

# Peel board early years centres give children substantial learning boost [CA-ON] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

Excerpts from news release:

Are children ready to learn when they start school? Do they have the social, emotional, intellectual and communication skills needed to succeed? For children who attend Peel District School Board's early years hubs and readiness centres, the answer is yes. This is the finding of a study by the Peel board. The research also shows that almost all parents increased their involvement in their child's learning and do more activities with their child than before visiting the centres.

Launched in 2004-05, the four hubs and 10 readiness centres help families make the transition to school easier. "A child's readiness to learn at the start of school is the single strongest predictor of how well the child will do in every grade and whether or not the student will even finish high school," says Jim Grieve, director of education for the Peel board. "This research demonstrates that these centres improve early childhood development and help children and families get ready for school."

Early years centres are staffed with a teacher and a teaching assistant. Each of the four hubs also has a part-time social worker, speech-language pathologist, secretary and full-time community outreach worker.

The role of staff at the centres is to teach parents and caregivers developmentally appropriate ways to enhance their children's learning and development, encourage children's growth in all areas, build children's early literacy and numeracy skills, and support families.

Parents reported the following main outcomes from their experiences at the centres:

- children were more prepared for their transition into kindergarten
- gained new teaching strategies and learned activities they could use at home with children
- greater knowledge of positive parenting strategies and skills
- more knowledge of early childhood development
- increased comfort with school curriculum and expectations
- increased language and literacy skills to use at home with their children
- awareness of community agencies and services that offer additional support

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The free drop-in program serves children from birth to four years of age. Slightly more boys than girls attended the centres during the study period, and the most common age of participating children was 25 to 36 months. Parents noted improvement in their children's language and vocabulary skills, social and behaviour skills, literacy and numeracy skills and fine motor skills.

An assessment conducted as part of the study showed that children improved in all 10 of the outcome areas:

- literacy/reading skills
- math skills/number sense
- interaction with other children
- interaction with adults
- self-help skills
- emotional development
- classroom behaviour
- physical skills
- oral language skills (in English)
- oral language skills (in the language spoken at home)

The research also showed that children's letter identification scores and numeracy scores were significantly higher as a result of attending the centres. By the spring testing session, scores of English as a second language learners were higher than the non-ESL learners, despite lower average pre-test scores for the ESL group when compared to the non-ESL group.

Families who attend the centres speak more than 55 languages other than English, and many of them are newcomers. The top five languages spoken are Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati and Tamil. Three-quarters (77 per cent) reported that they speak a language other than English at home, and many of the participating families are new to Canada.

The centres are designed for pre-school children who are accompanied by their parents or caregivers. Families can attend any of the hubs or readiness centres, regardless of where they live in Peel. The centres are located at schools in communities of high social risk, as identified by the Peel board's Pathways Schools report.

The Peel board spent approximately \$2.4 million to get the hubs and readiness centres up and running. These funds are a portion of the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) from the Ministry of Education. For more information about the hubs and readiness centres, including their locations and hours of operation, visit [www.peelschools.org/early\\_years/](http://www.peelschools.org/early_years/) [2].

**Region:** Ontario [3]

**Tags:** diversity [4]

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