



Rainy River District
Social Services
Administration Board

Building a Strong Child Care and Early Years System 2014-2018

A Five-Year Children's Services Plan

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The Mission, Vision and Values of Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board

Vision:

To provide quality, people-centred services in an efficient, affordable and sustainable manner.

Mission:

To meet needs by providing services with caring, integrity, and accountability.

Values:

- Being proactive, adaptive and responsive;
- Coordinated and integrated services;
- Effective and efficient service delivery;
- Equitable access to services;
- The long term health and wellness of residents;
- Effective leadership, advocacy, and communication;
- Partnerships in the community;
- Satisfied employees;
- Fiscal sustainability, accountability, and transparency.

Goals and Objectives of the Rainy River DSSAB Strategic Plan 2013-2018

Goal 1: To meet service needs and deliver mandated responsibilities.

1. Address housing and homeless needs.
2. Strengthen Ontario Works services.
3. Address children's services needs.
4. Delivery quality land ambulance services.
5. Improve people centered services.

Goal 2: To be a financially sustainable, accountable, and transparent organization.

1. Improve financial sustainability.

Goal 3: To advocate for improvement of senior government policies and funding to support RRDSSAB in achieving its goals.

1. Improve policy and funding through advocacy.

Goal 4: To ensure RRDSSAB's information technology supports the organization in achieving its goals.

1. Improve information technology.

Goal 5: To increase public awareness and support and build strong community partnerships.

1. Improve communications with the public and community partners.
2. Build stronger relationships with community partners.

1. Introduction

The role of the Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board, as the service system manager, is to plan and manage early years services at the local level and administer provincial and municipal funding for licensed child care providers in the District. The agency also administers funding for the Ontario Early Years Centres (i.e. Best Start Hubs) and the Best Start Network which facilitates community planning for local service delivery for families and children.

In late 2013, the District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB) for Rainy River began development of a Five-Year Children's Services Plan to guide its work in the management and coordination of licensed child care in the District, as called for in its Strategic Plan for 2013-2018.

Across the province of Ontario, the Early Learning and Child Care system has been undergoing a transformation that includes the implementation of full-day kindergarten that is expected to be complete in late 2014, the transfer of responsibility for children's services from the Ministry of Child and Youth Services to the Ministry of Education in 2011, and a new funding guideline that is intended to streamline the process of allocating resources and increase local control. These system-wide changes reinforce the need for a long-term plan for the DSSAB to address their impacts and make the best use of the resources available.

This Five-Year Plan will support the DSSAB in ensuring that childcare and early years services are delivered in alignment with its values, mission and goals, and also sets out a specific vision for children's services.

1.1 A Vision for Children's Services in Rainy River District in 2018

"Rainy River District will have in place a system of accessible, integrated, high-quality child care that empowers families, responds to their needs, and promotes community development."

The Vision for the Five-Year Children's Services Plan reflects the vision of the DSSAB to "provide quality, people-centred services in an efficient, affordable and sustainable manner". It is also consistent with the goals for children's services within the DSSAB's Strategic Plan, which include the following actions to address children's services needs:

- Consulting parents directly about their needs (1.3.2);
- Exploring opportunities to assist with training for child care staff of partner organizations (1.3.3);
- Providing additional communication about child care services to inform the community of changes and increase awareness (1.3.4).

The Strategic Plan also emphasizes the value of strong community partnerships (Goal 5); the vision of an integrated system speaks to this goal.

This Vision emerged through the consultation process with stakeholders in Rainy River District and summarizes the key characteristics that were identified (See Appendix 1 for a full description of the themes that emerged in the consultation sessions).

1.2 Objectives of the Plan

The Five-Year Children’s Services Plan for Rainy River District will work toward six key objectives, which were identified through engagement with community stakeholders and parents and reflect the DSSAB’s strategic plan. The objectives are described fully in section 6 of this document.

1. Promote affordability in child care across Rainy River District.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1.1 Develop a consistent policy for child care providers to utilize General Operating Funds to provide additional support or incentives to families.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1.2 Review the fee subsidy policy to ensure that it optimizes the use of fee subsidy funds to best meet the needs of families and the best interests of children.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1.3 Encourage child care providers to implement more flexible fee structures and/or additional subsidies to increase the affordability of licensed child care.

2. Foster access to licensed child care, including before- and after-school care, in each community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2.1 Explore alternative delivery models, including the possibility of direct delivery of some child care services by the DSSAB, to ensure that there is equitable access to licensed child care services in Rainy River District.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2.2 Encourage local child care providers to develop innovative strategies to overcome transportation as a barrier, including consideration of volunteer transportation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2.3 Establish a private home day care agency to allow unlicensed home child care providers to become licensed. Encourage existing unlicensed home care providers to become licensed to expand access to regulated child care in the smaller communities and increase flexibility of child care options for families throughout the District.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2.4 Collaborate with partners to develop a plan for eliminating wait lists for before- and after-school programs.

<p>3. Collect data and monitor service usage to ensure that children’s services reflect community needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.1 Initiate an annual survey of community child care needs. • 3.2 Adopt or create a “quality framework” to use to evaluate child care services on a regular basis. • 3.3 Create and distribute an annual public “report card” on children’s services in Rainy River District. • 3.4 Continue to monitor the level of demand for infant, toddler, before and after school and pre-school spaces at the existing child care centres.
<p>4. Strengthen existing partnerships to improve the integration of the Early Learning and Child Care system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.1 Continue to collaborate with community partners to create a “transition document” for all children moving from child care to full-day kindergarten. • 4.2 Establish a working group that includes members of the Best Start Network and child care providers to develop and implement strategies to integrate child care centres with other family and children’s support services.
<p>5. Support ongoing professional development for child care staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5.1 Annually create a professional development agenda for child care providers in Rainy River District. • 5.2 Coordinate a minimum of three professional development activities for all child care providers each year.
<p>6. Engage in education and communication to build awareness of the importance of high-quality licensed child care in Rainy River District.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.1 Regularly review and update child care information on the DSSAB website. • 6.2 Develop an accessible information guide to early learning and child care services in Rainy River District for distribution at the Best Start Hubs and other community facilities. • 6.3 Continue to collaborate with the Best Start Network to complete the development of the “Navigator” website for community-based service providers and parents. • 6.4 Organize and host regular public information sessions at schools and child care centres where community members can ask questions about the programs and services that are available.

Each objective is accompanied by specific recommendations for actions that will help the DSSAB to achieve its goals for children’s services and work toward the fulfillment of the vision over the next five years. A two-year action plan sets out a timeline and action steps for the DSSAB to implement the first phases of this plan.

1.3 How the Plan Was Developed

The Five-Year Children's Services Plan for the Rainy River District was developed through research and consultation with stakeholders in the District.

A broad range of stakeholders, including all of the licensed child care providers, Best Start Network members, First Nations and municipal government representatives were invited to participate in three consultation meetings that were held in November 2013 in Fort Frances, Rainy River and Atikokan. Participants worked in small groups to identify critical issues and barriers in the current Early Learning and Child Care System, brainstorm opportunities to enhance services and expand access, and develop a vision for the future. The key themes that emerged from the consultation meetings are summarized in Appendix 1.

With assistance from the Rainy River District School Board and the Northwest Catholic District School Board, child care providers, and the Best Start Hubs, parents of infants, toddlers and school-aged children were provided with a brief survey about their current child care needs and their anticipated needs over the next five years. Surveys were distributed to parents with children in licensed child care through the child care providers, and were made available in the Best Start Hubs; in addition, the Rainy River District School Board and the Northwest Catholic District School Board sent paper copies of the survey home with every child and collected completed surveys. The survey was also advertised in local newspapers and was available to be completed online through the DSSAB website. The text of this survey is reproduced in Appendix 2. The results of this survey are integrated in the report and summarized in Appendix 3.

2. Demographic and Socio-Economic Context of Rainy River District

2.1 RR District Population

The Rainy River District is home to 20,370 people¹, including 3,740 children under the age of 15. Since 2006, the population of the District has declined by 5.5 percent overall, although some communities experienced deeper declines in population and there are differences between age cohorts.

The population of children between ages 0 and 14 has decreased in all communities within the District. In every community except Morley, the decline in this age cohort was steeper than the decline in the overall population; it is most pronounced in Atikokan and Dawson. Table 1 summarizes the change in the population of children in each community between 2006 and 2011.

¹ Statistics Canada. (2013). 2011 Census of Canada.

Rainy River DSSAB Children's Services Plan—2014 - 2018

Table 1: Population Change Among Children 0-14 Years Old In Rainy River District, 2006-2011

	Rainy River District		Fort Frances		Rainy River (Town)		Alberton		Atikokan		Chaple	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011
0-4	1220	1145	430	375	30		35	65	170	110	65	50
5-9	1400	1230	485	440	60	45	55	50	185	150	55	55
10-14	1625	1365	545	485	60	50	95	45	205	170	65	50
Total Children	4245	3740	1460	1300	150	140	185	160	560	430	185	155
% Change in Child Population 2006 - 2011		-11.2%		-10.9%		-6.7%		-13.5%		-23.2%		-16.2%
Total Population	21565	20370	8100	7955	910	840	960	865	3295	2785	855	740
	Dawson		Emo		La Vallee		Lake of the Woods		Morley		RR Unorganized	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011
0-4	40	25	85	70	50	60	10		25	30	30	25
5-9	40	40	95	85	65	55	15		35	25	60	35
10-14	65	40	100	95	105	70	20		35	35	60	65
Total children	145	105	280	250	220	185	45		95	90	150	125
% Change in Child Population 2006 - 2011		-27.6%		-10.7%		-15.9%		No Data *		-5.3%		-16.7%
Total Population	620	565	1305	1250	1065	990	325		495	475	910	1160

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 and 2011 Censuses

* 2011 Census population data was not available for Lake of the Woods.

Figures provided by the Northwestern Health Unit indicate that on average, 179 infants were born in the Rainy River District annually between 2009 and 2012; however, this number does not include babies born to Rainy River District parents in Thunder Bay, Winnipeg or elsewhere in Ontario.

Population projections for Rainy River District provide an estimate of the situation in Rainy River District at the end of the plan period, 2018. Although the long-term population trends in Rainy River District shows that decreases will continue, a slight increase is expected between 2013 and 2018, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Rainy River Population Estimate, 2018

	Population in 2011	Population in 2018
Rainy River District	20370	21060

Source: Province of Ontario. Ontario Population Projections Update Spring 2013

In 2011, children 0-14 comprised 18.4 percent of the population of Rainy River District and the population over 55 comprised 31.2 percent. By 2018, the older age cohorts will make up 35 percent of the population, while the youngest age cohort will have shrunk to 17 percent (Table 3).

Table 3: Age Cohorts as a Percentage of the Population, 2018 Estimate

	0-14	15-19	20-24	25-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+
Rainy River District	17.0	6.2	6.6	21.5	21.2	15.9	11.1	5.7	3.0

Source: Province of Ontario. Ontario Population Projections Update Spring 2013

2.1.1 Aboriginal Community

There are 10 First Nations within the boundaries of Rainy River District. According to the National Household Survey, 4,475 individuals who identified as Aboriginal live in Rainy River District, including 1285 children between the ages of 0 and 14.

The Rainy River DSSAB does not coordinate children's services on the First Nations, as they are funded separately and managed independently. However, Aboriginal children living both on- and off-reserve may be using child care services managed by the DSSAB. The DSSAB also provides some funding and support for the Zaagi-idiwin Aboriginal Head Start program that is located in Fort Frances. As such, the DSSAB has a role to play in ensuring that child care in the District is sensitive to the multiple cultures of the population, including although not limited to the large Aboriginal community.

2.2 Families

In total, there were 3250 households with children in Rainy River District in 2011, including 1855 married couples with children at home, 425 common-law couples with children at home, and 920 lone-parent families. In contrast, there were approximately 3400 households with children in 2006.

Consistent with the finding that the number of children in Rainy River District is shrinking overall, average family size is also shrinking (Table 4). Although the consultations indicated that families with more than one young child struggle to pay for child care, shrinking family sizes suggest that there may be fewer families in this situation over time.

Table 4: Change in Average Household Size in Rainy River District, 2006-2011

	2011	2006
Ontario	3	3
Rainy River District	2.9	3
Rainy River Service Area	2.9	3.0
Fort Frances	2.8	2.8
Rainy River (Town)	2.8	2.8
Alberton	2.9	3
Atikokan	2.7	2.8
Chapple	3.1	3.4
Dawson	3	3
Emo	3.1	3.2
La Vallee	3.1	3.2
Morley	3.1	3.4
RR Unorganized	2.6	2.8
Lake of the Woods	No Data *	2.9

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 and 2011 Censuses

* 2011 Census population data was not available for Lake of the Woods.

2.2.1 Family Formation

Family structure is changing over time. Much of the current family formation in Rainy River District is occurring outside of the ‘traditional’ arrangement of a married couple. As Table 5 shows, married couple families declined over the years between 2001 and 2011, while the number of ‘non-traditional’ families increased. In this respect Rainy River District tracks the broader societal trends at the provincial level.

Table 5: Changes in Family Formation, 2001-2011

	Married Couple families	Common law families	Female lone parent	Male lone parent
Ontario	-578095	96130	275640	33315
Rainy River District	-2180	150	80	20
Fort Frances	-825	65	-20	35
Rainy River Town	-115	15	-10	-5
Alberton	-40	20	35	5
Atikokan	-440	-15	30	-25
Chapple	-85	-10	-5	10
Dawson	-45	-15	0	-5
Emo	-90	15	45	0
La Vallee	-55	5	35	5
Morley	10	5	25	0
RR Unorganized	-175	-10	30	-5

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2001, 2006 & 2011

Common-law and lone parent families are expected to increase between 2011 and 2018 (Table 6). This will have implications for child care needs as lone parent families are more likely to require child care if the parent is employed or in school and also more likely to require financial assistance to access it.

Table 6: Rainy River District Family Formation Types as a Percentage of the Total, 2024

	Married Couples		Common Law Couples		Female Lone Parent		Male Lone Parent	
	2018	2011	2018	2011	2018	2011	2018	2011
Rainy River District	63.2%	68%	18.2%	15%	14.2%	12%	4.5%	4%

Source: OrgCode Consulting

2.3 Labour Force

Rainy River District has been shaken by the 2008 recession and its subsequent slow recovery, with major employers either curtailing their operations or closing entirely.

Labour force indicators for the District indicate that unemployment has remained high relative to the situation in 2006, and labour force participation is lower.

Table 7 illustrates labour force participation rates, employment rates and unemployment rates for Rainy River District and the communities in 2006; Table 8, drawing on data from the National Household Survey, illustrates these indicators for the District for 2011.

Table 7: Rainy River District Labour Force Indicators, 2006

	Participation rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate
Ontario	67.1	62.8	6.4
Rainy River District	64.2	59.1	7.9
Fort Frances	64.4	59.7	7.3
Rainy River Town	53.4	45.9	15.2
Alberton	78.3	73.7	5.9
Atikokan	62.4	56.8	9.0
Chapple	61.8	61.0	2.4
Dawson	56.1	46.9	16.4
Emo	63.1	60.1	4.7
La Vallee	75.0	72.6	3.2
Lake of the Woods	74.0	60.0	16.2
Morley	73.4	68.4	5.2
RR Unorganized	62.1	59.6	4.7

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2006.

The 2011 National Household Survey provides a more recent snapshot of these economic indicators:

Table 8: National Household Survey Labour Force Indicators, Rainy River District

	Total	Male	Female
Participation rate	60.2	62.3	58.2
Employment rate	54.8	55.9	53.8
Unemployment rate	9	10.3	7.6

Source: Statistics Canada, NHS 2011.

However, major sources of economic development for the District are on the horizon, including two gold mines and biomass energy plant. These are the Hammond Reef Gold Project, located 30 kilometres northeast of Atikokan, and the Rainy River Gold Project, located 65 kilometres northwest of Fort Frances in the Township of

Chapple. The former is expected to begin construction in 2014, and be in operation for 11 years; the latter would be operational from 2016 to 2031.

A new sawmill slated for construction in Atikokan is expected to employ 90 people once it is operational. In addition, the conversion of the Atikokan Thermal Generating Station to a biomass plant has resulted in a spike in construction employment, and the production of wood pellets to feed the plant in the future will employ approximately 25 people locally.

These changes may have implications for demands for child care services in the next five years as families may migrate in to the District, particularly in Atikokan and Fort Frances.

2.4 Income and Low Income Rates

Median incomes vary widely depending on family type. Married couple families in Rainy River District have a median income of \$74,363, whereas for common law families the median is \$55,936. The difference between male- and female-led families is also substantial, at \$26,288 for females and \$49,512 for males.² This is an important data point as lone-parent headed families are prevalent in Rainy River District and are much more likely to require financial support to access child care.

Low-income rates in Rainy River District are lower than the province but higher than the local comparators (Table 9). The incidence of low-income varies within the District by community, with no persons in Alberton and Morley³ identified as low income compared to more than 10 percent of residents each in Atikokan, Chapple and Dawson as low income in 2006, according to the Statistics Canada after-tax Low Income Cut-Off. The Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) is an income threshold that Statistics Canada determines for communities of different sizes and families of different sizes. The LICOs are based on an analysis of family expenditure data; households that fall below the LICO devote 20 percentage points more of their income to necessities (food, shelter and clothing) compared to an average Canadian household. For example, in 2005, the LICO for a 4-person household living in a small urban region (30,000-99,999 residents) was \$24,373.⁴

Across the District the incidence of low income is almost equal between men and women, although within the communities the differences are more pronounced. Low-income rates for those under 18 were higher in almost every community relative to adults; in some communities, such as Lake of the Woods, the spread between adult and youth low-income rates is dramatic.

² Statistics Canada, Census 2006

³ The method that Statistics Canada uses to calculate the incidence of low income in a community is based on a rounded count of individuals/families in low income and the rounded count of all individuals/families, which may result in a reported low-income incidence of 0 even if a small number of individuals/families do meet the Low Income Cut-Off.

⁴ Statistics Canada. (2006) Income Research Paper Series, Low Income Cut-offs for 2006 and Low Income Measures for 2005. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75F0002MIE, no. 004

Table 9: Rainy River District Low Income Prevalence Rate, 2006⁵

	Percent in low income after tax - All persons	Male	Female	Percent in low income after tax - Persons less than 18 years of age	Male	Female
Ontario	11.1	10.5	11.6	13.7	13.7	13.8
Kenora, City	4.3	4.4	4.2	5.1	4.5	5.7
Dryden, City	3.9	3.7	4.1	5.2	7.3	2.9
Rainy River District	6.6	6.8	6.3	8.8	9.2	8.3
Fort Frances	7	6.4	7.7	8.9	6.1	11.2
Rainy River Town	2.3	0	0	0	0	0
Alberton	0	0	0	0	0	0
Atikokan	10.2	12.5	8.1	14.4	21.1	5.9
Chapple	11.7	16.3	7.1	20.5	0	0
Dawson	14.5	13.7	14	17.6	15	21.4
Emo	1.9	3.9	0	0	0	0
La Vallee	1.9	0	0	0	0	0
Lake of the Woods	9.5	9.4	9.7	22.2	20	28.6
Morley	0	0	0	0	0	0
RR Unorganized Territory.	3.9	2.7	0	5.8	0	0

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2006.

⁵ Statistics Canada calculates a rounded low income prevalence rate based on a rounded count of low income persons/families and the total number of persons/families; these counts are also independently rounded. Where the prevalence rate is identified as 0, the results should be interpreted with caution as they may mask a small number of residents who are in low income.

3. Current Child Care Service Demands

Licensed child care is regulated under the provincial *Day Nurseries Act*, and managed by the District Social Services Administration Board.

High-quality licensed child care is an important element in giving all Ontario children the best possible start in life.

The Ontario Early Years Policy Framework (OEYPF) sets out a vision for a provincial system of responsive, high-quality, accessible and increasingly integrated programs and services that contribute to healthy child development. This vision encompasses many different service sectors of which child care is an integral part, and the OEYPF seeks both to stabilize and transform child care services in Ontario.

Across Ontario, many communities struggle to provide adequate access to licensed child care. Although there is currently no wait list for fee subsidies and most of the licensed child care providers do not have a wait list,⁶ Rainy River District has licensed child care spaces for only a small percentage of the population of children 0-12. The absence of wait lists may not be indicative of the level of need, given that there is no licensed child care in some communities and that some families are unable to take advantage of child care services that are available because they need flexible hours. In addition, the findings from the parent survey show that some families did not apply for fee subsidies as they did not know it was an option or believed they would not qualify, while others prefer home-based child care which is not currently regulated in Rainy River District.

3.1 Child Care Funding in the Rainy River District

Funding for child care in Ontario is changing, in response to the broad directions set by the Ontario Ministry of Education as well as the recognition that the previously existing funding formula was outdated and inefficient. In 2013, the Province of Ontario established new municipal funding and management guidelines for child care services, including a new funding formula for Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM) and District Social Services Administration Boards and a simplified allocation process. The new guidelines will take effect fully in 2014; 2013 was a transition year.

The framework sets out broad funding allocations that can be spent on a range of expense categories, with the primary operating costs funded through the Core Service Delivery allocation. Additionally, special purpose allocations are made based on local needs, and minor capital projects are supported through the Capital Retrofit allocation.

Under the new funding formula, by 2015 the Rainy River DSSAB is expected to receive an increase to its child care funding of \$1.8 million over 2012 allocations.

The DSSAB cost-shares, plans and manages prescribed child care services, which include fee subsidies and Ontario Works child care; it is responsible to maintain a flexible mix of subsidies for part- and full-day child care, across age groups that reflect the range of local service needs, and to implement practices that provide for a seamless transition between subsidized part-day and subsidized full-day care as families' needs change.

⁶ The Aboriginal Head Start program in Fort Frances does have a waiting list; unlike the other licensed providers in the District, all of the child care spaces at Head Start are fully subsidized.

3.2 Overview of providers

Licensed child care services in Rainy River District are provided by non-profit operators and municipalities.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of licensed child care spaces that are available across the District by community.

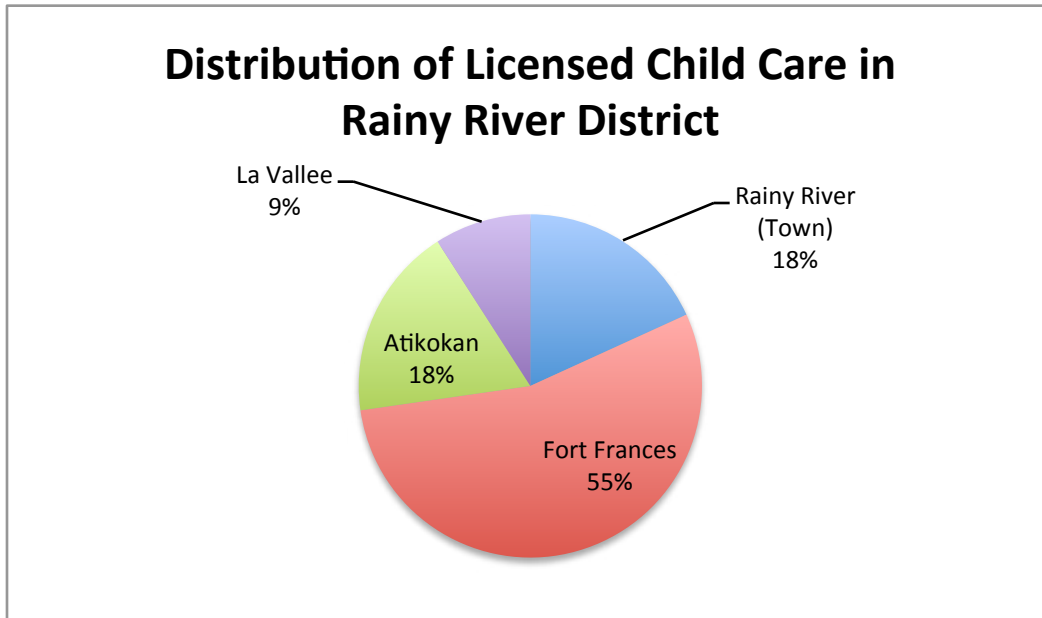


Figure 1: Distribution of Child Care Spaces by Community

There are currently seven licensed providers operating 11 child care and early learning programs in Rainy River District:

Community	Operator	Program	Licensed Spaces
Rainy River Town	Rainy River Playschool Inc.	School Age Program - Riverview School	20 School Age
Rainy River Town	Rainy River Playschool Inc.	Learn Laugh & Play Children's Centre	10 Toddler 16 Pre-school 15 School Age
Devlin (La Vallee)	Country View Child Care Centre Inc.	Country View Child Care Centre	10 Toddler 16 Preschool 10 School Age
Atikokan	Atikokan Non Profit Day Care Corporation	Rainbow Centre	15 Toddler 24 Preschool 30 School Age
Atikokan	Atikokan 2-3-4 Playgroup Inc.	Atikokan 2-3-4 Playgroup	15 Preschool
Fort Frances	Fort Frances United Native Friendship Centre	Zaagi-idiwin Aboriginal Head Start Program	25 Preschool ⁶
Fort Frances	Fort Frances Nursery School Inc.	Fort Frances Nursery School	16 Preschool

⁶ Only 9 of these spaces are funded by the DSSAB

Community	Operator	Program	Licensed Spaces
Fort Frances	The Corporation of the Town of Fort Frances	Fort Frances Day Care Centre	10 Toddler 24 Preschool
Fort Frances	The Corporation of the Town of Fort Frances	Fort Frances Children’s Complex-St. Michael’s School	30 School Age
Fort Frances	The Corporation of the Town of Fort Frances	Fort Frances Children’s Complex-Robert Moore School	30 School Age
Fort Frances	The Corporation of the Town of Fort Frances	Fort Frances Children’s Complex-J.W. Walker School	30 School Age
Total			165 School Age 136 Preschool 45 Toddler

There are a few providers that operate in schools. Country View Child Care Centre provides all of its services within shared school space, while The Town of Fort Frances runs its school-age programs from three different schools and the Rainy River Play School operates its summer school-age program from an elementary school. All other providers operate at alternative sites.

At the time of writing, renovations to the Atikokan Rainbow Centre were in progress to accommodate a new infant room, a form of child care not currently available in the District.

There are currently no licensed recreation programs, for-profit, or private-home day care providers in the District, although there are people who provide unlicensed child care in their homes, which is permitted in Ontario for up to five children unrelated to the caregiver, dependent upon age.

3.3 Current enrollment

Across Rainy River District, there are a total of 346 licensed child care spaces. Based on the number of children in the District, there are sufficient licensed child care spaces for 12.9% of the 0-4 year-olds, but there is no waiting list for most child care providers and at least some centres are below capacity. Current enrollment as of September 2013 was 87.5%⁸ of the total number of licensed child care spaces.

Table 10 contrasts the actual enrollment by program as of 2013 with the total number of spaces available for each age group. Although in some cases the number of children enrolled in the program exceeds the number of spaces, child care providers are not permitted to operate above capacity; the difference arises because some children leave the program during the year and others take their place.

⁸ Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board. (2013). Total number of children in licensed child care as of September 2013.

Table 10: Actual Enrollment and Total Licensed Child Care Spaces, By Community and Age Group

	Fort Frances		Atikokan		Devlin (La Vallee)		Rainy River Town	
	Actual	Total	Actual	Total	Actual	Total	Actual	Total
Infant		–		–		–		–
Toddler	11	10	9	15	9	10	11	10
Pre-school	85	65	35	39	14	16	21	16
School Age	57	90	22	30	11	10	18	35

Source: Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board. (2013) Enrollment by program as of 2013

In Rainy River Town, some families from Baudette, Minnesota enroll their children in child care at the Learn, Laugh and Play Children's Centre. However, consultation participants reported that currently, limited demand for full-time child care from families living in Rainy River Town means that these families are not using spaces that would otherwise go to children living in the town.

Data from the parent survey that was conducted as part of this project and which garnered 377 responses suggests that more than half of the respondents either have one parent staying home or are using informal child care through an unlicensed home care provider or family member. Slightly more than 10 percent of the respondents reported that they have one or more children in licensed child care (N=43, 11.4%), and just under one fifth (N=72, 19.1%) use nursery schools or playgroups. (See Appendix 3 for a complete discussion of the parent survey results).

Programs for school-age children (68 months – 12 years) are typically operating under capacity, though there are wait lists in some instances which could be eliminated with increased staffing. Meanwhile programs for pre-schoolers and toddlers are at or near capacity, which suggests that additional spaces may be needed to accommodate them.

The finding that before and after-school care enrollment is below capacity is significant given that the parent survey identified before and after-school care as a very high priority. Some parent comments suggest that the DSSAB and school boards may need to review the service delivery model to make before and after-school care more affordable, particularly for families that only need it for a short period of time or who do not always require it because of irregular work schedules, but who do not find it affordable to pay the full fee. In addition, it may be necessary to explore opportunities to ensure that before- and after-school care is accessible to parents who begin work before the programs open or finish after they end.

3.4 Fee Subsidies

Fee subsidies, which are funded by the province and managed locally by Consolidated Municipal Service Managers or District Social Service Administration Boards, provide financial support to people who qualify to assist with paying fees in a licensed child care setting. Administration of child care fee subsidies is one of the core components of the Rainy River DSSAB's role in children's services management.

Table 11 shows the total amount of funding available in Rainy River District for fee subsidies for eligible families. The number of fee subsidies that can be issued is limited by the total amount of funding available for this use; however, in Rainy River, as of November 2013, there was no waiting list for fee subsidy. The DSSAB has the ability to change the amount of funding it allocates for fee subsidy

Table 11: 2013 Fee Subsidy Funding Allocations

Category	Funding Allocation
Fee Subsidy	\$575,000.00
Ontario Works (Formal)	\$20,000.00
Ontario Works (Informal)	\$20,000.00

Source: Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board

Eligibility is determined through the completion of an Income Test. Families in receipt of Ontario Works and other forms of social assistance are considered automatically eligible for a subsidy, but must be participating in employment assistance unless the child or parent has a special need, or the child has a social need.

Fee subsidies can be used to support both full and part-time licensed child care, and for parents receiving Ontario Works, may also be used for informal child care (e.g., care provided by an unlicensed provider).⁹

Table 12: Number of Families and Children Receiving Fee Subsidy, 2010-2013

Year	Number of Families	Number of Children
2010	139	189
2011	139	184
2012	133	184
2013 ⁹	139	197

The number of households receiving fee subsidies and the number of children who are subsidized has had limited fluctuation over the past four years and grew slightly in 2013.

Among the parent survey participants, 22 reported that they were receiving fee subsidy, representing 40 children. Of these, approximately two thirds (N=14, 63.6%) have children enrolled in preschool or nursery school, and just under one third have children in a before- and after-school program (N=7, 31.8%). In addition, the Aboriginal Head Start program provides fully subsidized spaces for participants. This program was used by 7 of the survey participants (1.8% of all respondents).

3.5 Special Needs Resourcing

The DSSAB allocates funds for Special Needs Resources. This funding can be allocated for children and youths up to 18 years old. At a minimum, the Ministry of Education requires CMSMs and DSSABs to spend 4.1 percent of their total child care allocation on Special Needs Resourcing; the Rainy River DSSAB allocates approximately 14 percent of its allocation (\$395,000.00) for this purpose.

3.6 Best Start Hubs

The DSSAB administers funding for five Best Start Hubs in Rainy River District, located in Atikokan, Fort Frances, Rainy River, Stratton and Emo. These facilities offer a variety of programs, including drop-in times for parents and caregivers, and promote access to and awareness of a range of children’s services. The funding for the Best Start Hubs is transitioning from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to the Ministry of Education in 2014.

⁹ Ministry of Education. (2013). Ontario Child Care Service Management and Funding Guideline, p. 24.
¹⁰ 2013 numbers cover January-October

4. Gaps in Children’s Services

High-quality child care is essential for families with parents who are working or attending school, and is a key component of the Province’s early learning policy. However, parent survey participants and consultation participants identified a number of barriers to accessing licensed child care. These barriers include the cost of child care, as well as accessibility and availability of services.

Many of the gaps are long-standing. The issues of high cost, lack of flexibility and lack of transportation were all identified in the DSSAB’s 2010-2011 Children’s Services Plan, and these are complex issues that cannot be easily addressed. The District’s large area and the decreasing population mean that it is a challenge to deliver an equitable level of service to every community. The staffing requirements and standards for child care providers that are set by the province through the *Day Nurseries Act* also impose some fixed costs on child care providers, although these are offset in part by the provincial funding for fee subsidies and general operating expenses.

Data from the parent survey indicates that before- and after-school programs represent the form of child care that families are most interested in but currently find difficult to access.

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of survey respondents that reported that they are unable to access the type(s) of child care that they currently require. Families who receive fee subsidies are somewhat less likely to report that they want to use nursery school/playgroups and before/after-school care but are unable to access it, which suggests that the subsidy is helping to overcome the affordability barrier for this type of service. However, families receiving fee subsidy and families not receiving fee subsidy were about equally likely to report that they wish to use licensed child care and cannot access it.

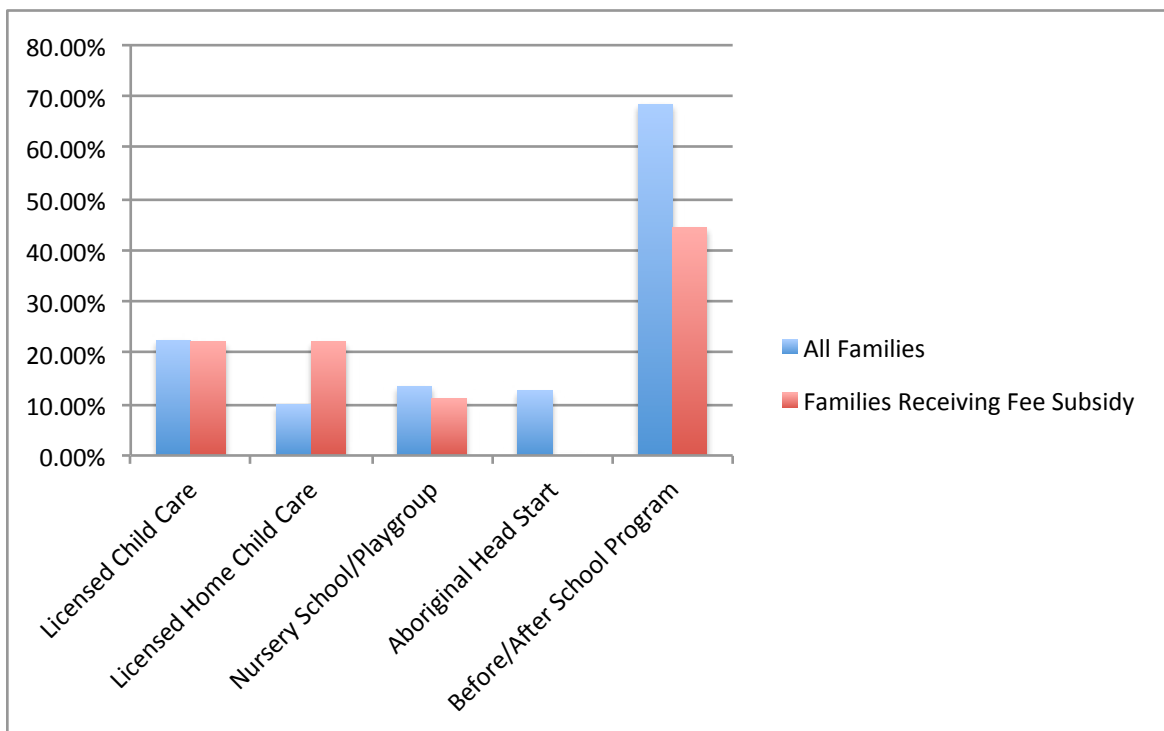


Figure 2: Percentage of Families Identifying Child Care Services As Not Accessible

4.1 Barriers to Accessing Services

Figure 3 illustrates the reasons that parents face barriers in accessing the child care services they wish to use, and contrasts families receiving fee subsidies with those that do not.

There are some differences in the barriers that are reported by families receiving fee subsidy and families that are not. Participants who do not receive fee subsidies were slightly less likely to report that the cost of child care is too high or that they are on a waiting list for child care services, and slightly more likely to report that there are no services close to where they live.

Families receiving a fee subsidy, on the other hand, were more likely to report that they are unable to access child care services because they lack transportation, and significantly more likely to report that child care hours are not compatible with their work or school schedules.

Families not receiving fee subsidy reported that not knowing what services are available is a barrier to accessing services significantly more often than families receiving a subsidy. This finding suggests that those families that are engaged with services already have access to the information they need about child care programs they can use, and that efforts to increase awareness of child care services should focus on how to reach families who are not involved in these programs.

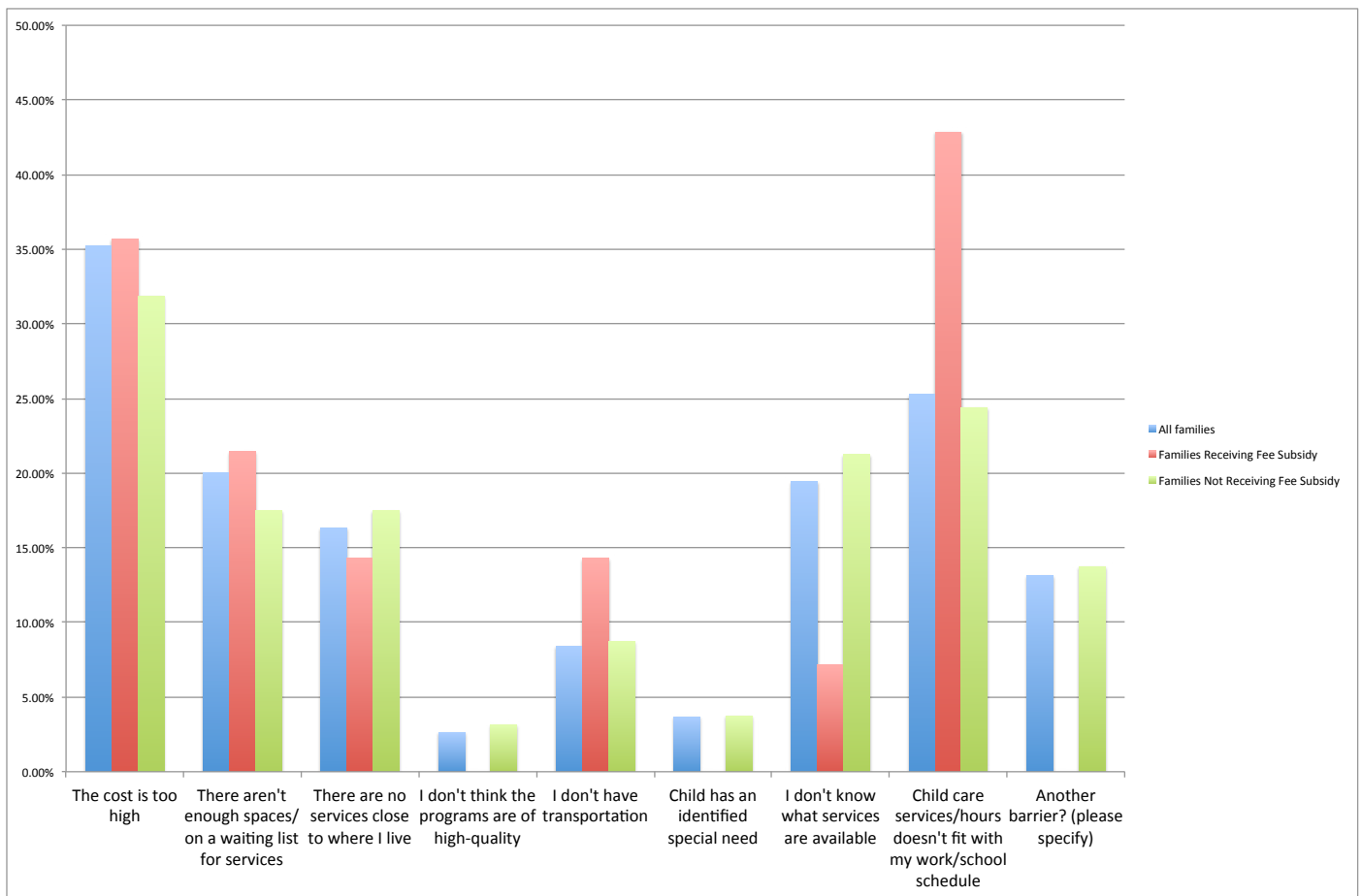


Figure 3: Barriers to Accessing Child Care

4.1.1 Affordability

In every consultation session and in the parent survey, affordability was identified as a barrier to accessing licensed child care in Rainy River District. Affordability was also one of the two top priorities for the DSSAB to focus on over the next five years that was identified through the parent survey.

Ensuring that licensed child care is affordable will require a multi-pronged approach, as the issue is related to both the cost of child care and household income. There are fixed costs associated with the provision of licensed child care, including legislated requirements for the space and mandatory staff-child ratios. In order to promote affordable child care in Rainy River District, it will be important to explore opportunities to reduce the cost of care to families where possible, and to examine different ways to allocate fee subsidies to optimize the number of families who receive this support.

4.1.2 Availability of Services

As indicated in the overview of child care services in Rainy River District, there are communities where no licensed child care is available. In these communities, unlicensed home day care and informal care are the main alternatives for parents who work.

4.1.3 Transportation

Lack of transportation is a long-standing barrier to access to child care services in Rainy River District. The District covers a large area and there is considerable distance between population centres.

In addition, families without access to a personal vehicle may struggle to access licensed child care services even when they are available within the community.

4.1.4 Lack of flexibility and responsiveness in services

Licensed child care centres are typically open on weekdays between approximately 7:00am and 5:30pm.

However, those hours do not meet the needs of all parents in Rainy River District. For example, 190 survey respondents identified barriers that limit their ability to access child care services; of these, 25 percent (N=48) identified child care service hours as a barrier – the second most frequently identified barrier, after the cost of care. In addition, this issue was highlighted in the consultations, particularly in Rainy River Town where many families working in the railroad industry have irregular hours. Shift workers may need care to begin earlier or end later. These families may wish to use licensed child care but cannot do so; community consultation participants and survey respondents both reported the experience of being unable to use child care services during the hours that they are available.

4.1.5 Lack of awareness of the importance of licensed child care

During the consultation sessions, participants reported that families in Rainy River District are often not aware that licensed child care services use play-based learning and other strategies to foster children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. Child care is sometimes seen as a "baby sitting" service rather than an early learning and child development environment, and may be undervalued as a result.

In addition to limited awareness that licensed child care is an integral part of early childhood education in Ontario, parents may also not understand the distinction between licensed and unlicensed care. For example, one survey participant indicated that they did not know if their home child care provider was licensed, and the consultation participants noted that better communication and promotion of licensed programs is needed to ensure that parents understand the benefits of regulated child care and are able to identify which programs are licensed.

The responses from the parent survey suggest that more than half of the families in Rainy River District use informal child care provided in a private home or by a family member and many comments indicate that the respondents prefer a “home-based” environment. Although these findings may not represent the views of all families in Rainy River District, they suggest that in addition to undertaking efforts to educate families about the benefits of regulated child care and the role of early childhood educators in fostering children's learning and development, the DSSAB may also wish to encourage home child care providers to become licensed to respond to this preference while ensuring that there is oversight of this form of child care. This approach would also serve to increase access to licensed child care in the more remote and smaller communities.

5. Future Directions

The Ontario Early Years Policy Framework calls for child care to be “stabilized and transformed”. Addressing the barriers that limit families' ability to access child care in Rainy River District will help to stabilize the system by ensuring that families are able to make use of it. Working to enhance and improve child care in Rainy River District is also important.

5.1 Expansion of Services

There is an identified need for additional licensed child care spaces. Before- and after-school care was identified as a top priority, but the high enrollment numbers also indicate a need for additional licensed spaces for toddlers and preschool children. Infant care is likely needed, but it will be important to re-evaluate the demand for this service after the ten infant spaces that are being created in Atikokan become available. Licensed private-home day care is not available in any of the communities right now, but this is an avenue that could be explored to increase access to licensed child care in the communities.

5.2 Strengthening Partnerships

Strong partnerships between child care providers, the school boards, and the Best Start Network members is seen as one of the crucial ways to overcome the barriers to accessing services and improving the quality of child care in Rainy River District.

Given the DSSAB's role in managing child care services, one area of focus should be on working with the child care providers to create opportunities to disseminate information about other children's services and using the child care centres as access points.

Partnerships will also help to facilitate children's transition from early learning to school. For example, information sharing between child care providers and schools would help ensure that teachers are familiar with the needs of every child entering full-day kindergarten. In addition, there may be opportunities for child care providers to work with schools to inform parents about full-day kindergarten and before- and after-school programs and what they can expect once their children enter school.

5.3 Professional Development

Licensed child care centres are staffed by trained Early Childhood Educators who use their skills and knowledge to engage children and support social, cognitive and emotional development. They are transitioning from curriculum-based to more play-based learning and discovery in an enriched environment based on the most recent research in child brain development. It is important to emphasize that focus on professional development does not mean that child care staff are not qualified; they are already skilled professionals. However, ongoing professional development was identified as necessary to ensure that child care continues to be delivered in line with best practices in the future, as well as a way to recognize the important work of child care staff. Regular

professional development activities for all child care staff can also help ensure that across the District, child care is based in current best practices and of consistently high quality.

Professional development initiatives may help to address several issues that were raised in the consultations and in the parent survey. In particular, there may be opportunities to develop greater awareness and understanding of the multiple cultures in Rainy River District, and tools for early childhood educators to respond to different cultures. The large Aboriginal population in Rainy River District should be a focus, but consultation participants also stressed the need for improved understanding of the needs of all cultural groups, including newcomers to Canada.

Professional development in Rainy River District already occurs with strong partnerships with other organizations. As the DSSAB moves forward with the five-year children's services plan, it should consider how these activities can be coordinated across all child care providers and ensure that these activities address topics that have been identified as important by families and child care providers.

5.4 Education and Communication

The value of licensed child care is not always well-understood by families, and the range of available services is not always clear. The role of early childhood education in fostering development and school readiness is not always well-understood; there is a tendency to think of licensed child care as "babysitting", and not all community members are familiar with how this service is increasingly focused on early learning. Emphasizing the importance of licensed child care and early learning in preparing children for school to families who would benefit, as well as to the broader community and to political decision makers, will help build support for a strong children's services system in Rainy River District.

In addition, several consultation participants raised the issue that parents do not always know what child care services and other resources are available and it is not always easy to find out. The Best Start Network is already taking steps to develop an online resource for service providers to learn about children's services in the District, which will eventually be expanded to the community; in the meantime, there are also opportunities to improve communication through the RRDSSAB website. In-person outreach, through community events (e.g., barbeques) held at child care centres, as well as information packages given to parents whenever children are born, may also provide opportunities to engage with new parents and raise awareness about available child care and children's services.

5.5 Governance

It is important to ensure that child care in each community in the District is rooted in local needs as well as District- and provincial-level policies. It is also important to ensure that each community and the child care providers have a voice in decision-making for the District as a whole. At the same time, it is essential that the volunteer and parent boards that currently oversee the not-for-profit child care providers in Rainy River District have a clearly defined role and the capacity to fulfill their responsibilities. In its discussion paper on "Modernizing Child Care in Ontario", the Ontario Ministry of Education notes that the volunteer and parent boards that govern not-for-profit child care centres in Ontario are committed to supporting the best interests of children and families, but may not be well-supported in their roles and have different levels of expertise.¹¹

Conversations with consultation participants indicated that the DSSAB is seen as a responsive and positive partner at the Best Start Network and for the child care providers and school boards, but there may be opportunities to look at additional ways to maintain an ongoing conversation about children's services and licensed child care in Rainy River District. For example, a regular working group focused on child care, and/or a regular community forum to explore strategies to enhance licensed child care, could provide value.

11 Ontario Ministry of Education. (2012). Discussion Paper: Modernizing Child Care in Ontario. Toronto: Province of Ontario.

The DSSAB may also wish to consider alternative modes of governance for child care in Rainy River District. Alternatives may include direct delivery of licensed child care in the District under a single board responsible for oversight, or assigning the DSSAB oversight of specific resources within the system (e.g. Special Needs Resource Teachers) in order to ensure equitable allocation of all resources. There may be opportunities for the DSSAB to play a greater role in the administration of child care services while strengthening the role of the not-for-profit boards in providing broader strategic direction for the child care providers in each community. This would ensure that parents and other local stakeholders have a strong voice in the provision of child care in each community in Rainy River District, while making the best possible use of the DSSAB's administrative resources.

6. Strategic Objectives and Recommendations

These strategic objectives and recommendations represent a road map that will guide the DSSAB over the next five years to close gaps and overcome barriers and enhance child care services across the District. Each objective reflects one of the themes that emerged through the consultations and parent survey and is associated with several specific recommended actions.

6.1 Promote affordability in child care across Rainy River District

The high cost of licensed child care is one of the most significant barriers that prevent families from making use of this service. It is an issue for families of children of all ages. Infant care is more expensive than care for older children because of the very low staff-to-child ratio that is required; before-and-after school care, while less costly to provide, is also subject to fluctuating demand so that it can seem unreasonable to parents to pay full fees to place their children in care every day if they do not use the service every day.

The recommended actions to promote more affordable child care in Rainy River District address the needs of low income families who qualify for fee subsidies as well as the needs of families who do not receive subsidized care. Although the income test used to determine eligibility for fee subsidy is mandated by the province, the DSSAB has authority, as the service manager, to determine the amount of money that will be allocated to fee subsidy and the amount of subsidized child care for each eligible family based on their needs. The DSSAB may also determine a number of fee subsidies that will be allocated to each community, to account for the differences in population size. As there is currently no wait list for fee subsidies in Rainy River District, examining alternative approaches to the current fee subsidy policy may enable the DSSAB to provide a higher degree of support to eligible families.

In addition, individual child care providers are able to use their General Operating Funds to support families who struggle to pay the full cost of care. The DSSAB may work with child care providers to identify a consistent approach to providing such assistance across the Service Area.

- 6.1.1 Develop a consistent policy for child care providers to use surplus General Operating Funds to provide additional support or incentives to families.**
- 6.1.2 Review the fee subsidy policy to ensure that it optimizes the use of fee subsidy funds to best meet the needs of families and the best interests of children.**
- 6.1.3 Encourage child care providers to implement more flexible fee structures and/or additional subsidies to increase the affordability of licensed child care.**

6.2 Foster access to licensed child care in every community in Rainy River District

Accessibility in child care is a core element of the vision for the Five-Year Plan. This objective encompasses strategies to address the issue of lack of transportation as well as strategies to increase the availability of licensed child care in each community.

In the context of Rainy River District, with a small population that is distributed over a large area, it is expected that there will continue to be communities where there is not sufficient demand to justify a child care centre. However, licensing private-home day care providers is an option that will increase access to regulated child care in communities without the population to support a larger child care centre and that will address the desire many parents expressed to have their children cared for in a "home-based" environment.

There is currently no licensed private-home day care agency in Rainy River District, which is required to support licensed private home child care providers. It may be necessary for the DSSAB to support the establishment of one. There will be costs associated with the DSSAB establishing its own agency, as it would require staff to oversee the home care providers. There may also be staffing implications associated with encouraging existing unlicensed home care providers to become licensed. Initially, the DSSAB may wish to focus on Emo, where stakeholders report there are many unlicensed care providers and which several survey participants identified as needing licensed child care.

In addition, an exploration of alternative service delivery models, including direct delivery of some child care services by the DSSAB, could help to ensure equitable access to child care in each community in Rainy River District.

The DSSAB should also facilitate a discussion between the child care providers and the schools to develop options to provide before and after school care in every community. This conversation should include how such care can be provided more flexibly to address the needs of parents who do not work "standard" hours.

Overcoming the transportation barriers is a significant challenge given the lack of public transportation in Rainy River District. To address this issue, it is recommended that the DSSAB and child care providers work to implement innovative solutions through the use of General Operating Funds.

- 6.2.1 Explore alternative delivery models, including the possibility of direct delivery of some child care services by the DSSAB, to ensure that there is equitable access to licensed child care services in Rainy River District.**
- 6.2.2 Encourage local child care providers to develop innovative strategies to overcome transportation as a barrier, including consideration of volunteer transportation.**
- 6.2.3 Encourage existing unlicensed home care providers to become licensed to expand access to regulated child care in the smaller communities.**
- 6.2.4 Collaborate with partners to develop a plan for eliminating wait lists for before- and after-school programs.**

6.3 Collect data and monitor service usage to ensure that children's services reflect community needs.

Up to date information concerning child care needs in Rainy River District is an essential tool for service planning. While child care providers and the DSSAB already report annually on child care usage to meet Ministry requirements, the consultations with stakeholders suggest that there is limited data available to help child care providers project future needs regularly. As a result, it is challenging to plan for service expansions or develop new services as community needs may change relatively quickly. More frequent collection of data regarding community needs for child care services may help the DSSAB and local child care providers to respond more quickly to emerging trends in Rainy River District.

On an annual basis, the DSSAB should survey Rainy River District families and child care providers to identify their anticipated child care needs for the next year and the next three years. The survey conducted as part of the process of developing this plan may be used to provide some baseline data. The same survey could also be used to evaluate parents' perceptions of the quality of child care in the District.

Regular reflection on the quality of child care services in Rainy River District will also be a valuable tool to help the DSSAB and child care providers identify opportunities to improve services. An established framework for evaluation will support this activity. An example of a framework that is being used for evaluation in the Region of Waterloo is presented in Appendix 5.

This information will be of greater value if it is publicly available. The DSSAB, with input from child care providers, the Best Start Network, and the school boards, should issue a public annual report on children's services in the District.

- 6.3.1 Initiate an annual survey of community child care needs.
- 6.3.2 Adopt or create a "quality framework" to use to evaluate child care services on a regular basis.
- 6.3.3 Create and distribute an annual public "report card" on children's services in Rainy River District.
- 6.3.4 Continue to monitor the level of demand for infant, toddler, pre-schooler and before- and after-school spaces at the existing child care centres.

6.4 Develop stronger partnerships

The Ontario Early Years Policy Framework is intended to result in an integrated Early Learning and Child Care system in every community. The Rainy River District already has a strong network of service providers who work with children, and the DSSAB was identified in the consultations as an important partner and facilitator in this network. However, in any community there are opportunities for partnerships to be enhanced and to develop new links to improve access to services.

The DSSAB should continue to engage with child care providers and school board representatives in the development of a "transition document" that would ensure continuity for every child beginning school, as is already done for children with special needs.

The DSSAB should also consider working with child care providers and the schools to coordinate the expansion of 'play dates' that would serve as opportunities for preschoolers to be introduced to school and to inform parents about the expansion of full-day kindergarten and before and after-school programming.

- 6.4.1 Continue to partner on the creation of a “transition document” for all children moving from child care to full-day kindergarten.
- 6.4.2 Establish a working group that includes members of the Best Start Network and child care providers to develop and implement strategies to integrate child care centres with other family and children's support services.

6.5 Support ongoing professional development for child care staff

Although professional development is not solely the responsibility of the DSSAB, it is in a strong position to facilitate it by working with the child care providers to identify their needs and coordinating activities, in collaboration with organizations such as Firefly. It is also in a position to help set the professional development agenda by identifying system-wide priorities for improvement in services.

On an annual basis, the DSSAB should engage with child care providers and the Best Start Network to identify priorities for continuing education over the following year.

The DSSAB, working with the child care providers and Best Start Network members, should facilitate at least three professional development activities each year for all child care providers.

- 6.5.1 Annually create a professional development agenda for child care providers in Rainy River District.
- 6.5.2 Coordinate a minimum of three professional development activities for all child care providers each year.

6.6 Engage in education and communication to build awareness of the importance of high-quality licensed child care in Rainy River District

The DSSAB should be an advocate for a strong child care system in Rainy River District. This includes educating families, community members, and decision-makers about the value of licensed child care as well as ensuring that community members are aware of the services that are available.

Currently, the DSSAB's website is not fully up to date and there is little information about the role that licensed child care centres play in early childhood education and development. The DSSAB should update the information about licensed child care providers that is available on its website to ensure that it is clear and easy to navigate, and should ensure that it is updated on at least an annual basis afterward.

The DSSAB should also work with local child care service providers and the Best Start Network to develop an accessible information campaign, suited to distribution in a variety of formats, to illustrate the value of early learning to parents and caregivers.

The DSSAB should continue to work with the Best Start Network to complete the roll out of the Navigator website, and should work with its community partners to develop a strategy to make the Navigator website accessible and useful to parents and families.

- 6.6.1 Regularly review and update child care information on the DSSAB website.
- 6.6.2 Develop an accessible information guide to early learning and child care services in Rainy River District for distribution at the Best Start Hubs and other community facilities.

- 6.6.3 Collaborate with the Best Start Network to complete the development the "Navigator" website for community-based service providers and parents.
- 6.6.4 Organize and host regular public information sessions at schools and child care centres where community members can ask questions about the programs and services that are available.

7. Two-Year Action Plan

This Action Plan identifies a timeline and specific activities that will support the DSSAB to work toward the objectives and strategic directions over the first two years of the plan period (2014-2018). It also identifies the organizations and community partners whose engagement is required for each activity. The activities recommended for attention in the first two years reflect the objectives that have higher priority according to community feedback, those that are required to support later work in Years 3-5 of the Five-Year Children’s Services Plan, as well as activities that should continue over the full period of the Plan (e.g., Professional Development-related activities).

Strategic Direction	Timeframe	Action	Responsibility
Promote Affordability	2014, Q2	Convene a child care working group to provide the DSSAB with input on its fee subsidy policy.	DSSAB
	2014, Q3-Q4	Work with child care providers to develop consistent standards for using General Operating Funds that will include a policy for using these funds to support affordability that is consistent across Rainy River District.	DSSAB, child care providers
	2015, Q1	Implement the new fee subsidy funding allocation model and the new policy for child care providers to use General Operating Funding to increase the affordability of care.	DSSAB
	2015, Q2-Q4	Convene a working group consisting of the school boards and child care providers to identify opportunities to work together to ensure that licensed child care is affordable and accessible.	DSSAB, school boards, child care providers
	2015, Q4	Evaluate the outcome of the new fee subsidy funding allocation model and the General Operating Funding policy with input from child care providers.	DSSAB, child care providers
Foster Access to Child Care	2014, Q2-Q4	Facilitate conversations between schools and local child care providers to identify specific opportunities to increase access to before- and after-school programs and licensed child care for families who only need part-time care.	DSSAB, child care providers, school boards

Rainy River DSSAB Children's Services Plan—2014 - 2018

Strategic Direction	Timeframe	Action	Responsibility
	2014, Q1-Q4	The DSSAB will evaluate the feasibility of direct delivery of services to increase access to licensed child care across Rainy River District.	DSSAB
	2015, Q1-Q4	The DSSAB will engage with existing unlicensed home care providers and report on the feasibility of licensing home care providers.	DSSAB, community members
	2015, Q1-Q4	The DSSAB will develop a plan to implement changes to before and after school programs based on the opportunities identified in 2014.	DSSAB, school boards, child care providers
	2015, Q3-Q4	The DSSAB will select a community and pilot a volunteer transportation program coordinated by the child care centre.	DSSAB, child care provider
Strengthen Partnerships	2014, Q3	Work with child care providers and the schools to develop a "transition document" for all children entering full-day kindergarten in the fall of 2015.	DSSAB, child care providers, school boards
	2014, Q1-Q4	The DSSAB will establish a Child Care Working Group to meet regularly over the year and develop a short list of strategies to increase integration between the child care system and other children's services providers.	Best Start Network, child care providers, DSSAB
Professional Development	2014, Q3-Q4	The DSSAB will engage with child care providers, the Best Start Network, and other stakeholders and identify three areas of focus for professional development for 2015.	DSSAB, child care providers, Best Start Network
	2015, Q2-Q4	The DSSAB will coordinate a professional development activity in each quarter.	DSSAB
Data and Monitoring	2014, Q3-Q4	The DSSAB will work with child care providers and the Best Start Network to develop an evaluation framework.	DSSAB, child care providers, Best Start Network

Rainy River DSSAB Children's Services Plan—2014 - 2018

Strategic Direction	Timeframe	Action	Responsibility
	2014, Q3	The DSSAB will develop a parent survey that can be deployed on an annual basis to assess the types of child care parents anticipate they will need over the next year and the next three years.	DSSAB
	2015, Q4	The DSSAB will work with the schools and child care providers to survey parents across the District about their anticipated child care needs over the next year and three years.	DSSAB
	2015, Q4	The DSSAB will use the evaluation framework and survey results to create the first "Annual Children's Services Report Card" and publish it by the end of Q4.	DSSAB
Education and Communication	2014, Q2	The DSSAB should begin work immediately to update the children's services website with general information about the value of licensed child care, specific information about the currently available programs in Rainy River District, and instructions for parents wishing to apply for fee subsidies.	DSSAB
	2014, Q3-Q4	The DSSAB should work with the Best Start Network to roll out the Navigator website for service providers.	DSSAB, Best Start Network
	2015, Q3-Q4	The DSSAB will work with the Best Start Network to facilitate expanding the Navigator website for families.	DSSAB, Best Start Network
	2015, Q1-Q4	The DSSAB will work with child care providers and community partners to develop written information guides about key children's services that can be distributed at the Best Start Hubs.	DSSAB, Best Start Network

Strategic Direction	Timeframe	Action	Responsibility
	2015, Q3	The DSSAB will host four public information sessions to invite parents and other community members to ask questions about licensed child care and the work the DSSAB is doing to improve it.	DSSAB

Appendix 1: Service Provider Consultation Themes

The consultation meetings that took place in Fort Frances, Rainy River and Atikokan during the week of November 18 identified several critical gaps in the child care system. These meetings were also rich in ideas for strengthening licensed child care in Rainy River District and supporting child care providers, schools, and children's services to work together to foster early development for all children.

7.1 Vision Statements

Consultation participants, working in small groups, crafted these vision statements to help guide the Five-Year Children's Services Plan for the Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board:

- "We will strive to provide integrated, respectful, fully accessible child care service system that is affordable, responsive and sustainable for ALL children and families/caregivers in the Rainy River District."
- "To provide care that meets ALL families' needs: quality, accessibility, affordable, flexible, that provides real time responsiveness to children's and the community's needs."
- "Ensure quality child care is affordable, accessible, available and sustainable for all families and children in the Rainy River District."
- "Partnerships, Commitment from families, Emphasis on infants, Maintain a quality, educated staff."
- "Every family has equal opportunity to make choices that are best for them that empower their future."

These statements provide clear direction for the areas of focus of the Children's Services Plan. The consultation visions all emphasize that the child care system in Rainy River District will empower all families by providing accessible, high-quality child care that responds to their needs and fosters community development.

7.2 Barriers, Gaps and Areas of Focus for the Future

The consultation participants also identified significant barriers or gaps in the current system of licensed child care as well as several areas of focus to enhance licensed child care in Rainy River District.

7.2.1 Barriers and Gaps:

- Transportation
- Lack of access to services
- Lack of flexibility and responsiveness in services

7.2.2 Areas of Focus:

- Partnerships
- Coordination to ensure school readiness for all children
- Professional development opportunities for ECE
- Communication and education for parents
- Governance

7.2.2.1 Affordability

In every consultation session, participants described families who are unable to afford licensed child care, even if they qualify for a fee subsidy.

Participants identified two strategies to help overcome the affordability barrier:

- Child care providers could explore opportunities to use their operating funding to address affordability
- The DSSAB can examine different formulas for calculating the fee subsidy

7.2.2.2 Transportation

Throughout Rainy River District, transportation is an issue that impacts the ability of families to access licensed child care. To address the issue, it will be essential for the DSSAB and the child care service providers to look for creative solutions that draw on existing resources such as taxi services. There may also be opportunities to build volunteer-based systems.

7.2.2.3 Lack of access to services

Particularly for those living in the smaller communities and more isolated parts of Rainy River District, licensed child care services may not be locally available because of insufficient demand. Conversely, for some services (e.g., Aboriginal Head Start), there is more demand than there is capacity. Infant care in particular was identified as a need across the District, but it is challenging to identify how many spaces will be required and to deliver it in a way that is affordable. Making use of data on the number of births from the Health Unit, regularly surveying parents to assess the demand for infant and other forms of child care, and targeted use of operating funds to subsidize more expensive forms of care may all be helpful in expanding access where it is needed.

7.2.2.4 Lack of flexibility in licensed child care services

The issue of how child care providers can accommodate shift work and other irregular work or school schedules is significant. In some communities, particularly Rainy River Town, the prevalence of flexible work schedules mean that it is challenging for parents to enroll their children in licensed child care, and in smaller communities that can be a strain for the child care providers.

7.2.2.5 Partnerships

Strong partnerships between the DSSAB, child care providers, other workers in children's services, and families are a thread that runs through all of the following areas of focus.

7.2.2.6 Coordination to ensure school readiness for all children

While there is a transition planning process to help children with identified special needs move from child care to school, all children in the District would benefit if their parents, early childhood educators and future teachers had a shared understanding of each child's needs. Participants in several of the consultation meetings said this could be accomplished by developing a standard transition document. Additional strategies to prepare children for school, including 'playdates' for children in child care and attending full-day kindergarten, were identified in other conversations with child care workers and school board officials.

Assessment and early intervention is essential when a child shows signs that he or she may have delayed development, as it allows parents, early childhood educators, and other children's services professionals to provide ongoing support before, during and after the child's transition to school. However, it is often frightening for parents to hear this message. It is important for ECEs and other professionals who work with children to build trust with these parents to help create a collaborative relationship.

Coordinating the transition from child care to school and ensuring that there is early identification of special needs and that intervention continues seamlessly when a child transitions to school also requires shared consent.

7.2.2.7 Professional development opportunities for ECEs

The importance of continuously strengthening staff qualifications was raised in all of the consultation meetings and in additional conversations with child care providers. It is seen as essential to providing high-quality child care and early childhood education. Professional development initiatives represent an opportunity to increase knowledge and skills necessary to ensure that child care in Rainy River District is culturally sensitive and responsive to the different needs of all children. It also will help to ensure that there is consistency in the quality of all licensed care across the District.

It is important to emphasize that child care staff in Rainy River District are already skilled professionals. However, continuous and focused attention to enhancing their skills and qualifications will ensure that staff have opportunities to incorporate emerging best practices in early childhood education into their work. Supporting professional development also demonstrates to staff that their work is valued and important to the community.

Professional development already occurs in the District with coordination by Firefly; there are also opportunities to partner with the school boards to do this.

7.2.2.8 Communication and education for families and the community

The role of early childhood education in fostering development and school readiness is not always well-understood; there is a tendency to think of licensed child care as "babysitting", and not all community members are familiar with how this service is increasingly focused on early learning. Emphasizing the importance of licensed child care/early learning in preparing children for school to families who would benefit, as well as to the broader community and to political decision makers, will help build support for a strong children's services system in Rainy River District.

In addition, several consultation participants raised the issue that parents do not always know what child care services and other resources are available and it is not always easy to find out. The Best Start Network is already taking steps to develop an online resource for service providers to learn about children's services in the District, which will eventually be expanded to the community; in the meantime, there are also opportunities to improve communication through the RRDSSAB website. In-person outreach, through community events (e.g., barbecues) held at child care centres, as well as information packages given to parents whenever children are born, may also provide opportunities to engage with new parents and raise awareness about available child care and children's services.

7.2.2.9 Governance

It is important to ensure that child care in each community in the District is rooted in local needs as well as District- and provincial-level policies. It is also important to ensure that each community and the child care providers have a voice in decision-making for the District as a whole. Conversations with consultation participants indicated that the DSSAB is seen as a responsive and positive partner at the Best Start Network and for the child care providers and school boards, but there may be opportunities to look at additional ways to maintain an ongoing conversation about children's services and licensed child care in Rainy River District. For example, a regular working group focused on child care, and/or a regular community forum to explore strategies to enhance licensed child care, could provide value.

Appendix 2: Parent Survey

Community Survey on Children's Services

1. Which community do you live in?
 - Alberton
 - Atikokan
 - Big Grass FN
 - Big Island FN
 - Chapple
 - Other (please specify):
 - Couchiching FN Dawson Emo Fort Frances
 - La Vallee
 - Lac La Croix FN Lake of the Woods Manitou FN Mine Centre Morley
 - Northwest Bay FN Rainy River Red Gut Bay FN Seine River FN
 - Stanjikoming FN
2. How many children in your family are (please indicate the number of children in each age group):
 - Newborn-6 months old
 - 6 -12 months old
 - 18 – 36 months old
 - 4 - 6 years old
 - 6-12 years old
3. Which children's services does your family use right now? (Select all that apply)
 - Licensed Child Care
 - Nursery School/Playgroup
 - Aboriginal Head Start
 - Best Start Hub
 - Before/After School Program
 - Informal Child Care (i.e. family member, private home)
 - Other (please specify)
4. If you are using informal child care right now, is this your preferred option? Yes No If informal child care is not your preferred option but you are using it, please tell us why: _____

5. Are you currently receiving a child care subsidy through the Rainy River DSSAB? Yes No
If not, please tell us why:
- Applied but did not qualify
 - Chose not to apply (please specify reason):
 - Did not think I would qualify
 - Did not know this was an option
6. Do you want your child or children to be involved in any services right now that you are not able to access?
- Licensed Child care
 - Nursery School/Playgroup
 - Before/After School Program
 - Licensed Home Child Care
 - Aboriginal Head Start
 - Other (please specify) Comments:
7. What are the barriers to using the services you want to use?
- The cost is too high
 - There aren't enough spaces/on a waiting list for services
 - There are no services close to where I live
 - I don't think the programs are of high-quality
 - Another barrier? (please specify) Comments:
 - I don't have transportation
 - Child has an identified special need
 - I don't know what services are available
 - Child care services/hours doesn't fit with my work/ school schedule
8. Will you want your child or children to be involved in one of these services in the next one - five years?
- Licensed Child Care
 - Nursery school/Playgroup
 - Before/After School Program Licensed Home Child Care
 - Aboriginal Head Start Other (please specify)
9. Would you say that the children's services in the Rainy River District:
- Completely meets our needs
 - Mostly meets our needs
 - Meets some of our needs
 - Mostly doesn't meet our needs
 - Doesn't meet our needs at all Comments:

10. What would you like the Rainy River District Social Services Board to focus on over the next five years to improve children's services in your community?

- Affordability
- Transportation
- Before and after-school programs for 6-12 year olds
- More flexible hours of operation for child care services
- Expansion of programs for infants and toddlers
- Education and resources for parents
- Support for children with an identified special need
- Expansion of programs for 3-5 year olds
- Expansion of culturally appropriate children's services
- Other (please specify):

Comments: _____

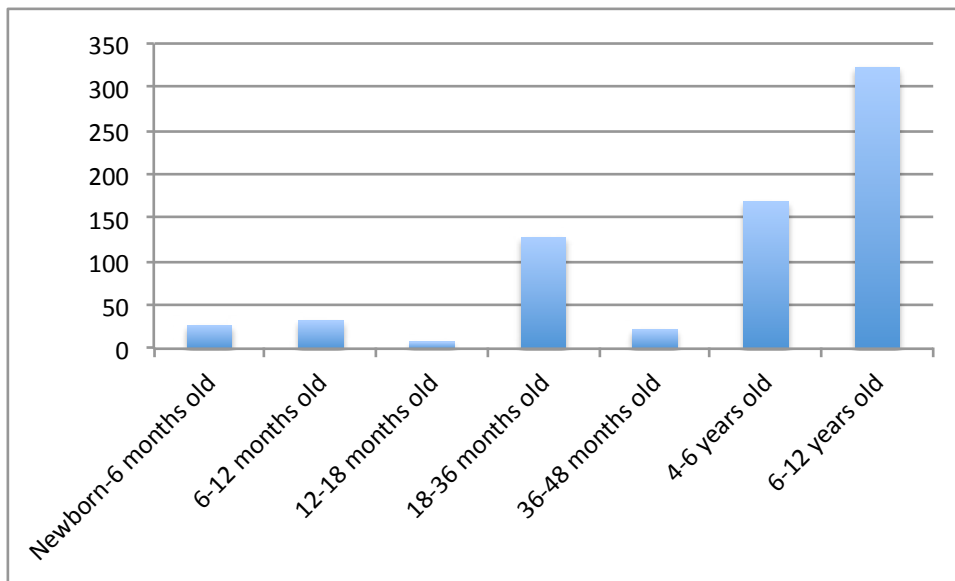
Appendix 3: Parent Survey Results

The Children’s Services Survey, undertaken as part of the process of developing a Five-Year Children’s Services Plan for the Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board, was conducted to solicit feedback from parents about their current and future child care needs.

375 parents responded to the survey, distributed through schools, child care centres and online; collectively, these families have 709 children between the ages of 0 and 12. According to the 2011 Census, there were 3250 households with children in Rainy River District, which suggests that 11.5% of families with children participated; however, this figure includes households with children over 12 years old.

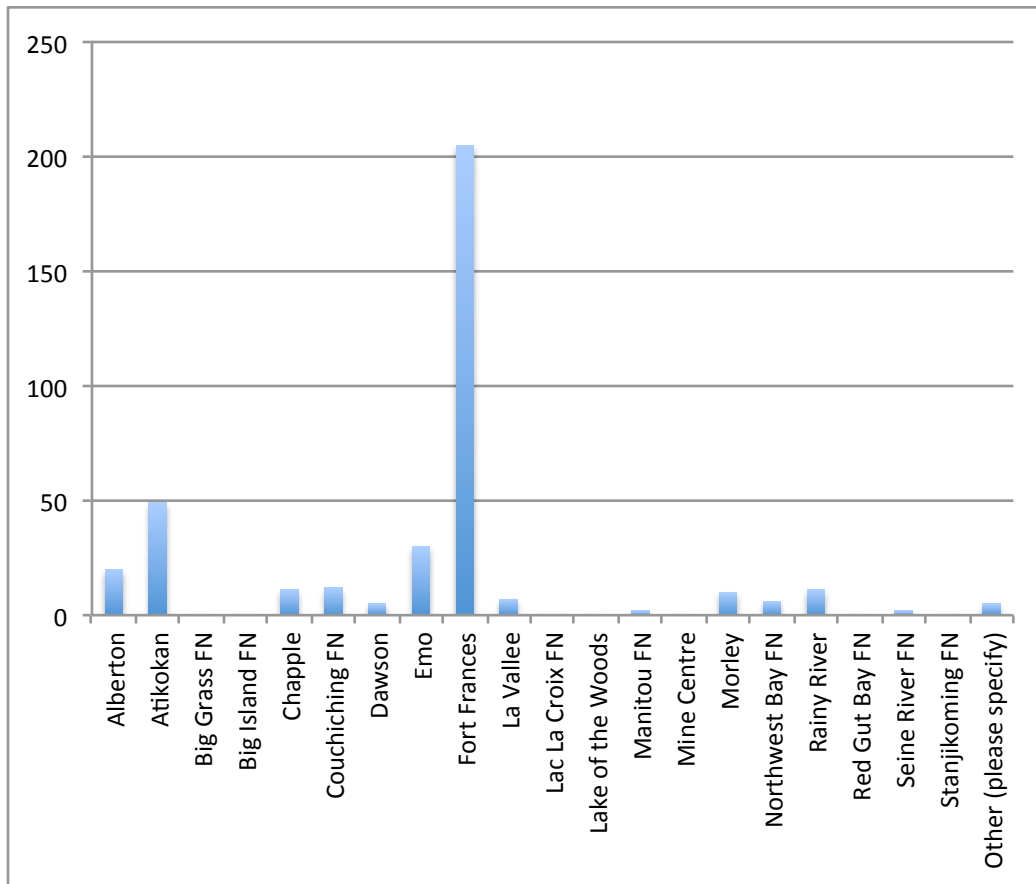
Because the surveys were sent home with all children attending elementary schools in the Rainy River District School Board and the Northwest Catholic District School Board and distributed through child care centres, families with children who are aged 18-36 months, 4-6 years old, and 6-12 years old are better represented; however, these families may also have younger children.

Figure 1: Number of children in each age category



The participants are primarily from Fort Frances; however, feedback was also obtained from families in Atikokan, Emo, Rainy River, and several of the First Nations and smaller communities.

Figure 2: Number of Responses By Community

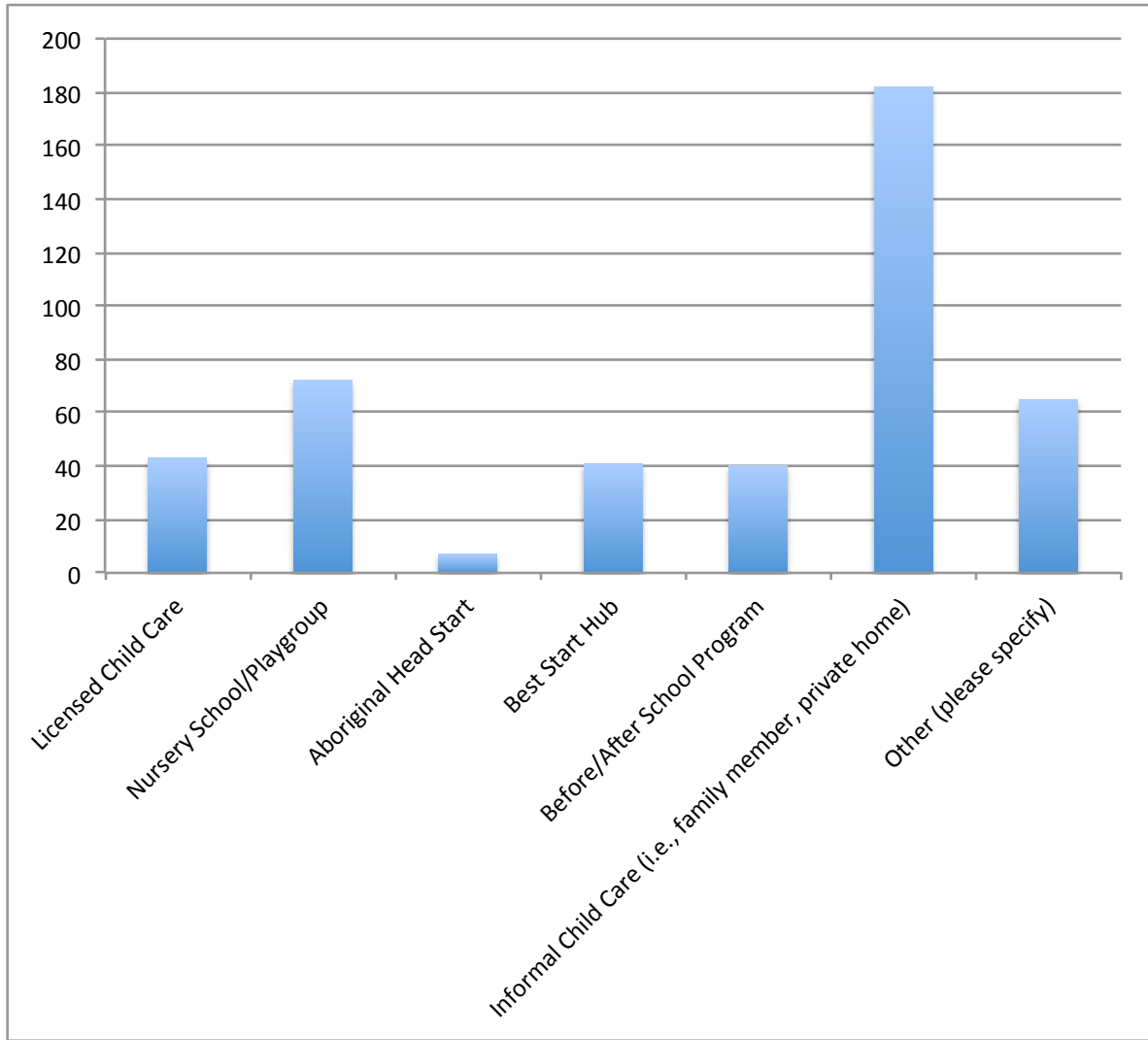


The responses suggest that access to licensed child care may be limited. Slightly more than one half of the participants (N=182, 54.5%) reported that they currently have children in informal child care provided in a private home or by a family member; just under one quarter reported that they have children in nursery school or play group (N=72, 21.6%).

65 of these respondents selected “Other”; of these, 43 reported that they do not use child care, either because a parent stays at home or because their children no longer require it. 9 others are using informal child care options such as an in-home sitter, a private home day care, or a family member.

In total, 231 respondents indicated that they are using informal child care, and of these, 160 (69.3%) reported that it is their preferred option. However, just under one third (N=76, 30.7%) indicated that informal child care is not their preferred option even though they are currently using it.

Figure 3: Type of Child Care Used by Survey Participants



The most common reason participants gave for using informal care is the cost of licensed child care (N=24, 33.8% of those who indicated that informal child care is not their preferred option). 14 participants (19.7%) indicated that they cannot access licensed child care because there are no spots open or because there is no licensed care in their community. Another 13 participants (18.3%) indicated that licensed child care does not meet their needs because they cannot access care during their work hours. It is important to note that the participants’ reasons for using informal child care indicate that while some do see it as the best choice for them, others described it as their preferred choice but also stated that they could not afford any other option.

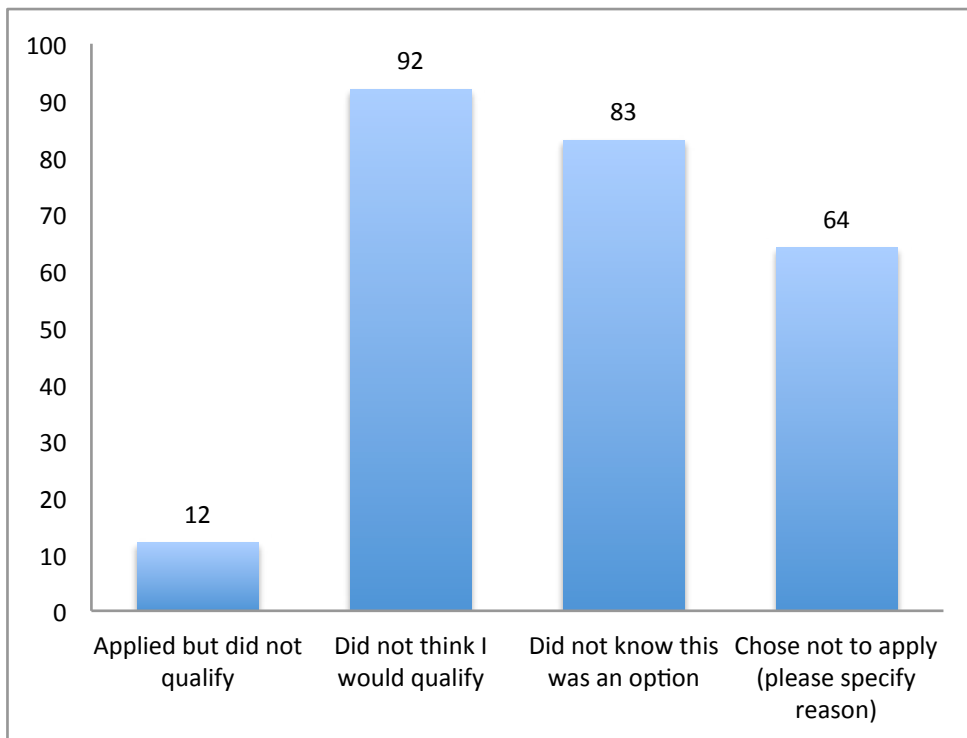
A relatively small number of participants (N=3, 4.2%) reported that they cannot access child care because their child is too young; the parents of children 0-18 months old typically reported that a parent was staying home or simply indicated that they are not currently using any form of child care.

22 participants (5.8%) reported that they are currently receiving a child care subsidy from the DSSAB; 329 participants (87.3%) are not receiving a subsidy. The remaining participants did not respond to this question.

Among those who are not receiving a subsidy, 92 reported that they did not believe they would qualify. An additional 16 participants who indicated that they chose not to apply also stated that they did not believe they would qualify; the reasons included income (4 participants) and their use of informal child care (3 participants).

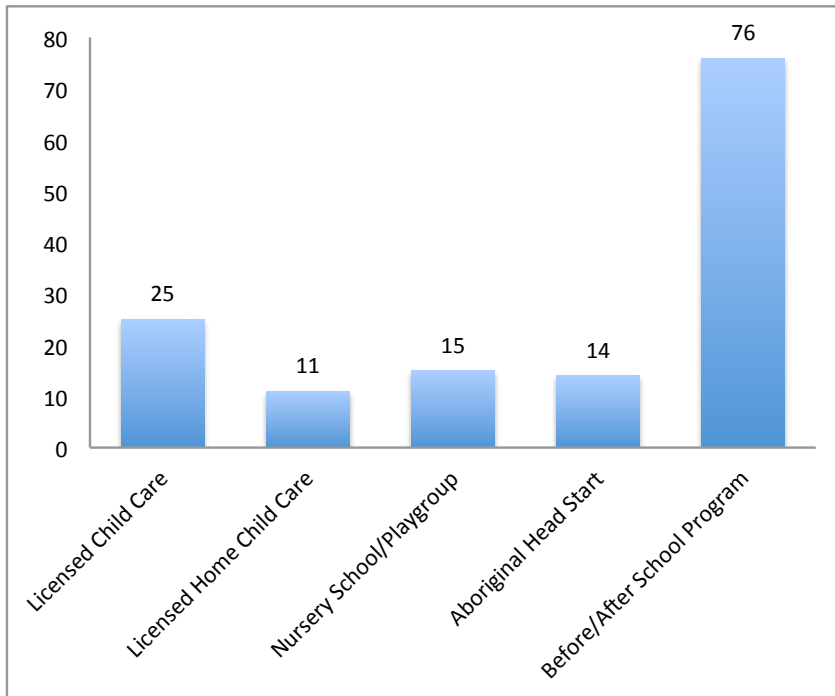
The most frequent reason for not applying for a child care subsidy (N=37, representing 57.8% of the participants who chose not to apply for a subsidy) was that it is not needed, typically because the family has made other child care arrangements (including informal care or having a parent at home) or because the household income is sufficient to pay for child care.

Figure 4: Reasons Given by Participants Not Receiving Child Care Subsidy



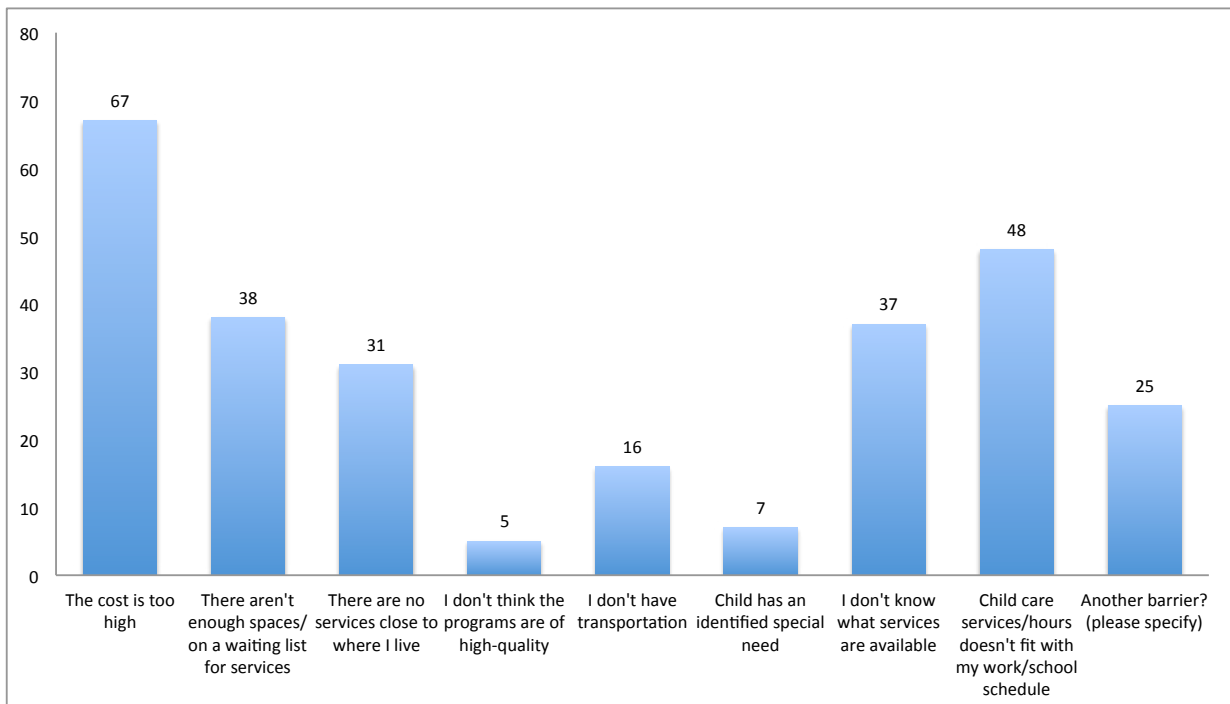
A total of 111 participants indicated that there are children’s services that they would like to use right now that they are not able to access. Before and after school care was the most frequently identified service (N=76, 68.5%), followed by licensed child care (N=25, 22.5%). 17 participants indicated that there are currently no services that they would like to use that they are not able to access.

Figure 5: Children's Services Parents Would Most Like to Access Right Now



190 participants identified barriers that affect their ability to access the children's services that they would like to use. The cost of services, the hours of services and lack of spaces were the most frequently identified barriers, consistent with the reasons given for using informal child care. Another significant barrier, identified by 37 participants (19.5%) was not knowing which services are available.

Figure 6: Barriers to Accessing Children's Services



The issue of cost is highlighted by participants’ closing comments on the survey; in particular, working parents with low incomes were described as “often missed in the funding process, making it difficult and at times impossible to afford licensed childcare and playgroup programs”.

The cost of child care and the issue of shift work are also deeply interconnected; for example, one participant noted that their household cannot afford to pay for days of child care they do not use when their shifts will not allow it. Another participant suggested that fees should be based on time used in order to accommodate parents who work irregular shifts; this was also suggested as a potential strategy to make before and after-school care more affordable.

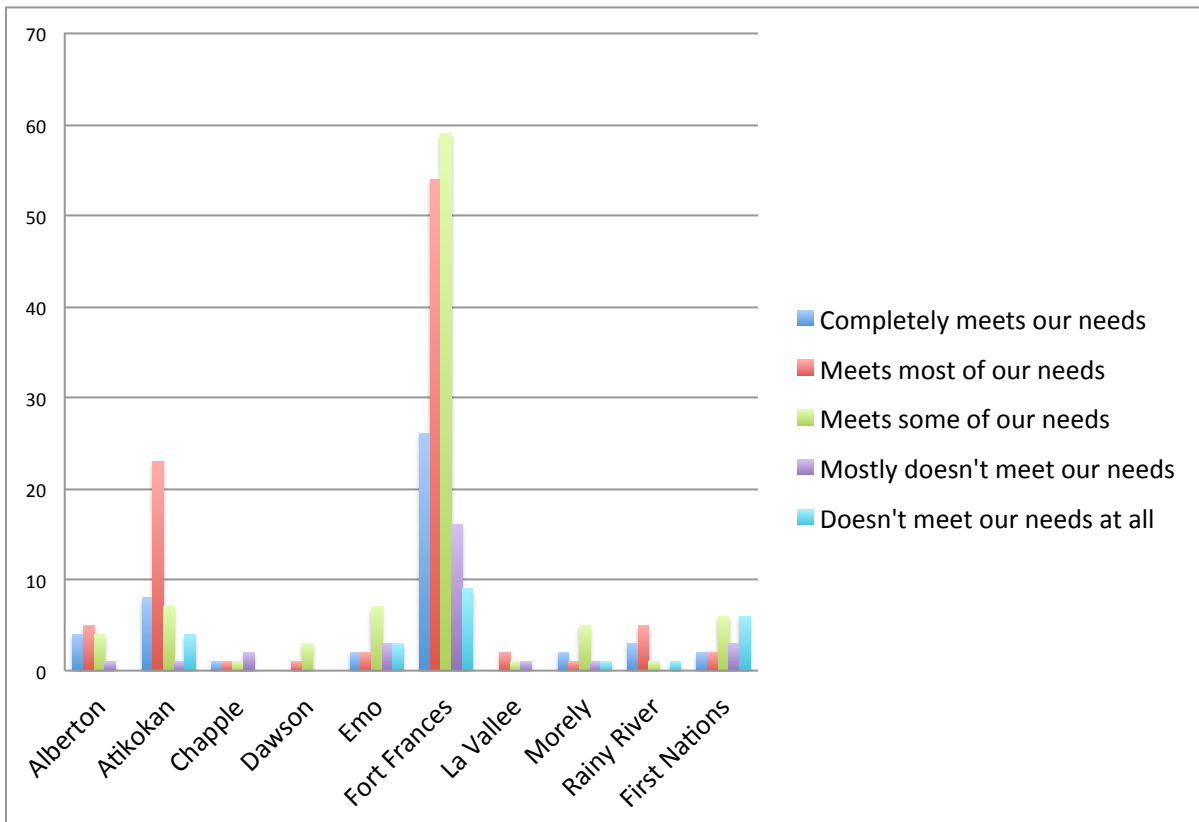
Over the next five years, 230 survey participants indicated that they will want their children to be involved in services that include before and after school programs (N=159, 69.1%), nursery school or play group (N=69, 30%), and licensed child care (N=58, 25.2%).

Overall, the survey responses suggest that the children’s services that are available in the Rainy River District meet some or most of families’ needs, but there is a significant subset of the population whose needs are not being met.

There is some variation by geographical location. Even though Fort Frances is the largest community in the district and is best-served in terms of the number of available child care spaces, a larger proportion of the respondents from this community indicated that the available child care mostly does not meet their needs. However, these geographical differences should be interpreted with some caution given that there are fewer responses from the smaller communities.

Emo, where there is no licensed child care, also had a higher proportion of participants who reported that the available children’s services mostly do not meet their needs; several participants indicated that licensed child care in Emo is needed in their closing comments.

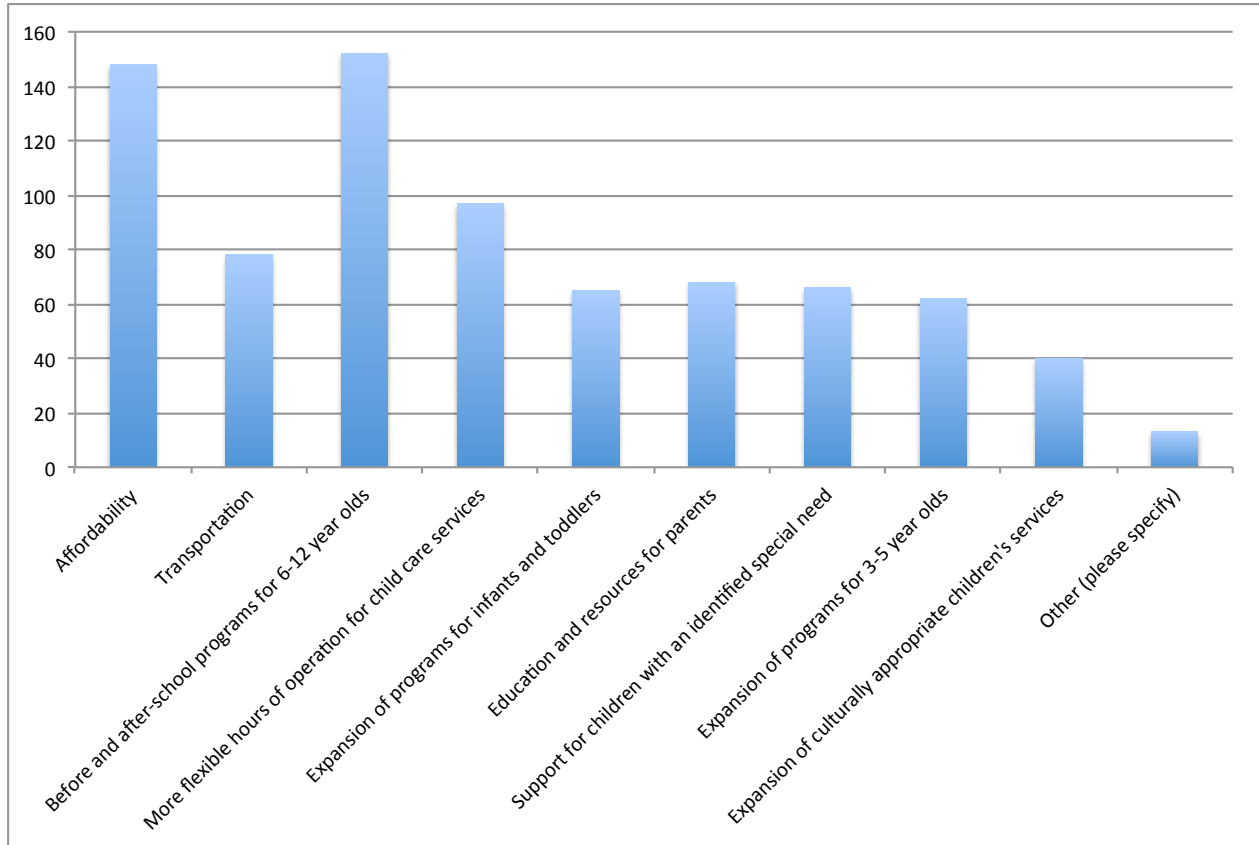
Figure 7: Rating of Children’s Services by Community



In interpreting the responses to this question, it is important to note that respondents may not have been referring only to services overseen by the DSSAB.

Over the next five years, participants identified several key areas of focus, including: additional before and after-school programs, affordability of care, and more flexible hours of services.

Figure 8: Key Areas of Focus for the Next Five Years



To address these two priorities, it will be necessary for the DSSAB to work with the child care providers and with the schools. It may be helpful to form a working group or working groups in each community that would be responsible for developing partnerships between child care providers and the schools to address before and after-school needs, for example.

In addition, although “Education and resources for parents” was identified as a priority by slightly less than one half of the respondents, providing information, particularly about the services that are available, is a relatively low-investment opportunity that the DSSAB could address easily.

Appendix 4: Summary of Key Data from Early Years Snapshots

Early Years snapshot reports are available for Fort Frances, Rainy River, Atikokan and Emo. ^{1 2 3 4 5}

	Atikokan ¹	Emo (2012) ²	Fort Frances ³	Rainy River ⁴
Population change, 0-4 year-olds	- 19% change in number of children aged 0-4 between 2001 and 2006, and -35.3% between 2006 and 2011 (from 210 to 110) – much higher than the CD as a whole ⁵	-17.6% drop between 2006 and 2011 (from 85 to 70)	-6.5% among 0-4 year-olds between 2001 and 2006, and -12.8% between 2006-2011; lower than in the CD overall, still much higher when compared to province	RR saw a 50% decrease in 0-4 year olds between 2001 and 2006, but then a 50% increase in this age group between 2006 and 2011 (60-30-45).
Unemployment	0.0% adult unemployment in families with 0-6 year-old children, compared to 9% for all families in the community and 7.9% in the CD	Adult unemployment in families with 0-6 year-olds is low compared to all families (0.0 vs. 4.7%), and lower overall than in the CD, region and province	Adult unemployment in families with children 0-6 is much higher compared to all families, the CD, and the province – 18.6% vs. 7.3% and 7.9%	High unemployment – 40% among families with 0-6 year old children, 15% among all families (vs. 7.9% in the CD)
Lone parents	46.9% of 0-6 year-olds are in lone parent families (compared to 21.6% for all families, and 24.9% for the CD)	Percentage of single-parent families with children 0-6 is very high relative to all families in the town and the CD (33.3% of families with 0-6 year olds are lone-parent families, compared with 11.4% for all families and 24.9% for all families in the CD)	40% of families with 0-6 year old children are lone-parent families (30.9% for all families, and 24.9% of all families in the CD)	More than 2/3 of families with 0-6 year old children are headed by lone parents (64.3%, compared to 25.9% of all families and 24.9% in the CD)

1 Firefly Northwest. (2012) Atikokan Early Years Community Snapshot 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.fireflynw.ca/download/2693>

2 Firefly Northwest. (2012). Emo Early Years Community Snapshot 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.fireflynw.ca/download/2699>

3 Firefly Northwest. (2012). Fort Frances Community Snapshot 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.fireflynw.ca/download/2701>

4 Firefly Northwest. (2012). Rainy River Community Snapshot 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.fireflynw.ca/download/2705>

5 CD is a Statistics Canada Census Division.

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	Atikokan	Emo (2012)	Fort Frances	Rainy River
LICO/SES	23% of families with 0-6 year old children are under the LICO, compared to 11.1% for all families and 7.7% for the CD	Fewer families with young children are under the LICO compared to all families (0.0%, vs. 8.7% for all families and 11.8% for the CD)	High percentage of families with 0-6 year olds are under the LICO (21.2%, compared to 7.2% of all families and 7.7% of all families in the CD)	0.0% of families with 0-6 year old children are under LICO, compared to 5.9% of all families (7.7% across the CD)
Aboriginal Families	6.3% of families with 0-6 year olds are of Aboriginal identity, compared to 11.5% of all families and 21.7% in the CD	Lower number of Aboriginal families (0.0% with 0-6 year old children, 4.1% for all families, 21.7% for all families in the CD) suggests that there is less need for culturally appropriate children's services in Emo, but also that the small number of families here who need these services may struggle to access them locally.	25% of families with 0-6 year old children are Aboriginal; compared to 16.8% of all families and 21.7% of all families in the CD	23.1% of families with 0-6 year old children identify as Aboriginal, compared to 17.5% of all families.
Newborns at Risk	The number and percentage of newborns at risk has decreased from 19 (27.5%) in 2006-2007 to 8 (18.2%) in 2010-2011.	The number and percentage of newborns at risk has decreased from 19 (27.5%) in 2006-2007 to 8 (18.2%) in 2010-2011.	Number of newborns at risk has fluctuated slightly (64,57,62 between 2006-2011), percentage has held fairly steady (30.5, 30.5, 31.2%)	Number of newborns at risk was suppressed to maintain confidentiality, but in 2005 21.7% of all newborns were identified as at risk.
Early Development Instrument scores	Both the number and percentage of children with valid vulnerabilities on EDI domains have been decreasing.	According to the Early Development Instrument (EDI), both the number and percentage of children with valid vulnerabilities on EDI domains have been decreasing in Emo	Number and percent of children with a valid EDI vulnerability has fluctuated, with peak in 2006 and a decrease in 2009 (but still higher than in 2005)	There has been a sharp drop in the percentage of children with a valid EDI vulnerability; the number of children with a valid EDI has also decreased.

Appendix 5: An Example of a Quality Framework

Some Ontario CMSMs are adopting frameworks to help regularly evaluate children’s services. For example, the Region of Waterloo uses the “Eight Elements of Quality Child Care”, developed by Martha Friendly and Jane Beach, as a conceptual framework for planning and an evaluation tool.

The “Eight Elements of Quality” are outlined in the following table.¹¹

Element	Description
Planning & Policy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System-wide planning with targets and timetables • Use of the best available knowledge regarding policy and practice • Critical mass of knowledgeable policy makers • Mandated involvement of experts and stakeholders in policy processes at all levels • Local service planning
Data, Research & Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strategy for collecting and analyzing basic data to monitor effects of policy and financing and ensure accountability • Research agenda to address key policy and program issues • Evaluation of various approaches and innovations • Regular review of progress toward goals
Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financing for capital development • Sustained financing sufficient to support ongoing program operation • Core funding that covers the majority of program operation costs • Financing for infrastructure and training • Affordable parent fees
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership at all levels • A critical mass of knowledgeable policy makers, post-secondary early childhood instructors and researchers • Post-secondary level training in early childhood with lead staff at degree levels • Human services management training for program supervisory staff • Pre-service and in-service training • Good wages • Working conditions that encourage good morale and low turnover • System support for program level staff • Support, recognition and respect for the value of the work
Physical Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient well-designed indoor and outdoor space • First-rate equipment and program resources • Amenities such as staff room, outside play spaces, kitchen, windows for natural light • Connections to the surrounding community
Conceptual Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear statement of the values that underpin the system • System-level goals for children and families • Educational philosophy related to the values and goals • Curriculum defined as a short general statement

¹¹ Friendly, M. & J. Beach. *Elements of a High Quality Early Learning and Child Care System*. Child Care Research Unit. University of Toronto: Toronto.

Element	Description
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy, planning and program delivery continues to be organized by the DSSAB as the lead department • Legislation as a basis for the system • Regulation defining minimum standards • Monitoring to ensure standards are met • Mechanisms for ongoing quality improvement • Ongoing consultation and assessment of Early Learning and Child Care programs • Public education about Early Learning and Child Care
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear definition of roles and responsibilities of DSSAB, parents, and the community • Continued public management at system level and operation of child care centres by not-for-profits • Program delivery managed at local level • Appropriate involvement of community, researchers, parents and children

The “Eight Elements of Quality” addresses the Early Learning and Child Care system at multiple levels, from the local to the provincial, but it is an example of a framework that can help to guide the DSSAB’s work as the children’s services manager in Rainy River District.

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