

Niagara's 2011 Online Parent Survey Summary

BACKGROUND

In Spring 2011 Early Years Niagara Planning Council launched an online parent survey. The purpose of the survey was two-fold:

- ▶ To inform local planning for Best Start Child and Family Centres; and
- ▶ To inform Early Years Niagara Planning Council's Community Forum Event, "Setting the Course for children aged 0-12, their families and their communities" where local priorities were being set for children in Niagara on April 27, 2011.

The survey asked parents questions about their experiences utilizing different types of supports and services for children and families including questions related to waitlists and accessibility. Parents were also asked to prioritize what they felt were the most important issues related to different topics of child health, child learning, families being strong, stable and connected, and child safety.

A total of 1011 surveys were completed (93 paper and 918 online) representing parents of 1521 children from across Niagara. The survey was open to complete online during the months of March and April 2011.

Survey distribution included:

- ▶ First, a paper version was completed by parents from five child care centres as a pilot;
- ▶ Then the survey link was emailed to early years organizations and agencies to then be emailed to parents of their organization or agency;
- ▶ Posters were displayed in some centres/buildings of early years agencies and organizations with the survey website link as a grab tag; and
- ▶ An advertising campaign using social media (Facebook).

The survey captured the point of view from early years service users (participants of early years agencies and organizations) and non early years service users (Facebook was used as a method of hearing from parents who may not attend the services of early years agencies or organizations).



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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Respondent Profile

- ▶ 59% of the children of respondents were aged 0-5 years (n=892)
- ▶ 41% of the children of respondents were aged 6-12 years (n=629)

Services/Supports for Children

- ▶ The types of services/supports being used primarily were:
 1. Health & Dental
 2. Child Care
 3. Physical Activity & Recreation
- ▶ The types of services/supports that were needed but not being utilized by children and families were:
 1. Health & Dental
 2. Physical Activity & Recreation
 3. Child Care



Services/Supports for Parents

- ▶ 23% of respondents reported needing parenting supports and services but that they were not using them.
- ▶ Of those parents who identified services and supports which were needed but not being used and specified a reason, reasons were because:
 1. Parents did not know the service was available
 2. Parents could not afford to pay for services
 3. Parents were currently on a wait list for service(s)

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- ▶ Of those parents who indicated they were on a waitlist, the top 5 services they were waiting for:
 1. Pre & postnatal support
 2. Language & literacy support
 3. Special needs supports
 4. Mental health services & behavioural supports
 5. Child care



- ▶ Of the parents who responded that they were on a waitlist, the most common response was that they were on a waitlist for service for more than 6 months.

- ▶ When parents were asked how they thought access to services could be improved in Niagara, their top 5 ideas for improvement included:
 1. Reducing wait times/increasing staffing/increasing funding
 2. Increasing promotion/awareness of services
 3. Expanding hours (evenings, weekends, etc)
 4. Reducing costs associated with services and supports
 5. Increasing capacity and outreach of services (home visits, expand locations, etc)

- ▶ When parents were asked what they felt were the most important issues related to child health, children learning, families being strong, stable & connected, and child safety in Niagara, there were a variety of options to choose from. The top 3 responses for each area are shown in the table below:

	Children are Healthy	Children are Learning	Families are Strong Stable & Connected	Children are Safe
1.	Healthy Eating	School Academics	Bullying	Family Economic Wellbeing
2.	Behaviour & Mental Health Issues	Speech & Literacy	Neighbourhood Cohesion	Parental Involvement in School
3.	Dental Health	Preschool Learning Opportunities	Safe Neighbourhoods	Family Structure

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- ▶ When parents were asked to identify other issues that they thought were the most important related to children being healthy, children learning, children being safe and families being strong, stable & connected in Niagara, the overwhelming response was about parenting. Specifically parents identified the following - lack of parenting skills; lack of parenting knowledge & support; lack of parental involvement due to working too much; lack of attention being paid to children; family structure such as single parents; etc.

- ▶ When parents were asked what improvements could be made in order to make Niagara the best place for children to live, learn, play and grow, their top ideas were:
 1. Increase availability and uptake of services (e.g. breakfast programs, homework programs, physical activity, before/after school programs, Ontario Early Years Centres, Full-Day Kindergarten, cultural programs, special needs supports, services in other languages);
 2. Decrease program costs, increase access to subsidies and increase free programming;
 3. Increase access and outreach of services, improve coordination of services, increase neighbourhood resources (e.g. access to services in community centres or schools, increase parks & playgrounds, broaden eligibility criteria, universal services);
 4. Increase parent involvement with their children and their children's education;

Early Years Niagara Planning Council would like to thank all parents who participated in completing this survey. The results will be used for several planning purposes which will ultimately benefit children and families living in Niagara.

If you have any questions or would like more information about Niagara's 2011 Online Parent Survey, please contact Lori Bell, Manager, Children's Services, Niagara Region @ 905-984-6900 ext 3804 or lori.bell@niagararegion.ca

