

Province Ensuring Children Get Strong Start in Life

Premier's Office
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NOTE: A social media version of this release is available at <http://novascotia.ca/news/smr/2013-04-10-Early-Years/> (<http://novascotia.ca/news/smr/2013-04-10-Early-Years/>). Hi-res, downloadable photos, audio and video clips will be added after the event.

Families will have better access to the supports they need to ensure their children get a strong start in life thanks to changes and funding announced in this year's budget.

Premier Darrell Dexter and Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Ramona Jennex visited Rockingstone Heights School in Halifax today, April 10, to talk about the initiatives, which include integrating provincial programs and services for children and families, establishing early years centres, and free, comprehensive screening of children at 18 and 36 months.

"I've talked to many parents and grandparents over the years," said Premier Dexter. "They tell me that the health and education of their children needs to be a priority for government, and that the success of our province depends on the foundation our young people get early on. I couldn't agree more.

"With so many great opportunities on the way for Nova Scotians, I want to make sure that each and every one of our children gets the best possible start in life to help them reach their full potential. These changes will help to do that."

Research shows the years from birth to age 6 are the most important in a child's development, the premier said.

To ensure a better focus on those years, the province announced in the Speech from the Throne last month that it was expanding the Department of Education to include an early years branch, which created the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

"We have many great services and programs for young children and families," said Ms. Jennex. "Families were having a hard time navigating the system to access those supports. These changes are about doing the great work already being done more efficiently, so more children and their families can access and benefit from the resources available."

The early years branch creates a team of early childhood development experts from the departments of Community Services, Health and Wellness, and Education to enhance collaboration, strengthen expertise and expand knowledge.

"I am very pleased to hear that so much is being done to integrate supports for children and families," said parent Christine Lane. "I've been involved with early intervention programs for almost 10 years with my son, and have found them very helpful. Having such expertise together in one department

will make the transition to school smoother for children, families and the schools."

The province is also establishing three early years centres across the province that will provide support for young children and their families at accessible locations in the community. These centres build on the highly successful SchoolsPlus model being used in schools like Rockingstone Heights, and will help bring seamless access to regulated child care, early learning programs, early intervention and parent education.

Through the early years branch, the province is developing a comprehensive plan for checkups with families when a child is 18 months old and again at 36 months. These free visits are designed to identify a child's needs early, to ensure supports are in place when the child starts school.

These steps are based on feedback in response to the Early Years discussion paper released in May. More than 1,000 Nova Scotians attended focus groups and interested groups sessions and provided written submissions on how to improve supports for children and families.

FOR BROADCAST USE:

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