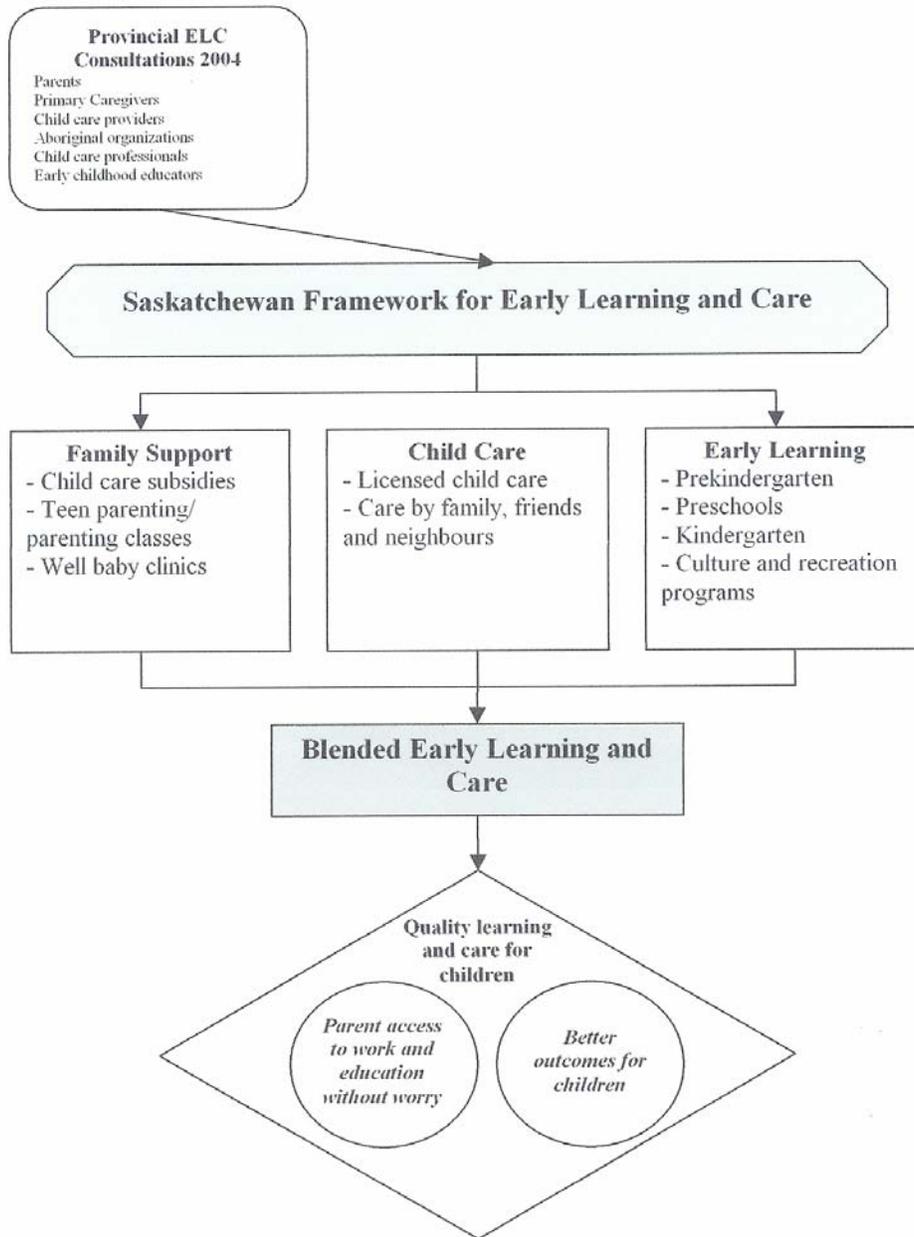
**Appendix B – 5**

**Federal/Provincial/Territorial Agreements**



Appendix B – 6

### Toward a Blended Early Learning and Care System in Saskatchewan



## Appendix B – 7

Government of  
Saskatchewan

DRAFT FRAMEWORK

## Early Learning and Care in Saskatchewan

### Vision

All Saskatchewan children enjoy a good start in life and are nurtured and supported by caring families and communities. (*Government of Saskatchewan, Early Childhood Development Strategy, 2000*.) Children benefit from good care and learning wherever they are. Families benefit from choosing learning and care opportunities that meet their needs. Communities benefit from strong and healthy families, now and in the future.

### Challenge

There is much evidence, both research and experience-based, that proves the earliest years of a child's life are critical in determining life outcomes. Healthy child development can be fostered wherever the child is, at home or in other settings. At the same time, families benefit from being able to participate in the social and economic life of the community. For this reason, early learning and care must also support families' capacity to work, go to school, and undertake voluntary activities. The challenge is to develop a coherent system of early learning and care in Saskatchewan, that is family-centred and benefits all children. Families, communities and governments collaborate in addressing the central question:

*What do families need to help them raise healthy children?*

### Values

Common values, based on respect and inclusiveness, are incorporated into all actions in early learning and care:

- ♦ **Child-focused, family centred** — Children are seen within the context of family and community relationships. The needs of children and the adults in the family are all important, and within each family at different times, the needs of either may be paramount.
- ♦ **Holistic and comprehensive** — Early learning and care happens everywhere the child is and considers all aspects of child development in a holistic manner.
- ♦ **Choice** — Families make choices for the care the learning of their children based on the family's needs, preferences and circumstances. Family choices and values are respected, and families are supported to make healthy decisions.
- ♦ **Equitable and culturally-affirming** — Opportunities and benefits for all children and families are maximized regardless of the family's circumstances. All voices and ways of knowing contribute to early learning and care.
- ♦ **Community partnerships and shared responsibility** — All adults share responsibility for supporting children in realizing their gifts, purpose and potential. Strong, healthy communities support families in nurturing children.
- ♦ **Outcomes-based and accountable** — All actions are based on achieving good outcomes for children and families. Families, communities and governments work together to ensure the resulting system is accountable and transparent, and that decisions are based on evidence.

## Goals

**Goal #1:** Children have the best possible early learning experiences.

Each child has the opportunity to learn, thrive, problem-solve and contribute to the best of their inherent ability. Whether the child is at home or in the care of others, developmental needs (physical, emotional, spiritual, social, cultural and cognitive) are met. Warm loving care creates a secure base from which children can grow and explore the world. Children benefit from positive attachment in their primary relationships, and from developmental opportunities in nurturing, respectful environments conducive to early learning. They are able to realize their inherent gifts, purpose and potential.

**Goal #2:** Families are confident that their children are safe and secure when in the care of others.

Families are able to balance their responsibilities to their children with other societal obligations, knowing their children are well cared for when they are in the care of others. With safe, healthy, culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate early learning and care, parents can “work and not worry”. The family’s comfort with their early learning and care arrangements contributes to their independence and self-reliance, which in turn leads to healthy families. This means that children are in safe and healthy physical environments, are cared for by appropriate caregivers, and have the best possible learning experiences identified in goal #1.

**Goal #3:** Families have support and assistance from the people and communities around them to raise healthy children.

Supportive communities enable families to maximize benefits from early learning and care. Extended families have considerable influence and provide essential support to many families. Children and their families thrive in communities that value children, recognize that parenting is important and a responsibility shared by all, and hold high standards for the development of children’s gifts, purpose and potential. Community networks support the system of Early Learning and Care that is coherent, responsive, culturally responsive and well integrated, blending the needs of children and of their families into a “seamless” approach. In many communities, School<sup>PLUS</sup> creates a hub for organizing community resources around learning and care.

**Goal #4:** Families have practical solutions to barriers.

Practical supports help families address the barriers to benefiting from early learning and care. Families know what opportunities are available to them based on reliable information and can decide whether those opportunities meet their needs. They can access early learning and care opportunities in their community that are affordable. Healthy choices for families are the easy choices for them to make.

## **Appendix C**

### **Invitation Letter and Press Release**

## Appendix C -1

Community Resources and Employment/Learning #04-227 - PROVINCIAL CONSULTA... Page 1 of 2



Executive  
Council

Media  
Services

Legislative Building - Regina, Canada S4S 0B3 - (306) 787-6281

# News Release

May 3, 2004

Community Resources and Employment/Learning - 227

## PROVINCIAL CONSULTATION TO ENHANCE EARLY LEARNING AND CARE

The Government of Saskatchewan is launching a series of discussion forums with key stakeholders as an important step in the creation of a strategy and action plan that will address preschool learning, child care and parenting supports in the province. Discussion forums will be held throughout May and June in Regina, Yorkton, Carlyle, Swift Current, Meadow Lake, Beauval, La Ronge, Tisdale, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw and Saskatoon.

"Early learning and care is a relatively new concept that addresses both the child care needs of parents and the developmental needs of children, our most precious resource," Community Resources and Employment Minister Joanne Crofford said. "Dialogue with key stakeholders and the community is essential to ensuring creation of a plan that will work for Saskatchewan children and families."

"Early learning and care provides children with a good start in life which will help with learning later on," Learning Minister Andrew Thomson said. "We want to build strong families while helping children with social and intellectual development."

The Saskatchewan Instructional Development & Research Unit (SIDRU) from the University of Regina will facilitate the discussion forums and submit a report to the provincial government that reflects the overall interests and needs identified across the province. Government will use this information in developing an Early Learning and Care strategy and action plan.

Representatives from key stakeholder groups, including parents, KidsFirst service clients, caregivers, early childhood educators, the Aboriginal community, schools and school divisions, Regional Intersectoral Committees (RICs) and community organizations, will be invited to participate in forums. Anyone else interested in sharing views and input is welcome to make a written submission, and can contact Nanette Marquarte of SIDRU by phone at (306) 585-4309 or by e-mail at nanette.marquarte@uregina.ca to obtain more information.

-30-

For More Information, Contact:

<http://www.gov.sk.ca/newsrel/releases/2004/05/03-227.html>

05/05/04

## Appendix C – 2



SASKATCHEWAN

Legislative Building  
Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0B3

April 2004

*Name*  
*Address*  
*Address*  
*Address*

Dear *Salutation*:

We are pleased to invite you to attend a discussion forum in [*merge locations and times* - for example - the Beauval Community Centre on May 18, 2004 from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.].

This forum is one of a series of meetings organized by the Government of Saskatchewan to discuss an integrated approach to early learning and care services for children. Our intention is to give parents and children's service providers an opportunity to work together to help develop a policy framework and action plan for early learning and care in Saskatchewan. Our vision is for a family-centred approach that helps parents meet the developmental needs of their children, whether the child is at home or in another setting, and also ensures that parents can meet their child care needs.

We have asked the Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit (SIDRU) from the University of Regina to facilitate discussion groups in Regina, Yorkton, Carlyle, Swift Current, Moose Jaw, North Battleford, Beauval, La Ronge, Tisdale, Prince Albert, and Saskatoon. You may recall that SIDRU assisted in public consultations associated with the Role of the School Task Force that led to the development of the School<sup>PLUS</sup> initiative. SIDRU will be developing a report for the province following the meetings that will reflect the views and perspectives of parents and service providers across the province.

For parents and community-based participants who require childcare or a staff replacement to attend the forum, limited assistance is available for you (\$5.00 per hour for childcare and \$10.00 per hour for staff replacement costs). As well, if the distance you need to travel is greater than fifty kilometers, a travel allowance will be available. Reimbursement forms will be available at the session and payment will be mailed after the forum.

... 2

Name  
Page 2  
April 2004

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In preparation for the discussion, information is attached for your review.

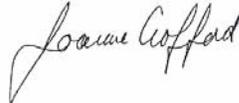
Your involvement in this process is important and we value your participation. Members of the SIDRU team look forward to meeting with you, hearing your ideas and building on the good work of communities. If you are unable to attend, please have someone else attend on your behalf.

Thank you for your valuable input and commitment to the success of our young people.

Sincerely,



Andrew Thomson  
Minister of Learning



Joanne Crofford  
Minister of Community Resources and  
Employment

Attachment

## **Appendix D**

### **List of Themes from OECD: *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care***

***Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care***, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001. (Titles from the executive summary, pp. 8 – 11)

### **Main Policy Developments, Issues**

- Universal Access
- Raising Quality of Provisions
- Promoting Coherence and Co-ordination of policy & services
- Strategies for adequate investments
- Improved staff training
- Pedagogical frameworks
- Engaging parents, families and communities goals; range of strategies to disseminate research findings to diverse audiences. (public education)

### **Policy Lessons**

- Systematic, integrated approach to policy development and implementation
- Strong, equal partnership with education and care
- Universal approach to access especially special needs
- Substantial public investment in services and infrastructure
- Participatory approach to quality improvement: staff, parents, children, regulatory standards. for all forms of provision supported by co-ordinated investment.
- Pedagogical frameworks focusing on holistic development to support quality practice.
- Appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision: strong training, in-service opportunities, recruitment and retainment, mixed gender workforce, status
- Systematic attention to monitoring and data collections: coherent procedures, identify gaps
- Stable framework and long term agenda for research and evaluation: sustained investment to support research on key policy

