

Ontario announces funding for Indigenous child care spaces, early years programming ^[1]

First Nations School of Toronto to get \$11.5M in upgrades

Author: Johnson, Rhiannon

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EXCERPTS

Ontario plans to expand culturally relevant programs for Indigenous children in its early years programming and provide more child care spaces to support Indigenous families, the province's education minister announced Friday.

Indira Naidoo-Harris, Minister of Education and Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care, made the announcement at the First Nations School in Toronto.

"This funding gives more Indigenous children access to high-quality child care and child and family programs in their communities," she said in a news release.

The province plans to spend up to \$70 million over two years on child care and child and family programs developed in partnership with municipal service managers and Indigenous organizations.

The money will help 15 friendship centres across Ontario expand programming and services.

"We know this will have a positive impact for urban Indigenous people living in cities and towns across Ontario," said Sylvia Maracle, executive director of the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, in a news release.

"The long-term effects of adequately investing in our children will be felt for generations to come."

It was also announced that there will be \$11.5 million in upgrades to the First Nations School of Toronto.

First Nations School incorporates Indigenous knowledge into its curriculum serving students in junior kindergarten to Grade 8, and also recently expanded its programming to include Grade 9.

Increasing the number of child care spaces and culturally relevant programming off reserve was part of The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, released in May 2016. The plan committed more than \$250 million over three years on programs and actions focused on reconciliation.

"Through The Journey Together initiative, First Nations and Indigenous organizations working in partnership with service system managers will design these early years programs to meet local needs and priorities, including cultural and linguistic revitalization," said Heather Irwin, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Education.

"These new programs will be developed and delivered by Indigenous organizations or First Nations. Many programs will involve Elders and Indigenous language speakers working alongside early childhood educators to support learning and healthy development of participants."

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