Early Childhood Development Strategy

District of Saanich

February 2012

Prepared by

Yates, Thorn & Associates

Saanich

Success By 6
Helping all children succeed for life.

50 Beach Drive, Victoria, BC, V8S 2L4
250-598-3525
www.yatesthorn.com

Table of Contents

Preface

This report was prepared by Yates, Thorn & Associates Inc. The principal assigned to the project was Bob Yates. Research and consultation assistance was provided by Morgan Yates.

The consultants were assisted throughout by a steering committee consisting of:
Diane Andiel	Programmer, Community Services, Saanich Parks and Recreation
Jane Barclay	VIHA
Careena Elford	Recreation Programmer, Cedar Hill Recreation Centre
Sylvia Exposito	Planning Department – Municipality of Saanich
Colleen Hobson	Executive Director, Saanich Neighbourhood Place and Chair – P.L.A.Y. Victoria
Steve Meikle	Manager of Community Services Saanich Parks and Recreation
Diane Murray	Parks Division
Jan White	Coordinator - Success by 6 and P.L.A.Y. Victoria

We would like to extend our thanks to all who assisted with their ideas and views, especially the many parents, early childhood educators and pre-school coordinators from other municipalities who participated in focus groups and who gave us their thoughts through the online survey.

The project commenced in October 2010 and was completed in August 2011.

Client	Municipality of Saanich 780 Vernon Avenue Victoria BC V8X 2W7 T: 250-475-5422 F: 250-475-5411
For Further Information	Steve Meikle Manager of Community Services Saanich Parks and Recreation Municipality of Saanich 780 Vernon Avenue Victoria BC V8X 2W7 T: 250-475-5409 steve.meikle@saanich.ca
Report	Early Childhood Development Strategy
Consultants	Yates, Thorn & Associates Inc. 50 Beach Drive Victoria, BC V8S 2L4 Telephone: 250 598-3525 bob@yatesthorn.com http://www.yatesthorn.com
Date	June 2011

Cover photo provided by Natural Learning (www.naturallearning.com)

Executive Summary

The need for a municipal Early Childhood Development Strategy was identified by a number of groups both within and outside of the municipality. This report is a partnership endeavor funded by the municipality and by Success by 6.

The report's principal focus was to identify the goals that the municipality should pursue, and what initiatives would best achieve these goals. Goals and recommended initiatives are as follows:

Goal #1 - To be a recognized player and partner in, and advocate for, the early childhood development community.
   a. Taking a leadership role in bringing together community organizations to develop and improve service planning and delivery
   b. Playing a leading role in the advocacy for early childhood development at provincial and national forums.

Goal #2- To enhance economic viability, and ensure sustainable, supportive, and appropriate child care as an essential element of community infrastructure.
   a. Developing a Municipal Child Care Strategy in cooperation with the child care community
   b. Determining how much care needs to be provided in the community
   c. Identifying opportunities for increasing the number of care spaces that are provided.

Goal #3 - To continue to deliver a range of early childhood development services, programs and opportunities
   a. Strengthening the Department's community development strategies for supporting the local child care community
   b. Continually refining the range of early childhood development programming in response to changing community needs
   c. Expanding the 'hub' model for supporting early childhood development, and establishing programs in municipal facilities based on the StrongStart principles
   d. Linking the Ministry of Education framework proposed for early childhood development settings by schools (as in the StrongStart programs and in full day kindergarten) or professional organizations and embedding this into and communicating it through municipal programming
   e. Exploring how best to support the community organizations that deliver early childhood development programming
   f. Upgrading staff training as necessary.

Goal #4 - To ensure programs are affordable
   a. Working with regional partners to expand the LIFE program so that the costs of participation in local programs are diminished.

Goal #5 - To encourage the development of neighbourhoods that are 'friendly' to preschoolers and their families, and that all Saanich community plans consider the development goals of early childhood development
   a. Developing a community-based child friendliness audit process.

Introduction

The need to engage citizens in the creation of a strategic plan for the delivery of programs and services to support early childhood development in the municipality of Saanich was determined through several channels which included:

- Research conducted locally through P.L.A.Y. Victoria (Partnership for Learning and Advocacy for Young Children) and Understanding the Early Years Victoria such as The Saanich Early Years Report, The Role of Municipalities Report and local EDI statistics and mapping.
- Customer feedback gathered through a comprehensive programs and services survey in the summer of 2009.
- Staff concern over the impact on services from initiatives brought forward through the federal and provincial levels of government such as full day kindergarten and private preschool provision.
- An internal program review process and service delivery assessment in recreation which identified inefficiencies in the provision of programs for young families and children.

The municipality decided to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the current state of programs and services for young families and children in the municipality. The process was supported by an advisory committee made up of representatives from local service providers, several departments of the municipality and local stakeholders such as representatives from P.L.A.Y. Victoria. The project was part funded by Success by 6. The project included a process of community and stakeholder consultation to provide recommendations for the future direction of programs and services supporting early childhood development. This report provides a clear indication of the municipality's role in supporting the early years and provides strategies and recommendations for action.

The desired project outcomes were:

- An in depth analysis of the current state of programs and services supporting early childhood development in Saanich identifying needs, gaps and future directions derived from a literature review and consultations with citizens and stakeholders.
- A framework for the municipality in supporting young families and early childhood development.
- A five year strategic plan for the provision of programs and services through the municipal park and recreation delivery systems.
- Creation of opportunities for the community to provide feedback and be involved in the decision making for the future direction of municipal services supporting young children.

The broader desired impact will be more efficient service delivery and a broader range of services to support healthy child development.

Background

Over the last 20 to 30 years, the importance of the early years to children's growth and development has become clear. Research and promotion, first by Fraser Mustard and more recently by UBC's Human Early Learning Partnership, have made it clear to both public and decision-makers that early childhood development is critically important - we learn 50% of all we ever learn, before the age of 5 years. Addressing this issue will not only require more resources than are currently committed, but will also require more agencies, both public and not-for-profit, to be engaged…and this certainly includes Canada's municipalities.

Sensitive Periods in Early Brain Development

Graph developed by Council for Early Child Development (ref: Nash, 1997; *Early Years Study*, 1999; Shonkoff, 2000.)
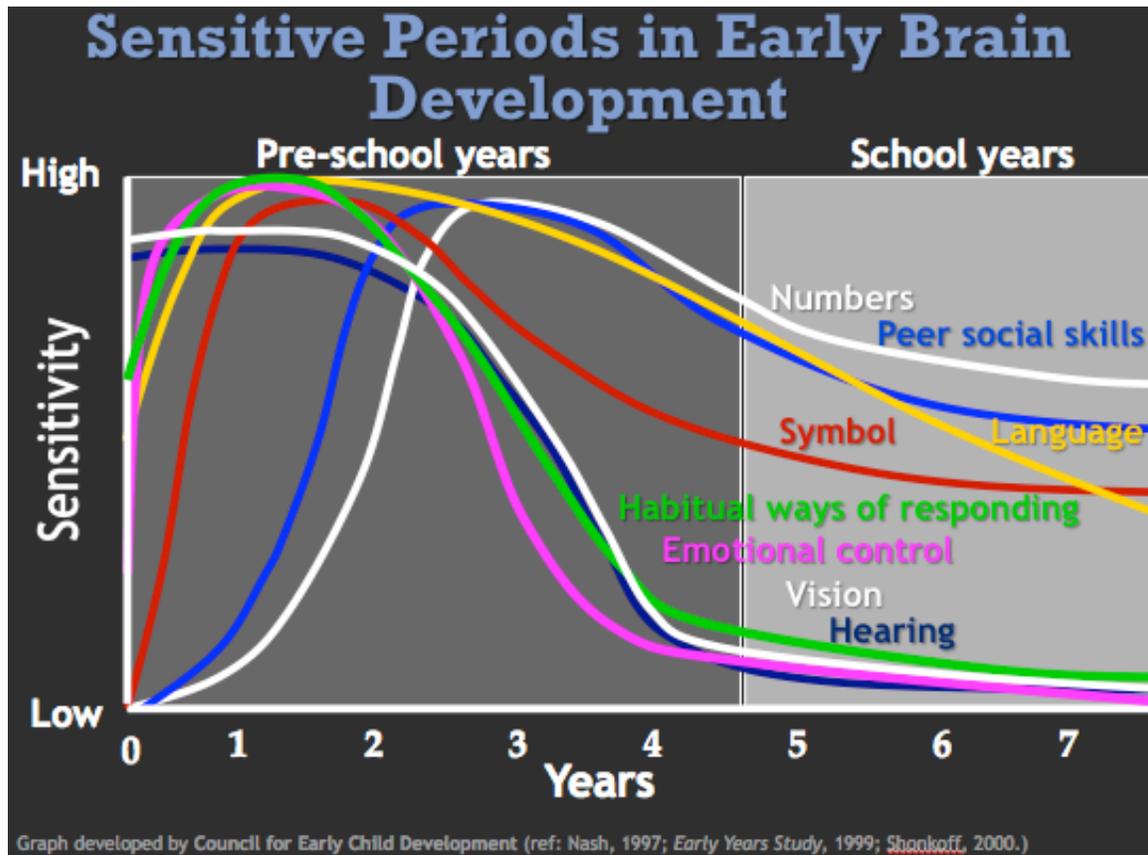
Other social and economic factors have thrust other aspects of early childhood development, especially childcare, into the public arena. However the question that still stymies the adoption of a systemic approach is one of jurisdiction. In Canada, different levels of government, and different agencies within levels, are responsible for different desired outcomes: economic development is both federal and provincial, education is provincial and local through school districts, recreation and quality of life are municipal…and early childhood development and quality child care will contribute to all these outcomes.

And of course the bottom line is that the daily impact of inadequate services is felt at the personal, family and community levels. Communities have responded by doing what they can within their mandated areas. In Saanich:

- The Recreation Division offers a wide range of social and physical activity programs for young children and their parents.
- The Parks Division install equipment in the parks to allow children to play with their parents and care givers.
- The Planning Department is mindful of making all the neighbourhoods of Saanich child friendly, while various other departments, such as Police, Fire and Engineering, provide programs and services which impact children in their early years.
- Saanich municipality partners with VIHA (who champion the Social Determinants of Health) on the delivery of a variety of programs for new mothers, health screening, child care licensing, etc.
- The school system now offers StrongStart programs for children under kindergarten age, full day kindergarten (full implementation by September 2011) and partners with municipalities on community schools (where programs are run) and more recently Neighbourhoods of Learning.

However this is not an integrated, child and parent oriented system. While there are some inventories and resources that help parents find programs (such as the Active Living Guide and Island Parent), it still takes enormous effort on the part of a parent to set up a calendar of activities for their child, especially if the search is for full, or near full, day care. Many parents rely on their parents, friends and neighbours to pinch hit…which is good (generally). But far too many young children spend too much time in front of a screen…which is not good. And recent research indicates that on average at least 20% of children are not being adequately prepared in early childhood for entry into kindergarten at age five years; and in some neighbourhoods, this proportion is as high as 40%.

Many organizations have worked tirelessly to create a better, more integrated system, and are to be applauded for it. P.L.A.Y. Victoria (Partnership for Learning and Advocacy for Young Children) has worked to coordinate advocacy, while Saanich Neighbourhood Place delivers vital services to parents and children through a partnership with Saanich's G.R.Pearkes Recreation Centre.

The fundamental focus for this report is therefore: **What goals should the municipality pursue to support early childhood development generally, and the children and parents involved?**

Within this overall focus, key questions are:
- What kinds of programs and services, facilities and spaces should the municipality provide?
- How best can municipal programs compliment those delivered at schools and by other agencies?
- How can neighbourhoods be made more 'child-friendly', especially for young children and their parents?
- How can the municipality best communicate with parents about programs and services?

Process

Several process values were fundamental to this project:
- The views of parents must be central to the understanding of issues and the selection of strategies.
- Young parents have different experiences based on their gender, income group and ethnicity, as well as their age. Every effort was made to engage a cross-section of young parents.
- Many groups contribute to the effectiveness of early childhood development services in a community: schools, recreation centres, private providers, not-for-profit groups, to name just a few. The study was seen as an opportunity to enhance the overall system and the collaboration within it.

The process and timeline of the project was as follows:

October 2010
A meeting was held with the Early Childhood Advisory Committee All relevant reports, documents and files held by the Project Manager and Early Childhood Advisory Committee members were reviewed and summarized.
The inventories of municipal programs and services were reviewed.

November 2010
Key informant interviews were conducted with both workers of agencies and representatives of stakeholder groups:
- Community Health Nurses
- Native Friendship Centre Preschool Coordinator
- School District staff from both SD61 and SD63 – Program Coordinators and Principals
- Camosun College Early Childhood Development (teaching) staff
- Swan Lake Nature House staff

January 2011
Working with the Early Childhood Advisory Committee and other stakeholder organizations, a broader group of adults, young parents in particular, were invited to participate in a series of focus groups.
A focus group was held with those municipal employees who work on the early childhood development file in other municipalities, and Saanich Preschool Programmers.
Using an on-line survey tool, a survey was created and distributed by publication on the municipal and partner websites. Data on key questions was gathered from parents and early childhood development providers. In total, 68 responses were received.

February 2011
The results were gathered into a draft report, which was then reviewed by the Early Childhood Advisory Committee. After several revisions, the report was finalized.

Agencies involved in Early Childhood Development

Many agencies are involved in the provision of services to children and their families in their early years. Children are the youngest citizens of our country and province, they are residents of our municipalities, and clients of our education and health systems. In addition, they are the consumers of services sold to them by the private sector, and are supported through a variety of not-for-profit agencies. All these organizations have roles to play, some larger, some smaller, in ensuring a positive early childhood environment. A brief outline of this organizational landscape is as follows:

Municipality	Various departments provide services to children and their families:

- Parks and Recreation – provide community facilities and parks which allow drop-in and casual recreation, as well as venues for a variety of programs for young children and their parents/caregivers, either separately or together.
- Planning – support an integrated approach that incorporates child friendly design elements in community planning, especially in major centres and villages.
- Engineering and other departments – provide the community systems, such as streets and sidewalks, which also increase 'child friendliness'.

School Districts	The new mandate for School Districts, now officially known as Boards of Education, includes the following roles and services:

- StrongStart – programs for children aged zero to kindergarten age, designed to provide a grounding in the many elements that will ensure an effective start to school life in kindergarten.
- Schools as facilities – which are venues and opportunities for out-of-school time programming.

The commitment of SD63 to working with the ECD community, and their openness to new ideas has been commendable.

VIHA	VIHA has an extensive staff of health professionals who provide a variety of services during children's early years:

- Screening – dental, nutrition and other general health services are provided to screen children and identify as early as possible any issues or concerns, and initiate remedial treatment. This occurs at both health clinics and through outreach.
- Program delivery/public education – programs and courses focused on healthy living, such as Best Babies. These also occur at both health clinics and through outreach.
- Community development – increasingly, the health authorities and their staff are moving beyond programming and screening to direct community development, based on an understanding of the social determinants of health.
- Licensing – licensing of child care facilities and programs is a VIHA responsibility.

The Care Community	Whether established as private businesses or not-for-profit organizations, the early childhood care community includes:

- Family child care centres – providing in-home care to a small number of children, generally for an extended period of time, often full-day.
- Group child care centres – larger centres with multiple staff and up to 20 children.
- Preschools – programs with a generally shorter than full day program.

The Support System for the Care Community	A variety of agencies exist to support the care community, such as:

- P.L.A.Y. – Partnership in Learning and Advocacy for Young Children – committed to creating a better future for children, families and the community.
- Success By 6 builds and enhances community through engaging citizens in early childhood development, and funding programs that strengthen services for young children and their families. Funded programs include literacy, nutrition, children's play, parenting and family skills development. It is funded by the Province of BC, United Way and the Credit Unions of BC.
- Saanich Neighbourhood Place – which provides a wide range of parenting and support programs for parents and tots.
- The Queen Alexandra Hospital and its Foundation for Children - support the physical, mental and social well being of children, youth and families, especially those aged 0 through 6 years and those with developmental delays.
- Child Care Resource Centre – since 1990, supporting child care providers, families and the community to increase the quality and quantity of child care in Greater Victoria.

The private sector	Some of the more significant providers of services and products for early childhood include:

- Island Parent – a magazine focused on the needs of Island parents. In addition, they publish an annual Family Resource Guide 'listing over 700 resources between Victoria and Parksville'
- Retail outlets – clothing, new and pre-owned, toys, etc.
- Learning Centres – providing early assessment and intervention, such as the Read Society.
- Recreation providers – from corn mazes to music lessons.
- Various web-based information sources such as Kids in Victoria.

And of course, the most important care providers and service supporters of children in their early years….are their parents and other extended family members and friends.

Summary of Learning and Findings

The report examined various aspects of early childhood development in Saanich. The learning gained from these analyses can be summarized as follows:

Demographics

- Affordability of programs (and everything) is an issue with many families and a significant issue for between one quarter and one third of families. Even this is likely a low estimate, particularly of the number of children impacted, given high house prices in Saanich, the lower incomes experienced by younger workers, and the likelihood that families with larger families have less money on a per child basis.

- Saanich is an attractive community for parents and families, and attracts families with older children, again largely due to the higher than average housing costs. However the fact that the 0 to 4 year age cohort is significantly smaller than the 15 to 19 year cohort is an indication of these attractiveness and cost factors, not of a shrinking child population.

- As the generation referred to as 'the echo of the boom' (generally those born between 1975 and 1995, whose parents were born between 1945 and 1962) moves into its peak child-bearing years, the 0 to 4 age population will increase, likely by around 10 or 15% in the next 5 to 10 years.

- The current 0 to 4 population is concentrated in the areas west of Blanshard Street. Their closest community centres are Pearkes and Saanich Commonwealth Place. While parents are mobile, these are the most sensible places where programs should be located.

Review of Background Reports

- There are many agencies involved in supporting and delivering early childhood development, and it is essential that a systemic approach be adopted, and that the municipality work in concert with all those other agencies.

- While the sector is getting better at making its case for resources and promoting the value of early childhood development to the community as a whole (as opposed to just the families wanting child care), advocacy is as critical as partnering. The municipality has played little part in advocacy to date, but it could and should use its authority and authoritative status to advocate re early childhood development.

- While many early childhood development providers have early childhood development qualifications, this is not the case for all course leaders in Saanich early learning programs. This is reflective of programmers all across the sector.

- At the same time, the required content for quality early childhood development programming has been established by the Ministry of Education (Framework for Early Learning), with backing from the sector's advocacy organizations. It uses the following terms:
  - o aesthetic and artistic development,
  - o emotional and social development,

- intellectual development,
- physical development and well-being, and
- development of social responsibility.

So everyone is now agreed what children need to learn and experience in their early years if they are to be developmentally ready for kindergarten. The municipality needs to ensure that its programs fit with these framework elements, realigning programming as necessary, and that staff and the public understand why this realignment is taking place. This could be as simple as including this information in the Active Living Guide and identifying those programs that focus on which framework element.

- As with quality, so with quantity. The municipality, and other providers, need to ensure that enough programming is being provided for children's needs, both in terms of what it provides directly, and what the system needs and delivers. A start has been made in this at the regional level assessing child care, but it also needs to be extended to the non-care/recreation settings. Where possible, this also needs to link with where children live, and will likely lead to a stronger emphasis being applied for additional programming at Pearkes.

- The 'elementary school as community hub' model is well respected as a way of delivering coordinated services. However it has likely only long term potential in Saanich due to the expansion of kindergarten to full-time in all schools and the likely reluctance of the Ministry of Education to fund construction when other options present themselves. One such option would be some form of 'binary hub', with recreation centres or their satellites linking with neighbouring schools or even sets of schools. In the short term, there is great potential to expand the StrongStart program, which is well respected by both parents and care givers, and to establish one or more new StrongStart programs in the recreation centres.

Review of Results from the Early Development Index

- About one quarter of children could and should be doing better when they arrive at kindergarten.

- This percentage is greater in areas showing lower incomes and lower socio-economic characteristics.

- Some of the sub-domains where low scores are higher than expected, such as physical health/gross and fine motor skills and pro-social attitudes are clearly within the programming mandate of the parks and recreation department.

- Early childhood development professionals have suggested a range of initiatives for the municipality to consider if it hopes to impact these results which are somewhat surprising and troubling.

Review of the Municipality's CLASS Data

- The decline in participation in programming is more apparent than real. Changes to the registration systems have ensured that the current system is closer in tracking actual children than was previously the case.

- Recent renovations have further depressed numbers, but these will soon be completed and the numbers are expected to bounce back.

- The distribution of courses does not match the distribution of the 0/4 population. For probably 30% of the 0/4 age population, the closest recreation centre is Pearkes, but only 8% of programs are offered there.

Learning from Focus Groups with Parents and Caregivers, and with other Key Informants

- Affordability is the biggest issue.

- Preschool and dance programming are high priorities with parents.

- Managing multiple children is complicated – as is creating 'me' time.

- The StrongStart model works very well and running a program at the recreation centre would be well received. This would allow more gym time, which is very restricted at school-based StrongStarts, where the older children have priority.

- The challenge of programming is greatest with younger children. This is true for all programming, but especially for full-day care.

- Places like Saanich Neighbourhood Place, with its multiple programming and awareness of income issues, is a wonderful sanctuary for many parents, especially those with limited incomes.

- ECE providers such as family day cares would like better linkage with the recreation centres so that they can augment their programming.

- There is strong support for more 'play in the park' programs.

- Required park enhancements include more water parks, more washrooms (and those that exist should be open in winter) and more benches around the play areas. The idea of a 'forest pre-school' should be investigated.

- More neighbourhood child friendly features include more crosswalks, preferably with lights, and more sidewalks. The transit system could also become more child friendly, both in policies and personnel.

- In terms of communicating, the current selection of ways to find out about programs works well.

Goals and Initiatives

There is no shortage of ideas within the early childhood development community about what needs to be done to improve its functioning and the delivery of programs and opportunities for parents and their young children. And we hope that municipal administrators take up some of these ideas.

However this report needs to focus on the key questions which were the focus of the investigation, namely:

What goals should the municipality pursue to support early childhood development generally, and the children and parents involved?

Within this overall focus, key questions were:

- What kinds of programs and services, facilities and spaces should the municipality provide?
- How best can municipal programs compliment those delivered at schools and by other agencies?
- How can neighbourhoods be made more 'child-friendly', especially for young children and their parents?
- How can the municipality best communicate with parents about programs and services?

In this next section, we identify the goals that the municipality should pursue, and initiatives that will actualize them.

Goal #1 - To be a recognized player and partner in, and advocate for, the early childhood development community.

All the members of the Saanich early childhood development community – parents, providers, support organizations, etc – need to know that the municipality thinks that the development of its youngest citizens is a matter both within its jurisdiction and that it is concerned about. Currently this is not the case, and Council needs to unequivocally commit to being a player and a partner in this sector:

- Being a player means that it will take on certain responsibilities that it sees as being within its jurisdiction, commit resources to them, and ensure that it does them well.
- Being a partner means that it will work with other players in the area to ensure that early childhood development receives the resources and in particular political profile that it needs if our youngest citizens are to reach their potential.
- Being an advocate means that the municipality, both elected officials and staff, will use those opportunities which are available to them to promote the needs and importance of the ECD sector.

Recommended Initiatives

a. **Taking a leadership role in bringing together community organizations to develop and improve service planning and delivery.**

P.L.A.Y. is the leader of the local initiatives for enhancing early childhood development. The current members would welcome the municipality becoming a member[1] and taking a more active role in the organization.

b. **Playing a leading role in the advocacy for early childhood development at provincial and national forums**

There are a number of venues at which municipal officials can promote and advocate for ECD:

- Every year, Councillors attend the UBCM conference and a wide range of resolutions are passed stating the views of local government as a whole. The organization uses these to guide its annual and ongoing work. This would be an appropriate venue to lobby for greater provincial resources to be allocated to early childhood development. There are similar forums at the national level.
- Municipal staff also attend conferences and take part in regional and provincial discussions on a range of issues, many of which have implications for ECD. A strong commitment by Council will in turn empower these officials at such meetings.

Goal #2- To enhance economic viability, and ensure sustainable, supportive, and appropriate child care as an essential element of community infrastructure.

Policy 6.1.6 of the municipality's OCP states:
> *Support the retention and recruitment of a qualified labour pool by ensuring access to appropriate and affordable housing and other necessary support services such as child and elder care.*

It is not the role of the municipality to provide child care, but there is a role to be played, as the OCP states, in ensuring that this aspect of community infrastructure is available to residents. And there are many elements of that infrastructure that the municipality has some control over, and others where it can be a major advocate and influencer.

Some Statistics
- 5,545 young children living in Saanich (2006)
- 1810 licensed/registered child care spaces (January 2008)
- 124 licensed infant-toddler spaces for 2,695 children aged 2 and under.
- There is currently 1 space for every 2.4 children aged five and under. A regional goal is one space per every 1.4 children.
- An estimated 1,600 additional spaces in Saanich are necessary to meet this ratio.

Recommended Initiatives

a. **Developing a Municipal Child Care Strategy in cooperation with the child care community.**

Child care needs to be distinguished from early childhood development, while at the same time recognizing that they both are part of a continuum, although the role of the Parks and Recreation Department is at the

---

[1] The municipality is a member of Success by 6 South Vancouver Island, which is in turn a member of P.L.A.Y.

'development' end, rather than the 'care' end. Municipalities across Canada have recognized the important role that they can and must play in child care, and many have developed child care strategies. Saanich should do likewise, building not only on this report, but also on the various other Saanich-oriented reports reviewed in this report.

b. Determining how much care needs to be provided in the community

P.L.A.Y. has worked with other partners to establish targets for the number of child care spaces which should be available in Saanich and in the region. These targets would no doubt be incorporated into a Child Care Strategy. The municipality, through its strategic planning process, sets annual goals for achievement. There is an opportunity for these goals for day care spaces to be incorporated into municipal policy and planning.

c. Identifying opportunities for increasing the number of care spaces that are provided

There is also a range of ways in which the municipality can assist in the achievement of these numeric goals:
- Reviewing zoning regulations and approval processes so that there are no unwarranted obstacles to the establishment of in-home and group day cares.
- Publishing a Guide to Establishing an In-Home Day Care, which would make it easier for potential care givers to navigate the system. The preparation of this Guide would also alert the municipality to ways in which they could simplify their own regulations and advocate to other agencies, such as VIHA, regarding possible regulation improvements.
- Ensuring that amenity bonusing is used wherever possible to deliver space for child care centres in new developments.

Goal #3 - To continue to deliver a range of early childhood development services, programs and opportunities

The provision of programs and recreational opportunities for preschool children is a major way in which the municipality serves the needs of young parents and their children. While this must continue, there are significant opportunities to fine tune this programming so that it links better with the mandates and activities of other partners, and helps parents to provide a better developmental base for their preschoolers.

Recommended Initiatives
a. Strengthening the Department's community development strategies for supporting the local child care community

A principal aim of the first two goals is to strengthen the overall network of organizations that make up the early childhood development community. As the Department refocuses its resources in response to the 2011 Parks and Recreatino Master Plan, it will emphasize its role in community development and this should include strengthening the linkages with the early childhood development community.

b. **Continually refining the range of early childhood development programming in response to changing community needs**

Parents suggested a number of areas where existing programming could be enhanced. These include:
- Programs which can accommodate two children of different ages.
- Preschool in the Park and other outdoor programs could be expanded. There would be interest for a 'Forest Preschool' program.
- Additional preschool programs and other programs which are for a longer period of time. A minimum of 90 minutes allows a parent to accomplish some of their other daily goals, whereas a 45 minute program does not.

These are just examples, and the focus should be on maintaining a responsiveness and open ear to the comments of parents about what meets their needs. One area of focus needs to be staying abreast of social media as young parents will always be at the cutting edge of technological change.

c. **Expanding the 'hub' model for supporting early childhood development, and establishing programs in municipal facilities based on the StrongStart principles**

- Many parents spoke in glowing terms of the Saanich Neighbourhood Place which operates out of Pearkes Recreation Centre in partnership with the municipality. It is a long established model and blends parental counselling and education, basic support (nutrition, clothing exchange, etc) and programming. It provides a venue for other services, such as VIHA's post-natal, immunization and public health nurses to link to parents and children.
- The school districts all now run StrongStart programs, which is a similar model, and equally well received by parents. VIHA are also involved in these programs.

> A 'hub' model would provide for the delivery of a full range of family and parenting support services, including integrated pre- and post-natal health and family support for children under 30 months, and a network of affiliated family-based early care and learning programs for children before they enter school at age 5.

- The key elements that parents like about these programs are that they are free, run by trained ECE professionals, are drop-in as opposed to programmed, and they are offered every day of the week.
- Parents and professionals would like to see these kinds of program expanded. The Ministry of Education will be expanding the StrongStart programs, but there may well be space limitations in elementary schools with the expansion of full day kindergarten. Another disadvantage of running the StrongStart programs in schools is the lack of gym time.
- The municipal recreation centres would be good locations for a StrongStart program, or some variant of it, and discussions should be initiated with school districts and the Ministry to examine this opportunity.

d. Linking the Ministry of Education framework proposed for early childhood development settings by schools (as in the StrongStart programs and in full day kindergarten) or professional organizations and embedding this into and communicating it through municipal programming

Early learning has a 'curriculum' or content framework which is now defined and essentially 'approved' by early childhood educators and by the provincial government. The progress of children in achieving mastery of these elements is essentially measured in the Kindergarten Readiness testing and analysis that is carried out for the Ministry of Education and School Boards by UBC-HELP.

The degree to which this is understood by parents is questionable. No doubt well educated and thoughtful parents know that they need to provide a range of stimulations and opportunities for their children. However it would also be helpful if municipal programming used the same language and there was information in the *Active Living Guide* that explained the terms. It would also be beneficial if programmers integrated these concepts into the programs, although it is likely that this is already happening.

e. Exploring how best to support the community organizations that deliver early childhood development programming

Community-based organizations exist on a shoe-string, and the early childhood development sector is no exception. The municipality should continue to partner with these organizations on a project basis, but should also consider assisting them in other ways, such as through the provision of office space or other administrative support, or through direct funding.

f. Upgrading staff training as necessary

The field of early childhood development is becoming increasingly credentialized, with universities and colleges providing courses and qualifications that are becoming an expectation among parents seeking programs for their children. Saanich needs to review the credentials of its staff, both those on its payroll and the many contractors whom it uses for specific program delivery, to ensure that they have, or are moving toward, the required qualifications.

Goal #4 - To ensure programs are affordable

Affordability is a major issue for parents of preschoolers – not just for single mothers or those earning minimum wage, but for the vast majority of parents who are committed to building a quality life for their families, buying homes, serving nutritious food, exposing their children to a wide range of experiences. Assisting parents by ensuring a range of affordable programs are available is one of the most significant ways in which Saanich can support early childhood development.

Recommended Initiatives

a. **Working with regional partners to expand the LIFE program so that the costs of participation in local programs are diminished**

Expanding the LIFE program can take three forms. Firstly the marketing of the program toward young parents could be enhanced so that more currently eligible families take advantage of this opportunity. Secondly, the program could be expanded so that more municipal programming is available for an individual family. Thirdly, the program could be expanded so that it covers some of the programming currently delivered by not-for-profit groups such as local gymnastics and other sport clubs.

Additional marketing could also include linking the LIFE program to some of the other available financial support programs such as the Jump Start program run by Canadian Tire.

Goal #5 - To encourage the development of neighbourhoods that are 'friendly' to preschoolers and their families, and that all Saanich community plans consider the development goals of early childhood development

Saanich is committed to ensuring that its planning facilitates the development of complete communities. This translates into a range of policies that for parents and young children means 'child friendly' communities. And child friendly attributes are very similar to those provided in age friendly communities. The provision of neighbourhood parks, community gathering places, sidewalks and crosswalks, stroller parking in centres and villages…all contribute to the ability of parents to get outside with their preschoolers into environments which will stimulate their growth and development.

Beyond these more obvious linkages, are other policies and practices which impact young families. Affordable housing and transit planning are two examples. Considering the impacts on young children should be a key 'impact' that is considered when any policy change is contemplated.

Recommended Initiatives

a. Developing a community-based child friendliness audit process

Parents and especially children are very knowledgeable about how their neighbourhoods can be made more walkable, or 'child friendly'. The Saanich OCP encourages the involvement of local community associations and other community groups in local planning. Whether this is a part of the various local area planning studies underway (Shelbourne Action Plan, UpTown/City Centre, Tillicum, or the Douglas Corridor), or as part of more general community involvement, it is important to ensure that all community planning processes recognize the needs of early childhood development and that parents of young children are encouraged to participate.

There are various work-kits available that will assist communities in this process and they could easily be adapted into an appropriate format for Saanich[2], and would be a useful way in which citizens could identify small improvements to their communities to make them more child friendly. Linking this process with an age friendly audit would also build significant intergenerational linkage at the community level.

---

[2] Most cover a broader range of ages (see http://www.childfriendlycities.org/), but the Society for Children and Youth of BC did develop one focused specifically on 'The Early Years', with funding from Success by 6.

Appendix A - Learning and Findings

Research related to this project looked at the following areas:

- Saanich demographics, both what characteristics are pertinent to the situation of young parents, and what changes are projected for the next decade.
- A review of recent reports that provide a context for early childhood development in Saanich.
- A review of and discussion about the results of the Early Development Index and other studies by research agencies.
- A review of participation in early childhood development programs run by Saanich municipality over the past three years, based on CLASS data
- A summary of the comments of key informants and stakeholders as gathered through focus groups, individual interviews and the online survey.

Demographics

Current Population Characteristics

According to the 2006 Census, Saanich was home to 31,180 families, some with children and some without. And of course, most of these children lived at home, but some did not.

Children by Family Structure - 2006					
	Total	Av Family Size	Children in Family	Children	%
Total	31,180			29,095	
Married couples	22,985	2.9	0.9	20687	71%
Common Law couples	3,405	2.5	0.5	1703	6%
Lone parents	4,790	2.4	1.4	6706	23%

Of these families, almost 23,000 were married and 3,400 lived in common-law relationships. The remaining 4,790 families had a lone parent head of household. These lone parent families had a slightly higher number of children per family, and were home to 23% of all children.

Income Levels - 2005		
	Saanich	BC
Median Family Income - 2005		
All Census Families	$72,304	$62,346
Married couple	$79,913	$69,207
Common-law couple	$67,402	$62,202
Lone-parent - all	$41,271	$35,437
Lone-parent-female	$39,282	$33,592
% in low income before tax - All persons	11.8%	17.3%

While income levels in Saanich were above the provincial average for all categories of family, it is noteworthy that lone parent families, especially those with a female head of household, had average family incomes of almost half that of couple families.

Approximately 12% of Saanich families have incomes below the provincial low income cut off, although housing for families (and everyone) is less affordable in Victoria than elsewhere. As recently noted:

> *B.C. cities are world-class in their lack of affordability*
>
> *Jan 25, 2011 Don Cayo Vancouver Sun*
>
> *Homes are "severely unaffordable" in all four of the B.C. cities that were included in a 325-city international survey of housing costs…….Victoria's average price of $430,000 was 7.1 times the median household income of $60,900, resulting in a ranking of 297th out of 325.*
>
> *The study pins the "severely unaffordable" label on any city with a multiplier of more than five -- about 75 of the 325 studied, including Montreal and Toronto, but nowhere else in any part of Canada except B.C.*

Therefore it likely that many more families, especially lone parent families, experience issues associated with low income…and the purchase of recreation services is likely one such service.

Population Projections

During the last inter-censal period, from 2001 to 2006, the overall population of Saanich increased from 103,700 to 108,300, or 4%.

In terms of individual age cohorts, this increase was less evident:

- The cohort aged 0 to 19 years declined from 23,800 to 23,400. Most of the 5 year cohorts within this 20 year cohort stayed fairly static, except for the 5 to 9 age group which declined from 5,575 to 5,130.
- The 0 to 4 cohort increased very marginally from 4,515 to 4,560.
- There is a very marked trend to smaller numbers of children and lower family size, by almost 1,000 children per 5 year age cohort: from 7,375 youth aged 15 to 19 years, down to 4,515 children aged 0 to 4 years.

	Population (2001)	Population (2006)
Saanich Pop (2001)	**103,655**	**108,265**
0 to 4 yrs	4,515	4,560
5 to 9 yrs	5,575	5,130
10 to 14 yrs	6,360	6,325
15 to 19 yrs	7,375	7,390
Total	23,825	23,405

When looked at by one year increments, there was virtually no change – just up a bit one year, and down the next.

	Population (2001)	Population (2006)
0 yrs	805	870
1 yrs	895	920
2 yrs	900	880
3 yrs	965	985
4 yrs	955	895
Total	4,520	4,550

In the last 20 years, the local fertility rates have closely mirrored the provincial average, although with larger fluctuations from year to year. It should also be noted that the more rural, or less urban, areas of the Saanich Peninsula have a higher fertility rate than the more urban health district that is Greater Victoria.

Total Fertility Rates by Local Health Area - 1987 to 2009
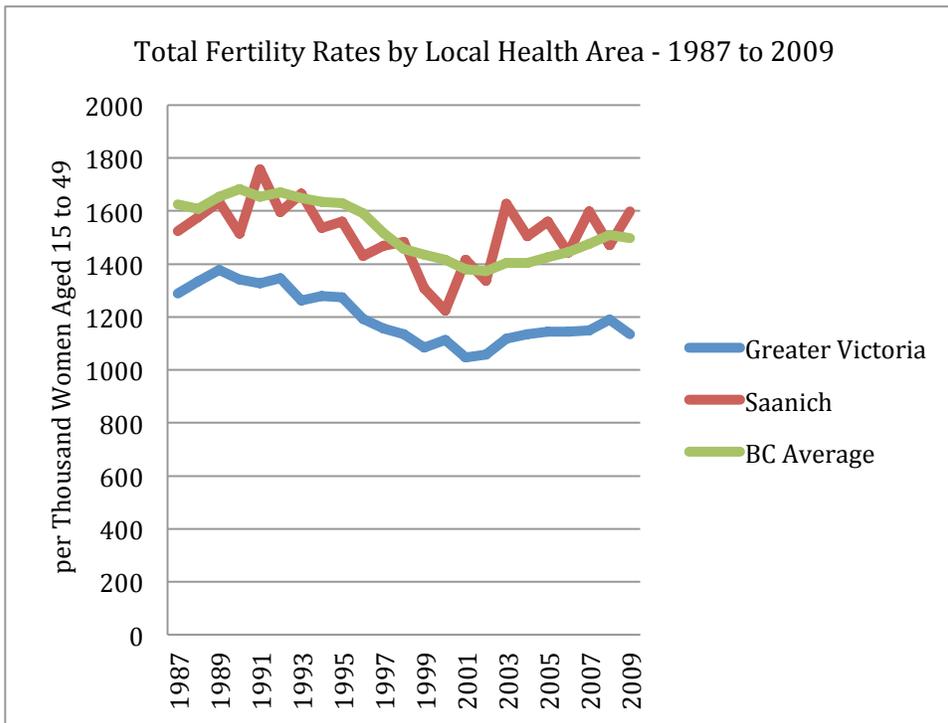
However more clarity emerges when cohorts are tracked from one census date to the next. While it would appear that fewer children are being born (ie arriving in Saanich aged zero), there is growth through in-migration: the 0 to 4 year cohort in 2001 had 4,515 children, but this grew to 5,103 by the 2006 census date.

2001 Age groups		becomes	2006 Age groups		Ratios
			0 to 4 yrs	4,560	
0 to 4 yrs	4,515	becomes	5 to 9 yrs	5,130	114%
5 to 9 yrs	5,575	becomes	10 to 14 yrs	6,325	113%
10 to 14 yrs	6,360	becomes	15 to 19 yrs	7,390	116%
15 to 19 yrs	7,375	becomes	20 to 24 yrs	8,100	110%
20 to 24 yrs	7,170	becomes	25 to 29 yrs	5,920	83%
25 to 29 yrs	5,765	becomes	30 to 34 yrs	5,580	97%
30 to 34 yrs	6,125	becomes	35 to 39 yrs	6,650	109%
35 to 39 yrs	7,265	becomes	40 to 44 yrs	7,930	109%
40 to 44 yrs	8,300	becomes	45 to 49 yrs	8,810	106%
45 to 49 yrs	8,535	becomes	50 to 54 yrs	8,725	102%
50 to 54 yrs	8,075	becomes	55 to 59 yrs	8,195	101%
55 to 59 yrs	5,875	becomes	60 to 64 yrs	5,810	99%
60 to 64 yrs	4,590	becomes	65 to 69 yrs	4,505	98%
65 to 69 yrs	4,465	becomes	70 to 74 yrs	4,300	96%
70 to 74 yrs	4,435	becomes	75 to 79 yrs	4,115	93%
75 to 79 yrs	4,200	becomes	80 to 84 yrs	3,375	80%
80 to 84 yrs	2,840	becomes	85 yrs and over	2,850	100%
85 yrs and over	2,180				
Total	103,655	becomes		108,265	104%

Indeed all four of the child/youth cohorts grew substantially over the inter-census period. It can also be noted that, despite having a world-class university, the 20 to 29 age cohort, declined in size. The growth in the child population is mirrored, or led, by the growth in the 30 to 45 year cohorts.

Clearly Saanich is attractive to parents but they are more likely to be able to afford to live here, or find jobs here, when their children are growing up, rather than when they are in their pre-child years.

Births to Residents of BC
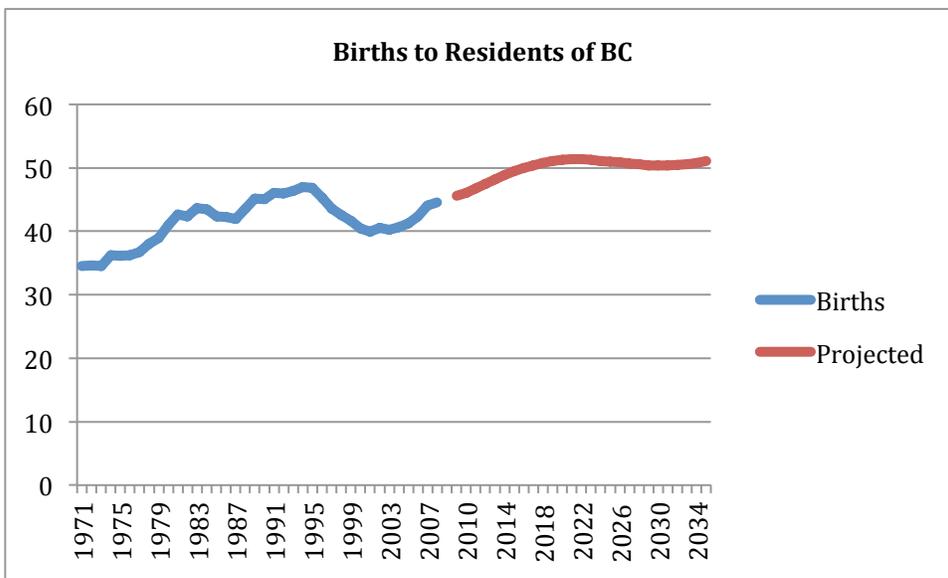
Across BC, the number of births to residents bottomed out in 2001 at around 40,000 births; it was relatively static at this number for a few years but started growing again in

2006. This growth, which is based on the generation that is the 'echo of the boom', will continue for this next decade, peaking around 51,000 births annually in 2021.

The implications of these trends for Saanich and its early years population are that:

- The number of children born to residents will not decline further, and indeed has likely already started to increase.
- The community will continue to attract young families with children (although this will be tempered if there is a further increase in house prices over the next decade).

Where Do Pre-Schoolers Live?

The maps on the following pages show where the Saanich Preschool population lives. One map shows the density of preschoolers per hectare by Census Canada Dissemination Area (DA), while the other shows the percentage of the total population that are preschool age. From these maps, it can be determined that:

- Cedar Hill — 24%
- Gordon Head — 10%
- Saanich Commonwealth Place — 29%
- Pearkes — 37%
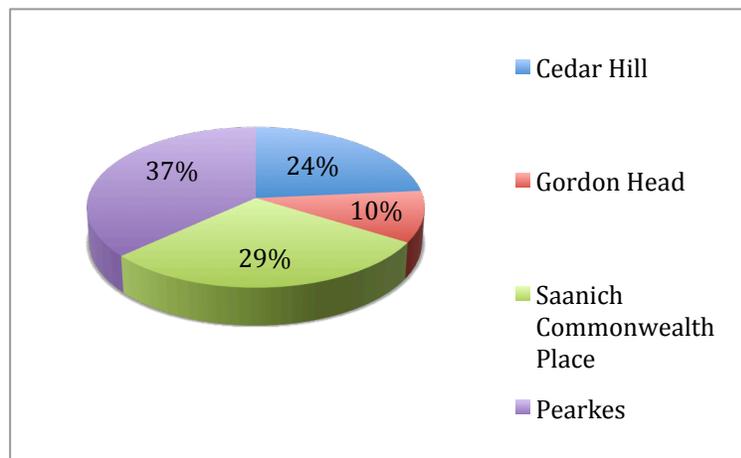
- The highest concentrations of preschoolers live in the triangle defined by Blanshard/Highway 17, Wilkinson Road, and the Gorge/Esquimalt border.
- Other concentrations are around Quadra and MacKenzie, and in UVic Family Housing.
- Few preschoolers live in the Shelbourne Corridor.
- The primary service locations for recreation are therefore Pearkes and Saanich Commonwealth Place.
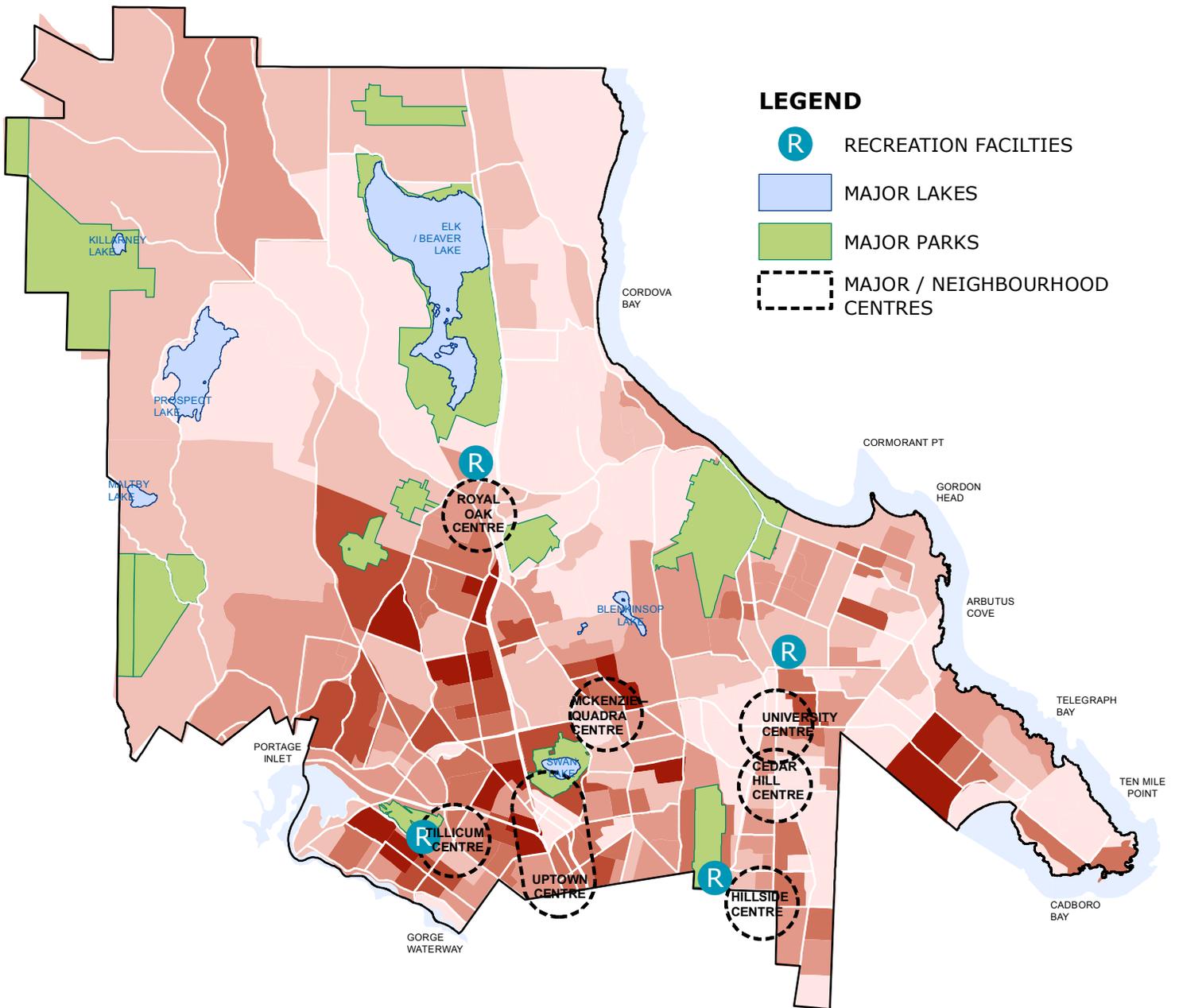
LEGEND

R RECREATION FACILITIES

MAJOR LAKES

MAJOR PARKS

MAJOR / NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

Saanich Preschool Population (Aged 0-4 yrs):

	LOW		MED		HIGH
	Under 3%		5%		7%
	4%		6%		Over 8%
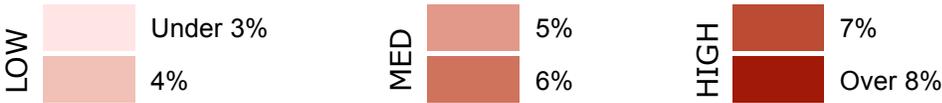
Proportion of pre-school children aged 0 to 4 years in Saanich. Statistics are based on 2006 Census. Shading of Dissemination Areas show lowest to highest proportion.
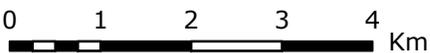
0 1 2 3 4 Km

PREPARED BY SAANICH PLANNING DEPT, 2011
DATA SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, 2006 CENSUS OF POPULATION

LEGEND

R RECREATION FACILTIES

MAJOR LAKES

MAJOR PARKS

MAJOR / NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

CORDOVA BAY

CORMORANT PT

GORDON HEAD

ARBUTUS COVE

TELEGRAPH BAY

TEN MILE POINT

CADBORO BAY

PORTAGE INLET

GORGE WATERWAY

ROYAL OAK CENTRE

MCKENZIE–QUADRA CENTRE

UNIVERSITY CENTRE

CEDAR HILL CENTRE

TILLICUM CENTRE

UPTOWN CENTRE

HILLSIDE CENTRE

Population Density:
Number of Preschool Children per hectare:

LOW
Under 0.5
0.6 - 1

MED
1.1 - 1.5
1.6 - 2
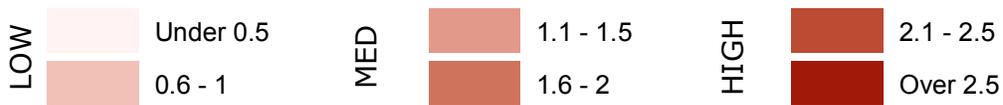
HIGH
2.1 - 2.5
Over 2.5

Average number of pre-school children aged 0 to 4 years living in Saanich. Statistics are based on 2006 Census. Shading of Dissemination Areas shows the lowest to highest proportion.

0 1 2 3 4 Km

PREPARED BY SAANICH PLANNING DEPT, 2011
DATA SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, 2006 CENSUS OF POPULATION
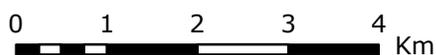
Summary

There are four main points of learning from this review of the demographic context:

- Affordability of programs (and everything) is an issue with many families and a significant issue for between one quarter and one third of families. Even this is likely a low estimate, particularly of the number of children impacted, given high house prices in Saanich, the lower incomes experienced by younger workers, and the likelihood that families with larger families have less money on a per child basis.

- Saanich is an attractive community for parents and families, and attracts families with older children, again largely due to the higher than average housing costs. However the fact that the 0 to 4 year age cohort is significantly smaller than the 15 to 19 year cohort is an indication of these attractiveness and cost factors, not of a shrinking child population.

- As the generation referred to as 'the echo of the boom' (generally those born between 1975 and 1995, whose parents were born between 1945 and 1962) moves into its peak child-bearing years, the 0 to 4 age population will increase, likely by around 10 or 15% in the next 5 to 10 years.

- The current 0 to 4 population is concentrated in the areas west of Blanshard Street. The most proximal community centres are Pearkes and Saanich Commonwealth Place. While parents are mobile, this is the most sensible place where programs should be located.

Background Reports

There is no shortage of reports about early childhood. Some report on research, while others report on the activities of organizations that are advocating for or delivering programs to this age group.

Our review of these documents focused on the following three issues:

- Identifying the role for the municipality within this multi-agency sector
- Determining what methodological/organizational frameworks were being used, in order to structure and focus municipal roles and partnering.
- Looking closely at the partnering/advocacy role of other agencies to determine whether or how best this role could be structured for the municipality.

While a larger number of reports and resources were reviewed, we comment here on only the key ones for this project.

SUCCESS BY 6 - ANNUAL REPORT - APRIL 1, 2009 TO MARCH 31, 2010 - UNITED WAY OF THE LOWER MAINLAND

Municipalities' Goal

The UWLM's main focus is through a variety of local partnerships which bring together all agencies in a community in early childhood development planning and funding. These are generally organized by municipality, often with the municipality in a lead role. An example would be the Surrey Office of Early Childhood Development, Learning and Care, which is the body UWLM has created and funds to service Surrey.

Success By 6
Annual Report
April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010
United Way of the Lower Mainland

Frameworks Suggested

The UWLM's strategies to support children 0 to 6 are:

- Invest in community organizations that deliver quality programs and services to young children and their caregivers.
- Ensure children age 0 to 6 have opportunities to participate in quality early childhood development programs.
- Ensure young children's parents and caregivers have opportunities to build their knowledge of and access to community resources and supports.
- Increase community awareness about early childhood development and issues impacting young children and their caregivers.
- Enable communities to take action on issues that impact young children, and to support healthy child development.
- Strengthen systems that contribute to healthy child development.
- Advance policy that positively impacts young children.

Partnering/Advocacy Goal

- Continued support to a key group of 11 "champion" organizations to advance awareness raising, advocacy, and the overall strengthening of early child development (early childhood development) organizations.
- Continued support for 15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC.
- Participation in many other early childhood development activities – forums, workshops, conferences, community events, and a pan-Canadian initiative – to build awareness and understanding of critical issues impacting young children and their families.

BC EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK

This document is a resource for providers of under 6 programming and for parents. It notes that all levels of government have a responsibility to support children in their early development and life long learning. It comments on the link between early learning and the Ministry of Education's Primary Program, noting that children in BC enter the Primary Program around the time when they turn five years of age.

The provincial document *The Primary Program: A Framework for Teaching* describes five areas of development for children in kindergarten to Grade 3:

1. aesthetic and artistic development,
2. emotional and social development,
3. intellectual development,
4. physical development and well-being, and
5. the development of social responsibility.
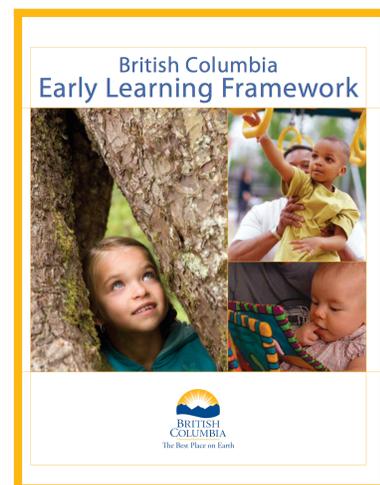
INTEGRATED EARLY CARE AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN – COALITION OF CHILD CARE ADVOCATES OF BC

This document looks at how each province and territory manages kindergarten and school programming for 3 and 4 years olds. It provides a comprehensive overview of education for this age group, curriculum used and education of the teachers. It also provides an overview of other programming for this age group funded by the respective education ministries to increase school readiness (such as the StrongStart BC Program).

Environmental Scan for the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of British Columbia and Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia Integrated System of Early Care and Learning Project

Prepared by Jane Beach
July 2010

Municipalities' Goal
- To work with the provincial government and local school boards to implement the seven principles of early childhood education

Frameworks Suggested

Seven principles for an integrated system of early childhood care and learning are given:

1. The right of all children to access universal, high quality, publicly funded early care and learning services is enshrined in legislation.
2. Programs are planned, delivered and governed on a democratic, not-for-profit basis through an integrated system of early care and learning.
3. The system of early care and learning advances equity and social inclusion for all.
4. Programs provide play-based, inclusive experiences that meet all children's developmental needs and respect their right to quality of life.
5. Programs are designed to meet the needs of the majority of families where parents are in the paid labour force, studying and/or participating in community life.
6. Programs are delivered by socially valued and fairly compensated staff with specific education and expertise in early childhood education.
7. Programs are adequately funded, stable and openly accountable to the communities they serve.

VISION, VALUES AND VIEWS FOR ENGAGING FAMILIES IN THE CRD

Municipalities' Goal

- This reports suggests that local municipalities need to come together with all other organizations serving children under 6 to provide support that is family centered, comprehensive and integrated.
- Recommends governments initiate an 'every child counts' program

    Schorr examined programs and projects aimed at improving the lives of vulnerable children and families around the United States and determined there are Seven Attributes of Highly Effective Programs. These are:

    - *Services that is comprehensive, flexible, responsive and persevering*
    - *Seeing children in the context of their families*
    - *Dealing with families as parts of neighbourhoods and communities*
    - *Taking a long-term preventive orientation, a clear mission, and continue to evolve over time*
    - *Services that are well managed by competent and committed individuals with clearly identifiable skills*
    - *Staff who are trained and supported to provide high-quality, responsive services*
    - *Operate in settings that encourage practitioners to build strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect (p.5-11)*

    Schorr, L. (1997) Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighbourhoods to Rebuild - America. Anchor Books: New York

Frameworks Suggested

- Lots of good practice examples from across Canada and the world of programs that really 'work' for families

- Generally this document suggests all organizations need to work closer together in order to provide the best possible care for all children, especially at risk children.

Partnering/Advocacy Goal

- This report outlines the benefits to families of organizations working together more uniformly including better service delivery, more time for support and more integrated services that meet everyone's needs. The municipality could play an advocacy role in providing this type of integration in Saanich.

P.L.A.Y. CHILD CARE BRIEF TO SAANICH MAYOR AND COUNCIL

This brief suggests a number of steps that Saanich could take to link child care with the three overarching themes of the OCP.

Municipalities' Role

- Advocate to senior levels of government on behalf of the region for supports to child care,
- Allocate resources towards a childcare plan
- Consult with Child Care Resource and Referral, Regional Child Care Council and P.L.A.Y. on planning and zoning issues related to child care and young children as they arise.

Frameworks Suggested

Overview of Saanich's Child Care Capacity (2008)

- There are approximately 5,545 young children living in Saanich (32% of the region's children aged five and under).
- There were 1810 licensed/registered child care spaces in January 2008, representing 35% licensed spaces in the region.
- There are 124 licensed infant-toddler spaces for 2,695 children aged 2 and under.
- Between March 2007 and January 2008, 2 new group centres for children 30 months to school age opened, 1 preschool opened, 9 family child care centres opened, and 7 family centres closed, resulting in a net gain of approximately 54 spaces.
- There is currently 1 space for every 2.4 children aged five and under. A regional goal is one space per every 1.4 children. (Regional ratio is now 1 space for 2.7 children). An estimated 1,600 additional spaces in Saanich are necessary to meet this ratio.

SAANICH EARLY YEARS REPORT 2007

This report was funded by the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria. It is designed to be a resource document to assist Saanich in developing and implementing child care support policies.

Its conclusions are as follows:

The Saanich Early Years Report

The Early Years Report Series for BC's Capital Region

a report of

PLAY
GREATER VICTORIA
PARTNERSHIP in LEARNING &
ADVOCACY for YOUNG CHILDREN

December 2007

Victoria, BC

The Understanding the Early Years initiative is funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada. For further information, visit www.hrsdc.gc.ca.

- There is a lack of trained early years staff available due to low wages and a general lack of people trained in this area.
- There is a lack of adequate childcare spaces available, especially for children under three years.
- There is a lack of funding for childcare services and programs.
- Rating of the percentage of children that are ready for kindergarten in a variety of areas is provided.

It identifies key future issues as:

1. How effective community assets in Saanich are in strengthening child development outcomes, for example the number of children and families served by current resources, the frequency and duration of service, fees charged, accessibility for all families.

2. What community-based child development outcomes data could be collected and used along with the EDI results to determine what community factors (such as housing affordability, income, mobility, safety, etc.) have made a difference to improving healthy child development and what additional supports are needed.

3. What built and natural environmental features positively and/or negatively influence children's health and well-being in Saanich (such as naturalized play spaces, transportation routes and modes, community gardens, etc.)

4. What child care options best suit the needs of parents with children under the age of six, and to identify where additional child care spaces should be provided.

5. Which transportation choices and mobility factors influence access and facilitate or limit the use of community assets that support young children and their families.

6. What early childhood supports are important to various cultural and ethnic populations, such as First Nations, and whether these are available, accessible, and in close proximity to where the respective children live.

BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS: A CHILDCARE PLAN FOR VICTORIA

This plan focuses on the investment necessary for a child care plan to be effectively implemented. It diagrams the proposed model as follows:

Building on our Strengths:
A Child Care Plan for Victoria

A Report of the Victoria Regional Child Care Council
in Collaboration with
Partners in Learning and Advocacy for Young Children (PLAY)

September 2008

Report Authors

Lynell Anderson, CGA
Senior Researcher,
Human Early Learning Partnership

Dan Rosen, M.Sc.Pl
Consultant
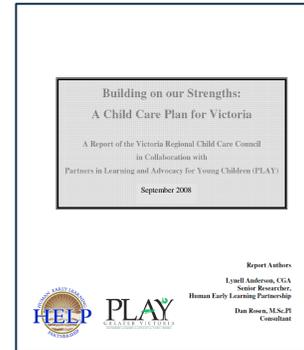
Child Care System Implementation Model
Full Implementation
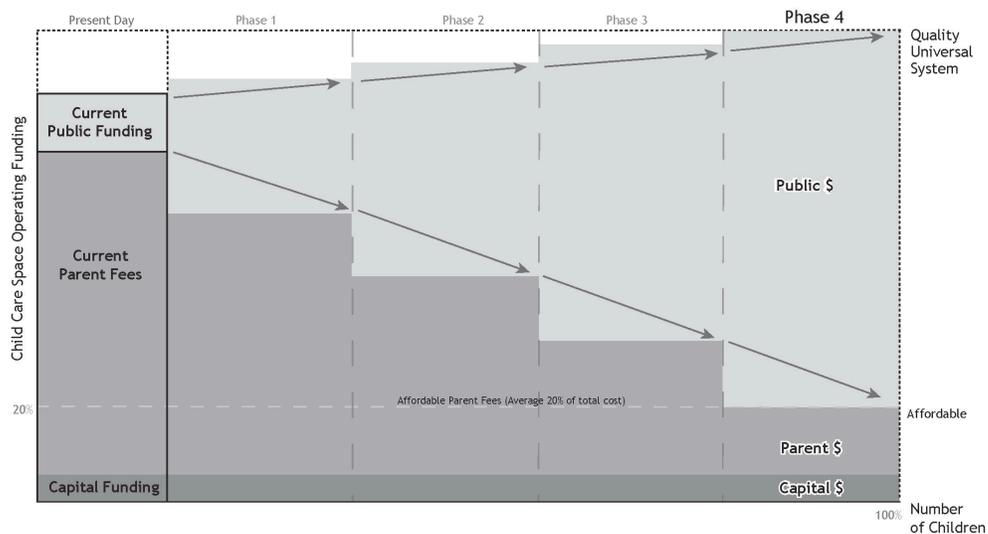
Notes:
Full Implementation of the model means that, by the end of phase 4 a quality, affordable child care space is available for all those who need or want it on a part time, full-time or drop-in basis in a regulated family home or centre.

Source:
Lynell Anderson, B.Comm., CGA and YWCA Canada

Municipalities' Role

- This plan relies on funding from government to implement. Therefore the municipal government must be involved in providing funding and in advocating for funding from other levels of government.

15 BY 15 : EARLY HUMAN CAPITAL INVESTMENT IN BC - HUMAN EARLY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

This report looks at the economic need for early childhood development. This approach has now been embedded in provincial government commitments[3]. The thesis is that:

> " a well-educated, creative and adaptive workforce is key to the long-term success of the British Columbian economy. Early child development is a critical issue for business leaders, because the years before age six set in motion factors that will determine the quality of the future labour force. Currently, only 71% of BC children arrive at kindergarten meeting all of the developmental benchmarks they need to thrive, 29% are developmentally vulnerable.

The Business Council of British Columbia commissioned a study from The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at the University of British Columbia.

The study linked population level data to answer three questions:

1. What does early vulnerability cost the BC economy?
2. How does vulnerability at kindergarten influence graduation rates/educational achievement at Gr 12?
3. How does vulnerability at kindergarten affect involvement in crime?

Its findings include:

- Reducing the kindergarten vulnerability rate to 10% would lead to a 34% increase in the number of children achieving the grades necessary for admission to BC's top universities.
- A reduction in kindergarten vulnerability rates to 10% would result in a reduction in the BC crime rate of 31%.
- Reducing early vulnerability will yield enormous long-term gains for individuals, business and the economy in general, as well as for taxpayers and governments specifically. The study estimates that investing in smart family policy now, would, over a 60-year period, generate a 20% increase in British Columbia's GDP. In 'today's' dollars, this would amount to $401 billion.
- It is much more effective to invest early in childhood than compensate later in life by increasing investment in final years of school, expanding post-secondary education, or in job skills training for adults.

---

[3] See http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2009/stplan/2009_Strategic_Plan.pdf - page 40.

OUR EMERGING PLAN FOR AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF EARLY CARE AND LEARNING IN BC - COALITION OF CHILD CARE ADVOCATES OF BC

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) and the Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) are developing a **Plan for an Integrated System of Early Care and Learning in BC**. This work is motivated by BC's implementation of full day Kindergarten for 5 year olds and the consideration of 'pre-kindergarten' for 3 and 4 year olds to follow. On the one hand, the extension of universal, publicly funded, free services for young children is progressive and welcomed. On the other, while Ontario and other provinces are developing integrated approaches for the provision of early care and learning, BC is proceeding without a strategy that recognizes and is inclusive of existing services or the needs of all families. Therefore a plan is essential.

MOVING TO A SYSTEM OF
integrated early care & learning IN BC

BRIEFING NOTE

Our Emerging Plan
for an Integrated System of
Early Care and Learning in BC

AUGUST 2010

ECEBC | early childhood educators of BC

COALITION OF
child care
advocates
OF BC
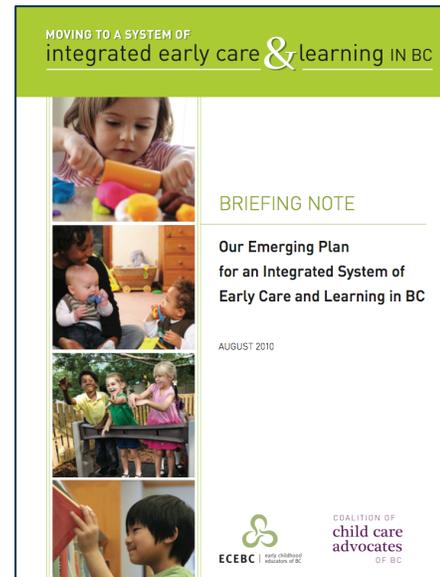
Key elements of a system of early care and learning include:

- Ministry of Education responsible for planning, developing, delivering and governing an integrated system of early care and learning from birth up
- New BC Early Care and Learning Act enshrines the rights of children and families
- Boards of Education responsible for local governance of Early Care and Learning Act and related community and school based services
- Amendment to School Act to accommodate new Kindergarten/Grade 1 program and make Boards of Education responsible for provision of school age care for children from Grade 2 and up where there is demonstrated need

This system is supported by:

- Pre-natal – 18 months - Build on maternity and parental leave.
- Early Years Centres - neighbourhood level consistent with elementary school catchment areas. EYCs could act as 'hubs' for the delivery of a full range of family and parenting support services.
- Full day, full year, integrated Kindergarten, including grade 1.
- School Age Care for Grade 2 and up - Boards of Education would assume full responsibility for school age care.

Summary

The learning from these reports, and the many others that were reviewed, is as follows:

- There are many agencies involved in supporting and delivering early childhood development; it is essential that a systemic approach be adopted, and that the municipality work in concert with all those other agencies.

- While the sector is getting better at making its case for resources and promoting the value of early childhood development to the community as a whole (as opposed to just the families wanting child care), advocacy is as critical as partnering. The municipality has played little part in advocacy to date, but it could and should use its authority and authoritative status to advocate re early childhood development.

- While many early childhood development providers have early childhood development qualifications, this is not the case for all course leaders in Saanich early learning programs. This is reflective of programmers all across the sector. At the same time, the required content for quality early childhood development programming has been established by the Ministry of Education, with backing from the sector's advocacy organizations. So everyone is now agreed what children need to learn and experience in their early years if they are to be developmentally ready for kindergarten. The municipality needs to ensure that its programs fit with these 'curriculum' elements, realigning programming as necessary, and that staff and the public understand why this realignment is taking place.

- As with quality, so with quantity. The municipality, working with other providers, needs to ensure that enough programming is being provided for children's needs, both in terms of what it provides directly, and what the system needs and delivers. A start has been made in this at the regional level assessing child care, but it also needs to be extended to the non-care/recreation settings. Where possible, this also needs to link with where children live, and will likely lead to a stronger emphasis being applied for additional programming at Pearkes.

- The 'community hub' model is well respected as a way of delivering coordinated services. However it has likely only long term potential in Saanich due to the expansion of kindergarten to full-time in all schools and the likely reluctance of the Ministry of Education to fund construction when other options present themselves. One such option would be some form of 'binary hub', with recreation centres or their satellites linking with neighbouring schools or even sets of schools. In the short term, there is great potential to expand the StrongStart program, which is well respected by both parents and care givers, and to establish one or more new StrongStart programs in the recreation centres.

Early Development Index Results

P.L.A.Y. has created a good summary of the EDI results in their report. In this report we will summarize the learning and implications of this data.

The EDI presents data about the readiness of children for kindergarten. It identifies five 'domains' or areas where skills are acquired in early development and which can be assessed by kindergarten teachers using a consistent set of scales. The EDI assesses childrens' scores against the range of scores.

- Those with the highest scores are deemed 'very ready' – between 100% and 75% of range.
- Those with the next highest scores are deemed 'ready' – between 75% and 50% of range.
- Those with the next highest scores are deemed 'at risk' – between 50% and 25% of range.
- Those with the lowest scores are deemed 'vulnerable' - between 25% and 0% of range.

In Saanich, the majority of children score in the 'ready' or 'very ready' categories, although this varies by domain as follows:

Domain	Percentage of students assessed as 'ready' or 'very ready' for kindergarten
Physical health and wellbeing	79%
Social	75%
Emotional maturity	79%
Language and cognitive development	71%
Communication skills and general knowledge	60%

- Between 20 and 30% of children are deemed vulnerable or at risk.
- 40% of children have communication skills and general knowledge that is not at the ready/very ready level.

Each of these domains is built up from scores in a number of sub-domains. At this level, students are classified as being 'on track', 'not on track' or 'middle'. This data for Saanich is as follows:
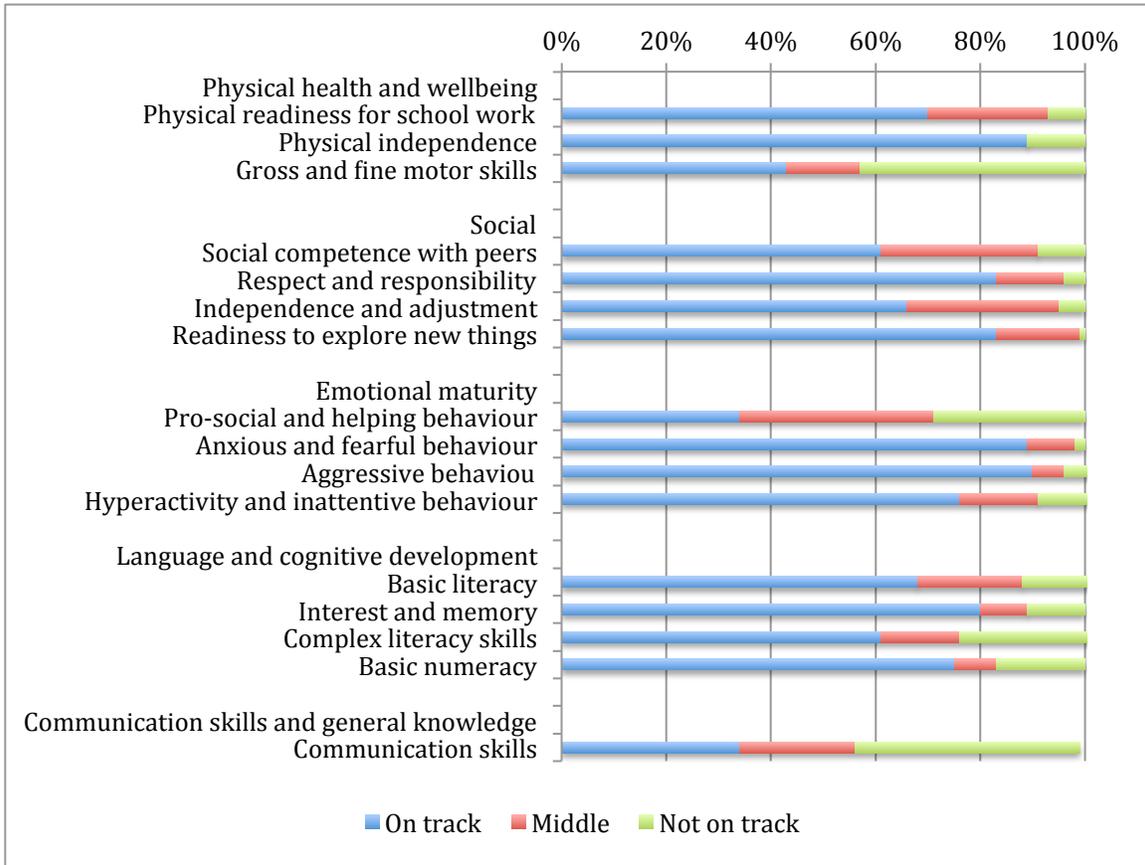
The sub-domains where less than half the students are not on track are communication skills, gross and fine motor skills, and pro-social and helping behaviours.

Further information is available from the Community Reports and mapping recently released by HELP/UBC. This presents data for each school district and for local areas within them, for each of the five domains, for each of the four times (waves) that the EDI has been administered.

EDI Data Table
SD 61, 62, 63 & 64 Capital Regional District

SD 61	EDI Count				Physical Health & Well-Being				Social Competence				Emotional Maturity				Language & Cognitive Dev.				Communication Skills				Vuln. on One or More Scales			
	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4
Oak Bay	71	91	94	62	2.8	8.8	9.6	4.8	8.5	6.7	10.8	4.8	8.6	6.6	9.6	3.4	7.0	6.6	2.1	2.1	7.0	4.4	4.3	4.8	19.7	17.6	17.0	11.3
Mount Tolmie	44	31	27	49	4.5			6.1	4.5			10.2	7.1			6.5	16.3			4.9	9.1			4.1	22.7			12.2
Strawberry Vale	40	38	12	35	10.0	2.6		2.9	5.1	5.3		5.7	2.6	7.9		5.7	5.1	2.6		8.6	5.0	15.8		0.0	15.0	21.1		17.1
Cedar Hill - Swan Lake	76	68	64	74	5.3	13.2	11.1	5.4	3.9	1.5	12.5	13.5	5.3	1.5	7.8	8.1	2.6	5.9	4.7	4.1	0.0	7.4	7.8	5.4	10.5	20.6	23.4	17.6
Gordon Head	100	113	85	108	5.0	9.7	6.0	5.6	3.0	2.7	8.3	9.3	11.0	2.7	10.6	7.5	1.0	5.3	2.4	4.7	8.0	9.7	9.4	8.3	17.0	19.5	24.7	18.5
Fairfield	73	78	85	61	8.2	10.3	7.1	9.8	5.5	7.7	6.0	16.4	8.5	7.7	8.2	15.0	8.2	6.4	2.4	5.3	9.6	10.3	5.9	9.8	20.5	17.9	15.3	19.7
University	63	61	41	59	11.1	6.6	14.6	5.1	9.5	16.4	12.2	1.7	14.5	11.5	15.0	6.8	9.5	9.8	9.8	5.1	14.3	11.5	14.6	13.6	33.3	29.5	34.1	20.3
James Bay	68	39	43	40	16.2	12.8	9.3	7.5	17.9	10.3	7.0	10.0	14.3	17.9	4.7	10.3	11.9	7.7	9.3	2.6	10.4	15.4	7.0	7.5	29.4	35.9	16.3	22.5
Hillside	101	73	95	102	10.9	17.8	9.5	10.1	11.9	8.2	9.5	10.9	12.0	5.6	5.3	9.0	9.0	9.6	6.3	7.5	8.9	11.0	10.5	8.8	27.7	26.0	17.9	28.4
View Royal - Thetis Lake	80	69	96	100	10.0	8.7	8.3	12.0	8.8	8.7	7.3	11.2	7.9	9.0	10.0	10.3	8.8	12.5	8.4	14.3	6.3	13.0	9.5	12.1	21.3	24.6	24.0	31.0
Fernwood	63	36	44	45	20.6	19.4	9.1	20.0	20.6	5.6	6.8	11.1	24.6	11.1	6.8	11.6	19.0	0.0	6.8	0.0	12.7	11.1	4.7	6.7	36.5	25.0	13.6	31.1
Mayfair	48	55	57	54	6.3	3.6	12.3	18.5	4.2	9.1	8.8	16.7	6.4	1.9	10.5	17.0	8.3	3.6	7.0	9.4	12.5	12.7	12.3	24.1	18.8	23.6	26.3	33.3
Carey - Glanford	162	143	157	144	4.3	10.5	12.2	18.1	4.3	7.7	11.5	19.4	8.8	8.5	11.6	16.0	7.4	7.7	10.8	10.4	7.4	9.2	13.4	13.9	24.7	23.8	24.8	35.4
Esquimalt	79	60	65	53	32.1	13.3	16.9	18.9	39.7	11.7	12.5	15.1	34.6	15.3	11.1	18.9	30.8	18.6	10.9	7.3	32.1	11.7	15.4	11.5	51.9	28.3	29.2	39.6
High Quadra	84	81	88	96	4.8	11.1	14.8	12.6	6.0	4.9	12.5	25.0	9.6	7.4	10.2	16.7	8.3	10.0	11.4	14.6	4.8	12.3	11.4	21.9	16.7	23.5	31.8	41.7
Saxe Point	63	39	50	38	9.5	20.5	2.0	26.3	17.7	23.1	8.0	10.5	17.7	20.5	11.1	21.1	11.1	15.4	2.0	13.2	9.5	20.5	6.0	7.9	28.6	35.9	16.0	42.1
Downtown - Vic West	87	72	81	57	12.6	15.3	27.2	28.1	8.0	4.2	17.3	22.8	9.6	8.6	12.5	28.1	9.3	5.6	9.9	16.7	9.2	13.9	9.9	21.1	25.3	26.4	35.8	42.1
Burnside	85	84	67	78	11.8	11.9	19.4	23.4	16.7	11.9	20.9	33.8	10.6	20.2	22.7	18.2	14.1	3.6	9.0	14.1	10.6	15.5	22.4	21.8	31.8	33.3	41.8	52.6

The data for SD61 shows that in the High Quadra, Carey-Glanford, and Mayfair local areas, more than one third of kindergarten students are deemed vulnerable in more than one of the five domains.

The data for SD63 areas in Saanich show that the Elk Lake area (approximates to Saanich's Rural Saanich Local Area) also has more than one third of kindergarten students deemed vulnerable in more than one of the five domains.

SD 63	EDI Count				Physical Health & Well-Being				Social Competence				Emotional Maturity				Language & Cognitive Dev.				Communication Skills				Vuln. on One or More Scales			
	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4
Cordova Bay	63	78	73	81	3.2	14.1	9.6	12.3	11.1	12.8	4.1	12.3	12.7	7.7	6.8	7.4	6.3	20.8	4.1	8.6	3.2	14.1	4.1	4.9	23.8	39.7	19.2	24.7
Central Saanich - Keating	155	121	139	134	11.0	10.1	4.3	14.2	17.4	10.7	5.8	14.9	5.8	7.7	5.8	12.7	11.7	32.5	3.6	9.7	12.9	5.8	7.2	10.4	28.4	46.3	13.7	26.1
Deep Cove - McTavish	74	72	69	57	4.1	11.1	8.7	10.5	0.0	9.7	10.1	14.0	1.4	13.9	10.1	21.1	8.1	15.5	8.7	14.0	2.7	4.2	4.3	12.3	9.5	25.0	17.4	28.1
Elk Lake	42	35	56	46	7.3	31.4	7.1	21.7	9.5	14.3	8.9	28.9	9.5	4.0	14.3	11.6	11.9	33.3	10.7	4.5	2.4	20.0	10.7	13.3	23.8	37.1	19.6	39.1
Sidney	70	57	58	65	5.7	19.3	25.9	20.0	25.7	40.4	37.9	33.8	7.1	31.6	37.9	30.8	10.0	33.3	29.3	26.2	12.9	19.3	25.9	12.3	30.0	54.4	48.3	47.7

What is the learning from this extensive, multi-year assessment exercise:

- Between 20% and 40% of children are not receiving the support in early childhood that ensures that they are ready for kindergarten.
- There is little consistency between areas, between 'waves', and between domains or sub-domains such that specific strategies can be enacted either at the community or the municipal level to address them.
- However a broader set of strategies will assist in addressing these issues.

In the P.L.A.Y. Report, factors which promote positive development related to each domain are identified. Some of these are focused on parents, some on health authorities, some on schools. Those that could be part of the municipality's program/service delivery are as follows:

- Factors that Promote Physical Health and Well Being:
  - Lots of safe outdoor play areas, both formal and informal
  - A variety of accessible recreation programs
  - Recreational opportunities in both urban and rural settings

- o Food security programs in places that are friendly to children and families (such as nutritional education for expectant and new mothers, community kitchens, free or low cost community lunches and dinners etc.)
  - o Children are seen, and there are places where people knowledgeable about normal development observe children. This is important to ensure any delays result in early referrals to professional services. (Early Childhood Educators, nurses, family doctors, infant development workers etc.)
- Factors that Promote Social Competence:
  - o Parent education programs that promote social and emotional development
  - o Places for children to play games with their peers
  - o Quality childcare, preschools, and other early learning programs
  - o Places for parents and children to get together to play and learn
- Factors that Promote Emotional Maturity:
  - o Places where children are able to participate safely in free, imaginative play
  - o Spaces where children can talk about their feelings
  - o Places for children to play together in an unstructured, but supervised environment
  - o Parent education programs and support
  - o Quality childcare, preschools, and other early learning programs
- Factors that Promote Language and Cognitive Development:
  - o Making early literacy initiatives like Mother Goose and story times a priority
  - o Reading to children
  - o Playing games with numbers as part of every day life
  - o Partnering with the library in developing preschool programs
  - o Quality childcare, preschools, and other early learning programs
  - o Book exchange opportunities for children's stories
  - o Partnering with the school districts in sharing early literacy resources
  - o Accessible health care services, such as hearing and vision screening
- Factors that Promote Communication and General Knowledge:
  - o Telling stories and encouraging children to do the same
  - o Developing parent education programs that emphasize the importance of communication
  - o Support English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for children who have different home languages
  - o Having adults and elders tell children about their experiences growing up

Clearly some of these are opportunities for municipal programming, while others are elements that could or should be built into all early childhood development programs and services which the municipality delivers.

Summary

The data confirms four key issues:

- About one quarter of children could and should be doing better when they arrive at kindergarten.
- This percentage is greater in areas showing lower incomes and lower socio-economic characteristics.
- Some of the sub-domains where low scores are higher than expected, such as physical health/gross and fine motor skills and pro-social attitudes are clearly within the mandate of the parks and recreation department.
- Early childhood development professionals have suggested a range of initiatives for the municipality to consider if it hopes to impact these results which are somewhat surprising and troubling.

CLASS Data

Saanich, like many other municipalities, uses a software program called CLASS to register participants in programs. The program also tracks other users of the recreation facilities, such as memberships and drop-ins, but these are not segmented by age group, as are programs. We can use this data therefore to assess the usage of recreation programs by early childhood participants.

From these records, it would appear that registrations over the past three years have declined from over 7,100 in 2008, to 6,100 in 2009, and to 5,300 in 2010. However during this time the department changed the way it registered participants: in 2008, registering for four preschool programs which ran consecutively would have been counted as four registrants; in 2009, this was changed to be counted as only one registration. For example, Pearkes preschools in 2008 had a registration number of 585; in 2009, the number was a more realistic 156 registrants.

Memberships
- No charge for 4 years and under, although must be accompanied by a paying adult

Drop-in
- Kindergym, swimming, skating, Preschoolers in the Park – no charge but parent participation required

Programs
- Wide variety as discussed in this section – all require fee.

Early Childhood Course Registrations by Category

	Mins	Max	Registrants	Waitlists
2008	4226	9557	7114	375
2009	3634	8319	6089	423
2010	4032	9040	5321	603

This change was only one of a number of factors which caused registration numbers to decline. During all three years, renovations to three of the four centres caused enrolments to fall off. This affected both registrations and capacity (data for the minimum and maximum program registration). Not only were programs cancelled, but also parents did not register for programs that were advertised, due to issues with noise of construction, parking, etc.

2010 Early Childhood Course Registrations by Category

	Mins	Max	Registrants	Waitlists
1 Day Specials	104	260	125	11
Arts - Crafts and Visual	31	60	22	1
Arts - Dance	825	1520	1077	91
Arts - Theatre, Music, Literary	407	943	375	31
Daycamp - General	42	82	19	0
Daycamp - Performing Arts	40	55	17	0
Daycamp - Specialty	12	32	32	1
Daycamps - Crafts & Visual				
General Interest	627	1270	851	59
Parent & Tot	855	1964	827	40
Preschools	397	1101	920	306
Sports	692	1753	1056	63
Grand Total	4032	9040	5321	603

However what is clear from the data for 2010 registrations is that:

- Preschool programs are very popular, with over 300 waitlisted
- Location is a key factor – preschools had 180 spare spaces at some centres, but waitlists at others.
- Dance is also very popular, although again, there is a waitlist for some programs but spare capacity at others.

This is not surprising. We all prefer certain teachers/instructors, some facilities are simply more attractive than others, some times are better than others.

The preschool waitlists are at the three centres, but not at Pearkes, while the dance waitlists are at Dansco and at Saanich Commonwealth Place.

	Preschools		Arts - Dance	
	Reg	Waitlists	Reg	Waitlists
Cedar Hill Recreation Centre	135	107	286	10
Dansko Dance Studios			318	40
Gordon Head Recreation Centre	239	80	83	2
Karen Clark Dance Studio (Viewmon			104	8
Pearkes Recreation Centre	123	6	77	0
Saanich Commonwealth Place	423	113	209	31
Grand Total	920	306	1077	91

Early childhood classes are spread across the municipality, but primarily reflect where space is available as opposed to other factors, such as where preschool children live. Almost half the programs are offered at Saanich Commonwealth Place[4], with less than 10% offered at Pearkes. This is even more marked for Parent & Tot classes.

2010 Early Childhood Programs by Category and Location	1 Day Specs	Arts - CV	Arts - Dance	Arts - TML	Daycamps	Gen Interest	Parent & Tot	Preschools	Sports	Grand Total
Saanich Commonwealth Place	71	10	209	83	15	648	585	423	93	2137
Gordon Head Recreation Centr	25	12	83	224	32	107	77	239	223	1022
Cedar Hill Recreation Centre			286			29	89	135	48	587
Pearkes Recreation Centre	29		77		8	67	21	123	106	431
Falcon Gymnastics Centre									362	362
Dansko Dance Studios			318							318
Gordon Head Middle School	0			17	9		15		118	159
Karen Clark Dance Studio (Viewmon			104							104
Colquitz Middle School			0				25		33	58
MYC Royal Oak Studio				49						49
Claremont Secondary School									37	37
Royal Oak Middle School				2					29	31
McMinn Park							15			15
Royal Victoria Yacht Club									7	7
Majestic Park					4					4
Grand Total	125	22	1077	375	68	851	827	920	1056	5321

---

[4] Although for many young families Pearkes is the recreation centre that is physically closest to their residence location, it is likely that SCP is both easier to get to by bus or is perceived as a newer and more attractive centre.

Programs are offered at a wide range of other facilities, as well as free programs offered as Preschoolers in the Park – using over 20 different locations in Saanich.

Summary

The three main points are:

- The decline in participation in programming is more apparent than real. Changes to the registration systems have ensured that the current system is closer in tracking actual children than was previously the case.
- Recent renovations have further depressed numbers, but these will soon be completed.
- The distribution of courses does not match the distribution of the 0/4 population. For probably 30% of the 0/4 age population, the closest recreation centre is Pearkes, but only 8% of programs are offered there.

Focus Group Learning

A number of focus groups and individual interviews were held with parents, providers, professionals and others. While these conversations were wide-ranging, we have structured this summary around the key questions identified at the beginning of the survey.

An online survey was also used to gather primarily qualitative data from parents and early childhood development providers. A total of 68 responses were received. Here are the questions asked and a summary of the comments received:

Question: What programs/services should the municipality be providing?

This of course needs to be set in the context of what every other agency/organization is providing...and there are lots of them, both public, not-for-profit and private.

According to parents, good programs currently being offered include ones involving physical activity, especially dance, swimming, special events, and preschools. Other suggestions from parents included:

- More arts programming including music and art
- Extending all programming so that it could create longer spaces of time for parents to socialize, run errands, etc.
- Provide day care
- More preschool programming at the rec centers
- Continue the preschoolers in the parks program
- More classes for children with special needs
- Increased programming in other languages
- New mom programs

At a special workshop for early childhood development care providers, the following suggestions were made for increasing their opportunities, especially those of in-home care providers, to access programming:

- Parenting classes
- Discounted rates for short use swimming
- A rec center-based StrongStart program
- Affordable programs, especially allowing free gym time
- More drop in programs specifically for childcare groups
- Better trained instructors

Other ideas, widely supported by parents and others included:

- A program like StrongStart run in community recreation centers with lots of gym time; preferably it should be free or low cost and provided at a variety of times (StrongStart is always in the mornings).
- The LIFE program is great, and should be better promoted and linked to programs delivered by community organizations.

- Affordability is a critical issue, especially for those with more than one child and where there is a custodial parent. Sponsorship and parents volunteering (like a co-op preschool) were all positively received as ways to lower costs. Also a large need for special pricing for larger families and for day care groups was identified.
- Program needs: programming for three year olds, more multi age programs, more dedicated preschool spaces and generally more gym time for everyone.
- Parents preferred the preschools provided by the recreation centers, to those of outside contractors.
- There is a need for affordable care for children under 30 months.
- It was also noted that the pool at Esquimalt is warmer, and that they provide child minding. The Y has a program for home-based day cares. Parents like the health unit programs, which were generally free and provided highly trained personnel.

Other roles noted for the municipality included addressing liability issues of preschools, the need for increased staff training for both municipal staff and those who work with under 5s, advocacy for licensing flexibility, and providing information regarding licensing.

Support for full day kindergarten was tempered by a feeling among some parents and ECE providers that they are losing children and therefore jobs and income. The staff/student ratios for kindergarten are very different from those required for preschool programs for the same age group – this inequity was also a concern for providers.

Question: What should be provided at municipal facilities/amenities?

Parents would like to see these types of facilities:

…in recreation centres

- indoor play areas
- designated preschool rooms with toilets for boys and girls
- outdoor play spaces
- stroller parking

a dedicated drop-in area where you could always bring kids not just at set times, especially when it's raining.

Parent at Focus Group

…in the parks

- water parks
- more playgrounds

…and generally

- a children's museum
- more places like Saanich Neighborhood Place
- the development of a 'Forest Pre-School'.

Question: How can neighborhoods and communities be made more child friendly?

Increasing walkability and sociability of the community will improve neighbourhoods for everyone, including parents/preschoolers. Suggestions included the following:

- Playgrounds and parks: should have more wild space in parks and more trees for shade and for 'natural' play. Some parks should have children's gardens. There should be a place specifically for young children to learn to ride bikes. All parks should have fences and 'children at play signs'.
- Bathrooms: need more washrooms at parks and existing ones need to be open during the day, even in winter.
- Water parks: more water parks would be good; even just small water features are great for kids.
- Other Play Areas: beaches are great play spaces.
- Regional trails are good, but hard for young children as bikes travel too fast.
- There is a need for more parks programming, like the *Preschoolers in the Park* which was very well received.
- Other Organizations: there are other organizations which provide great child friendly programming, the municipality should support these organizations.
- Children could be more involved in community gardens, with consideration being given to developing community gardens at or close to pre-school settings.
- Training: more training should be offered to preschool leaders regarding 'nature' activities. The idea of a Play Ranger was also well received.
- Crosswalk/Sidewalks/Curb cuts: generally more sidewalks, crosswalks (especially ones with lights at busy intersections) are needed.
- Transit: transit is not very family friendly and the routes make it hard for some parents to get to the recreation centers.
- Other issues noted included:
  - Dog off leash areas are a problem.
  - More benches would be nice.
  - Keep parks clean.
  - Improve parking at the busy parks.
  - Upgrade swings and play equipment as some of it is unusable after rain.

> *I have a point to offer re: Early Childhood Development. A small (but important) part of the future of our children's health (and our own) must be making our communities walkable. A return to walking places, (rather than driving or being driven) like in days-gone-by. In the days of my youth, I walked to school, to my friends homes, to baseball practice, the store etc. Our children don't do this any longer because we don't feel it is safe for them to walk. We need to make it safe for people to walk!*
>
> *To accomplish this, I think Saanich really needs to consider a blanket drop in speed-limits in residential areas from 50km/h to say 40Km/h. In most US cities residential streets are 25mph (40km/h.) And, within Saanich even some major roads are 30 or 40km/h. Meanwhile, there are so many side streets where there are NO SIDEWALKS and yet the speed limit is the same as any major road. 50km/h is too fast for our children to safely walk our side streets.*
>
> *Just one small bit to the puzzle.*
>
> *Scott Karpes, Parent*
> *Provided by email*

Question: How should the municipality communicate with young parents about programs, etc?

There are a variety of means of communication currently used and young parents are also in touch with the world through a variety of social media.

Options for communication include print and online approaches, through the Active Living Guide, and using social media:

- The municipal website and the Active Living Guide were used, although most people preferred to browse the print version of the Guide and then use the website to book courses.
- E Newsletter; very few people said they used this to find information.
- Other Websites: Victoria Stroller, the Child Care Resource Centre, and Kids in Victoria
- Island Parent: seems to be used extensively.
- Other media people use: word of mouth, the phone book, inserts in the Saanich paper and the Times Colonist Family Section.
- Facebook/Social Media Sites: did not seem to be well liked and people did not want to register or have to share their information. On the other hand, those people who did seem to use social media, were heavy users.

The information people wanted included:

- General information about children (milestones, growth, age appropriate play, etc).
- A more comprehensive guide to all childcare/preschool/ programs in the region, all drop in programs, and generally a single, more comprehensive guide than is currently available from each recreation agency.
- There were also some suggestions for a map of the playgrounds with information on what age the play equipment is designed for.

While the focus group participants were dubious about FaceBook and other social networking sites, this is not the case for everyone. The site http://www.meetup.com/cities/ca/bc/victoria/ has several groups for young parents in Victoria, some of which are recreation oriented. The ability of social media to allow people to 'self-organize' is rapidly revolutionizing how we communicate.

Raincoast Rascals

Hey! Are your kids sitting inside watching TV on a beautiful day? Get them outside! Most weekends we hike in our local woodlands, but we notice a distinct lack of children on the trails. The founders of this group hope to provide an opportunity to get you and the children in your life enjoying the benefits our local wilderness areas. Our aim is to help children develop an appreciation of the natural world through nature walks, hikes, and outdoor adventures. Children must be accompanied by an …

4.8 miles away in Victoria, BC

54 Rascals

Kids, Children, Hiking, Children and Nature, Outdoor Recreation, Moms, Dads, Friends, Playgroup, Family Outdoor Recreation, Camping, Adventurers, Parents, Outdoors, Nature Walks

Question: How is all this changing and likely to change in the next five years?

- Low-income families often qualify for a preschool subsidy, but not a day care subsidy, which actually makes it more difficult to provide much needed child care in communities such as First Nations.
- Full day kindergarten has generally been well received and there are some indications that a four-year-old kindergarten will be implemented by the Ministry of Education.
- The StrongStart programs have been a huge success, although they only serve parents who don't work or those with flexible child care options.
- The plethora of rules and regulations that child care providers in particular, but also parents, face, is making the provision of the right kinds of programs, and visiting facilities such as parks, quite problematic. This needs to be addressed. Issues include:
  - Issues about bussing and care seats.
  - Confusion about access to the StrongStart programs by home-based day cares; some have been told that they can come to these program, some are only allowed on gym days, and some have been told they cannot come at all.
  - Some home-based day cares would like to rent gym space, but the cost is prohibitive as they are considered 'for profit' businesses.
  - Fears of litigation for preschools means children are not allowed to take any sort of risks. This often leads to a lack of stimulation for children; this is also an issue in home based day cares, but often the problem there is a lack of training.

Other issues noted included:

- Lack of qualified day care/preschool staff. Lack of access to indoor gym space for all types of programming, this is especially an issue on rainy days when kids can't play outside.
- There is a lack of children's programming on the weekends.
- Teacher librarians who are available for consultation with parents of young children.

Summary

The following is a distillation of the numerous comments that were made:

- Affordability is the biggest issue.

- Preschool and dance are high priorities with parents.

- Managing multiple children is complicated – as is creating 'me' time.

- The StrongStart model works very well and running a program at the recreation centre would be well received. This would allow more gym time, which is very restricted at school-based StrongStarts, where the older children have priority.

- The challenge of programming is greatest with younger children. This is true for all programming, but especially for full-day care.

- Places like Saanich Neighbourhood Place, with its multiple programming and awareness of income issues, is a wonderful sanctuary for many parents, especially those with limited incomes.

- ECE providers such as family day cares would like better linkage with the recreation centres so that they can augment their programming.

- There is strong support for more 'play in the park' programs.

- Required park enhancements include more water parks, more washrooms (and those that exist should be open in winter) and more benches around the play areas. The idea of a 'forest pre-school should be investigated.

- More neighbourhood child friendly features include more crosswalks, preferably with lights, and more sidewalks. The transit system could also do with become more child friendly, both in policies and personnel.

- In terms of communicating, the current selection of ways to find out about programs works well.