

## ABORIGINAL ECEC

### CONTEXT

Canada's Aboriginal populations include First Nations and non-status native people (on- and off-reserve), Métis and Inuit. Although many Aboriginal people live in remote and/or northern areas, there are large southern and urban populations as well.

**TABLE 2.1** Number of children 0-14 years identifying with an Aboriginal group, Canada (2006)

Age	North American Indian	Métis	Inuit	Multiple	Other Aboriginal
0-4	71,730	29,010	5,890	680	1,575
5-9	74,065	32,215	5,800	630	2,045
10-14	78,980	37,200	6,030	825	2,160

### ISSUES

#### Accessibility/flexibility

Aboriginal groups have larger than average child populations, making early childhood education and care an especially important issue. According to information from the 2006 Census, "several factors may account for the growth of the Aboriginal population. These include demographic factors, such as high birth rates. In addition, more individuals are identifying themselves as an Aboriginal person, and there has also been a reduction in the number of incompletely enumerated Indian reserves since 1996<sup>1</sup>."

A particular need for a wide range of flexible services to accommodate the diverse needs of Aboriginal communities has been identified by Aboriginal groups. The analysis of ECEC in Canada conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development noted that

Thirty-five percent of the Aboriginal population is under age 15. Compared to the population as a whole, the Aboriginal population is educationally disadvantaged. Over the past decade, the federal government has introduced a number of new ECEC services for Aboriginal children under age 6 both on and off reserve and increased financial support. Aboriginal organizations often express a strong desire to maintain their culture and for ECEC services that are culturally sensitive, reflecting Aboriginal cultural norms and practices<sup>2</sup>

1 Statistics Canada (2008). Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census. *The Daily*, January 15, 2008.

2 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004). *Canada Country Note*. Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care. Paris: Directorate for Education, 86.

### **Cultural integrity**

The maintenance of indigenous culture is a major concern for Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal organizations point out that general standards for child care centres are sometimes too rigid for northern and/or remote communities and that they may not reflect traditional cultural norms and practices. Culturally sensitive early childhood education as it pertains to training and service delivery is of special concern. There is a strong interest among Aboriginal groups in developing ECEC programs that are operated and controlled by the communities themselves.

### **Government policy**

Generally, funding for on-reserve social programs is the responsibility of the Government of Canada while social programs for other Aboriginal people may be a federal or a provincial responsibility. In 1996 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that

federal, provincial, and territorial governments co-operate to support an integrated early childhood funding strategy that a) extends early childhood education to all Aboriginal children regardless of residence; b) encourages programs that foster the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual development of children, reducing distinctions between child care, prevention and education; c) maximizes Aboriginal control over service design and administration; d) offers one-stop accessible funding; and e) promotes parental involvement and choice in early childhood education options.<sup>3</sup>

Although governments in some provinces carry out regulation of on-reserve Aboriginal child care, others do not. In some provinces, First Nations communities do not recognize provincial jurisdiction on reserves. Generally, First Nations and Inuit organizations have responsibility for administration of funds and for developing services.

Today many First Nations people do not live on reserves. Indeed, according to data from the 2006 Census, “an estimated 40% lived on-reserve, while the remaining 60% lived off-reserve. The off-reserve proportion was up slightly from 58% in 1996”<sup>4</sup>. While programs for which the federal government takes responsibility include Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities, regulated child care for Aboriginal people living off-reserve has no special status with the federal government.

Until 1995, when the First Nations Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI) and Aboriginal Head Start were announced, there was relatively little spending for Aboriginal ECEC in much of Canada. At one time, federal funding for child care was limited to First Nations in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, in Ontario and Alberta where the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) covered costs in accordance with provincial funding policies, and in Quebec where child care programs for First Nations children received national funding through the James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement.

The number of regulated child care programs located on First Nations’ reserves has grown considerably over the years (see Table 25). The “single window” access that had been discussed for some years had not materialized in 2008.

3 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). *People to people, nation to nation*. Ottawa: Author.

4 Statistics Canada (2008). Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census. *The Daily*, January, 2008.

FEDERAL ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS (2006/07 DATA UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

**TABLE 2.2** First Nations/Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI): Program overview

Program	Department	Objective	Information
First Nations/ Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI)	Human Resources and Social Development Canada	· To increase the supply of quality child care services in First Nations and Inuit communities	· On-reserve First Nations and Inuit communities are eligible · In 2006/07 there were 462 sites and 8,538 spaces funded under FNICCI

**TABLE 2.3** Federal spending on First Nations/Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI)  
2000/01 - 2006/07

Year	Public spending ( \$millions)
2000/01	41.0
2001/02	41.0
2002/03	41.0
2003/04	50.1
2004/05	50.1
2005/06	57.1
2006/07	57.1

**TABLE 2.4** Child/Day Care Program — Alberta: Program overview

Program	Department	Objective	Information
Child/Day- Care Program Alberta	Indian and Northern Affairs	To provide early child development programming and learning services on reserve that are comparable to those offered by the provincial government to people living off-reserve	· On-reserve First Nations in Alberta are eligible · In 2006/07, 17 sites (812 ) spaces were funded under Child/Day-Care Program Alberta

**TABLE 2.5** Federal spending on Child/Day Care Program — Alberta 1999/2000 - 2006/07

Year	Public spending ( \$millions)
1999/2000	3.6
2000/01	2.7
2001/02	2.7
2002/03	2.7
2003/04	2.5
2004/05	3.4
2005/06	4.0
2006/07	4.7

## Child/Day-Care Program — Ontario: Program overview

Program	Department	Objective	Information
Child/Day-Care Program Ontario	Indian and Northern Affairs	To provide early child development programming and learning services on-reserve that are comparable to those offered by the provincial government to people living off-reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On-reserve First Nations in Ontario are eligible</li> <li>In 2006/07 52 sites (2,850 children) were funded under Child/Day-Care Program Ontario</li> </ul>

**TABLE 2.7** Federal spending on Child/Day-Care Program — Ontario 1999/2000 - 2006/07

Year	Public spending (millions of \$)	Regulated spaces
1999/00	12.2	n/a
2000/01	12.2	2,097 spaces
2001/02	13.4	3,243 children
2002/03	14.3	3,018 children
2003/04	15.4	2,797 children
2004/05	15.5	2,799 children
2005/06	15.6	2,951 children
2006/07	15.6	2,850 children

**TABLE 2.8****Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC)**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Information</b>
Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC)	Public Health Agency	To prepare young Aboriginal children for school by meeting their spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical needs (ages 2-6 years)	First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and their families living in urban centres and large northern communities (off-reserve) are eligible. There were 131 sites (4,500 children) funded under AHSUNC in 2006/07

**TABLE 2.9****Federal spending on Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities 1999/2000 - 2006/07**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Public spending ( \$millions)</b>
1999/2000	22.5
2000/01	22.5
2001/02	22.5
2002/03	25.8
2003/04	31.2
2004/05	31.5
2005/06	31.2
2006/07	28.7

**TABLE 2.10** Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve (AHSOR): Program overview

Program	Department	Objective	Information
Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve (AHSOR)	Health Canada	· To prepare young Aboriginal children for school by meeting their emotional, social, health, nutritional and physical needs (0-6 years)	· On-reserve First Nations communities · In 2006/07 328 sites (9,173 children) were funded under AHSOR

**TABLE 2.11** Federal spending on Aboriginal Head Start On-Reserve 1999/2000 - 2006/07

Year	Public spending ( \$millions)
1999/00	29.5
2000/01	24.4
2001/02	22.6
2002/03	34.7
2003/04	35.1
2004/05	41.5
2005/06	50.2
2006/07	50.6

**TABLE 2.12** First Nations Child and Family Service Head Start — New Brunswick: Program overview and spending

Program	Department	Objectives	Information	Public spending (\$ millions)
First Nations Child & Family Service Head Start - New Brunswick	Indian and Northern Affairs	· To maintain strength of family unit; assist children with physical, emotional, social and/or educational deprivation; and support and protect children from harmful environments (ages 0-6 years)	· In 2006/07 15 sites were funded	1.4

**TABLE 2.13** First Nations Elementary Education: Program overview

Program	Department	Objective	Information
First Nations Elementary Education (including pre-k and kindergarten)	Indian and Northern Affairs	To provide programs on-reserve comparable to those required in the province/ territory of residence. Or to arrange for students living on-reserve to attend provincial schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· First Nations students on-reserve including pre-K and kindergarten are eligible</li> <li>· In 2006/07 13,181 children attended kindergarten classes through the program</li> </ul>

**TABLE 2.14** Federal spending on First Nations Elementary Education 1999/2000 - 2006/07

Year	Public spending ( \$millions)
1999/00	65.0
2000/01	33.1
2001/02	32.4
2002/03	34.6
2003/04	51.4
2004/05	50.4
2005/06	51.8
2006/07	52.2

## ECEC IN FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITIES IN A MINORITY ENVIRONMENT

### CONTEXT

According to the 2006 Census, 22.1% of Canada's population reported French as their mother tongue, a decrease of 0.8% from 2001. The rate of assimilation into the first-language English community is well documented and troubling for francophones in Canada. Receiving an education in French has been shown to be an effective way to counter assimilation.

Section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms obliges provinces to offer the two official language minorities — anglophones in Quebec and francophones outside Quebec — an education in their first language at the primary and secondary levels. However, the 2006 Census reveals that only half of francophone “rights holders” are sending their children to French schools. Table 3 shows the population of children 0-12 who would be eligible for French language education in regions of Canada outside Quebec.



TABLE 3

Children 0-12 years eligible for French language education, all children and percent of French eligible children in regions outside Quebec (2006)

Region	0-4 years			5-11 years		
	# French education-eligible population	# Total population	%	# French education-eligible population	# Total population	%
NL	180	22,470	0.8	300	36,980	0.8
PE	360	6,560	5.5	650	11,580	5.6
NS	2,120	41,050	5.2	3,700	68,030	5.4
NB (north)	4,720	6,490	72.7	9,130	11,350	80.4
NB (rest)	1,880	19,680	9.6	3,840	32,090	12.0
NB (south-east)	3,740	7,490	49.9	5,790	11,110	52.1
ON (north- east)	7,120	22,170	32.1	12,760	37,420	34.1
ON (Ottawa)	9,500	43,890	21.6	15,470	66,220	23.4
ON (rest)	15,360	452,740	3.4	26,700	717,420	3.7
ON (south- east)	4,200	9,260	45.4	7,830	16,420	47.7
ON (Toronto)	4,850	133,300	3.6	6,570	186,930	3.5
MB	3,040	59,640	5.1	5,400	94,720	6.1
SK	1,110	50,340	2.2	2,170	78,460	2.8
AB	6,430	194,590	3.3	10,330	280,960	3.7
BC	5,530	195,790	2.8	8,790	309,240	2.8
NT, NU,YT	270	8,300	3.3	340	11,690	2.9
<b>Canada</b>	<b>70,410</b>	<b>1,273,760</b>	<b>5.53</b>	<b>119,770</b>	<b>1,970,620</b>	<b>6.08</b>

Note: Criteria used by Statistics Canada to select respondents were based on answers to the 2006 Census questions on mother tongue, knowledge of official languages and language spoken most often at home. This ensured that the survey covered all the people considered to belong to official language minorities.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ECEC FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The critical period for the development of language skills is known to extend through the early years before formal schooling begins at age six. Research also shows that early childhood is the “gateway” to schooling in French. The establishment of a range of francophone early childhood services as a way to promote linguistic, cultural and identity development during early childhood and to encourage enrolment in French schools constitutes the major goal of key stakeholders living in francophone minority environments including parents, grandparents, early childhood educators, researchers and the 31 French school boards across the country.

## AVAILABLE DATA ON FRANCOPHONE ECEC PROGRAMS IN MINORITY CONTEXT (OUTSIDE QUEBEC)

Data from an analysis conducted by the Commission nationale des parents francophones in 2008 provides the best available information about francophone ECEC programs in minority context (outside Quebec).

The data collection used in the Commission’s analysis focused on four broad areas:

1. ECEC programs and services such as regulated centre-based and home-based child care services, preschool or nursery school programs and family resource centres funded and delivered mainly as part of the social services sector;
2. Early childhood programs such as junior and senior kindergarten, prekindergarten, nursery or pre-maternelle programs funded and delivered through the education sector;
3. Programs offered by school boards to welcome and “accompany” parents (in recognition of the important roles parents play in language, culture and identity transmission);
4. Integrated early childhood development service delivery models.

Re: Early childhood education and care programs funded as part of the social services sector:

- In 2008, 460 regulated francophone centre-based child care and preschool/nursery school settings serving 10,310 children were identified. These data do not include Ontario, as Ontario data on francophone child care centres and nursery schools are not clearly identified in the administrative information provided;
- 50% of the above programs were in school settings;
- Approximately 4,000 francophone early childhood educators (3,250 of them in Ontario) worked in child care settings and 105 in nursery schools/preschools;
- Information is not available on how many of the educators meet their jurisdictional requirements;
- Problems of training, recruitment and retention of francophone educators remain a serious barrier to service expansion;
- Progress has been made in the area of francophone curriculum development;
- Under-funding remains a problem across Canada.

Re: Early childhood education and care programs funded through the education sector:

- Four year old kindergartens are under the authority of francophone school boards in Ontario, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and the territories (only Ontario provides widespread four year old kindergarten for virtually all age-eligible children);
- A number of provinces also offer francophone early childhood education programs for three and four year olds (usually called *prématernelle*) where kindergarten for four year olds is not widely available. These may be on school property but not under the authority of the school boards;
- When these are added to four year old kindergarten, there were approximately 480 francophone programs for children younger than the usual Canadian kindergarten age of five years. These served 7,469 children and employed approximately 460 educators;
- Senior kindergartens are under the authority of francophone school boards in all jurisdictions except in Prince Edward Island, where they are part of the regulated child care system;
- Across Canada, 596 francophone senior kindergartens for five year olds served 11,171 children and employed approximately 606 early childhood educators;
- Altogether there were more than 18,000 young children and over 1000 educators (intervenants) in francophone junior and senior kindergartens under school board governance across Canada outside Quebec;

- Francophone sections of provincial Ministries of Education and francophone parents' organizations have developed a variety of resources to strengthen programming in early childhood settings to address the needs of exogamous and immigrant francophone families.

Re: Early childhood programs funded through the education system to welcome and support parents:

- Family resource centre-type programs were most frequently reported. They include the provision of a variety of written or audio materials in French to inform or educate parents about early childhood development;
- Other programs described tended to be fairly traditional such as using bulletins and parent meetings to discuss school curriculum and child progress;
- Little information was available about supports to parents of children with exceptionalities;
- Fund raising, events organization, and school trip monitoring continue to be main areas of involvement for parents.

Re: Integrated service delivery models for early childhood education and care programs:

- A great diversity of models exist with different terminology used to describe them such as early childhood and learning centres, parenting centres, early years centres, child and family resource centres;
- It is quite often difficult to distinguish between a bilingual and a francophone model;
- Several jurisdictions that have integrated francophone models established through government policy (Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba) are currently in the process of evaluating the experience.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Publication of *A Framework for collaboration: A shared vision, common strategies* by the Commission nationale with the collaboration of more than a dozen national partners establishes a roadmap for strategic action on early childhood programs in a francophone minority context.

Data collection remains a challenge. There is no current system of data collection that would permit a detailed description of ECEC services for francophone communities in minority environments. Quantitative and qualitative improvements cannot therefore be accurately measured. The development of a data collection system is a strategic recommendation of the Commission nationale's 2009 study.