

# Western Education to lead provincial early learning and child care centres <sup>[1]</sup>

The faculty will receive \$4.5-million to fund the program over the next three years

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## EXCERPTS

Western University's Faculty of Education announced a major initiative Friday after being chosen to lead the Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care.

"This is a fantastic and well-deserved recognition for not only the excellence of research and training opportunities within the faculty of education, but a testament to the vision which leaders have for the path forward," said Juan Luis Suárez, associate vice-president of research at Western, who made the announcement.

Western Education faculty members Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Rachel Heylon led Western's proposal.

[Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Rachel Heylon, members of the Faculty of Education, are leading the Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care.]

"The centre is going to provide professional learning for early childhood educators in an innovative way," said Pacini-Ketchabaw. "We're moving away from the idea of one-time workshops, and rather we're going to establish a network of pedagogical facilitators to provide educators with ongoing and sustaining learning."

Pacini-Ketchabaw says the professional learning of early childhood educators is an essential component to the success of the program. There will be spaces for educators to engage in ongoing conversations, pedagogical experimentation, and reflect on what they've learned from their own experiences.

In total, the centre will include 46 partners across Ontario in seven ministerial regions.

The province called for universities to apply to head the centres of excellence in November of last year. Applicants were asked to demonstrate an innovative, sustainable and responsive approach to delivering the key objectives for the centres, which included the Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care, Francophone Centre of Excellence and Indigenous Centre of Excellence.

Children up to six years old and families across the province are also invited to collaboratively invent and imagine early childhood education together.

Western will lead the centre, along with the Ontario Reggio Association.

Administrators for the centre want to encourage the fostering of democracy, social justice and a culture of research in early years programs by developing relationships between educators and pedagogical facilitators.

The centre also hopes to nurture a commitment to truth and reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities within the entire early years sector. They want to promote a view of children as citizens of today with rights and responsibilities, and promote strong and culturally-relevant local communities of practice among early years programs.

"The Centre leverages the knowledge and strong work already present in the province by collaborating with researchers, policy makers, early childhood educators, families, and children to promote innovative early childhood pedagogies," says Heydon. "Every aspect of the Centre is designed to have pedagogy, diversity, knowledge-sharing, and accountability at its core, all for the benefit of children and families."

The centres are part of the Canada-Ontario Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. As part of the agreement, practitioners, education institutions and service providers across the province will be connected through innovative learning networks.

The Ministry will also establish a Secretariat to ensure professional learning goals are effective and consistent.

"We're going to have a person dedicated to ensuring that we reach all of the programs in each region," said Pacini-Ketchabaw.

Western Education will receive \$4.5-million over the next three years to support the program.

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