

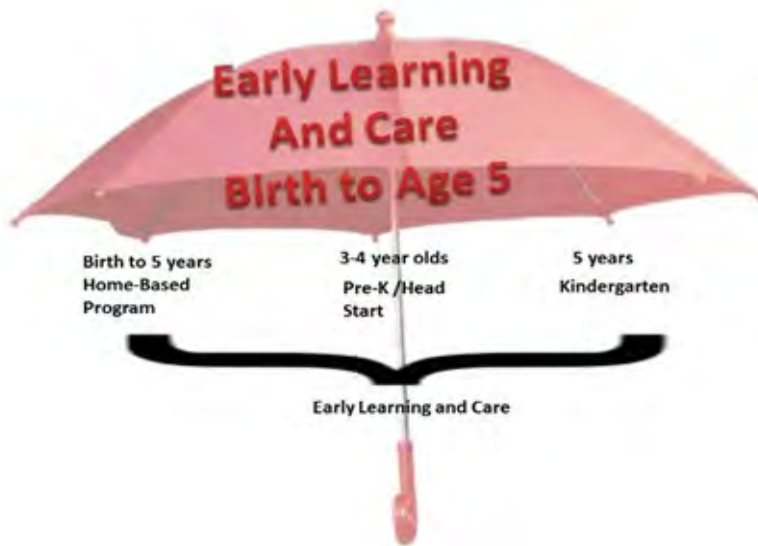
South East Cornerstone Public School Division Early Learning and Care Program

Success for Every Student in Every School is the vision of the Board of Education of South East Cornerstone Public School Division. The Division is located in the southeast corner of the province and serves 8200 students in its Pre K to 12 system. However, unlike the majority of school divisions in the province whose mandate is children Pre K/K to age of 22, South East Cornerstone Public School Division begins working with children at birth and indeed, in some circumstances, prior to birth. Early Learning and Care in South East Cornerstone Public School Division focuses on early intervention and prevention. Our program is innovative. The Board of Education recognizes the critical importance of innovative practices in its quest to meet our vision. Innovation requires thinking and acting “outside of the box”. In South East Cornerstone Public School Division we have assumed responsibility for delivering support to children, ages 0-5, who have vulnerabilities that may potentially create barriers for developmental milestones if not addressed. Our story is one of hope.

South East Cornerstone was approached by the Ministry of Education to assume responsibility for the Early Childhood Intervention Program (ECIP) in the winter of 2011. The Board of Education expressed profound interest in the philosophy of Early Learning and Care and saw this as a great opportunity for our School Division to impact lives. An Early Learning and Care team was put in place to take over the ECIP caseload and to find ways to reach out to other families in our school division.

Children enrolled in our Early Learning and Care program receive one-to-one consultant support in order to actualize the goals established by parents and consultants to bridge the gaps in their development. Early Learning and Care Consultants build trusting relationships with families and assist them in working toward mutually-identified goals. The Early Learning and Care consultants go into homes to support children and

families. These individualized sessions focus on childhood development, family support and making community connections. Early Learning and Care Consultants are also involved with expectant and teen parents. Their involvement helps teens prepare for the arrival of their babies and helps develop special project credits so they are able to graduate. Our division shares the belief that "All families have the capacity to meet the developmental needs of their children within the community of their choice."



Board Involvement

The Board of Education recognized that the Early Learning and Care framework was critical to the actualization of the Early Years outcome in the Education Strategic Sector Plan. This can be demonstrated in the areas of resource allocation, monitoring and professional learning and engagement.



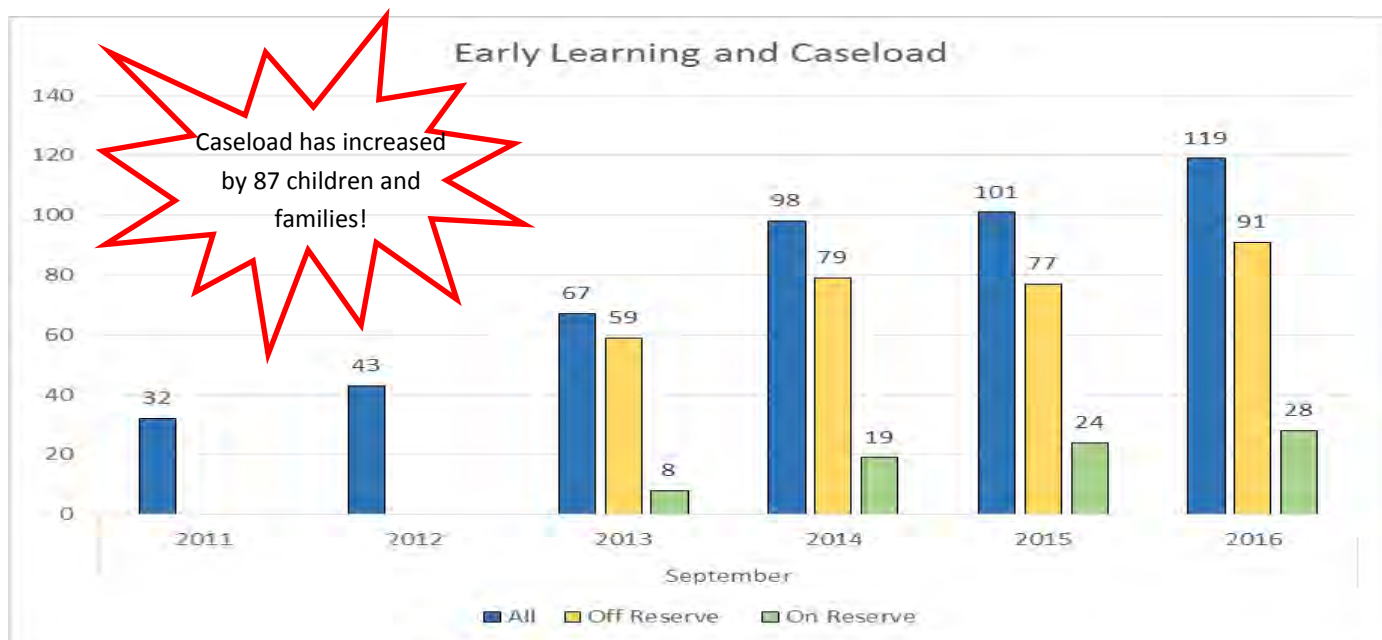
Resource Allocation

When assuming responsibility for ECIP in 2011, the Board of Education provided the necessary staffing and resources to make it successful. The division learning support team was expanded to include a Coordinator of Early Learning and Care. To make up the Early Learning and Care team, three Early Learning and Care Consultants, professional teachers, were hired to work with the Early Learning and Care Coordinator. When the team was first established, support was provided to vulnerable children and families living off reserve. In 2012, the need to support on-reserve children and families was identified. To enable the team then to provide support to on-reserve children and families, an additional 0.6 Early Learning and Care Consultant was hired.

Monitoring

The Early Learning and Care team meets with the Board of Education annually to provide a monitoring report. The Early Learning and Care program focuses on building the families' capacity to meet the needs of vulnerable children during the preschool years and as they transition into the school setting and beyond. One of the actions from the Education Strategic Sector Plan Early Years outcome is "to support parents whose experiences with school was not positive". The consultants acknowledge that parents know their children best which builds relationships and strengthens their partnership with parents and families. The connections with parents reduces the angst of their child starting school and helps to foster smooth transitions to school.

The Board of Education continually requires updates about the advancement of the program. Three times a year the Coordinator of Early Learning reports to the board, through our division wall walk, data reflective of the depth of the program and its continuing growth. The number of children on our caseload is one of the data sets that is monitored. In its inception in 2011, the Early Learning and Care program took over a caseload of 32 children from ECIP. The program has seen steady growth over the years with 119 children currently on the caseload. In 2013, the Early Learning and Care team began supporting 8 on reserve children and families on Ocean Man and Pheasant Rump First Nations. The team made connections and was able to begin providing support to children and families on White Bear First Nations in 2014. The Early Learning and Care team has seen growth in supporting on reserve children and families as there are currently 28 on the caseload. In 2015-16 the consultant was able to provide 341 in-home visits and 187 Head Start visits with our on-reserve children. Another area of support that the team provides is to expectant and parenting teens and currently have 21 on the caseload.



Professional Learning and Engagement

The Board of Education recognised that in order to move forward with this initiative, essential professional development was necessary. South East Cornerstone Public School Division has been instrumental in providing a wealth of opportunities for professional growth of the Early Learning and Care Team. The team has attended the following:

- * National Early Years Conference
- * International Division of Early Childhood Conference
- * International Early Years Conference
- * Applied Behavioural Analysis training
- * Picture Exchange Communication System training
- * Making Learning Visible
- * Family Assessment Training
- * Quality and Safety Care Behaviour Training
- * Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale Training

It has also been important to the Board of Education to build teacher capacity. As part of this initiative numerous professional development opportunities have been provided to our early years teachers. The needs of early years teachers were identified and then the following workshops were provided:

- * ABC and Beyond (Hanan workshop)
- * Responding to Children's Interest
- * Phonological Awareness training
- * Self Regulation In-service
- * Feeding Assessment In-service
- * Early Learning Site visits
- * Powerful Interactions workshop
- * Invitations and Inquiry Learning workshop
- * Professional Learning Outreach

The Board of Education has been extremely supportive of the Early Learning and Care team providing outreach to Head Start programs, daycares and playschools. This enhances smoother transitions for children entering school and fosters a team approach among community stakeholders. The Early Learning and Care Coordinator has provided presentations to School Community Councils to help build understanding about the importance of Early Intervention and support.

The Board of Education identified the need to support the Early Learning and Care team and teachers with an array of resources to support early learning. This speaks to the Education Sector Strategic Plan Early Learning action "Identify and enhance ministry, school division, and interagency supports, practices and resources that improve child outcomes and increase schools' readiness for children".

Innovative Nature of the Program

The South East Cornerstone Public School Division Early Learning and Care Program is unique and innovative due to the following features: the structure of the program, the role of the Early Learning and Care Coordinator and Consultants, and the benefits to children and their families.

1) Structure of the Program

- Early Learning and Care Consultants are involved with children and their families from birth until successful transition into school.
- Each consultant provides service to a geographical area consistent with the service areas in the school division so they are also a part of an area division team.

- In recognizing the importance of our most experienced, trained professionals working with children with the most vulnerabilities, our consultants are experienced teachers who often have post-graduate education and teaching experience in special education or early learning.
- Early Learning and Care Consultants have a caseload that is typically between 25 and 35 children.
- Through a consultative meeting, if it is determined that a child has a vulnerability which may impact developmental milestones, the child is accepted to our Early Learning and Care program and supports are provided. With our program meeting the needs of vulnerable children, we ensure that we do not have a waitlist and provide supports when needed.
- Assessment of the child's strengths and challenges is completed by the Early Learning and Care Consultants in consultation with the family. Goals for the child are then collectively developed based on the results and a family centered plan is developed.
- Support to children and families is provided through a play based, language rich and routine focused program.
- The child's plan is routinely monitored, assessed and adjusted according to a development screen and parent consultation.
- Early Learning and Care Consultants access school division Speech and Language Pathologists and Occupational Therapists for advice on meeting the needs of the children.
- Fostering and maintaining relationships with First Nations and Metis families and community partners on and off reserve. This affords the opportunity to understand the learning goals of these communities in our school division, and build connections between families and schools.

“Successful intervention for children with special needs depends on the formation of true partnerships with those who are considered to be the child's family” Ruth E. Cook, M. Diane Klein and Deborah Chen, Pg. 35 Cook, R. E., Tessier, A., & Klein, M. D. (1996). *Adapting early childhood curricula for children in inclusive settings* (4th ed.).



2) Role of the Early Learning Coordinator

- Lead the school division programming and supports for children ages 0-10 and expectant teen parents.
- Support Early Learning and Care Consultants and manage the budget for early learning.
- Coordinate and conduct initial interviews with Early Learning and Care consultants with perspective families, and determine which families will be on the Early Learning and Care caseloads. It is rare that families are not accepted and families with an identified need are never placed on a waitlist.
- Support schools in implementing best practices in Early Learning and provide them with current information on Early Learning.
- Organize Professional Development for Prekindergarten and Kindergarten teachers and to community pre-schools, daycares and Head Start staff.
- Provide support and answer questions regarding assessments such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire 3 and the Early Years Evaluation.
- Liaise with Ministry of Education and Early Years Branch—Pre K, Early Learning, ECIP.
- Member of Education Strategic Sector Plan Sub-Committee for the Early Years Outcome.
- Reports to Superintendent of Education, Senior Leadership and Board of Education.
- Submit required reports to the Ministry and other agencies.

3) Role of the Early Learning and Care Consultants

- Provide in home support to children and families to work towards achieving their learning goals.
- Connect families to outside agencies and community resources for necessary supports.
- Plan for successful transitions into the formal school system. This ensures that schools are ready to meet the needs of each child.
- Meet with and support teen expectant parents as they prepare for parenthood.
- Meet with and support teen parents to help them attain graduation through acquisition of special project credits.
- Support Prekindergarten, Head Start and Kindergarten teachers and students.
- Connect parents/caregivers to form networking opportunities.
- Provide observations and support to Day Care Consultants.

4) Benefits to Children and Their Families

- The Early Learning and Care Consultants transition children into Pre K and K to make it a successful transition for the child.
- The Early Learning and Care Consultants work closely with the school and staff to ensure schools are ready for each child.
- Children on our caseload have access to Speech and Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Students Services Counsellors, Student Services Consultant and Learning Support consultants.
- Less apprehension for parents when children are transitioning to school with the Early Learning and Care Consultants supporting the child and families through the process.
- Professional experienced teachers delivering the program and working with our most vulnerable children.
- With teachers in the consultant position and their backgrounds we are able to focus on higher level training and have had fewer personnel changes resulting in less transitions for families.
- Our consultants are in a salary position which allows more client visits and support each day.

Sustainability

The provincial Education Sector Strategic Plan has identified the importance of early intervention and has developed an Early Years outcome. South East Cornerstone Public School Division Board of Education has seen the value of our Early Learning and Care program and has committed to supporting it. The Ministry of Education provides partial funding for this program and our Board of Education subsidizes the remainder of the program. A First Nations and Metis Education Achievement fund enabled us to begin to provide on-reserve support. There is considerable expense that we are able to alleviate through “in kind”. For example fleet vehicles, office space and overhead, and technology are all provided by the system. This allows budget money to be allocated to salary and PD to support the program. These “in kind” costs assist in creating sustainability.

Making sure all children get a good start in life leads to a better quality of life for Saskatchewan people. It is estimated that one dollar invested in a high quality early years program can result in a return of \$4 to \$9 over the lifespan of the child. (Saskatchewan’s Early Years Plan 2016-2020)

Client Support For The Program

- ☺ “My son loves his consultant. She can get him to do and say things that my husband and I cannot. He went from barely speaking in January last year to non- stop talking now. He is able to express himself so much better. He loves the sessions and is so happy during them.” Parent
- ☺ “You have been a part of my daughter’s life since she was born! I truly love this program. We are learning lots. The consultant is fantastic with my child. My daughter responds extremely well to her consultant. Also the consultant tries her hardest to find out any information or concerns I have as a parent. The consultant listens to our family needs and accommodates us and helps my daughter. Our consultant is an asset to our family!” Parent
- ☺ “I have been very grateful for the help my son and myself have received from our consultant. She has been a very positive influence on my son. Always helpful and accommodating. Excellent program overall I’m very happy to be a recipient of the benefits of the program.” Parent
- ☺ “Since our child started ELC services, we have seen a huge improvement in her language after the second visit.” Parent
- ☺ “I really appreciate the distance and commitment that the ELC personnel make to my family. The attention that is given has drastically improved my child's development and mine included.” Parent
- ☺ “Everything that the ELC worker does for my girls is more than what I can ask for. She makes everything really easy and fun for the girls as well as playing with them to make it a fun learning experience.” Parent
- ☺ “Ever since ELC has started helping us, I've seen so much improvement in both of my boys.” Parent
- ☺ “I believe this program is so needed and is a great tool for parent(s)/families to have to enable them to help their child/ren. My child was stuck on saying two words at a time and now since we've been with this program she's come such a long way in a year and I'm astounded at how much progress has occurred. I'm sure without them being on board with us she would be much further behind in language. I'm so grateful for this program and I want this program to continue to be there for future families.” Parent



Partners in Support of Program

“As a Pediatric Speech-Language Pathologist, I work closely with the Early Learning and Care Consultants with South East Cornerstone Public School Division. There is copious research that points to the benefits of early intervention. Early Learning and Care consultants have been instrumental in collaborating on goals and assisting families to carry-over skills into their daily life. I have used the services of the Early Learning and Care program to help families of children who have difficulties with play skills, social behavior, speech delays, receptive and expressive communication deficits, and/or cognitive and emotional difficulties that may be impacting the child’s greatest potential. The consultants have knowledge and skill in early education and I can trust that they will be a life-line for these families, providing whatever they may need to prepare and transition their children to school. Those children who are at greatest risk need extra intervention at a young age when learning is most rapid. As a professional, I am thankful that I have this wonderful resource to refer my clients to!”

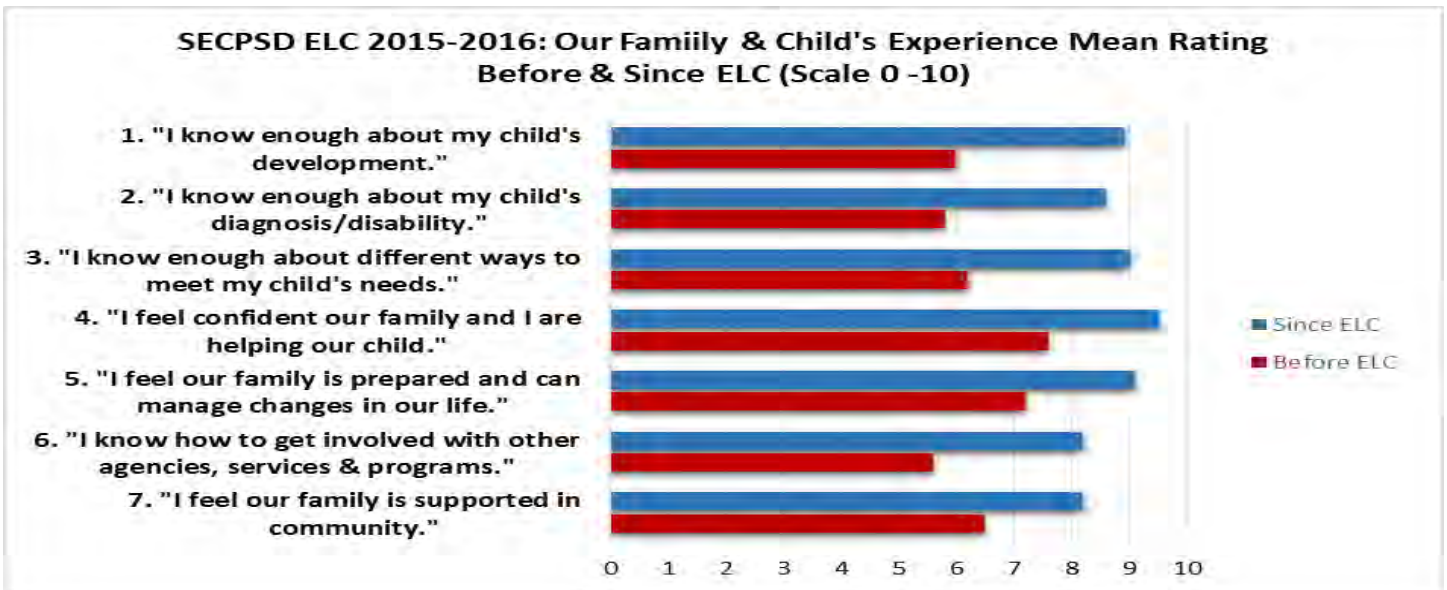
Twyla Siim, Speech-Language Pathologist, Registered Saskatchewan

“In my role of *Regional KidsFirst* Community Developer, I collaborate with many early childhood programs to support the implementation of quality early childhood programs and services within communities. I have especially enjoyed my work with both the Early Learning and Care Coordinator and Consultants, as their insight into early childhood developmental needs and strengths has been of tremendous value at the community level. This partnership has resulted in many successful initiatives such as our Pre K Family Friday kits, Community Data to Action presentations and the SE Region Children’s Charter. The support, promotion and assistance provided by SE Cornerstone’s Early Learning and Care program at community-based events such as our IMPACT Early Childhood Fairs and Community Baby Showers have certainly played a large role in the overall success of these events.”

Madeleine Valentine, Regional KidsFirst Community Developer

Evidence of Improved Student Achievement

A survey is sent out to families who have been involved with our Early Learning and Care program for six months or more. This portion of the survey deals with parents’ knowledge prior to and after their connection to Early Learning and Care. Parents have indicated that their knowledge regarding their children has grown with the involvement of the Early Learning and Care team.



Conclusion

The Early Learning and Care journey has influenced a fundamental change in how the South East Cornerstone Public School Division supports Early Learning. With the support of the Board of Education, a team of professionals has been hired, resources and professional development has been provided, and a model for family centered support has been established.

Through this innovation, the principle of Early Learning “Relationships as Opportunities” has come to fruition.

This innovation enhances growth for our earliest learners. It builds capacity in families, helps children to reach their developmental milestones and readiness for school, and prepares schools to be ready for these children thus making transitions both smooth and successful, and supporting South East Cornerstone Public Board of Education’s vision of “Success and Achievement for Every Student in Every School”.