



**9** Recreational and leisure activities in the form of play, creative expression and skill development opportunities

- Children who participated in organized activities about once per month showed they were more developmentally ready for school, than those who participated a few times per week. This indicates that children are often over-involved in organized activities outside of the home.
- Children participating in art programs a few times per week scored well in a study measuring 5 areas of child development.
- A higher percentage of children from high income families participate in organized and unorganized sports and physical activities in comparison to low income families.
- Children who are physically active are better prepared for school, fare better academically and have better social skills than those who are less physically active.
- Children who spent 6 to 10 hours per week being physically active are more developmentally ready for school.
- Most of Canada's largest municipalities reported at least one by-law in place that would discourage physical activity. (i.e. not allowing riding bicycles on sidewalks, skate boarding in public areas, playing in the street)



- 94% of local sports and recreation, arts and culture programs charge a fee to participate.
- Between 30 and 50% of municipally owned recreation facilities across Ontario are aging quickly and will need to close.
- The more hours spent watching television/ movies or playing video games the less likely children will be developmentally ready for school.
- An entire generation of children are not getting the 60-90 minutes of daily physical activity required to maintain their overall physical well-being and healthy weight. In fact, 21% of children aged 2 to 5 years are overweight or obese in Canada, and this figure only increases the older the age group of children.



**10** Protection from racism and discrimination irrespective of the child's ethnic, cultural, spiritual and/or religious identity

- Ontario has seen a steady decline since 2006, in the number of permanent residents (people who have immigrated to Canada).
- Niagara region has seen the number of refugees increase from 2,443 in 1998 to an average of over 5,000 per year since 2000.
- Between January 1<sup>st</sup> and June 30<sup>th</sup> 2008, there were a total of 2,443 refugees who entered Canada through Fort Erie, and of these there were 428 children under the age of 10 years.
- The majority of refugees are from Spanish speaking nations such as Mexico.
- In Niagara, it is estimated that 12% of those presently receiving social assistance are newcomers to Canada.

**What is Early Years Niagara?**

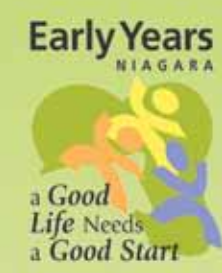
Early Years Niagara is a community alliance in partnership with education, health, childcare, and business to develop and sustain a shared community vision:

**All children in Niagara region are safe, healthy and respected.**

**All families in Niagara are supported to provide children with the best possible opportunities early in their lives.**

Research shows that early brain development sets the stage for lifelong learning, behaviour, and health. Investing early is vital to the continued success of our children and vitality of our communities.

Early Years Niagara is devoted to increasing awareness of the importance of the early years and sustaining an environment that supports all children to get a good start in life.



**Early Years Niagara Partners**

- A Child's World
- Adolescent's Family Support Services of Niagara
- Brock University
- Business Education Council
- Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara
- Conseil scolaire de district du Centre-Sud-Ouest
- Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud
- Contact Niagara
- District School Board of Niagara
- Early Childhood Community Development Centre
- Family and Children's Services of Niagara
- La Boite A Soleil
- Learning Disabilities Association
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services
- Niagara Aboriginal Children's Planning Council
- Niagara Best Start French Language Advisory Committee
- Niagara Catholic District School Board
- Niagara Child and Youth Services
- Niagara Child Care Sector
- Niagara College
- Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre
- Niagara Region Children's Services
- Niagara Region Public Health
- Ontario Early Years Centres-Niagara Region
- Port Cares
- Public Libraries of Niagara
- Quality Child Care Niagara
- Speech Services Niagara
- YMCA of Niagara

To obtain a copy of the full report, "Niagara Children's Charter Enacted" or for more information on the well-being of children, visit [www.earlyyearsniagara.org](http://www.earlyyearsniagara.org)

**2009**  
**Executive Summary**

This is a summary of a report on how well Niagara is supporting children and their families

**Report Objectives:**

1. Promote and encourage a local environment that fosters optimal child development, strong families, and healthy communities and neighbourhoods;
2. Distribute research data that would allow the community to make data-driven planning, resource allocation decisions, and secure resources for existing and/or new programs and services for children and their families;
3. Provide a baseline from which to monitor conditions, identify gaps and track changes to improve conditions aligned with the Niagara Children's Charter;
4. Promote and stimulate community action, advocacy, resource sharing, collaborative efforts and partnerships, to optimize and integrate resources;
5. Support and stimulate additional research in the areas where the information gaps are identified.

**Early Years**  
NIAGARA

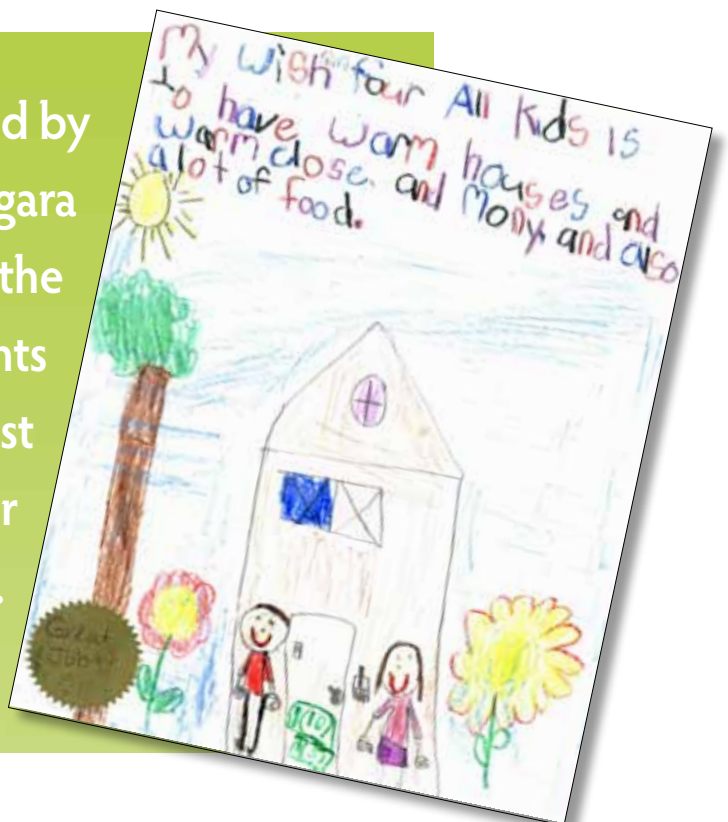


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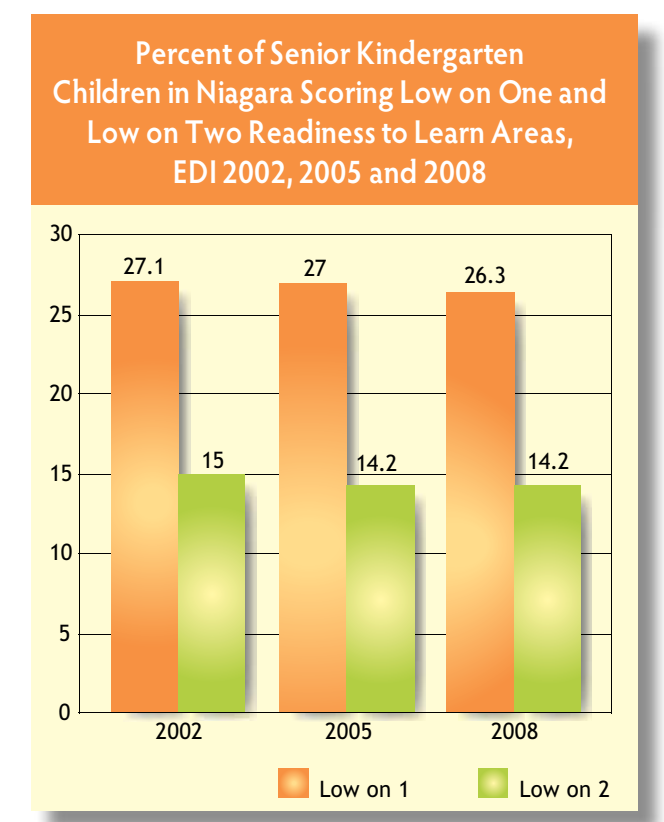
The information below is organized by the 10 guiding principles of the Niagara Children's Charter modelled after the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Niagara is one of the first regions in Canada to institute a Charter of Rights for children and teens.



- In 2007, about 81% of children 0-6 years were fully immunized, with an additional 16% having received some immunization.
- Since 2004, dental health of children living in Niagara has declined by 17%.
- In 2008, 93.8% of parents reported that their senior kindergarten (SK) child's health was very good or excellent, 4.9% reported their child's health to be good and 1.1% reported their child's health to be fair or poor.
- Asthma was most often reported by parents as the long-term health problem of their SK child followed by allergies, and speech impairments.
- Data gathered in 2002, 2005 and 2008 measuring child development are showing a decrease in the percentage of children who are ready for school. This will continue to be measured over time to establish whether or not this is a clear trend.



2005 and in 2008 in the Niagara region. The EDI measures children's school readiness in five different areas, Physical Health and Well-Being, Social Competence, Emotional Maturity, Language and Cognitive Development, and Communication Skills and General Knowledge. Results for each area are scored on a scale of zero to ten, the higher the score, the more ready children are to learn. Children who score among the lowest in one of the five areas are said to be vulnerable. Having said that, it is important to note that children who scored among the lowest in one area of the EDI will not necessarily have difficulty in school, but they are considered to be more vulnerable with regards to school readiness in comparison to other children. However, children who scored among the lowest on two or more of the five EDI areas are at increased risk of difficulties that could affect their future experiences at school.



**What the EDI measures**  
Being ready for school means much more than children knowing their A,B,Cs and 1,2,3s. School readiness means that children are physically, mentally, socially and emotionally ready and capable of handling the school day and what is expected of them (i.e. sitting quietly, listening to the teacher, cooperating and playing well with other students). In order to get a sense of children's school readiness, the Early Development Instrument (EDI) was completed for SK students in 2002,



#### 4 Protection from physical, psychological and sexual abuse both in and out of the home

- There has been a decrease in the number of total crimes against persons in Niagara from 2001 to 2007.
- A large drop in the number of crimes against property occurred in 2004 with a relatively continuous drop to 2007.
- The majority of families reported they live in safe neighbourhoods.
- Families that feel their neighbourhoods are safe have children who scored well in the study measuring school readiness.
- The higher the family income, the more positively they rated their neighbourhood.
- Ongoing protection services are being provided to 1,422 families with 613 children in foster care. There is a need for more foster care homes in Niagara.



#### 5 Time with their families and/or other nurturing and positive role models throughout their childhood

- 16.4% of families in the Niagara region are single parent families.
- Not all parents can take maternity leave. Just under half actually use the full leave. Income level is not always a factor.
- Only 26% of parents of SK children report that their work place offers alternative work arrangements to accommodate child care needs.
- Parents receiving a higher income have more flexibility in their jobs to support child care needs. It seems important to consider how to support lower wage earners in a similar manner.
- The level of financial support provided to extended families through the Temporary Care Allowance is much lower than what foster care providers receive.
- There has been a decrease in volunteerism in the Niagara region over time.

#### 6 High quality early child development opportunities to meet their best interests

- There are currently only enough licensed centre based child care spaces to accommodate 17.3% of Niagara's children aged 0-6 years. There is a continued need for affordable, accessible and high quality stable child care.
- About one-quarter of families with SK children reported that child care was too expensive, difficult to receive in emergencies, during times when their child is not in school, and the hours of care did not meet their needs.
- In 2008, 4,571 children were supported through fee subsidy. Of those children, more than half were considered children living in low income families. 22.3% of the children had parents who were on social assistance.
- Many Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) are making less than \$12.50 per hour. This decreases their status and importance in the public eye.
- More than 7,000 children in quality child care programs have been developmentally assessed, with some 500 referred on to other services to support their developmental needs.
- SK children who attended JK scored well in a study measuring school readiness, including 5 areas of child development. Participation in literacy and arts programs led to positive scores as well.
- Parental health, education, and income are also related to children scoring well in a study measuring school readiness and child development.



#### 7 Resources to achieve the highest attainable level of health and the assurance that the resources necessary to ensure lifelong good health are provided

- Approximately one-third of employed social assistance participants find seasonal and/or part-time work, but this type of employment has not provided enough income for them to no longer need social assistance.
- SK children whose families had a regular family doctor tended to be more ready for school. SK children who were identified as having a long-term health condition did not score as well on the school readiness assessment in all 5 areas of child development that were measured.



- The current physician population is aging; 33% of physicians are 50 years of age or older, and soon will be retiring.
- There is an increase in the number of referrals of pre-school aged children diagnosed with a Bi-Polar Disorder, and other developmental delays
- There is an increase in the number of children who are residing with grandparents who are the guardians of the children.
- Funding received for children's mental health services from the Ministry of Child and Youth Services is intended to serve 200 children and their families during the year, however over the past four years, the funding has run out within seven months.
- 28% of referrals completed by Contact Niagara for children 0-6 years of age were put on a waiting list.
- Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to have problems before entry to Grade 1 than children who are living in more economically secure families; however, more than 70% of children who are not ready for school, live in non-poor families. The majority of these children are found in moderate income, two-parent families.



#### 8 Primary and secondary education to enable them to reach their full potential

- Children who are ready for school are reported by parents to enjoy going to school and have the ability to manage the school day.
- Parents who are involved in their child's school support their child's sense of belonging to their school (connectedness) and play a key role in their children doing well in school. Parental involvement also supports mental well-being and decreases risky behaviour.
- Nearly 5% of parents surveyed indicated their lack of confidence in being able to help their child learn at home.
- Although 95% of the parents agreed that there were opportunities to participate at the school, less than half reported volunteering in the classroom.

## The children of Niagara should have:



#### 1 Healthy food, safe water and clean air

- The cost of feeding an average family of four has increased 27% over 8 years.
- One third of visits to food banks are made by children.
- The School Nutrition Program is located in almost half of the elementary schools in Niagara. Operating 5 days per week, the program provides nutritious breakfasts, lunches, and snacks to over 8,000 elementary school students.
- In 2007, beaches were closed on 27% of the total beach days.
- There has been a dramatic increase in both the duration and number of smog advisories.

#### 2 Housing in dwellings that reflects the normal standard of our community

- The largest increased cost for housing in Canada is energy - with a 20% increase from August 2007 to August 2008. This increase is happening across Canada.
- 51% of families in the Niagara region spend 30% or more of their income on rent or major house payments. This shows that half of Niagara's families may have difficulty affording their homes.
- The more often children move during their early years, the more at risk they become for developmental difficulties.
- In Niagara, 1,291 families in 2006 were experiencing homelessness.
- Wait time for affordable housing is longer in Niagara than in many other regions across Ontario. Depending on the municipality and the size of the housing unit needed, applicants can wait from one year up to 8 years.



#### 3 Healthy physical, intellectual, emotional and social development, well-being and quality of life

- From 2006 through 2008, approximately 5% of mothers were less than 20 years old at the time of their baby's birth, while approximately 17% of mothers were between 20 - 24 years old.
- The percentage of mothers who smoked during pregnancy seemed to increase slightly from 2006 to 2008. In 2008, 14% of pregnant women smoked in Niagara. Port Colborne had the highest number (28.2%) of mothers who reported smoking during pregnancy followed by Wainfleet (25%), then Fort Erie (22.8%).
- In 2008, nearly 6% of newborns had a low birth weight.
- Percentage of newborns at risk of developmental difficulties is around 18% for the Niagara region. The percentage has increased about 5% for Fort Erie during the last three years.
- The majority of emergency room visits by children between the ages of birth to 6 years is due to falls. The length of hospital stays is also the longest for children in this injury category.