

Childcare

In 2018:

- Of the schools with kindergarten, the percentage reporting on-site childcare for kindergarten-aged children has increased from 47% in 2012 to 80% in 2018—an all-time high in the history of the survey.
- 90% of elementary schools with a higher proportion of parents who have graduated from university offer childcare, compared to only 66% of schools with lower proportions of university-educated parents.
- The percentage of elementary schools reporting family support programs (EarlyON centres) dropped from 36% in 2015 to 28% in 2018.
- 50% of elementary schools report working with childcare organizations “often”.

“We have a great partnership with the childcare providers in our school. Most of the families have students in our school, so it is very convenient for parents.”

Elementary school,
Rainbow DSB

Research shows that development during the early years has long-term impact on success later in life. High-quality pre-schools have been tied to greater economic outcomes, lower crime, and better family relations (Schweinhart et al., 2005). Over the past several years, the Ministry of Education has recognized the importance of early childhood programs (Ontario, 2012a), and has worked to improve access to childcare and early childhood education.

However, this year’s survey data shows that there may not be equitable access to these vital programs across the province.

Public schools—the ideal location for childcare

For most families, the local school is the ideal location for early childhood education programs and before- and after-school care. It makes drop-off and pick-up simpler for parents, and it can ease the transition from school to care for students.

The province has identified schools as the preferred location for childcare (Ontario, 2012a, p.4), and provincial policy stipulates that “school boards are required to ensure the provision of a before-and-after school program for every elementary school serving students in the primary and/or junior division (i.e. from Kindergarten to Grade 6) where there is sufficient demand and/or viability” (Ontario, 2017b, p.3).

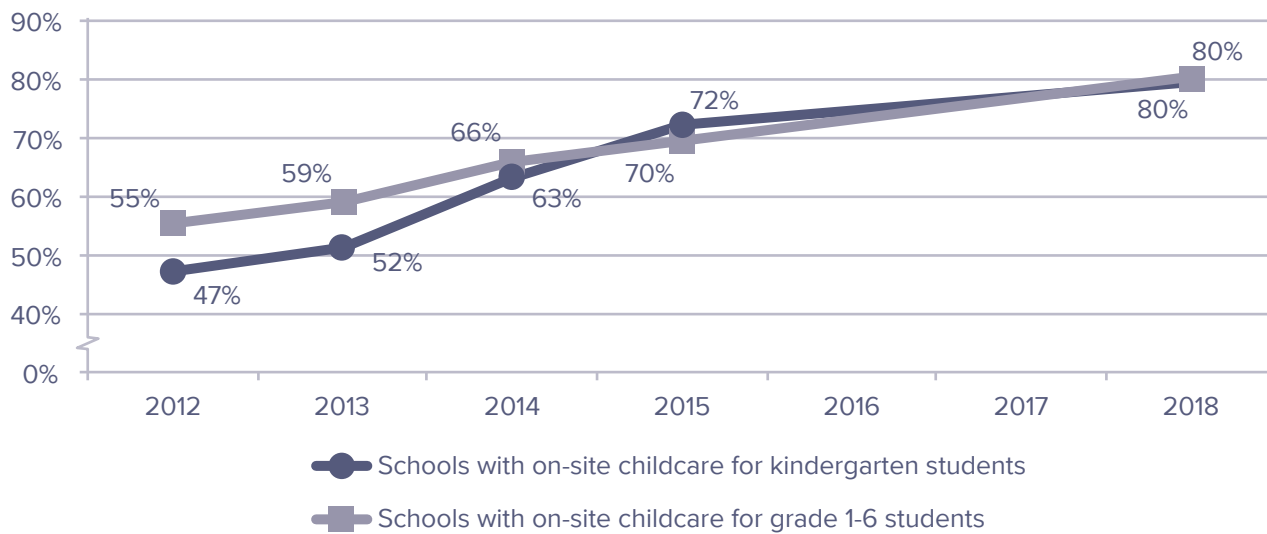
These policies appear to have had an impact. This year’s survey results show that more schools are offering on-site childcare:

- Of the schools with kindergarten, the percentage reporting on-site childcare for kindergarten-aged children increased from 47% in 2012 to 80% in 2018.
- The percentage of elementary schools reporting on-site childcare for children in grades 1 to 6 increased from 55% in 2012 to 80% in 2018.

These figures represent an all-time high in the history of the survey (see Figure 8.1). The increase coincides with the phased-in introduction of full-day kindergarten and requirements for before-and-after school programs articulated in provincial policy.

Figure 8.1

Percentage of schools offering childcare for school-aged children



Inequitable access to childcare

While the survey data show that more schools are offering onsite childcare, access to this vital service may be limited in schools with higher rates of poverty, as well as in schools with lower proportions of university-educated parents.

This year, we used information from Statistics Canada and Ontario’s Ministry of Education to examine the relationship between students’ family background and a range of resources and programs in schools. We compared the top and bottom 25% of our elementary school sample in two areas: the proportion of families under the Low-Income Measure, and the proportion of students with at least one parent who has graduated from university. For the sake of comparison, we refer to these as *high* and *low* poverty schools, and *high* and *low* parental education schools.

In 2018, schools with low parental education, and those with high levels of poverty, are less likely to have childcare (see Figure 8.2).

This year, many principals commented that even though there is demand for childcare, the fees charged make it unaffordable for their community.

Equitable access to childcare is also an issue for schools in rural communities. Only 72% of rural schools report having childcare available in the school, as compared to 83% of urban schools.

“Interest is there, but program is cost prohibitive.”

Elementary school,
Huron Perth CDSB

“The daycare providers have pulled out of the school as families cannot afford to pay the fees, or do not know how to access subsidies, so numbers are too low and fees are often unpaid.”

Elementary school,
York Region DSB

“We also have an Early Learning Program in the mornings only for 2 and 3 year olds. The biggest challenge is finding a space that meets the Ministry needs for them - currently they are sharing a bathroom with our students because we don’t have the funds to build a bathroom facility in the Best Start room.”

Elementary school,
Lambton Kent DSB

Family support programs in schools

As with childcare, schools can also be the ideal location for family support programs. Programs such as Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Best Start programs, and Early Years Centres do not provide childcare, but instead provide young families with essential resources, learning opportunities, and support. Parents and children participate in these programs together.

Ontario is in the process of combining all of the child and family programs funded by the Ministry of Education into one model, to be provided through local EarlyON centres (Ontario, 2016a).

According to the survey data, the overall percentage of Ontario schools with family support programs has dropped from 36% in 2015 to 28% in 2018. The decline may be partly due to the restructuring, but may also be a result of an expansion in childcare funding and improved access to childcare programs.

Interestingly, rural schools are more likely to report having these types of programs. While 33% of rural schools report a family support program, only 25% of urban schools offer them. Elementary schools with higher levels of poverty, and those with lower proportions of university-educated parents, are also more likely to have family support programs.

Figure 8.2

Schools with higher poverty and lower parental education have less childcare

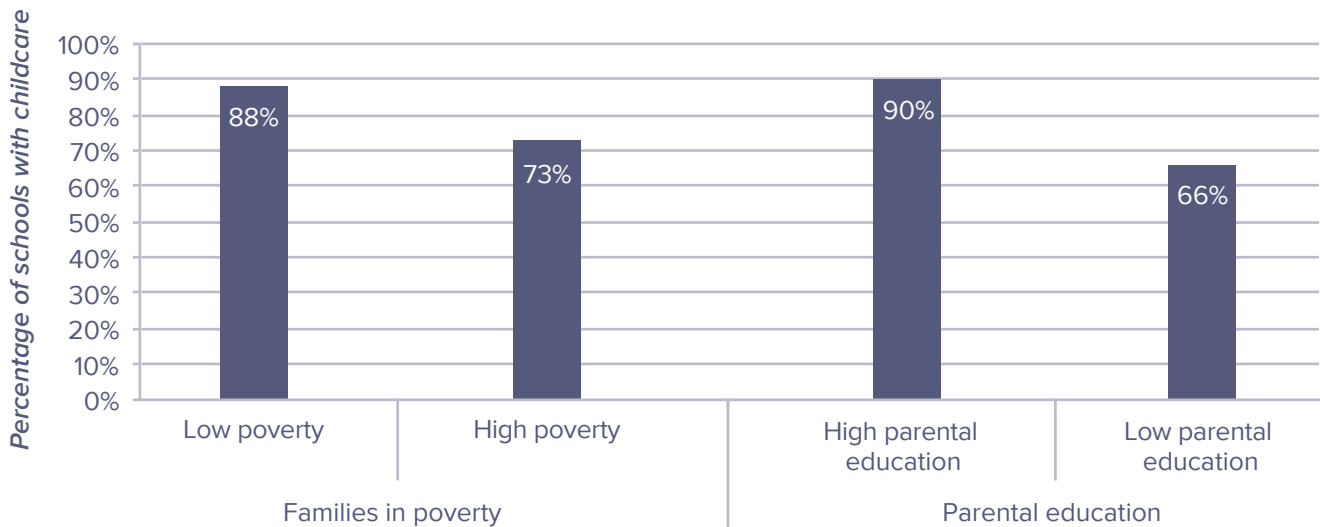
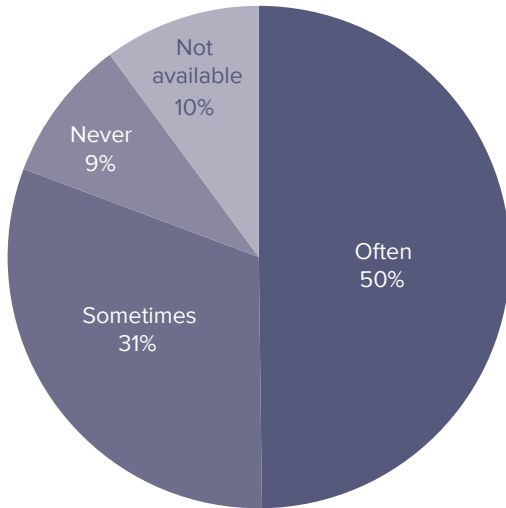


Figure 8.3

Frequency that elementary schools connect or work with childcare organizations



Working together – sharing space and making connections

As childcare is integrated into more Ontario schools, schools are working to find ways to share limited space with childcare providers.

On this year’s survey, we asked schools how frequently they connect or work with childcare organizations – sharing resources, co-planning, sharing space, and supporting students. The majority of elementary schools (81%) report at least some connection, with 50% of schools reporting that they “often” work together (see Figure 8.3).

While most schools report working with childcare organizations, many principals commented that sharing space can be a challenge.

Equity and childcare

The experiences and learning environments that a child is exposed to during early childhood are linked to their cognitive, social, and emotional development (Mustard, McCain, & McCuaig, 2013). Investments in high-quality early years programs are among the most effective ways to support children’s development in these areas, and can lead to more equitable education outcomes for all students (OECD, 2012).

“Our school doesn’t offer childcare, but we partner with an on-site external daycare that uses our facilities before and after school. It can be a challenge to share classrooms, as teachers and ECEs can’t have time to plan and set up their room for the teaching day without children being there.”
Elementary school,
Waterloo Region DSB

“Sharing the premises is not always easy for the school staff (planning, organization for the next day...)”¹⁸
Elementary school,
Conseil des écoles catholique
du Centre-Est

18. Translated from French. Original comment: “Partager les locaux n’est pas toujours chose facile pour le personnel de l’école (planification, organisation pour le lendemain...)”

Recommendations

Given the significant role that quality childcare programs play in supporting young students' development, all families should have access to these resources. Unfortunately, our data show that families with greater social capital—higher income and higher levels of education—appear to have greater access to childcare. The variation in access to childcare programs means that they may not be available to the families who need them most.

People for Education recommends that the province:

- Continue to make changes to funding and policy focused on childcare and early childhood education, in order to address current inequities in access, and to ensure that childcare is available at a reasonable or subsidized cost in all elementary schools where parents request it.