

Yukon Child Care Board

2025-26 Annual Report



WHAT WE DO

MANDATE

Under section 4 of the Yukon Child Care Act, the Yukon Child Care Board is established with the following functions:

- to encourage the development and support of child care services which meet the needs of parents and children in the Yukon;
- to make recommendations to the Minister on any matter pertaining to child care;
- to review any policies, programs, services or administrative procedures of government departments in matters pertaining to child care;
- to advise on the planning, development, standards, co-ordination and evaluation of child care services in Yukon; and
- to hear appeals under this Act.

VISION

Yukon Child Care Board proactively supports the management of child care issues and decisions, thereby yielding strength, innovation, and resiliency for the child care industry, its workers and all families affected by childcare policies and decisions.

MISSION

Maintain our board at full capacity with trained and knowledgeable members that are able to fulfill the board's responsibilities under the Child Care Act and effectively serve our stakeholders.



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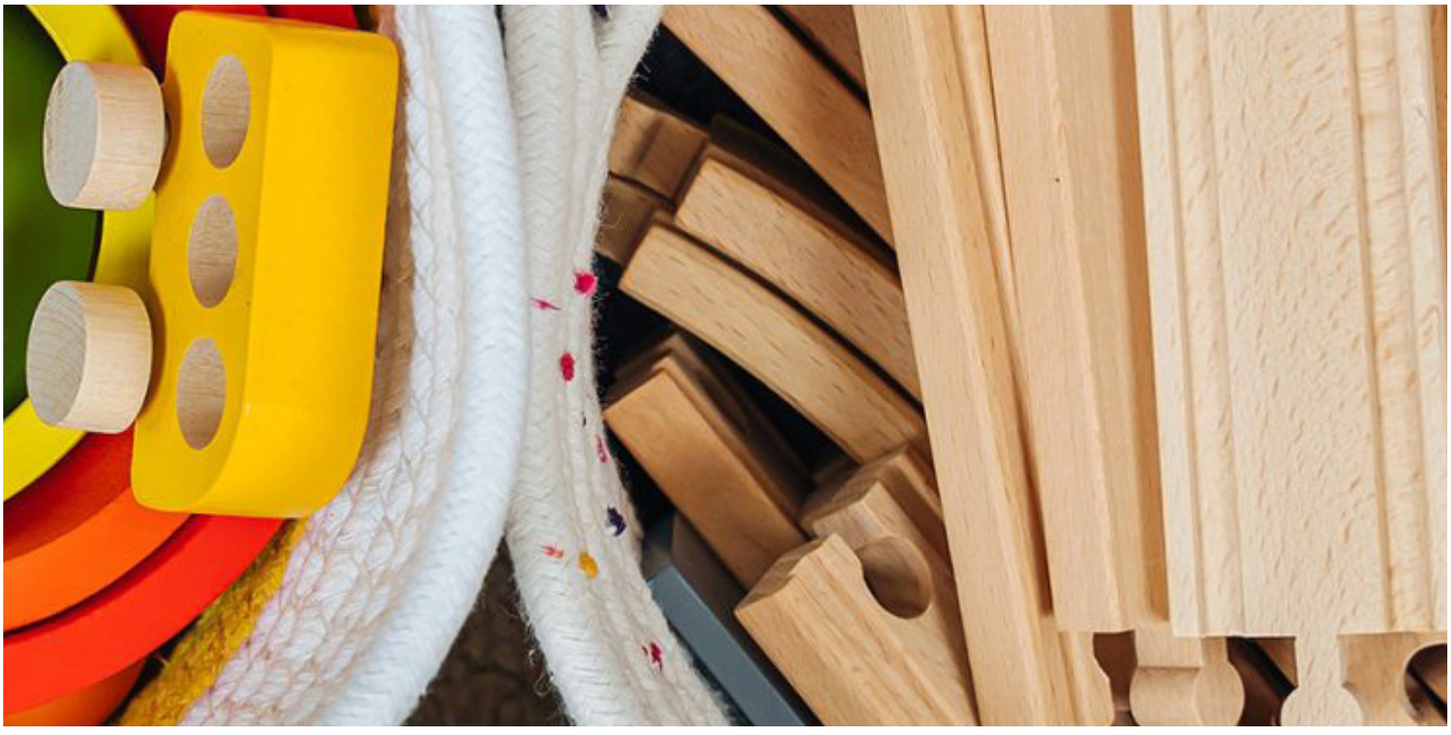
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Marsh Lake
Beach
Grace's hous

Who We Are – Meet Your Board Members

With gratitude, we recognize that our work as the YCCB affects each of the 14 First Nations of the Yukon. We humbly acknowledge our responsibility to the children who live, learn and grow on the lands of the beautiful Yukon. We accept the responsibility to question and to work to change the educational systems and structures that have historically harmed children by removing them from their cultures, families, communities and removing their cultures from education. We commit to finding good ways to apply the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action into our work as the Yukon Child Care Board.

Anne Pinkerton: As a proud Early Childhood Educator and sessional instructor at Yukon University, I am continually inspired by the wisdom of young children and believe they have much to teach us. I am passionate about uplifting the voices of educators and promoting our profession. As Chair of the Early Childhood Educators of Yukon Territory (ECEYT), I believe the Yukon can be a leader in the field of early learning.

Ashley Griffis, Vice Chair: I am a life-long Yukoner and have been in the field of early learning in one form or another since 1997. Most recently I have found a passion in supported childcare, inclusive practice, and social emotional development. I am currently working at the Child Development Center as an inclusion coach with the Early Learning Program Support (ELPS) team.

Clayton Keats, Chair: I arrived in Yukon in 1998 when I moved from my hometown of Bonavista, NL. I've served the Child Care field in many capacities and have been working at Church of the Nazarene Daycare since 2002, where I also hold the position of Associate Pastor.

Cyndi Desharnais: I am a long-time Yukoner and believe that ages 0 to 6 is the greatest learning curve in a person's life. I have been in the early childhood education field for nearly 30 years as a Day Care Director. I am President of the Yukon Child Care Association and am an active member of the Canadian Child Care Federation Council.

Edsel Banusig: As one of the newest members appointed to YCCB this year, I come with a strong passion for Early Learning. I have served as a Board Member of the Early Childhood Educators of Yukon Territory (ECEYT) and am equally determined to lend my voice to YCCB and all the families in the Yukon that we have the privilege of representing. Throughout my work here in the Yukon Territory, I have held the belief of upholding every child's right to learn and grow in environments that honor and support their unique way of being.

Jen Suttis: I began working in the Yukon during the spring of 2013 and have been privileged to call Dawson City my home since 2018. I have worked with children in various forms since my teenage years, first through music and movement and later through education. Currently, I work for the Child Development Centre as a Family Partner where I have the joy of supporting families, children, and the early learning programs in the community. I am grateful to walk alongside children as they make sense of the world, and if I am fortunate, they may invite me to join them on their journey!

Jennifer Bugg: Inclusion is my passion. I began working in education in 1999 and early learning and inclusion in 2009. Currently, I work alongside the Early Learning Program Support (ELPS) team and therapeutic groups at the Child Development Centre. The children, families and educators inspire me every day to learn and grow to better serve the children of the Yukon. I also consult and provide professional development on inclusion in early learning and have been a sessional instructor for the Early Learning Department at Yukon University. The Yukon has been my home since 2007.

Margit Aguilar: Before I moved to the Yukon, I spent several years working with young children, where I found my passion for nurturing their growth and learning. My enthusiasm for early childhood education and development has greatly expanded my commitment in advocating inclusion. For me, as an Early Childhood Educator, no child should be left behind.

Tara Wheeler started working with children as an educational assistant at Tantalus school in Carmacks in 2002. This is when I realized that young minds are amazing. My journey led me to start at the Dunena Zra Sunch'i Ku daycare and became the manager shortly after. I love learning along with the children and families in Carmacks and discovering something new about the world around us.



Message to the Speaker

Dear Speaker

With much respect and gratitude, we are pleased as a Board to present this annual report before you and the rest of the Members of the House today, based on all of our collective work together during the operational year encompassing 2025 - 2026. We appreciate and greatly value the entirety of the workload that everyone before you finds themselves tasked with on an ongoing basis on behalf of the public that they have been elected to serve. We are very pleased to see the high value that children continue to have as indicated in the anticipated future business that will occur in the upcoming years with such matters as anticipating the new Regulations that will finally bring further guidance to the new Yukon Early Learning and Child Care Act, and other tasks such as the development of a Yukon Early Learning Framework and many more tasks that we are very equipped to lend the expertise that each of our dedicated Board members collectively possess.

It is truly an exciting time for all of us involved in Early Learning throughout the Yukon and for all of the families that we represent.

As always, your Yukon Early Learning and Child Care Board as represented by its current membership deserves acknowledgement as we continue striving to work together for a place where the lives of the children which we are invested in and their families are excited to call the Yukon their home.



Message from the Chair

The Honourable Scott Kent
Minister of Education
Government of Yukon
Yukon Legislative Assembly
Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

Dear Minister Kent:

As per Section 4 (11) of the Yukon Child Care Act, the Yukon Child Care Board is pleased to once again submit our annual report to you so that you may present it before the Legislative Assembly.

At the outset of this report, I would like to comment that the words that follow will be based upon our most recent work as the YCCB (now known as the Early Learning and Child Care Board) from the reporting year of April 2025 until March 2026.

Again, as always, I am very grateful for all of the collective work that this Board has been able to complete under the unique challenge of having no actual secretariat help this past year (effective August 31, until the current moment). It would be wrong of us as a Board to not thank a very dedicated and long serving Secretary who has been more than just a secretary to us for well over 20 years. As secretary, Sophie Partridge has been a calming presence for many under the duress of facing an upcoming Appeal situation. She always found a way to act as a calming presence while she had to perform her various professional duties on our behalf. Sophie always was ready for any request that came her way from us and equally was very prepared for each and every task that she did. Her passion and love for what she was asked to do was always very evident to each of us over the years. Her absence is not very easily replaced among us.

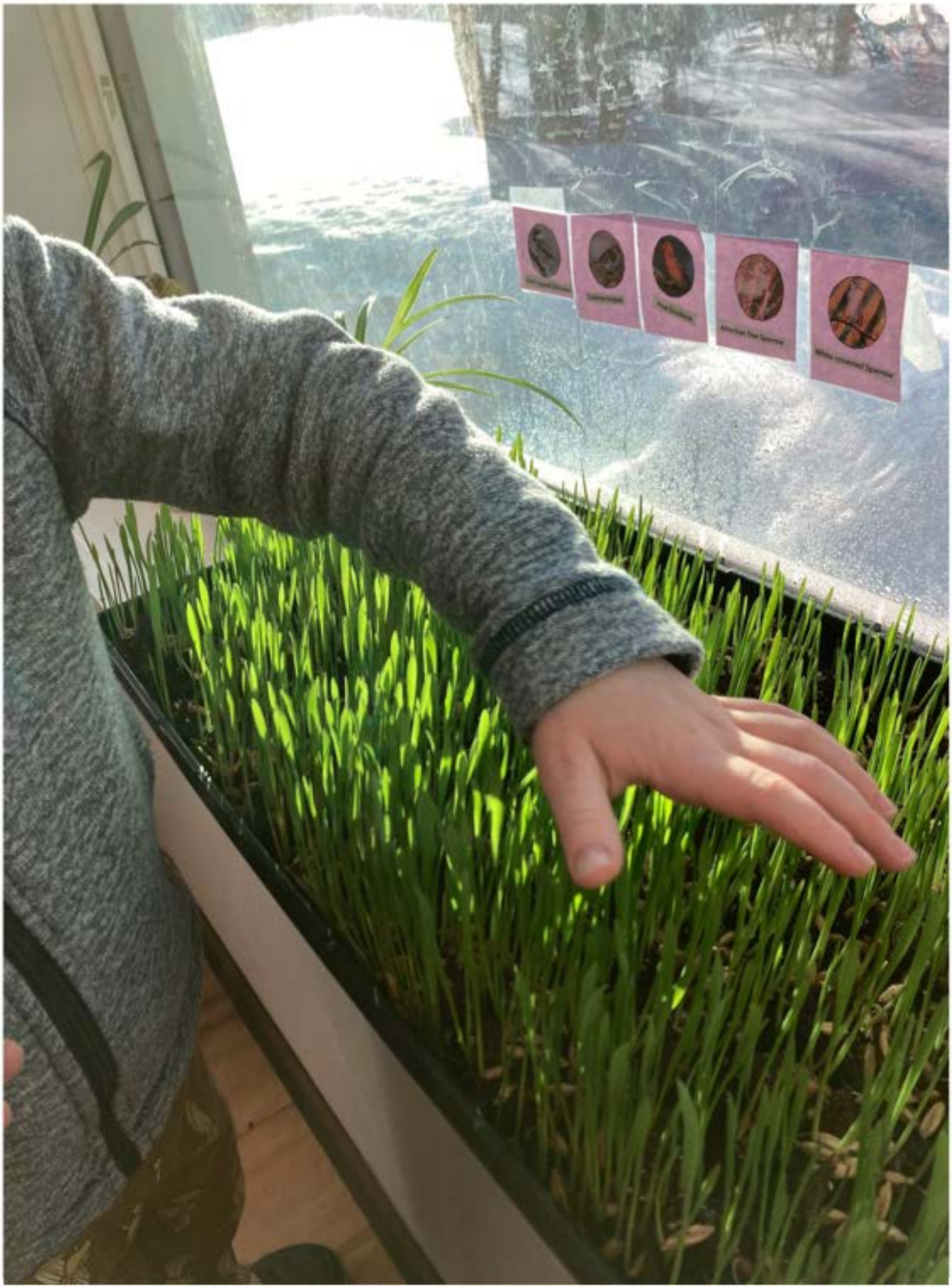
What work as a Board do we have that we can lend expertise to into the foreseeable future? Currently, we have a new Act but no Regulations as of yet to "give flesh" to its existence (as of the writing of this report from the Board). As always, we will stand collectively as a Board and agree that the Board's voice continues to deserve a place at the table for when the time comes for the writing process of the expected new Regulations. It is our desire to build upon the hard work that already exists and has gone into the preparation of an expected Yukon Early Learning Framework. We often discuss how much of a priority it is for us to see that no child misses out on the opportunity to be able to thrive in an Early Learning environment and what the bigger picture for Inclusion could look like into the future for our children and families that make the goal of accessible spaces for children an achievable one and a goal that removes all barriers to accomplish this reality.

The Board stands at the ready and has the capacity to lend its expertise to all consultation that needs to occur ahead of many other stakeholders on this and many other matters as it upholds its Mandate.

We look forward to a very bright future ahead in the upcoming years within Early Learning. Thank you for seeing how vital it is to invest in the lives of the many children that are currently making use of the available spaces in all Early Learning Programs throughout the Yukon Territory.

Sincerely,

Clayton Keats, Chair, YCCB



Shaping the Future of Early Learning - TOGETHER!

The Yukon Child Care Board continues its vital work to advise on high quality, inclusive, accessible and affordable child care spaces for our youngest learners!

At the heart of this work are the dedicated Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), program managers, and owner/operators who provide care and education with compassion and energy. They are the backbone of our early learning system, and we gratefully recognize their tireless efforts to support the children of the Yukon. Their work is of the highest importance with a stake in the future of our territory.

We also acknowledge the hard work of the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) branch as they work to modernize regulations and provide support for programs to excel. We recognize that the ELCC Branch is undergoing intensive audits with the Auditor General of Canada. We are grateful for the work the branch is doing to analyze and reflect on their work. We look forward to the Auditor General's report in December 2026.

The Yukon Child Care Board applauds the Premier of the Yukon for prioritizing the needs of students at the centre of our education system and for identifying systemic challenges within the system. The Minister of Education's mandate letter response emphasizes three key areas that have a profound impact on the field of early learning and the children and families who access these publicly funded spaces:

- developing a long-term plan for early learning infrastructure,
- implementing the Joint Education Action Plan (JEAP), and
- improving inclusive education and therapeutic supports for students.

The recommendations in this Annual Report fall under these three areas as well as the Premier's mandate to ensure that the education system is aligned with the needs of the economy.

The Yukon Child Care Board takes very seriously its responsibility to ensure the work provided by the ELCC branch meets the needs of all children, families, educators and programs. We know the next steps of modernizing regulations and policy is underway, and we continue to expect to be involved in every step of the regulation and framework development process so that we uphold the legislated mandate of the Yukon Child Care Board.

We are grateful that some of our recommendations from previous YCCB annual reports have recently been addressed. One recommendation from the 2023/2024 Annual Report was to have increased communication and transparency between the ELCC branch/ Minister of Education and the YCCB. We acknowledge and are grateful for the letter YCCB received from Minister Kent in response to the 2024/2025 Report. This letter identified and addressed each recommendation and other important ideas individually. The Director of ELCC has also continued to share information in a timely manner. We sincerely hope this type of increased communication will continue in the years ahead. It makes us better able to carry on our work in an informed way.

We must also note that several outstanding recommendations have not yet seen any action. This report seeks to highlight these areas of no action, areas of some action, and any areas to celebrate where recommendations are moving forward. We also acknowledge that some areas are under consideration as we also await the writing of the new regulations. We will look for these to be addressed in the coming year.





Strategic Areas and Recommendations

Strategic Area Number One

Developing a long-term plan for early learning infrastructure

Recommendation 1:

That the Yukon Government creates a long-term workforce strategy (road map) on how to create and sustain a qualified workforce that is appropriately compensated for the professional work they do

- **Rationale 1:** A workforce strategy ensures that educators have the qualifications and quality work environments they need to support children's learning, mental wellness, development and inclusion. It ensures that educators are fairly compensated (including pension, benefit and leave time) that provide a decent living with due consideration given to the year over year increases that continue to happen in the Consumer Price Index as listed by the Yukon Bureau of Statistics. It also supports positive working conditions that help keep people in the field. Qualifications, wages and working conditions are interrelated. This is why they must be planned and managed collaboratively—as part of a workforce strategy resulting in value for money in government spending.

  An additional way to support a long-term plan for infrastructure is to consider ongoing operational funding for a professional association of early learning educators. Associations are able to increase quality of education and retention through professional collaborations, developing a code of ethics (in collaboration with educators), managing peer mentorship opportunities (recently funded), and organizing professional learning opportunities such as an educator's conference. Further funding could be focused toward data collection to inform compensatory decisions.
- **Rationale 2:** A workforce strategy will ensure that the early learning system is aligned with the needs of the economy. Early Learning and Child Care plays a crucial role for the economy of the Yukon. The 2025 Auditor General report on the Canada-Wide ELCC Agreement highlighted the impacts on economic contributions in detail. In a region with a key growing population, accessible and affordable Early Learning and Child Care is not just a social service but a critical piece of economic infrastructure that enables workforce participation

Strategic Area Number Two

Implementing the Joint Education Action Plan

Recommendation 2:

That the Yukon Government prioritize completion of new regulations

- **Rationale:** New regulations will help bring much needed guidance for the early learning sector, ensuring quality, reducing gaps and improving results for the youngest Yukon learners. Completion of the regulations is of high importance and must continue to be in the forefront of the ELCC branch's work. Timeliness of completion is essential to meet the needs of the JEAP.

Recommendation 3:

That the Yukon Government prioritize collaboration on an early learning framework alongside work already being done by Yukon First Nations organizations in the territory.

- **Rationale 1:** Finding a good way forward to work together with First Nations in developing early learning curriculums is the government's responsibility according to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action 12. Decolonizing processes in how the government works with First Nations organizations and their ways of being would be a good place to start in meeting this call to action. The JEAP goal of supporting educators, operators, families and learners to understand Yukon First Nation history, culture, protocols and worldviews would be supported through this collaboration.
- **Rationale 2:** The minister's mandate response letter identifies the goal to find value for money in government spending. Early learning has a finite amount of resources. This could be a good place to avoid spending as it would reduce the time spent in duplicate research and duplicate consultation which will result in overlap and confusion and wastage in the framework space.

Strategic Area Number Three

Improving inclusive education and therapeutic supports for students

Recommendation 4:

That the Yukon Government reviews and enhances its inspection process for ELCC programs to ensure fairness, transparency, and collaboration.

- **Rationale:** A fair, transparent, and supportive inspection process is crucial for building collaboration between programs and the licensing office to ensure the quality and inclusiveness of ELCC environments. By adopting a strength-based approach and establishing a neutral oversight mechanism, YG can encourage programs to strive for excellence and continuous improvement, ultimately benefiting children and families in the Yukon. The new regulations will expand oversight beyond health and safety to include pedagogical guidance. To achieve this, a shared understanding of what constitutes "high-quality" Early Learning is necessary. When quality increases, inclusion becomes second nature and children will receive routine early intervention from qualified, well-supported and confident educators.
  A few considerations:
  - Consider establishing an independent third-party to manage complaints and investigations related to ELCC programs or educators. This would help to build trust and ensure neutrality in the oversight process.
  - Consider alternative opportunities for inclusion of children such as licensing for outdoor programs and a review of funding models for Family Day Homes to meet the needs of all children and families.

Recommendation 5:

That the Yukon Government ensure there is paid training time, required education and enhanced compensation for Inclusion Educators.

- **Rationale:**The most vulnerable learners deserve the highest trained and supported educators. Currently inclusion educators (supported child care educators) have minimal requirements for training and minimal paid opportunities to access increased education. Both these educators and children deserve better. Research from Kids Included states that undertrained inclusion educators are more likely to leave their role and less confident educators and operators are more likely to expel children from programs resulting in long-term mental health struggles for the affected child and family.

Recommendation 6:

That the Yukon Government consider food security/funding for all EL programs to provide food for children.

- **Rationale:** Children are unable to learn and are unable to be included well when they are hungry. The need to feed children at early learning programs became increasingly clear with the reduction of Jordan's Principle funding for nutrition programs. The increased cost of food has inhibited programs from meeting the nutrition needs and as a result, the inclusion and learning needs of our youngest learners. Of importance to note - ALL Yukon Early Learning Programs are expected to provide nutritional supplements to children where parents have chosen to enroll them into programs that do not provide a full "hot Lunch" service. In these instances, no additional funding is currently provided to support these programs at all (other early learning programs receive supplementing through the Yukon Early Learning and Child Care Funding Program (YELCC), creating additional financial burdens upon Early Learning Programs.







2024/2025 Recommendations

Below is a summary of the status of and response to the recommendations from the 2024/2025 annual report.

Recommendation	Status	Of Note
Recommendation 1: Set professional learning standards for those involved in early learning		
That educators and operators are required to continuous and yearly upkeep of credentials via approved and personalized professional development paths	Under "consideration" for regulations	The ELCC branch provided many opportunities for voluntary professional development.
Set expectations around required trainings for leadership	Under "consideration" for regulations	
Recommendation 2: Increase and differentiate support for community programs		
Increase the time that the ELCC Branch has available to support community programs, and to continue to differentiate intentional ways to support these programs and ECEs with their individual strengths and needs	Some action	
Recommendation 3: Ground newcomers to the Yukon in the unique context in which they will practice		
Fund and organize an orientation process and learning about cultural safety for newcomers to become grounded in the Yukon.	Under "consideration" for regulations	
Recommendation 4: Improve the inclusion experience of children with unique needs, their families, educators and programs		
Create a pathway of development for educators who provide inclusion support for children	Some action and a commitment to consider for regulations	
Recommendation 5: Support the Yukon Child Care Board to carry out its mandate in timely and professional ways.		
Ensure appropriate financial support and streamline the process for appointing new members to the board	An area to celebrate	Clear and supportive action for reappointments, funding for training events as needed, and clearer connections to appropriate support has happened within the past few months. We look forward to continued support to hire a Board Secretary in the territory who can meet the specific needs of the YCCB.

Other Recommendations

In our varied roles, the YCCB members have considerable contact with children, families, educators and operators who are involved in the early learning field. As a result we included many ideas that are important to Yukoners in our 2024/2025 report. We asked the Minister to consider these as the ELCC branch developed regulations and policies. The minister addressed some of these important topics in his response letter.

- That the Yukon Government provide sustainable funding for a professional organization (association) to support learning, retention and fair and respectful treatment of educators within their places of work;
  - Update: Funding was provided for some specific projects.
- That the Yukon Government provide a recognition of higher education in the early learning field (bachelors, masters and doctorate level of learning)
  - Update: Under consideration for regulations.
- Along with the new early learning framework, we ask that the Yukon Government ensure there is a Code of Ethics for both program owners and early childhood educators in the Yukon.
  - Update: Under consideration for regulations.
- That a safe pathway be built for educators to flag unfair treatment in their workplaces, especially in consideration of the Yukon nominee and permanent residency process.
  - Update: The ELCC branch does not have jurisdiction in this area.
  - Going Forward: A professional association could provide a safe space to support ECEs with this challenge
- That there be training for operators and expectations around emotional and psychological safety in the workplace for ECEs.
  - Update: Training offered by ELCC. Materials available.
  - Going Forward: A professional association could provide a safe space to support ECEs with unsafe work environments.
- That a clear pathway for licensing alternative programs (e.g. outdoor programs) be developed as means for meeting the needs of all children and families.
  - Update: Under consideration for regulations.
- That a clear wage grid be developed and that there be an option for diversifying career options for ECEs attached to the wage grid
  - Update: Under consideration for regulations.
  - Going Forward: A professional association could provide a way to gather data and give input into what educators consider as fair and will lead to retention.
- That government provide education to the public around the benefit of family day homes and the support to start up more family day homes
  - Update: Public education has not happened. Funding to start up is minimal in Whitehorse.
- That the need for more spaces for after-school care be addressed.
  - Update: There has been an increase in spaces, but the need is still high.
- That the Yukon Government modernize the inspection process for licensing of programs by increasing the qualifications of inspectors in order to ensure quality programming and inclusive practice (above and beyond health and safety);
  - Update: New act requires programs to have an inclusion policy;
  - Going Forward: Unclear how the ELCC branch will provide the needed support for increased inspection expectations
- That inspection reports be made accessible to the public as a means of building awareness of quality.
  - Update: Inspection reports are available at the ELCC office.
  - Going Forward: posting more broadly is under consideration for new regulations
- That quality indicators be developed and reported upon to ensure inspired practice.
  - Update: The new act allows for quality indicators
  - Going Forward: under consideration for new regulations

Conclusion

The board is grateful for the continued collaboration and information sharing with the ELCC branch Director and the Minister of Education. We look forward to continued shared work together for the best of all Yukon children, their families, educators and early learning programs. We continue to advise that above all, the new regulations be given the highest priority. We advise that the expertise of the YCCB be used in the development of regulations and policies.

We are honoured and grateful for the opportunity to serve the children of the Yukon in this important way. We look forward to a bright future where the four pillars of accessibility, affordability, quality and inclusion are upheld with equity in each program and for each child.







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