



# 2024 Community Sessions Post-Event Report

**EARLY YEARS  
COMMUNITY PLAN  
(EYCP)**



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# BACKGROUND

[Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan](#) is a multi-year plan designed to move our local Early Years System towards integration, transformation and seamless transitions for children and their families from birth to young adulthood.

On May 28 and 29, 2024, the City of Hamilton's Children's and Community Services Division hosted three Early Years Community Plan (EYCP) Community Sessions.

Attendees participated in various engagement activities integrated within each session, providing opportunities for them to share their input, insights, and ideas.

## PURPOSE

The sessions were designed to gather feedback and input on key areas within the plan and to identify ongoing challenges faced by the early years system.

The goal of these sessions was to ensure the EYCP is relevant and remains reflective of the evolving needs and priorities of children, families, and the early years community, ultimately contributing to the overall success and transformation of the early years system.

This report serves as an overview of the valuable input received during the sessions and outlines the plans for sharing and utilizing feedback.

## Attendees by service area\*

Early Years and  
Child Care\*\*



61%

Recreation, Arts &  
Community  
Programming



11%

Health, Income,  
Education & Housing  
Supports



11%

Other



17%



\*Percentages shown do not include staff from the City of Hamilton's Children's and Social Services Department.

\*\*Includes Licensed Centre and Home-Based Child Care, EarlyONs, Co-Ops and Before and After School Care.

# ATTENDANCE DATA

A total of 175 attendees representing 63 unique agencies across the city attended the sessions. The diverse group of representatives working in the Early Years System included licensed operators, before and after school care providers, EarlyON staff, and municipal services such as health, income, and housing. Partners from various fields such as recreation, arts, literacy, healthcare, and education also participated in the event.

This attendance was an increase in engagement from the 2023 EYCP Community Sessions, which welcomed 121 attendees.

- 1  Interactive Polls
- 2  Facilitated Table Discussions
- 3  Post-Event Survey

# ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Engagement activities were integrated throughout the sessions to help gain feedback and input from attendees. Attendees voluntarily opted to share their thoughts on a series of questions through interactive poll questions, facilitated table discussions, and a post-event survey.

# INTERACTIVE POLLS

Throughout the sessions, participants were provided with digital codes to access interactive polls on their personal devices. Below reflects the insights captured from this engagement. Percentages in this section are based on the total percent (%) of those who completed each interactive poll inquiry.

## Key Results Summary:

### Q1. How familiar are you with the Early Years Community Plan?

- Overall, 49% of attendees were familiar or very familiar with the EYCP and 41% were somewhat familiar with it, while 10% of attendees weren't familiar or didn't know about the plan.

### Q2. What information are you most interested in learning about today?

- Details about the EYCP, activities, and what's next (36.6%)
- Updates on the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system and its funding formula (15.2%)
- Special needs resourcing supports and meeting increased need (8.0%)
- Plans to alleviate waitlists and expand childcare spaces (7.1%)
- Other areas of interest for learning included updates on community supports, data on local need, the role early years agencies play in the plan, learning and sharing perspectives, and networking and collaboration.

# INTERACTIVE POLLS, CONTINUED

## Q3. What information are you most interested in sharing today?

- Perspectives and learnings to support the sector (31.8%)
- Work underway and planned to move the plan forward (18.2%)
- Ideas to grow and sustain the sector (12.1%)
- Opportunities to collaborate, and how agencies can contribute to advance to plan (9.1%)
- Other information to share included the voices and needs of families, networking with others, feedback on special needs resourcing, and services and support needs for middle years and early years mental health.

## Q4. Does the Early Years Community Plan address key areas in your work? If not, what needs and gaps does the plan not address?

- 87% felt the EYCP addressed key areas within their work, while 13% felt needs and gaps remained, or they did not know.

### ***The following are additional areas of need identified through the interactive polls requiring further attention and consideration:***

- Total compensation across the early years workforce (38.0%)
- Options to enhance special needs resourcing and inclusion supports (18.3%)
- Funding to support inclusion and quality in the classroom and approaches to address workforce conditions (19.8%)
- Systems approaches to engage and support families and priority populations, and address the mental health needs of school-age children (14.1%)
- Other gaps and areas of need included expanding spaces for families overall and within the licensed home care sector to meet demand.

# FACILITATED TABLE DISCUSSIONS

All 175 attendees were placed at tables of up to 10 individuals, with facilitators and scribes present. Responses collected from these discussions were pooled, tabulated, and analyzed to identify major themes. Percentages in this section are based on the total percent (%) of table discussions that identified each theme.



## DISCUSSION #1

**What are the strategic advantages to operators with increasing access and inclusion for families and children?**

Discussions identified many advantages to operators and the children and families they serve by increasing access and inclusion, such as expanded access for parents and caregivers to support return to work and school, earlier identification of supports and needs for children entering care, opportunities for socialization and learning, meeting identified gaps and needs, and providing children with complex needs greater opportunities for inclusion and to access additional supports.

Strategies and innovations to support increased access and inclusion for families and supports for operators were also discussed, these included:

- Activities to shorten the waitlist to enable earlier/better access to childcare and community supports (34%)
- Workforce total compensation to address challenging classroom conditions and support continuing education (26%)
- Improved and enhanced communication for families on available programs, resources, and support outside of the classroom and age-appropriate tools and resources for use by staff in the classroom (25%)
- Exploring solutions to access extra staff and improve the staff to student classroom ratio. (15%)



## DISCUSSION #2

**Based on some of the findings from 'Knowing Our Numbers', what strategies would support and create an environment of belonging in the early years' workforce?**

Prior to entering this facilitated table discussion, all attendees were engaged in a presentation from Dr. Emis Akbari from the Atkinson Centre on the province-wide, [Knowing Our Numbers](#) initiative.

Attendees were appreciative of the Knowing Our Numbers presentation and its confirmation of local needs and challenges within the early years' workforce. Attendees expressed gratitude towards the City and the EYCP's Early Years HR Workforce for their past and ongoing efforts in making the local early years workforce feel valued and respected.

Moving forward, attendees identified additional strategies to help enhance a sense of belonging in the workforce included:

- Continue to offer and explore non-monetary incentives and activities to support recruitment, such as recognition events, team building opportunities, and exploring activities to enhance staffing and reduce staff burnout (52%)
- Greater total compensation including wages and benefits, additional funding for administration, mentorship with incentives and ongoing opportunities for career growth and securing full time employment (25%)
- Continue offering of Professional Learning days overall and a systems approach to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB), education and capacity building (12%)
- Review of education gaps and motivations and expanded supports for students and new graduates entering the Early Years System (11%)





## DISCUSSION #3

### What efforts are needed to better collaborate with Early Years community and system partners?

Discussions revealed that there is a keen interest within the early years community to increase their level of involvement. It was suggested that the plan identify various opportunities for involvement to further its progress and continue to engage the community. Additionally, ideas were proposed to enhance communication and engage both staff and families in events and opportunities to collect feedback.

Recommended efforts included:

- Expanding community involvement and opportunities for collaboration by early years community and partners (32%)
- Processes to reduce response time and allow for timely implementation and changes (28%)
- Streamlining communication and integrating updates and engagement opportunities at other events throughout the year (21%)
- Direct engagement of front-line staff to build awareness and gain input (19%)



# POST-EVENT SURVEY

At the end of each session, participants were provided with a link to an online, post-event survey. The online survey was open between May 28, 2024 and June 7, 2024. During this time, 114 surveys were completed yielding a response rate of approximately 65%. Percentages in this section are based on the total percent (%) of those who completed the post-event survey.

## Key Results Summary:

- The majority of respondents felt that attending the session was a valuable use of time (92%), that the session increased their awareness and understanding of the EYCP (88%) and that they had an opportunity to make meaningful contributions during the facilitated discussions (92%).
- While 75% of respondents agreed with feeling confident that their contributions will be used to inform planning and strategy development for the Early Years Community Plan, there were 22% that neither agreed nor disagreed and 4% that did not feel confident that their contributions will be used.
- Feedback about what worked well in the sessions most often included references to the table/group discussions and the opportunity to network and interact with others.
- Some suggestions for improvement of future sessions and community consultations included having more sessions/opportunities to engage early childhood educators and/or more partners.
- Overall, the comments and feedback received from respondents were positive, noting appreciation for the opportunity to participate and hear the information shared.



# COMMON THEMES

## What themes did the analysis present across engagement mechanisms?

Levels of attendee engagement were consistently high, with feedback indicating a strong support and appreciation for the opportunity to share perspectives with the City and other attendees.

### Consistent themes emerged throughout attendee engagement, presented below:

1. **Workforce Crisis:** Hamilton's Early Years workforce is facing a severe staffing shortage.
2. **Limited Incentives:** There are insufficient financial incentives, a lack of non-monetary recognition, and limited opportunities for personal and professional growth for Early Years professionals.
3. **Increased Care Needs:** Early Years professionals are struggling to meet the needs of individuals requiring enhanced care.
4. **Rigid System Delivery:** The current delivery of the CWELCC System restricts the flexibility that child care providers need to support families and staff. This includes issues like competitive wages, performance incentives, centre expansion, and managing waitlists.



## NEXT STEPS

### How will this information be used?

The information gained from these sessions will be widely shared to contribute to planning, strategy development and decision-making for the Early Years System and the EYCP.

The report will be disseminated to the early years community and focused discussions will take place among the City of Hamilton's Children's and Community Services Division, local early years partners, and government liaisons to share the community's insights.

*Based on the information collected, the following recommendations will be taken:*

- **Organize for Workforce Improvements:** In collaboration with Children's Services divisions across Ontario and in partnership with the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE), the City of Hamilton will advocate for improvements to the early years and licensed child care workforce in alignment with the 'Knowing Our Numbers' project.
- **Increase Engagement Opportunities:** The City of Hamilton will increase opportunities for early years educators to participate in future EYCP engagement activities.
- **Action on Specialized Care Support:** The City will ensure that the Early Years Special Needs Resourcing and HR Workforce Operational Committees take action on the expressed challenges relating to supporting individuals requiring specialized care.
- **Action and Evaluation Planning:** The City of Hamilton will develop and implement an Action and Evaluation Plan to support the emerging priorities identified in the Early Years Community Plan (EYCP), 2023 Update.

# THANK YOU

**On behalf of the Children's and Community Services Division, thank you for your participation and interest in the 2024 EYCP Community Sessions. We are so grateful for the opportunity to engage with each of you, learning from each other, all in effort to best support the early years system and community.**

For any additional ideas or feedback, please contact Daniel Ridsdale, Senior Project Manager, Community Strategies, at [Daniel.Ridsdale@hamilton.ca](mailto:Daniel.Ridsdale@hamilton.ca).

