



Getting the right start to a good future

How can Albertans work together to help our young children reach their potential?

Early years are critical years

Every child is born brimming with potential. How this potential unfolds depends on the brain cell connections that are made, especially during the first three years of life. Children's experiences during this critical period shape the brain in ways that impact lifelong learning, behaviour, health and quality of life. Getting a positive start is key to a successful future.

It takes a community to raise happy, healthy children

Nurturing, stimulating environments spark the positive brain development that enables children to thrive and do well. Families, other caregivers and communities play a fundamental role in creating environments that promote healthy child development. Children who grow up in cohesive communities are likely to develop better and do better in life.

How well are Alberta's young children doing?

Alberta Education has launched the Early Child Development (ECD) Mapping Initiative, a five-year province wide research activity to look at factors that may influence healthy child development. The initiative will use the results to provide families, communities and school authorities with a picture of early childhood development in Alberta.

Information will be gathered from three sources:

- Early Development Instrument (EDI) assessments of the 'developmental readiness' of five-year-olds that are collected by kindergarten teachers,
- 2006 and 2011 census data provided by Statistics Canada on socio-economic factors throughout the province, and
- information about the local services, programs and facilities available for families with young children, which is compiled with community input.

Making meaning through maps

Information that is gathered will be plotted on maps for communities. Mapping allows complex information to be presented in an easy-to-understand visual format. Maps have been successfully used by other provinces studying early childhood development, including British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario.

Maps, along with community reports, can help to reveal such things as differences across communities in child development, and where strengths and gaps exist in programming, facilities and services.

Raising children for the good of the community

Community development coordinators will work closely with communities to help them define their boundaries, take inventories of their resources, interpret maps and information, and form local early childhood development coalitions.

Healthy early childhood development is vital to our children's well-being and to Alberta's future. The ECD Mapping Initiative will help Albertans to discover ways to create positive early childhood environments, and will enable communities, parents, school authorities, service providers and policy-makers to work effectively together to serve the best interests of young children and their families.

For further information, please go to www.ecdmapping.alberta.ca

***Mapping a bright future
for Alberta's young children***