



**Recommended Actions for the City of Edmonton
in Support of Early Learning and Care:
Rationale**

July 9, 2021



In a separate document, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care has identified 10 recommended actions that can be taken by the City of Edmonton to address some of the critical priorities found in the City Plan, the Economic Action Plan, and the ongoing work of EndPovertyEdmonton.¹ Those recommended actions are provided below but with expanded rationales.

Context

EndPovertyEdmonton identified early learning and care as one of six “game changers” that must be addressed if poverty is to be eliminated from Edmonton in a generation. EndPovertyEdmonton also recognized the need to work toward an integrated system of high quality and affordable early learning and care.² The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELCC) was created to pursue this work. It comprises eighteen institutional and community partners with expertise and experience in early learning and care. It has created a vision, mission, and principles to guide this work.³

The ECELCC has worked diligently to assess current conditions and needs, to develop partnerships, to explore options, and to identify paths for moving forward.⁴ It is time to act. Based on its work to date, the ECELCC recommends to the City of Edmonton actions in three categories (Policy, Initial Strategy, and Advocacy) that, together, constitute initial steps toward building a system that will

- provide high quality early learning and care that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive for all families that need it, including low-income and vulnerable families,
- nurture healthy social, emotional, and intellectual development in children, preparing them for success in school and in their communities,
- support families who need or want to improve their employment status and/or advance their education or training,
- advance the City of Edmonton's commitments to economic recovery from the pandemic, to gender equity, to elimination of poverty, and to the wellbeing of Indigenous, newcomer, low-income, and homeless families,
- support specific objectives in the *Edmonton City Plan* (Direction 1.2.2, 1.3.3) and the *Edmonton Economic Action Plan* (Action 17),⁵
- position Edmonton to benefit from the plan for a national system of early learning and child care, as described in the federal budget of April 2021,⁶ and
- support the rights of children and parents (as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)⁷ and advance reconciliation (as prescribed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in its *Calls to Action*).⁸

To build a system that can accomplish these outcomes, patchwork responses to immediate, short-term problems will not be sufficient. Systemic, coordinated solutions are required to meet the needs of the city's growing population and diverse communities. For many Edmontonians, early learning and care is difficult to access, uneven in quality, and largely unaffordable. Delivery of early learning and care services is highly fragmented, with some children and families left behind. These problems are amplified for families marginalized by economic and social factors, including those living near or below the poverty line. Edmonton desperately needs an integrated system of early learning and care for its young children.

¹ Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (2021b)

² For information about the affordable and quality child care game changer, see EndPovertyEdmonton (2015, 2016).

³ For the vision, mission, principles and composition of the ECELCC, see <https://www.ecelc.ca/about-us>.

⁴ Activities of the ECELCC are described in its 2020 annual report (Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, 2021a).

⁵ City of Edmonton (2020a, 2021)

⁶ The plan for a national system of early learning and care is outlined in the federal budget (Government of Canada, 2021, pp. 97-105).

⁷ United Nations (1989)

⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015)



Policy and Strategy (Recommended Actions 1-2)

City Council has recently recognized the importance of early learning and care for municipal development in several ways: high quality and affordable early learning and care is a critical element in EndPovertyEdmonton's effort to eliminate poverty; the *City Plan* refers to the value of accessible early learning and care in building vibrant and inclusive communities; and promoting affordable, accessible, high-quality, and inclusive early learning and care is a key action in the *Economic Action Plan*. Despite this recognition, Edmonton lacks the coordinated local planning, management, and support necessary for building an integrated system of early learning and care that is high in quality, affordable, accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the diversity of children and families that require it. Actions 1 and 2 will ensure that the City develops, implements, and monitors a clear policy and strategy that will guide the development of an integrated system of early learning and care in the years to come.

A formal commitment by city government to early learning and care is essential. This commitment may take the form of a broad policy, a specific strategy, or both. A policy and strategy can ensure that systemic, coordinated solutions are translated into programs and services that are responsive to the needs of Edmonton's communities. Without a formal commitment, City Council and administration are without direction and actions are bound to be, at best, a scattered set of patchwork responses that cannot meet the current and future needs of Edmonton's children and their families.

In our review of how municipalities elsewhere support, promote, and ensure early learning and care, the core element is a formal commitment by city government. In some cases a policy is put in place and an explicit strategy follows, and in other cases a strategy is initiated and a policy follows.⁹ Policies and strategies typically include the following components

- recognition of early learning and care as a key component in supporting children, families, and communities,
- a clear commitment to promoting early learning and care that is high in quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive,
- a focus on alignment of city planning and development goals and priorities as they relate to early learning and care,
- statements about the necessity and value of partnerships to ensuring effective and efficient program and service delivery,
- provision for local needs assessments and ongoing data collection, analysis, and information sharing,
- methods for allocating resources to cultivate and strengthen early learning and care initiatives, and
- processes for making formal recommendations to other levels of government as required.

Cities with an early learning and care policy and strategy have chosen to support early learning and care in a variety of ways, such as

- allocating city staff, funding, and other resources toward improving early learning and care,
- providing dedicated space at reduced rental rates for early learning and care centres in city-owned buildings and recreational centres,
- encouraging early learning and care centres to be co-located with community service hubs, and
- considering early learning and care in neighbourhood development, facility design, and building projects.

Note that the actions within the policies and strategies used in other cities do not necessarily involve direct municipal management of individual early learning and care centres, although this option has been undertaken by some Alberta municipalities.¹⁰ Some of these actions require immediate financial investment and some do not; how a municipality sequences its actions depends on its evolving strategic goals and its changing fiscal capacity. The all-important element is that the municipality commit to specific actions that are articulated in a formal policy or strategy.

⁹ For examples of Canadian municipalities that have a policy or strategy for early learning and care, see City of Richmond (2019), District of North Vancouver (2008), City of Burnaby (2000), and City of Vancouver (<https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/vancover-childcare-approach.aspx>).

¹⁰ For an overview of municipal government involvement in early learning and care in Alberta, see Muttart Foundation (2011, 2016).



1. Policy and Strategy

Action 1: That designated City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners to create a policy and strategy to promote high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care in Edmonton, and that this policy and strategy be presented to City Council for endorsement.

Rationale: Municipal governments are in a unique position to ensure coordination of systemic solutions for early learning and care, and to capitalize on opportunities related to building an integrated system of early learning and care that meets the needs of their local communities. A policy and strategy will stimulate a strong, made-in-Edmonton approach to early learning and care.

The creation of an early learning and care policy and strategy will position the City of Edmonton as a municipal leader in Alberta. This formal commitment will contribute to the social and economic development and overall health and wellbeing for Edmonton's children, families, and communities.

2. Annual Reporting

Action 2: That City staff and the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care report on progress to City Council annually and revise the strategy as necessary.

Rationale: Regular reporting allows government to track success of actions and to course-correct over time if required. An early learning and care strategy requires regular monitoring, review, and revision to be effectively executed and resourced throughout development and implementation.

Annual reporting to City Council can ensure the accountability and utility of the strategy going forward, as well as alignment with the new and ongoing work of city government. Action 2 provides a clear structure for strategy revision as Edmonton's needs change, as best practices evolve, and as new opportunities emerge.

Elements of an Initial Strategy (Recommended Actions 3-8)

Municipal governments in Canada typically are not primarily responsible for early learning and care. Nevertheless, many municipalities have chosen to improve the delivery of early learning and care services because they recognize its importance to the vitality of their cities and the wellbeing of their citizens.

In our review of municipal actions elsewhere, **one key ingredient is the city's role in establishing partnerships with local school boards and other levels of government to address barriers to high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care.** These barriers include lack of coordinated planning, inadequate assessment of needs, challenges to ensuring quality, lack of space, lack of affordable options for families, challenges to ensuring inclusiveness and cultural responsiveness, and more.

Partnerships are essential for surmounting these barriers because, in the case of early learning and care, authority and expertise are distributed.

- Local school boards provide early years programming, funded by Alberta Education, for some of the children who need preventive support to prepare for school entry.
- Local non-profit organizations and for-profit businesses manage early learning and care centres, preschools, and family day homes.
- Alberta Children's Services regulates child care centres and family day homes, and it provides grants to programs and subsidies to low-income families.
- The federal government provides funding for some preschools (e.g., Indigenous Head Start), is committed to building a national system of early learning and child care, and provides funding to provinces for this purpose.
- City government controls land use and planning within the municipality.



Where authority is distributed, responsibility must be shared by partners and at all levels of government. Collaborative partnerships, done well, create opportunities for building capacities and expertise for the benefit of the partners and, in this case, for the benefit of children, families, and communities. Where partnerships do not exist or fail to work properly, children, families, and programs fall through the cracks.

Actions 3-8 target some pressing issues and will create and strengthen the partnerships and capacities necessary for building a system. Implementing these actions will require active input from Indigenous and newcomer families and those marginalized by economic and social factors. Implementation will also require leadership and cooperation on the part of municipal government and school boards.

3. Zoning, Space, and Neighbourhood Development

Action 3: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners to ensure that high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care is part of ongoing plans regarding zoning (such as the Zoning Bylaw Renewal Initiative), space (such as the Joint Use Agreement), and neighbourhood development (including 15-minute districts).

Rationale: Alignment of relevant municipal policies, regulations, and practices in support and promotion of early learning and care is vital to ensuring that a city is well positioned to build a system that meets the needs of its children, families, and communities. Coordination of municipal work in progress and forthcoming, where applicable, helps to strengthen the early learning and care sector and improve program and service delivery.

The City of Edmonton has numerous initiatives underway that have implications for early learning and care, including those pertaining to zoning, space, and neighbourhood development. This related municipal work needs to be considered with the goal of making early learning and care programs and services as accessible as possible across Edmonton without sacrificing quality or affordability.

Provisions for early learning and care services provided in the City of Edmonton's existing zoning bylaws pertain mostly to where these services can be provided and to some of the physical characteristics of the area around these services. The multi-year Zoning Bylaw Renewal Initiative, in progress, is intended to "develop a strategic, simplified and streamlined Zoning Bylaw to enable people, places and businesses to thrive and prosper."¹¹ This comprehensive overhaul of Edmonton's zoning bylaws is an opportunity to offset disproportionate impacts for specific populations by considering how built environments can be made more equitable and inclusive for those who face barriers in current systems. Revisions can include provisions to facilitate the location of key local services, including early learning and care programs, in all neighbourhoods across the city. Enabling growth in high quality, affordable early learning and care spaces, as well as co-location of related services, will increase access to early learning and care. ECELC has begun to work with the City of Edmonton on related issues.

The formal mechanisms in Edmonton for coordinating use of shared space between institutions do not adequately consider early learning and care. For example, the Joint Use Agreements, which are partnerships of the City of Edmonton and local school boards (Edmonton Public Schools, Edmonton Catholic Schools, and Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord), provide guidelines for access to facilities and a framework for decision making related to land "to maximize benefits to students and citizens of the City of Edmonton."¹² However, there is no specific mention of how early learning and care fits into the use of these publicly funded facilities and land. The Joint Use Agreements are undergoing a regularly scheduled review process. This review provides an avenue for exploring opportunities pertaining to space planning and use for early learning and care in City, school board, and joint use areas.

¹¹ https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/urban_planning_and_design/zoning-bylaw-renewal.aspx

¹² City of Edmonton (2020b,c)



A concerted effort is needed to incorporate early learning and care needs into all aspects of community planning and development. New neighbourhood development projects and neighbourhood redevelopment plans must consider the availability of key services, such as early learning and care. The ongoing district level planning for 15-minute districts, as outlined in the *City Plan*, is “considering the needs of residents through all of life’s phases . . . [to] support more equitable access to facilities and amenities no matter where you choose to live.” This district level planning is intended to support “development of communities where many things can be done in a specific area, rather than regular travel across the city for basic needs.”¹³ For 15-minute districts to become a reality, these basic needs must be located in the neighbourhood within walking distance, or along active and public transportation routes. **For 15-minute districts to be inclusive of all residents, early learning and care must be considered as one of these basic needs.** Edmonton cannot expect to become a city where people can easily complete their daily needs within a 15-minute travel time, as envisioned in the *City Plan*, if families with young children do not have access to early learning and care in their communities. To ensure that Edmonton grows as a connected, adaptable, and livable city, high quality and affordable early learning and care needs to be located near where people live, work, and go to school.

4. City Planning

Action 4: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners to ensure that high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care is included in implementing elements of the *City Plan* and the *Economic Action Plan* that involve the development of healthy, vibrant communities.

Rationale: City planning and development must be guided by population and community needs for early learning and care, where applicable. Strategic linkages between overarching city goals and early learning and care priorities enable the municipality to work effectively and efficiently toward a coherent vision for children and families.

The City of Edmonton has included early learning and care in the new *City Plan*. This document is a blueprint that charts how Edmonton will grow, adapt, and succeed as it transitions into a city of two million people, including setting strategic direction in social planning, economic development, and environmental planning. Enabling “accessible child care facilities in a variety of locations throughout the city” is cited under the policy direction for Edmonton to “ensure vibrant and inclusive communities where children, youth and families can live, learn and grow together.”¹⁴ Realizing these goals will require that Edmonton have a clear policy and strategy for early learning and care.

Other key policy directions and intentions in the *City Plan* can also be tied to early learning and care.

- For Edmonton to “support the elimination of poverty, its root causes and disparity in Edmonton’s communities,”¹⁵ there must be consideration of early learning and care.
- For Edmontonians to “have the ability to live locally, with access to diverse and affordable housing options in communities that support their daily needs,”¹⁶ early learning and care is necessary in each community.
- For Edmontonians to “acknowledge and celebrate Indigenous heritage while honouring the diverse cultures, perspectives and experiences residents bring from around the world,”¹⁷ barriers to early learning and care for Indigenous peoples and newcomers must be reduced or eliminated.

¹³ City of Edmonton (2020a) p. 95

¹⁴ This direction is 1.2.2 (City of Edmonton (2020a) p. 46).

¹⁵ This direction is 1.3.3 (City of Edmonton (2020a) p. 48).

¹⁶ This intention is 2.2 (City of Edmonton (2020a) pp. 54-56).

¹⁷ This intention is 3.1 (City of Edmonton (2020a) pp. 63-64).



- For Edmonton to advance "equity through access to universally accessible spaces, services, facilities and transportation networks,"¹⁸ high quality early learning and care programs and services need to be affordable and accessible.

The City of Edmonton has also included early learning and care as an economic and social priority in the new *Economic Action Plan*. This document consists of tangible, specific actions that provide a roadmap for implementing the *City Plan*. One of these actions is to "promote affordable, accessible, high-quality, and inclusive early learning and child care."¹⁹ An early learning and care policy and strategy is an important step towards achieving this action.

5. Data Working Group

Action 5: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, local school boards, and other levels of government to convene and resource a Data Working Group to ensure that the data required for needs assessments and for planning and managing a system of early learning and care are collected, analyzed, and shared.

Rationale: Good city and neighbourhood data are necessary for local system design and evidence-based municipal decision making. More comprehensive information about Edmonton can mean better needs identification and analysis, leading to fewer missed opportunities, greater efficiencies, reduced duplication of effort, and improved program and service delivery in early learning and care.

Data are important for fostering an early learning and care system in Edmonton that is equitable, sustainable, and efficient. This information is required to monitor effects of policy and financing, address key program and service issues, evaluate various approaches and innovations, and regularly review progress toward goals and priorities.²⁰ A working group for the purpose of data collection, analysis, and sharing between the City of Edmonton, the ECELC, local school boards, and other levels of government can ensure that the local information required for improving early learning and care is readily available and used effectively. Data would be provided by working group members at the smallest level of granularity possible. The working group would include a data agreement between members that allows for the regular transfer of Edmonton data without having to submit Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) requests or going through formal internal request processes. This data agreement would address any privacy and data security issues associated with data transfer.

A wide range of data and information are needed for building an integrated system of early learning and care. To address issues of affordability, for example, details are needed about program costs, parent fees, uptake of subsidies, family income levels, cost of living, community supports, and other variables. To address issues of quality, information is needed about staff certification levels, use of curriculum frameworks, staff interactions with children and families, child-to-staff ratios, group sizes, characteristics of indoor and outdoor environments, and more. To address issues of accessibility, data are needed about community needs and demographics and the availability of spaces within neighbourhoods. To address issues of inclusiveness, information is needed about children requiring specialized programming as well as the needs of families for wraparound and culturally appropriate supports. These data are often either not made publicly available, not collected and disseminated in a systematic way, or are reported in aggregate format through occasional means. This information is required at the city and neighbourhood levels on a regular basis in order to understand and solve local early learning and care issues.

¹⁸ This intention is 4.1 (City of Edmonton (2020a) pp. 71-72).

¹⁹ This action is action 17 (City of Edmonton (2021) p. 30).

²⁰ For a longer discussion on the importance of data collection, analysis, and sharing to building an early learning and care system, see Beach (2020).



Presently, specific Edmonton data and information about needs for early learning and care are not adequate, particularly concerning marginalized or underserved families such as Indigenous, newcomer, low-income, and homeless families. A recent analysis conducted by the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP) for the ECELC revealed that **the data needed for planning and managing early learning and care are, in many cases, not collected, not analyzed, not shared, or simply insufficient.**²¹ For example, little information is readily available about the need for early learning and care as a function of location, family income, and ethnicity. Equally important, no group or entity is responsible for identifying and remedying ongoing gaps in information, obtaining data only held by school boards and governments, and analyzing and integrating data in a way that enables effective planning and management at system and community levels. These functions are especially important for enhancing workforce participation of parents as the city recovers from the pandemic,²² for accommodating increases in the city's population, and for adjusting as neighborhood demographic profiles shift over time. Comprehensive data will also be necessary for the kind of planning, accountability, and oversight that is likely to be required for funding through the new federal plan for early learning and child care.

6. Problem-Solving Working Group

Action 6: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, local school boards, and the provincial government to convene and resource a Problem-Solving Working Group to address problems in finding space, co-locating services, and addressing issues of affordability, quality, and inclusiveness in early learning and care.

Rationale: The problems described in Action 6 arise all too frequently when operators attempt to open, relocate, or expand early learning and care centres. Solutions to these problems often require coordination or cooperation from different authorities. A working group could establish a means of addressing these problems at the local level as they arise.

Edmonton has a mixed record of collaborating to solve problems commonly faced by early learning and care centres. The most salient examples involve space. Cases of successful collaborations include dedicated, purpose-built space in the George P. Nicholson School (Edmonton Public Schools and the YMCA), in the Clareview Community Recreation Centre (Edmonton Catholic Schools and the YMCA), and in the new Milner Library (Edmonton Public Library and the YMCA). These successes were not replicated, unfortunately, in many other cases, including the Terwilligar and Meadows Community Recreation Centres. Failure to find space in Edmonton forced one local agency, selected in 2017 to operate one of the Early Learning and Child Care Centre programs with affordable child care at \$25 per day, to move its site to Fort Saskatchewan. Preschools and early learning and care centres located in schools, an arrangement that contributes greatly to the school community, are often forced out when the schools need to reclaim the space for K-12 classes.²³ As a result, children and parents lose the continuity of care and the convenience afforded when child care and schooling are co-located. The result for early learning and care programs is that they must close or struggle to find comparable and affordable space elsewhere. Finding appropriate space often is extremely difficult.

The City of Edmonton has experience working collaboratively with school boards, other levels of government, and external organizations to solve problems of joint concern. In some cases these working relationships have been formalized. The Joint Use Agreements, for example, enable the municipality and school boards to work together to address space issues for publicly funded schools.²⁴ **In the case of early learning and care, however, collaborations to solve space issues, when they do occur, tend to be one-off accomplishments.** No policy, regulation,

²¹ Buschmann & Partridge (2019)

²² For example, Edmonton Chamber of Commerce (2020) and Business Council of Alberta (2020, 2021).

²³ Some of these problems are described in Edmonton Head Start Project (2021).

²⁴ City of Edmonton (2020b, c)



funding, community advisory board with delegated authority, or other formal impetus exists to address problems involving space, affordability, quality, and inclusiveness as they arise.

The City can provide much needed leadership by convening partners that, together, can establish the capacity to anticipate and solve these problems for early learning and care. Given the intention of the federal government to expand early learning and child care spaces across the country, forming a Problem-Solving Working Group may also position Edmonton as an early target for federal funding.

7. Early Learning and Care Demonstration Centres

Action 7: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners in other levels of government, postsecondary education, and community organizations to plan the development of two high quality early learning and care demonstration centres. These centres will help early childhood educators build the culturally sensitive competencies and dispositions needed to work effectively with diverse children and families. One centre would be devoted to meeting the needs of Indigenous children and families, and the other to meeting the needs of refugee and immigrant children and families.

Rationale: Indigenous, refugee, and immigrant children and their families sometimes have special needs that arise from past trauma, migration, and discrimination and that are intensified by current economic and social conditions. These needs and possible solutions have been clearly identified in recent documents and ongoing research by the ECELC.²⁵ Postsecondary institutions, such as MacEwan University, are working to help early childhood educators understand these special needs and solutions. What is required now is a means to help a broad range of early childhood educators acquire the knowledge and cultural competencies needed to provide optimal support for these children and their families.

Addressing these cultural needs on a broad scale throughout Edmonton will require a great deal of work in the coming years. An important initial step would be to develop two demonstration sites, one focused on early learning and care for Indigenous children and families and one focused on early learning and care for refugee and immigrant children and families. These sites would enable early childhood educators to explore and implement optimal designs and practices that provide cultural safety, that engage family members and leaders from cultural communities, that provide wraparound support as needed, and that adapt the curriculum framework in ways that will support children from diverse cultures. These sites would become centres of innovation and professional development for educators and would support the spread of cultural sensitivity and competencies across early learning and care centres in the city. Fortunately, a few early learning and care centres and Head Start programs in Edmonton have recognized these needs and have begun to develop the necessary expertise. The task now is to build on this work in a way that benefits children and families throughout the city.

Creating these demonstration sites will require considerable consultation and preparation. The recommended action is to initiate and resource the necessary planning process. Depending on how the federal proposal for a national system of early learning and care unfolds in Alberta, federal support for this sort of initiative is a possibility.²⁶ Edmonton would do well to prepare in advance for this potential opportunity.

²⁵ Recent publications of particular relevance and importance include Kemble (2019), Sumaru-Jurf and Felix-Mah (2019), Freeborn et al. (2021), and Mardhani-Bayne (2021). These publications and others are available at: <https://www.ecelc.ca/publications>.

²⁶ Other federal grants are likely to be forthcoming, such as funding for the Early Learning and Child Care Innovation program (<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/early-learning-child-care-innovation.html>).



8. Early Learning and Care Grant Program

Action 8: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, and possibly with other levels of government, to create and fund a grant program designed to help early learning and care centres meet the needs of Indigenous and newcomer children and families and those marginalized by economic and social factors.

Rationale: City government need not operate early learning and care centres. Instead, the municipality can directly support licensed and regulated programs through grant funding. A well designed grant program for early learning and care centres can improve access to high quality, affordable programs for presently underserved populations.

A City of Edmonton early learning and care grant program would encourage the growth and development of early learning and care that meets the stated priorities in the municipal early learning and care policy and strategy. This grant program can be targeted to support new and existing early learning and care programs and services in Edmonton. Eligibility criteria could be focused on funding early learning and care programs and spaces that meet the specific needs of Indigenous and newcomer children and families and others marginalized by economic and social factors. There could be a provision to support innovations that encourage cultural responsiveness. Priority could be given to programs that provide full-day early learning and care in high needs or underserved areas of the city. The grant program could assist programs serving these families to reduce parent fees below a capped rate.

Numerous other municipalities have grant programs for early learning and care in their communities that could be used as best practice examples to inform the development of one for Edmonton.²⁷ The City of Edmonton currently has a grant program designed to fund new or rehabilitated affordable housing units across Edmonton.²⁸ The City of Edmonton recently launched a grant program that is focused on anti-racism activities and addressing systemic and structural barriers.²⁹ The City of Edmonton also has recently implemented an Economic Recovery Grant to which early learning and care centres can apply for matching funds, but is not focused on meeting the needs of underserved populations.³⁰ These programs could be used as a model or starting point for creating a City of Edmonton grant program for early learning and care.

Implementation of the grant program described in Action 8 could include different categories. For example, a capital grant could assist with costs associated with facilities, renovations, playgrounds, equipment, and furnishings. An operations grant could assist with costs such as staff training, board development, program planning, and curriculum use. A program development grant could support space creation by helping to cover the costs of starting a new program or expanding an existing one. A program enhancement grant could help new or existing programs improve quality through increased professional development, enhanced staff ratios, and adoption of a community hub model.

Advocacy (Recommended Actions 9-10)

When the best interests of Edmonton's children and families require advocacy directed at school boards and other levels of government, the City can and must assume this responsibility if it is to achieve objectives articulated in the *City Plan* and the *Economic Action Plan*. To do so, the City needs to delegate authority for identifying critical issues for advocacy to staff or to an advisory group recognized by City Council and administration. The City has vigorously advocated for critical social development goals, such

²⁷ Examples of municipalities in Canada that have grant programs for early learning and care include Vancouver (<https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/community-grants.aspx>), Richmond (<https://www.richmond.ca/services/communitysocialdev/childcare/grant.htm>), and North Vancouver (<https://www.dnv.org/programs-and-services/child-care-grant-program>).

²⁸ https://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/funding_grants/affordable-housing-investment-program.aspx
²⁹ https://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/funding_grants/anti-racism-grants-program.aspx?utm_source=virtualaddress&utm_campaign=antiracismgrants

³⁰ https://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/funding_grants/economic-action-plan-grant.aspx



as increasing the supply of affordable housing and ending homelessness. Municipal governments can be powerful advocates to other levels of government and local school boards in support of high-quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care. **Currently there is no clear mechanism for engaging the City in advocacy for this work.**

As noted above, authority and expertise related to early learning and care are distributed across school boards and levels of government. When pursuing local goals in respect to early learning and care or related areas, such as housing and eliminating poverty, **the City must be prepared to advocate for its citizens no matter what the jurisdictional boundaries.** Consider some examples.

- Provincial policies, legislation, regulations, and practices can influence the quality, affordability, accessibility, and inclusiveness of early learning and care. The City, singly or joined by other municipalities, could advocate for improvements in staff certification levels, funding models and subsidies, space, and programs that help centres and family day homes support children with particular physical, intellectual, financial, or cultural needs. Advocacy on these issues is particularly important for addressing EndPovertyEdmonton's goal of eliminating poverty within a generation.
- When pressing federal and provincial governments for funding to support affordable housing, the City could simultaneously push to ensure that the families who gain affordable housing also have access to early learning and care. Affordable housing is essential for many families, but if they cannot also access and afford high-quality child care they will not be able to pursue employment and/or education in ways that meet their needs.
- Advocacy at the federal level could be especially important as the federal government searches for mechanisms to build a national system of early learning and care, as described in the federal budget for 2021. The City of Edmonton could advocate for federal-municipal collaborations in early learning and care, and it could work with the provincial and federal governments to find local solutions for implementing federal objectives.
- As the City endeavors to build communities in which people can easily complete their daily needs within a 15-minute travel time, it could advocate to the school boards and the provincial government for policies to ensure that delivery of early learning and care services are co-located with schools and other services.

The City of Edmonton needs to engage in advocacy focused on improving quality, affordability, accessibility, and inclusiveness of early learning and care. Advocacy efforts by the City of Edmonton can be made in conjunction with other municipalities in the region and province, with local and provincial business organizations, and with agencies and organizations in the early learning and care sector. Implementing Actions 9 and 10 will allow the City to capitalize on opportunities related to building an integrated system of early learning and care by advocating in a timely and targeted fashion.

9. Advocacy and the Federal Plan

Action 9: That the City, with advice from the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, advocate to the federal and provincial governments for a role in planning, implementing, and allocating federal funding for the anticipated national system of early learning and child care as it applies to Edmonton.

Rationale: Advocacy efforts targeted at initiatives arising from the federal plan for a national system of early learning and child care, as described in in the federal budget for 2021, could prove to be very impactful. Making early learning and care a priority for advocacy may help to position Edmonton to benefit from the federal plan through access to significant funding and resources for local programs and services.

10. Advocacy for an Integrated System of Early Learning and Care

Action 10: That the City, with advice from the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, advocate strongly for an integrated system of early learning and care that is high in quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive for all families that need it, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable families.



Rationale: An ongoing commitment to advocacy for early learning and care in the city is important for supporting the overall health, wellbeing, and quality of life for Edmonton children, families and communities.

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care has prepared recommendations for Edmonton school boards and for the Alberta Ministry of Children’s Services that, when adopted, would contribute significantly to building an integrated system of early learning and care in Edmonton.³¹ These recommendations include

- Joining the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care to create and resource a Data Working Group and a Problem-Solving Working Group (see Actions 5 and 6 above);
- Contributing to early learning and care projects in Edmonton that support low-income and vulnerable families as well as Indigenous, refugee, and immigrant families (see Actions 7 and 8 above);
- Increasing cooperation and partnerships between schools and nearby early learning and care centres;
- Creating guidelines for funding and infrastructure to ensure that space for early learning and care is included in plans for building new schools and renovating old schools;
- Working with the federal and provincial governments to enhance regional management and planning of regulated early learning and care in Edmonton;
- Revising funding models to ensure that fees charged to parents meet new federal objectives;
- Ensuring that expansion of early learning and care services addresses the needs of underserved children and families in Edmonton; and
- Supporting initiatives that will improve the quality of early learning and care by supporting increased standards for the education, professional development, and wage scales of early childhood educators.

The City can provide valuable and timely leadership in advocating for initiatives such as these.

Conclusion

These actions can be initiated immediately, and subsequent actions can take place over the next few years after an overarching early learning and care policy and strategy are developed.

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care looks forward to working with City Council and administration to draft a municipal policy and strategy as outlined in Actions 1 and 2. The ECELc, with appropriate delegated authority and funding, can also be actively involved with other steps, including:

- engaging with the planning and development work noted in Actions 3 and 4,
- convening and leading the working groups delineated in Actions 5 and 6,
- planning for the early learning and care initiatives described in Actions 7 and 8, and
- assisting with the advocacy functions outlined in Actions 9 and 10.

The ECELc is well prepared to work with City Council and administration, as well as with other institutional and community partners, to implement the recommended actions and to plan subsequent steps toward building a system of early learning and child care that is high in quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive, and that meets the needs of the city’s growing population and diverse communities.

For questions or further discussion, please contact info@ecelc.ca.

³¹ When these recommendations become available, they will be posted on the ECELc’s website (<https://www.ecelc.ca/>).



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