



# THE HAMILTON EARLY YEARS COMMUNITY PLAN

2016-2020

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Hamilton



# The Hamilton Early Years Community Plan 2016 – 2020 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## OVERVIEW

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The Hamilton Early Years Community Plan (EYCP) 2016–2020 builds on a decade of collective leadership in planning and implementing a comprehensive system of services and supports for children and families. The plan is based on and reflects the community-wide commitment to the principles of the Best Start Network (BSN) and the important learnings and beliefs reflected in the Hamilton Parent Charter of Rights, Hamilton’s Charter of Rights of Children and Youth, and the 2014 framework created by Ontario’s Ministry of Education in *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years*. These guiding principles and values form the foundation upon which the EYCP’s (2016-2020) priorities and structures are determined as well as informing what future success will look like.



The recommended strategic priorities and collaborative organizing structure that will be implemented over the next five years focuses on moving Hamilton’s early years community forward in creating a more integrated system of early years programs and services. The Hamilton EYCP 2016-2020 provides the opportunity for all partners, stakeholders, and contributors to be more conscious about collaboration and working together to achieve greater collective impact and the shared provincial vision for, “responsive, high quality, accessible and increasingly

*integrated early years programs and services that contribute to healthy development today and stronger futures tomorrow.”<sup>1</sup> An embedded equity and engagement lens ensures that the system remains focused on and accountable for achieving equitable outcomes for all children and families, which is an expectation that was clearly articulated through comprehensive stakeholder consultations.*

## PURPOSE AND PROCESS

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In partnership with the BSN, the City of Hamilton embarked on creating the EYCP 2016-2020 in the fall of 2015 to provide an update and an assessment of the Hamilton early years system of programs and services, along with strategies and recommendations to strengthen that system. To help plan and guide the creation of the EYCP 2016-2020, the City of Hamilton convened a Project Steering Committee comprised of City staff and three representatives from the BSN. Supported by consultants, the Project Steering Committee reviewed methodologies and provided advice to facilitate and support the development of the plan.

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<sup>1</sup>Ministry of Education (2013). *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework*.

The BSN dedicated much time and energy to the development of this plan. Through six planning sessions, the BSN played a critical role in generating ideas, validating findings, and shaping strategies.

In addition, comprehensive consultations in the form of targeted interviews and focus groups with over 100 individuals were conducted from the following stakeholder groups:

- BSN members including the Early Years Research and Evaluation and Parent & Family Engagement Committees, and the Family Support Leadership Table;
- The four school boards serving the Hamilton area; and,
- Service providers and parents/families who bring expertise and lived experiences to understanding the needs and perspectives of diverse early years populations (i.e. Indigenous families, newcomers, Francophones, young parents, LGBTQ parents, and parents of LGBTQ children and youth).

The EYCP 2016-2020 provides the community with the opportunity to look back on its achievements and to move forward by designing an integrated system that can effectively respond to the changing landscape and priorities of the early years programs and services.

## LOOKING BACK

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### PROGRESS SINCE THE EYCP 2012-2015

Looking back over the last four years, it is clear that much progress has been made in achieving the goals set in the last EYCP (2012-2015). Key achievements include:

**Child Care Stabilization:** Excellent progress has been made with regard to Child Care Stabilization work. Most of the EYCP 2012-2015 goals have been achieved in the high priority areas including:

- Disbursement of transition minor capital funding to support licensed child care providers in refocusing their services for children aged zero to four and transformation funding to cover one-time business transformation costs;
- City of Hamilton one-on-one meetings with all licensed child care providers to continue to build strong working relationships and understand how best to support their work;
- A new funding agreement that requires licensed child care providers to have inclusion policies and aimed increasing access for children and families; and
- Development and implementation of the new funding model and wage enhancement strategies, as well as supporting providers' preparation for the regulatory changes under the new *Child Care and Early Years Act*, 2014.

Furthermore, since 2013 the child care fee subsidy waitlist has experienced a steady decline with significant drops in 2013 and 2015 due to a range of factors, including increased fee

subsidy funding<sup>2</sup> and an updated waitlist management process. As of June 2016, the waitlist stood at 179 children, down significantly from 1,752 children in June 2013.

**Access to Information:** The Hamilton Child Care Registry<sup>3</sup> provides parents and caregivers with a single online point of access to all licensed child care providers. It eliminates the need for families to apply to multiple waitlists by amalgamating all information together in one location. It also provides an online fee subsidy application process.

Considerable progress has also been made by providing easier access to information for families through the work of the BSN's Pathways to Learning, Basic Needs and System of Care Work Groups. For example, the Pathways to Learning Work Group oversaw the redevelopment of the Hamilton Best Start website, with a specific focus on parents and families. Moreover, the Basic Needs Work Group contributed to progress in this area through their involvement in the Canada Learning Bond Strategy and the development of a financial supports inventory aimed at assisting low income families to become aware of and obtain access to available government supports. The System of Care Work Group developed and is in the process of implementing *Pathway to Connect*, a guide to key early years system access points for families.

**Inclusion:** The City of Hamilton reviewed its funding that supports children with special needs and their families. Recommendations from this review are being implemented. These include a new service delivery model and service criteria, new funding agreements requiring licensed child care providers to develop inclusion policies, enhanced staff training and development, and information management improvements.

Progress was also made by improving the transition process from child care to Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) for all four and five year olds, including those with special needs who require personalized supports.

Families and children have been engaged in developing the *Hamilton Parent Charter of Rights* and *Hamilton's Charter of Rights of Children and Youth*. These charters commit to providing families and children to timely information about programs and services in the early years system and to engage them in planning and assessing early years programs and services.

I have the right  
to be heard.

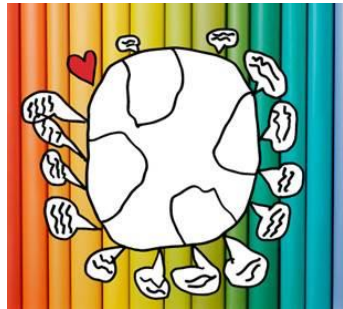


Community Action Research – Community Integration Leaders (CAR-CIL) identified a need for culturally sensitive service delivery at local family support programs. This was affirmed in a follow-up survey with staff from Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) and Parent and Family

<sup>2</sup> Since 2013, the City of Hamilton's child care fee subsidy budget has increased by 11%.

<sup>3</sup> The Hamilton Child Care Registry can be found at <http://childcare.hamilton.ca>

Literacy Centres (PFLCs),<sup>4</sup> and in consultations with parents attending local OEYCs. In response, Affiliated Services for Children and Youth (ASCY)<sup>5</sup> provided professional development opportunities and highlighted existing resources that are available to facilitate culturally sensitive service delivery. Moreover, ASCY identified gaps in existing professional development resources and added new resources and staffing (e.g. Indigenous) to address cultural sensitivities. ASCY hosted various symposiums and workshops to support professionals in gaining knowledge and strength in culturally sensitive service delivery. Additionally, OEYCs utilized the CAR-CIL findings to inform the Service Provider Networks and include culturally sensitive professional networking opportunities.



J'ai le droit de  
connaître ma  
culture et de  
vivre selon  
celle-ci.

**System Integration:** The Hamilton Family Support Leadership Table has begun the process of planning for the development of **Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres (OEYCFCs)**. There is also a project underway at the Beasley Child and Family Centre providing an opportunity for OEYC and PFLC to co-locate, coordinate, and integrate services.

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*“As a stay at home mother it (Child and Family Support Program) gives me the opportunity to ask questions and get answers when they arise. Not only does it allow my children to socialize and learn but it is also a place for me to socialize with people in my community and grow and learn as a parent.”*  
- Parent/guardian and Family Support Program attendee

*Source: e-Evaluation Family Resource Programs Survey. Hamilton OEYC-City Wide Results. February 2016*

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<sup>4</sup> Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) and Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) are the two primary components of Hamilton’s system of child and family support programs.

<sup>5</sup> ASCY ([ascy.ca](http://ascy.ca)) provides a range of consultation and supports that build on the capacity of early years practitioners and other community professionals by providing them with the tools they need to support optimal development of children ages 0 to 12 years. High quality resources and professional learning opportunities are provided through various approaches.

## THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

There are several significant changes in federal, provincial, and local policy and planning initiatives that will have significant impact on the development and implementation of early years programs and services. The EYCP 2016-2020 is designed to position the Hamilton community to address these changes while at the same time embedding the flexibility to accommodate new information and the challenges that will inevitably emerge.

The following is a summary of major changes identified by the City of Hamilton, service providers, community groups, and families, as well as from the scan of available data and research findings:

- **Federal and Provincial Policy Context:** Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Recommendations, Child Care and Early Years Act (2014), Community Hubs, the creation of OEYCFCs through the integration of existing child and family support programs, and the Provincial Special Needs Strategy, and the study by the Public Health Agency of Canada on the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities Program.
- **Local Initiatives:** Hamilton Strategy on Poverty Reduction, Healthy Birth Weight Coalition, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, Indigenous Community Hub, the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton's Report *LGBTQ+ Speak Out! Making Hamilton a Queer and Trans Positive City*, and the Hamilton Neighbourhood Action Strategy.
- **Demographic Changes and Population Trends:**

Hamilton has experienced a steep decline in the number of children in the city over the past two decades.<sup>6</sup> Looking to the future however, the total number of children (zero to 14) in Hamilton is projected to increase at a stable rate over the next 15 years with an estimated population of 86,040 in 2015 growing to 91,104 by 2020 and 101,996 by 2030.<sup>7</sup>

The Early Development Instrument (EDI)<sup>8</sup> is a principal measure of population-wide developmental outcomes. Completed by teachers for all children attending Senior Kindergarten in publicly funded schools, it provides a rich picture of the net effects on children of all early childhood experiences, including services. EDI results are reported as “vulnerability rates” on five domains of development, as well as an Overall Vulnerability rate, which reports the proportion of children who are vulnerable on *any* of the five domains. As “vulnerability” in this context is undesirable, lower rates are better and progress means rates get lower over time. In 2015, Hamilton saw significant decreases in vulnerability on the Language & Cognitive Development and Communication Skills & General Knowledge

<sup>6</sup> Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton (2011). *Hamilton's Social Landscape*.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Finance (Spring 2016). *Ontario Population Projections Update: 2015-2041. Based on the 2011 Census*.

<sup>8</sup> New EDI results were collected by the Ministry of Education in the spring of 2015 and released to the City in the spring of 2016. The City acknowledges the Ministry for receipt of this data and acknowledges that responsibility for the interpretation of this data lies with the City – the views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry.

domains, reflecting improvements in children’s literacy, numeracy, and speaking abilities. However, it also saw a significant increase in vulnerability on Emotional Maturity, after years of steady improvement, and a small increase in vulnerability on Physical Health & Well-Being. Social Competence remained stable, as did the City’s Overall Vulnerability.<sup>9</sup>

Many of Hamilton’s economic wellness indicators reflect a new sense of prosperity and optimism.<sup>10</sup> For example, both employment and unemployment rates have improved in Hamilton and are better than the provincial average.<sup>11</sup> The Conference Board of Canada consistently ranks Hamilton as one of the most diverse economies in the country.<sup>12</sup> While Hamilton’s improved economic outlook is welcome news, many residents are not yet sharing in the benefits of Hamilton’s increasing prosperity. More specifically, youth unemployment has remained at recession levels of 15%<sup>11</sup> and the number of people on social assistance in Hamilton still remains above the provincial average. Similarly, poverty rates have shown no improvement since 2001.

Poverty is experienced disproportionately by vulnerable groups including women, persons with disabilities, seniors living alone, recent immigrants, Indigenous communities, and visible minorities.<sup>13</sup> There is also uneven distribution of poverty across the city. In some neighbourhoods, poverty rates are below six percent, while in others the rate is over 40 percent; additionally, child poverty rates are over 60 percent in several neighbourhoods.<sup>14,15</sup>

Hamilton has recently welcomed Syrian refugees, housing almost 1,000 people as of early 2016. Children and youth represent approximately 50 percent of this population.<sup>16</sup>

Hamilton’s Aboriginal population is growing more quickly than the Hamilton population overall and it is substantially younger.<sup>17</sup>

Hamilton’s Francophone population is younger compared to the Francophone population in most neighbouring regions and more likely to be born outside of Canada.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Overall Vulnerability is defined as ‘low on 1 or more domains’.

<sup>10</sup> City of Hamilton (2016). *Hamilton Community Wellness Indicators*.

<sup>11</sup> Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (2015). *Hamilton’s Economic Renaissance: A prosperity unevenly shared. A Vital Signs Report from Hamilton Community Foundation*.

<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.investinontario.com/spotlights/ontario-cities-recognized-fdi-cities-future>

<sup>13</sup> Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (2009). *Incomes and Poverty in Hamilton*.

<sup>14</sup> Based on Statistics Canada Taxfiler data, using before tax Low Income Measure (LIM). Source: Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (2013). *The Rich and the Rest of Us. Trends in Hamilton’s Income Inequality and Why They Matter*.

<sup>15</sup> Hamilton Community Foundation (2012). *Hamilton’s Vital Signs*.

<sup>16</sup> Wesley Urban Ministries and City of Hamilton presentation to Best Start Network, February 19, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (2015). *Profile of Hamilton’s Aboriginal Residents*.

<sup>18</sup> Entité2 (2012). *Demographic Profile of Francophone Communities in the Regions of Waterloo Wellington Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant*. Rev Sept 2012



## **LOOKING FORWARD: THE 2016-2020 COURSE OF ACTION**

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Over the past decade, the early years community in Hamilton developed the willingness, leadership, and capacity to work together to make a positive difference in the lives of young children and their families. Building on this strong foundation, the Hamilton EYCP 2016-2020 links what has been done and what has been learned over the past five years to develop a Course of Action aimed at creating a more integrated system of programs and services that provides an opportunity for all partners and contributors to work together to achieve greater collective impact for the benefit of all children and families in Hamilton.

Over the next five years, the early years system will evolve so that the various parts connect seamlessly with each other and reach beyond the traditional early years arena to those services that are essential to children's successful growth and development (e.g. affordable housing, income security, education and skills development, poverty reduction, etc.).

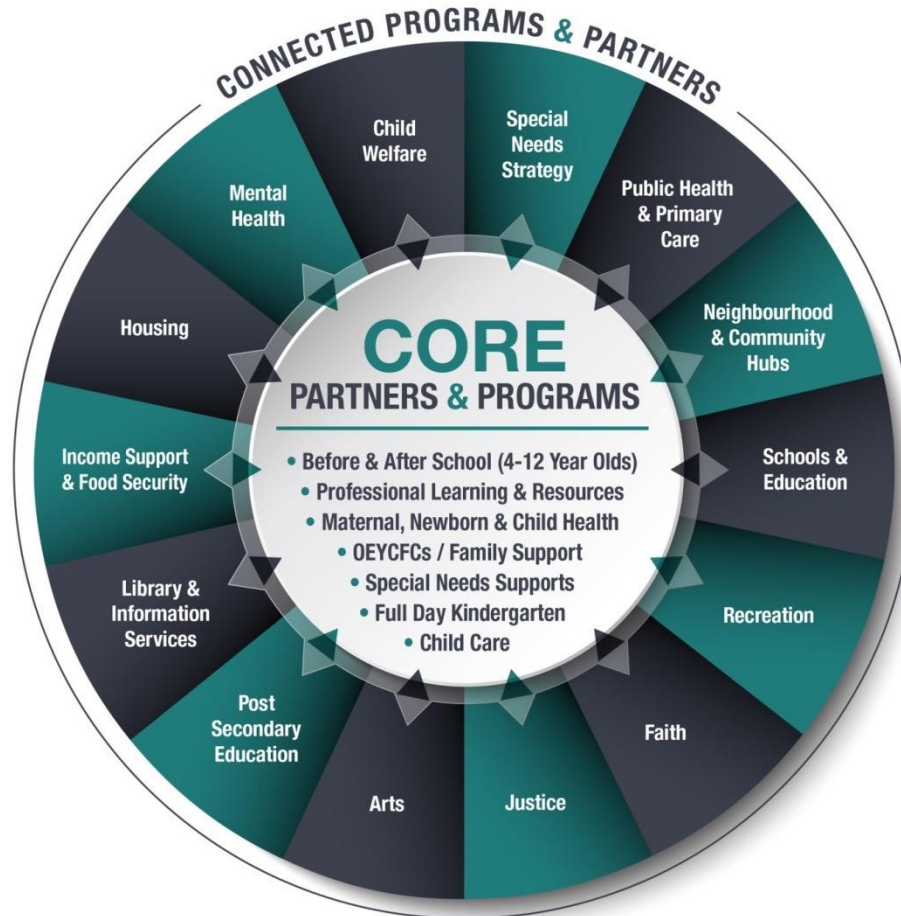
During the early years, young children pass through many developmental stages and transitions. For some, the journey through this period is quite straight forward however, many young children and their families face numerous economic, environmental, cultural, social, and physical obstacles that can undermine the achievement of developmental milestones and make successful transitions from stage-to-stage difficult, if not impossible. The EYCP places emphasis on an overarching equity and engagement lens that will ensure system accountability to achieve equitable outcomes for all children and families in Hamilton.

The Course of Action for the Hamilton Early Years Plan 2016-2020 consists of five key elements:

1. A description and definition of the key components of the early years system;
2. A strategy map that aligns the vision, the focus, and the foundational principles that underpin the early years system;
3. An equity and engagement lens to ensure equitable outcomes for all children and families;
4. A new organizing structure that enables each component of the system to effectively work and learn together; and,
5. Seven strategic priorities with specific goals and recommended actions for the future.

## ELEMENT ONE: DEFINING THE EARLY YEARS SYSTEM

The Hamilton early years system is large and complex with many programs and partners working together and depending on each other. One of the requirements in developing a successful system-wide early years plan is to identify and define the component parts of that system and the corresponding functions, accountabilities, and expectations of those component parts.



The EYCP 2016-2020 conceptualizes and describes the system with three key components:

- **Core Programs:** These programs provide the main functions of an early years system. They have legislative responsibility for early years system goals/outcomes and are funded and/or licensed by the municipality and/or the Province. They exist to provide provincially mandated and funded early years services. Core programs would cease to exist if early years funding was discontinued. These programs and services include: Child Care, FDK, Special Needs Supports, OEYCFCs<sup>19</sup> or Family Support Programs,

<sup>19</sup> Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres

Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, Professional Learning and Resources, and Before and After School Programs (BASPs) for children aged four to 12.

- **Contributing Programs:** These programs and services have mandates beyond the early years but are intrinsically linked to them. They connect to the core programs by providing information and referrals, offering a range of programs and services from health to recreation to child welfare, supporting families through housing, food services, and income security, as well as enriching family experiences through faith, the arts, and neighbourhood life. Although these connected programs are essential to the early years system, the partner organizations would continue to exist if the funding from the Ministry of Education was discontinued. The inter-face and points of intersection between the core and connected programs are critical to the success of the system.
- **Processes and Protocols** are the agreed upon glue that holds the component parts (both core and connected) of the system together. They provide system-wide expectations in terms of quality and service delivery. They ensure communication between and among the various components of the system and strive to ensure access and smooth transitions among organizations. Examples of these include Hamilton's Charter of Rights of Children and Youth, the Hamilton Parent Charter of Rights, the Hamilton Child Care Registry, the access protocol, and the emerging common research tools and data collection processes (i.e. draft BSN outcome indicators).

## ELEMENT TWO: THE STRATEGY MAP

Having defined the various components of the early years system the challenge becomes how to depict – at a strategic level - the way the system will work together to achieve its collective goals. The strategy map for the EYCP provides the framework that will enable the early years community to ultimately achieve its vision. Based on what was learned through the data collection, a policy review, and in conversations with diverse stakeholders, emerging themes point to strategic opportunities to enhance and further develop the early years system in Hamilton.

The strategy map has three components: a **foundation** that lays the groundwork for the work moving forward; a **focus**, including the building block **strategies** that focus the work and are essential to create the desired system; and, the **vision**, a shared vision of the communities' aspirations for its early years programs and services.

# HAMILTON'S EARLY YEARS COMMUNITY PLAN (EYCP) 2016-2020

## STRATEGY MAP



### ELEMENT THREE: EMBEDDING AN EQUITY AND ENGAGEMENT LENS

In the EYCP 2012-2015, inclusion was identified as a critical challenge and opportunity. One of the key findings from the previous plan was that the system needs to be more sensitive to the needs of “special” populations (i.e. Indigenous, Francophones, diverse communities, established immigrants and newcomers, young parents, LGBTQ parents, and parents of LGBTQ children and youth). Given this, the environmental scan for the current plan included targeted consultations with key informants who work with these populations, as well as parents who have lived experience. The findings confirmed the following emerging themes:

- The early years population is not homogeneous;
- There are populations whose needs and perspectives are not well understood or reflected in existing programs/services;
- Finding information about specialized programs/services that are available for diverse populations is difficult; and,
- The system needs to be accountable for equitably meeting the needs of ALL children.

Based on consultation findings and discussions with the BSN, it became clear that inclusion is viewed as more of a process than an outcome. What parents, providers, and BSN members feel passionate about is the need to strive for equity and to hold the system accountable for achieving equitable outcomes for all children and families. Stakeholders and parents suggest the need to shift from labelling the populations (“special”; “vulnerable”; “marginalized”) to labelling the system’s ability to respond to their needs (“unmet needs”; “underserved”). To achieve equitable outcomes, the system must embed an equity and engagement lens into future strategic priorities, organizing structures, and processes. The critical questions related to equity and engagement the system needs to address include the following:

- How do we meaningfully engage ALL stakeholders in system planning and evaluation on an ongoing basis?
- What indicators will tell us the system is getting better at responding to the needs of diverse populations?
- How do we ensure best practices with respect to equity and engagement?
- What unique access/transition challenges do we need to understand and address for diverse populations?
- Does membership in the future early years organizing structure include those who can effectively speak to diverse needs and experiences?

#### ELEMENT FOUR: THE COLLABORATIVE ORGANIZING STRUCTURE

Stakeholder consultations revealed that the current BSN structure must be refreshed to support a systems-level and strategic focus. The Network has succeeded in planning and implementing a diverse range of important collaborative initiatives. As the focus of the early years system expands in new directions, partners assume new roles and policies and demographics shift, therefore, it is essential that the organizing structure adapts to and reflects these changes. The new Collaborative Organizing Structure is designed to reflect those changes and to support the implementation of the EYCP vision and strategic priorities as outlined in the EYCP Strategy Map.

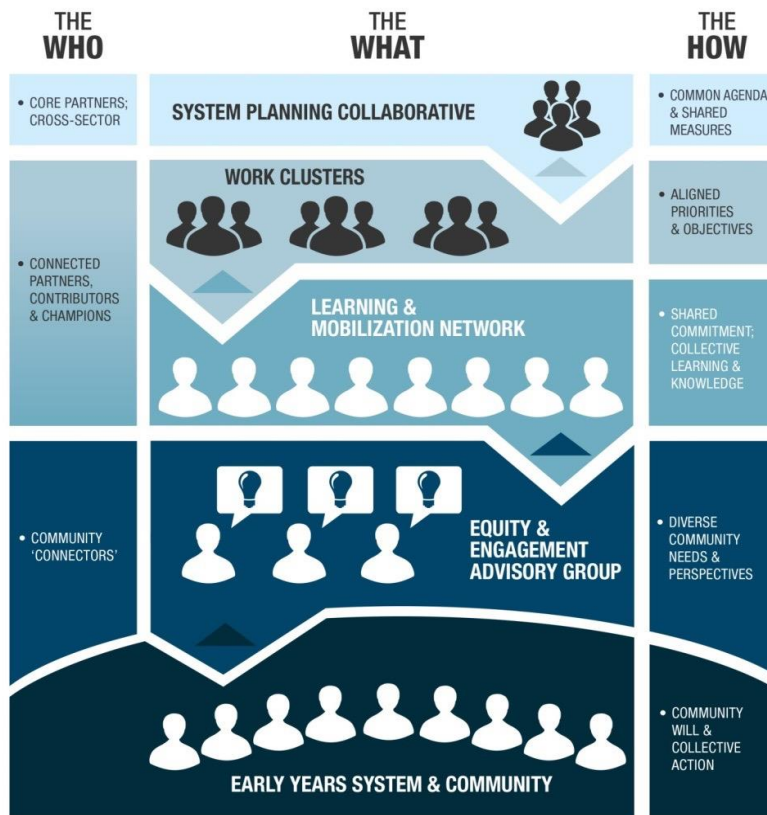
The proposed Collaborative Organizing Structure is designed to achieve the following:

- Align shared goals and interests towards greater collective impact;
- Allow for system leadership, problem-solving, decision-making, and accountability;
- Ensure the right people are able to contribute at the right place and time; and,
- Enable a fluid and dynamic structure that supports agile responses to emerging issues and opportunities.

The intent of the new structure is to build on work that is already underway by providing clear opportunities for existing subcommittees and initiatives to align their work with the new structure. It also incorporates evidence-informed practices, which suggest that fluid versus static, hierarchical structures lead to the most effective and sustainable collaborations, particularly in rapidly changing and evolving environments.

The following diagram illustrates key components and characteristics of the new Collaborative Organizing Structure, highlighting the fact that each draws its membership from the broader early years community and aims to inform one another’s work. The organizing structure enables highly connected and purposeful groups to work together to achieve greater collective action and impact by meaningfully engaging broader and more diverse voices and perspectives through cascading levels of collaboration.

## HAMILTON’S EARLY YEARS ORGANIZING STRUCTURE CASCADING LEVELS OF COLLABORATION



## ELEMENT FIVE: THE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The seven strategic priorities outlined below were identified through analysis of the environmental scan findings and were affirmed by the BSN. These priorities focus on the core program areas: BASPs, Family Support Programs, Special Needs Supports, and Child Care. The strategic priorities also focus on three key processes and protocol areas - Quality, Evaluation & Learning, Advocacy, and Access & Pathways (i.e. the glue that will hold the system together). Specific actions are recommended for each of these strategic priorities in the table below.

Strategic Priority Focus	Overarching Goal	Why is this Important?
<b>1. Quality, Evaluation &amp; Learning</b>	To lead informed practice and decision-making and ensure continuous quality improvement.	This strategic priority seeks to build on the Early Years Research and Evaluation Committee's work to ensure the early years sector's research, evaluation, and learning capacity continues to grow with emphasis placed on system-level inquiry and learning.
<b>2. Child Care System Planning &amp; Stabilization</b>	To ensure high-quality, sustainable, accessible and, increasingly integrated child care and early learning experiences for all children and their families.	In its role as the CMSM, the City of Hamilton is legislatively responsible for planning and managing child care and early learning services, administering fee subsidies, and allocating additional resources to families and centres providing care to children with special needs.
<b>3. Access &amp; Pathways</b>	To ensure all children and families meet with developmental success through the early years journey.	Given the commitment to creating an equitable early years system for all children it is essential to develop an understanding of what a successful pathway through the early years system looks like, how we can facilitate each child's passage along this pathway, and how we can remove barriers that may prevent some children from achieving success.

Strategic Priority Focus	Overarching Goal	Why is this Important?
<b>4. Family Support Programs</b>	To create vibrant and responsive hubs of family support services located conveniently throughout the community.	The provincial government has announced the formation of OEYCFCs to transform OEYCs and PFLCs into one suite of integrated services. The programs to be offered are intended to provide families and children with a core and standardized system of services that are responsive to the needs and requirements of each community.
<b>5. System Advocacy &amp; Education</b>	To identify and frame issues and opportunities that, through collective action, can contribute to addressing barriers to equitable outcomes for children and families.	Consultations with stakeholders suggest that there is an expectation that the early years system should take a position on research/initiatives that can positively influence early years outcomes. The intent of this strategy is to bring some rigour to the process of identifying and framing issues by defining what is meant by advocacy and identifying evidence-informed approaches that can contribute to addressing current barriers to equitable outcomes.
<b>6. Special Needs Resourcing &amp; Strategy</b>	To ensure accessible, supportive, and inclusive early learning environments for all children and an integrated, seamless collection of services that families experience as one system.	Key principles driving the Provincial Special Needs Strategy and local planning table recommendations align with feedback from consultations with key stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing available services for children with high and complex needs and/or disruptive behaviours who do not fit specific service definitions;</li> <li>• Ensuring clear access points and pathways and a seamless experience for children, youth, and families; and,</li> <li>• Improving the quality and accessibility of special needs data.</li> </ul>



Strategic Priority Focus	Overarching Goal	Why is this Important?
7. Before & After School Programs Community-wide Planning	To plan for a system of well-connected BASPs that reflect what families, children, and youth want.	<p>Given changes to the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 and the expectations for responsive and integrated BASPs, it is important for the City of Hamilton and the early years system to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a system-wide planning process for BASPs;</li> <li>• Create opportunities for collaborative planning efforts among school boards, child care providers, recreation programs, and families; and,</li> <li>• Improve access and identify barriers that prevent effective coordination and use of school space.</li> </ul>

## SETTING THE STAGE FOR SYSTEM ACCOUNTABILITY & FUTURE INVESTMENTS

*“There is perhaps no relationship that holds greater responsibility or reward than the relationships we develop with children. As educators, as family members, as policy makers, or as administrators, we all know that the stronger our partnerships and the deeper and more valuable our connections, the greater the benefit. It’s an investment that allows us all to grow.”<sup>20</sup>*

This understanding shapes the way that early years providers and educators work with children and families. The commitment to stronger partnerships and deeper, more valuable connections will benefit the systems that are being created to enable children and families to achieve healthy child development and growth.

The Hamilton EYCP 2016-2020 **Course of Action** is designed specifically to foster **at the system level** the meaningful connections and strong partnerships and collaborative undertakings that will build the community’s capacity to enhance learning, development, and well-being for all children and their families.

The new Collaborative Organizing Structure enables diverse system partners, champions, and connectors to work, learn, and grow together. Each of the component parts of this structure plays an important role in knitting the system together and strengthening outcomes.

- I. The *Learning and Mobilization Network* provides opportunities for deeper and more valuable connections as partners share experiences and ideas and learn from each other;

<sup>20</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education (2014). *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years*.

- II. The *Equity and Engagement Advisory Group* focuses attention on achieving equitable outcomes for **all** children and families;
- III. The *Working Clusters* generate ideas and products aimed at addressing specific priorities, programs, or process goals; and,
- IV. The *System Planning Collaborative* provides guidance and oversight to the overarching vision, goals, and accountabilities. It facilitates the investment of time and resources that will enable Hamilton’s early years system to thrive.

The Hamilton EYCP 2016-2020 has been developed with respect for the past and with an eye to the future. Building on the foundation from over a decade of work initiated by the City of Hamilton and the BSN, this early years plan is designed to create a system of programs and services aimed at “*contributing to healthy development today and stronger futures tomorrow*”<sup>21</sup> for all children and families in Hamilton.

The expectation is that this comprehensive EYCP, informed by diverse stakeholder experiences and perspectives, will inform future investments by providing a clear roadmap that suggests emerging priorities, considerations and opportunities for the next five years

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<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Education (2013). *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework*.





[www.hamiltonbeststart.ca/eypc](http://www.hamiltonbeststart.ca/eypc)