



Modernizing the  
*Yukon Child Care Act*

# What We Heard

This What We Heard report is a summary of the most common issues, feedback and suggestions made during the engagement for the review of the *Child Care Act*.

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## Vision for a modernized *Child Care Act*

Yukon’s *Child Care Act* and its accompanying regulations came into force in 1990, primarily focusing on ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children, similar to other child care laws in Canada at the time. Over the years, experts in early childhood education have recognized that children require more than just safety; they need high-quality, diverse, and nurturing experiences to support their learning and development.

Research in early childhood education worldwide has clearly linked healthy child development with high-quality early learning opportunities. At the centre of high-quality programs are well-educated and well-supported early childhood educators.

Legislation is key for a high-quality early learning and child care system that is inclusive, affordable, and accessible. Through the mandate letter set by Yukon’s Premier, the Minister of Education has committed to modernizing the *Child Care Act* with input from First Nations governments, the Yukon Child Care Board, stakeholders, and Yukoners.



*Now we know (ages 0 to four years) are the most important years to set the stage for the rest of the child’s life*

– Engagement session participant

### Previous engagements

**Early learning and child care engagement report:**  
What We Heard October 2020

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**Work to review the Child Care Act:**  
What We Heard March 2023

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## Why is early learning important?

Investments in early childhood education support the development of children and the future of a happier and healthier society. Results are optimal when preschool-age children have access to high-quality early learning and child care. These crucial early years are when they develop essential physical, cognitive, and social skills that pave the way for their future wellbeing and success.



*We want to commit to early learning, quality care and education. This should not just be child storage for eight hours a day.*

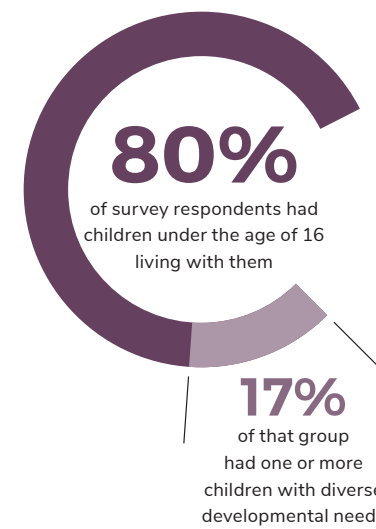
– Engagement session participant



## Engagement process

The public engagement on the modernization of the *Child Care Act* began November 27, 2023, and was completed on February 29, 2024. We used a variety of methods to engage a wide range of partners and individuals, including engagement sessions and one-on-one meetings, an online survey, discussion guides and encouraging written submissions. We promoted the engagement through social media, radio and newspapers advertisements and email invitations, to name a few.

### Online survey



We engaged with parents and caregivers for the first time. This was done through an online survey hosted on EngageYukon.ca that resulted in **434** responses.

### Engagement sessions

Yukon First Nations governments, municipal governments, early childhood educators, early learning and child care program owners and operators, early learning advocates and others were invited to provide feedback and participate in in-person meetings.

**Two** sessions were conducted in French, and four sessions were dedicated to rural early learning operators and educators.

  
**95**  
invites sent by email

  
**32**  
sessions were held over the three months of engagement

In-person sessions were held in Whitehorse and in Dawson City.

### Written submissions



In addition to the survey, and engagement sessions, the Department of Education received **twelve** written submissions from Yukoners.

# The guiding principles

Engagement activities were centred around the Yukon’s Early Learning and Child Care program’s four guiding principles:



**Quality**



**Affordability**



**Accessibility**



**Inclusion**

Quality was seen by engagement participants as the key principle, with accessibility, affordability, and inclusion all playing roles in achieving

the ultimate goal of a high-quality early learning and child care system. Engagement discussions were far-ranging, however virtually all

feedback could be filtered through one of these four principles.

## Summary of engagement feedback

Quality	Affordability	Accessibility	Inclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce child to educator <b>ratio</b></li> <li>Create a community of practice and/or revive the child care <b>association</b></li> <li>Require the use of an <b>early learning framework</b></li> <li>Ensure owner/operators and early childhood educators are <b>qualified</b></li> <li>Ensure access to <b>outdoor</b> spaces</li> <li>Require <b>continuous learning</b> for early childhood educators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure the sustainability of <b>universal child care</b> and subsidy programs for parents</li> <li>Keep and expand current <b>funding programs</b> available to operators and educators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Require all programs to be accessible to children with <b>diverse needs</b></li> <li>Ensure dedicated and sustainable funding for the <b>Supported Child Care program</b></li> <li>Expand the definition of "school age" children to include children registered in <b>kindergarten</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate and increase <b>access</b> to the Child Development Centre</li> <li>Offer more training for early childhood educators to support children with <b>diverse needs</b></li> <li>Importance of inclusion of <b>Yukon First Nations</b> cultures in programming</li> <li>Importance of inclusion of an understanding of <b>diverse cultures</b></li> </ul>

# Participants' overall impressions

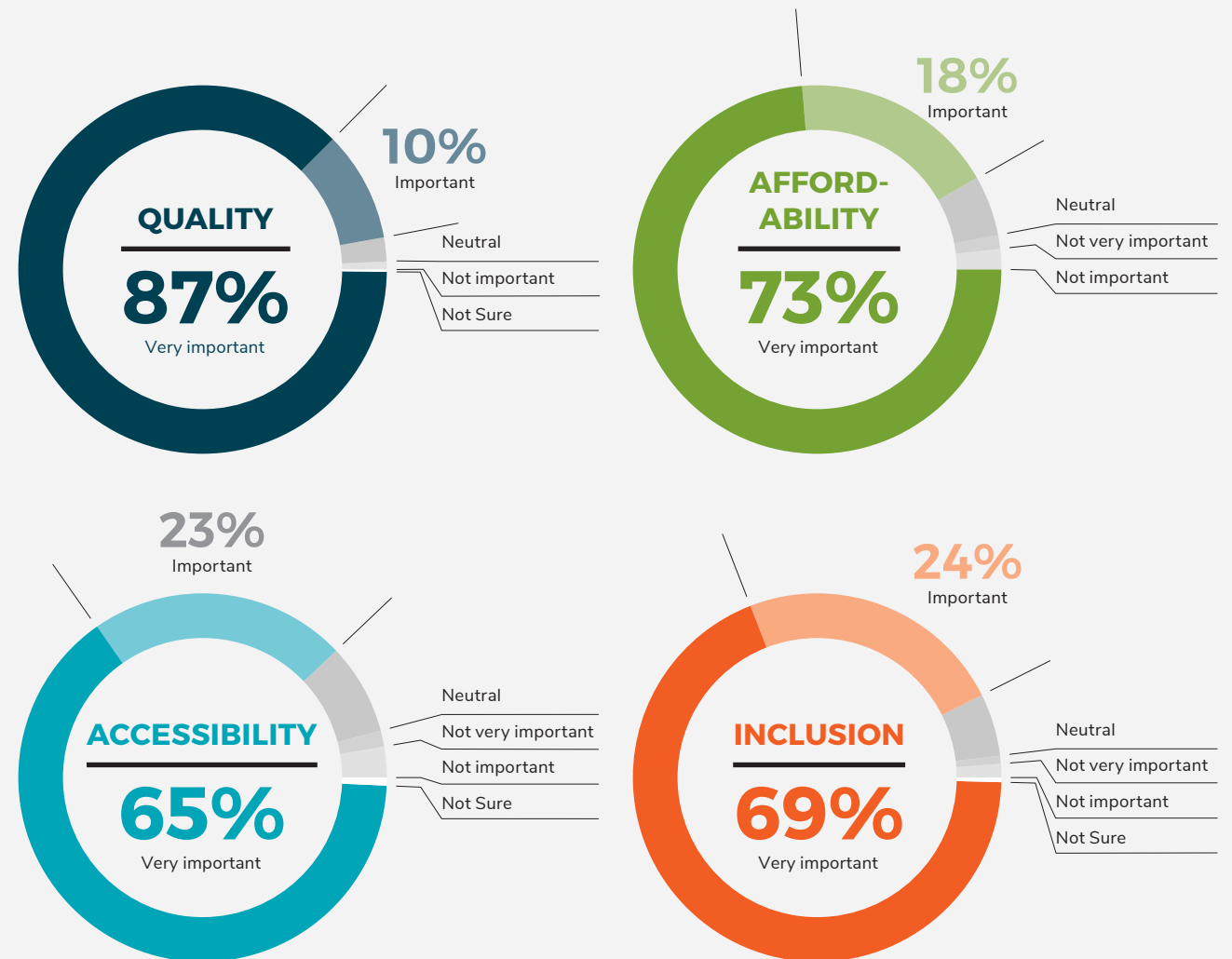
## Survey: Parent/caregiver perspectives

The survey was designed to collect information on the values and priorities of parents and caregivers about early learning and child care in the Yukon. Through a series of questions, the survey sought to gain insight into the needs and preferences of parents and caregivers to inform decision-making and early learning and child care program development.

Overall, there was a strong consensus of incorporating in law the four principles of *quality*, *affordability*, *accessibility*, and *inclusion*.

### Importance of enshrining principles in legislation\*

\*Values rounded up to the nearest 1%

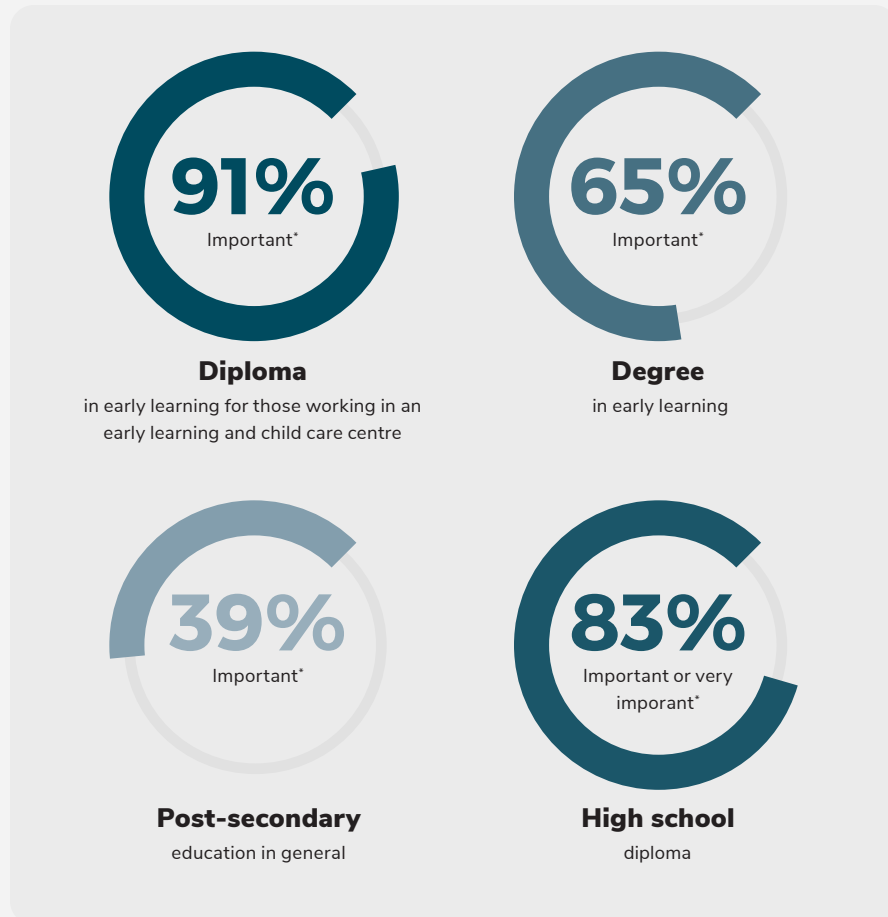
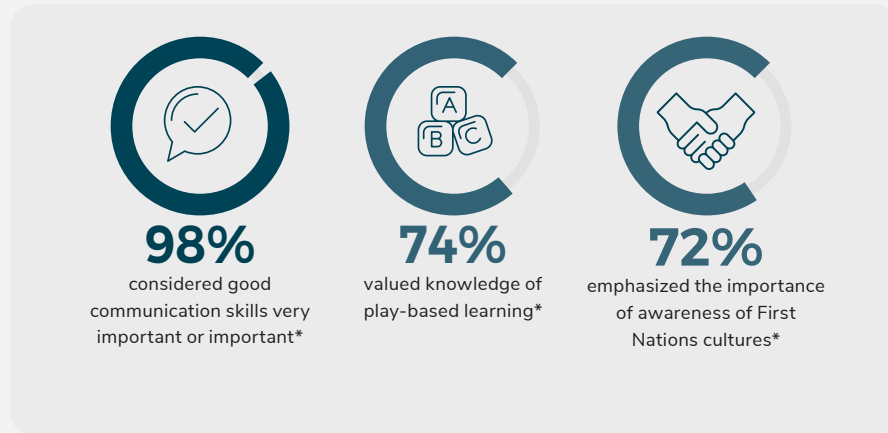




## Quality

Parents and caregivers placed significant emphasis on the training and qualifications of early childhood educators.

When asked to rate the importance of various skills for these educators, an overwhelming majority of respondents highlighted the following: ▶

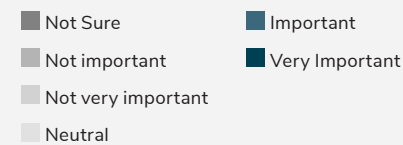
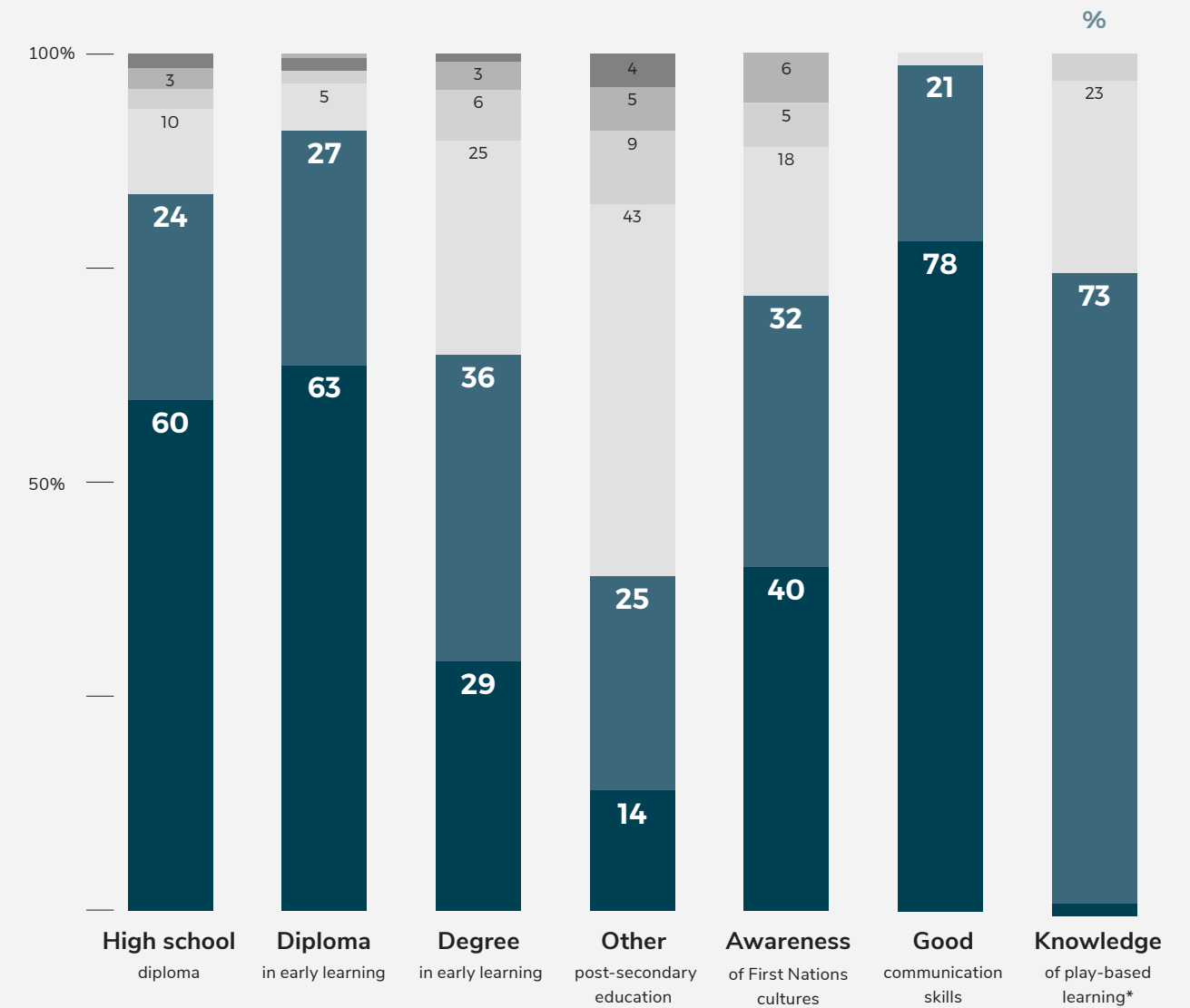


\*Values rounded up to the nearest 1%

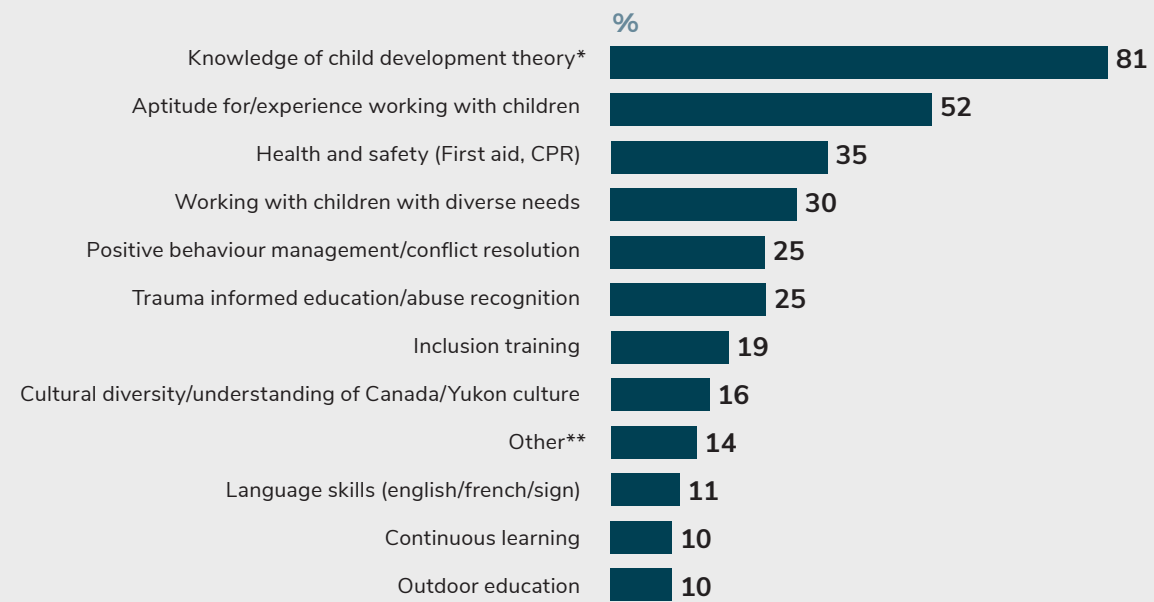
These findings underscore the varied perspectives on the importance of formal education qualifications in the field of early childhood education.

## Importance of skills/education for early childhood educators

Respondents also emphasized the significance of other skills and education as important qualifications for early childhood educators. These include having a solid understanding of child development, aptitude for and experience working with children, as well as a strong grasp of health and safety protocols.



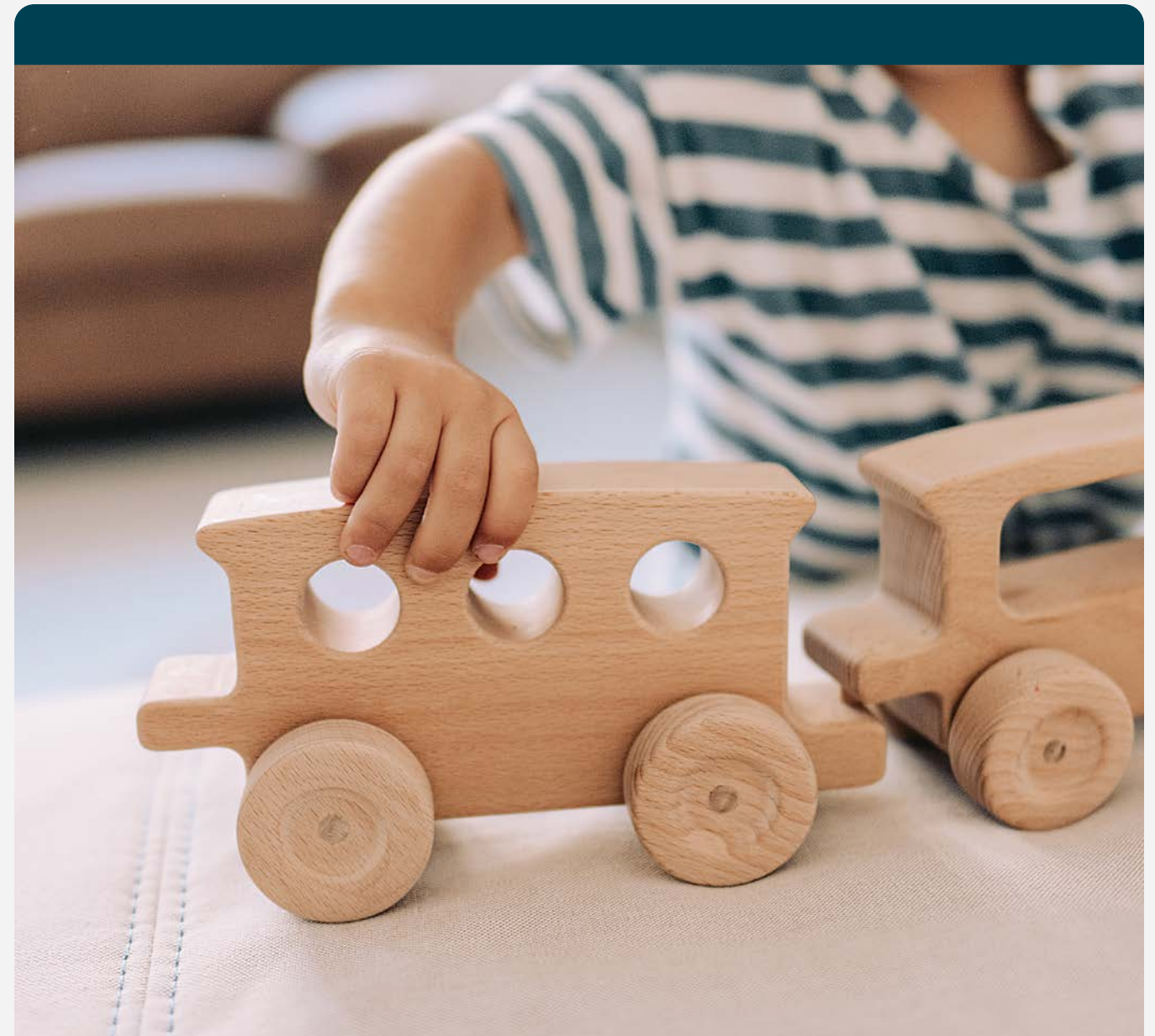
## Other skills or education important for early childhood educators



\*Knowledge of child development theory includes psychology, social-emotional learning, and early learning.

\*\*Other includes nutrition, organizational skills, workers' rights, art, leadership, and business.

Additionally, many felt the ratio of children to educators was too high, preventing quality interactions between adults and children. There were several calls for additional educators working together to care for children in the different age groups.



## Other recommendations

**Access** to outdoor spaces

**Purpose-built** early learning centres

**Healthy** meal programs



**Include** program quality criteria in program inspections





## Affordability

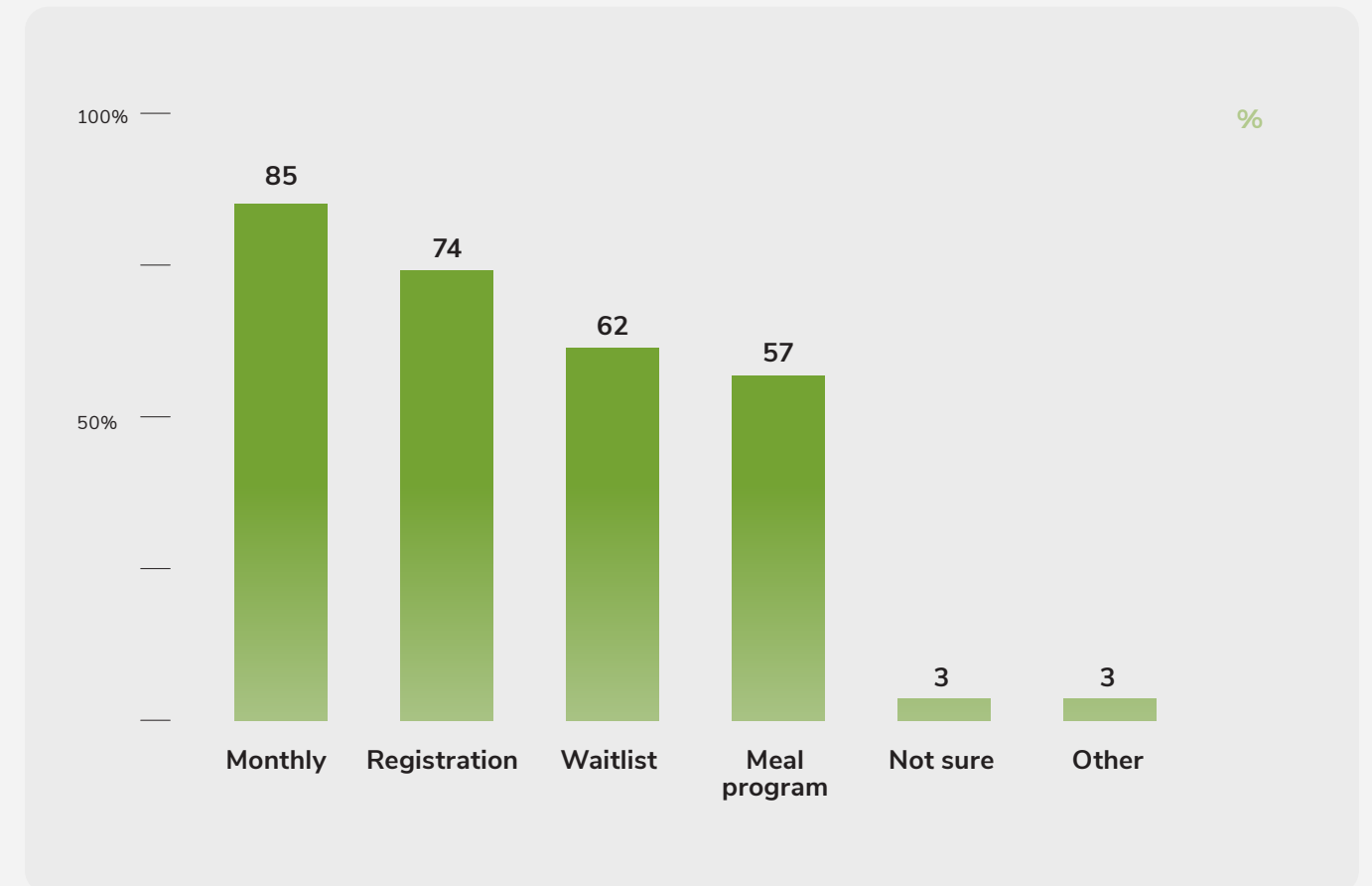


Parents were supportive and appreciative of the universal child care funding introduced in 2021 but expressed concern about extra fees being charged by programs and called for increased subsidies. A substantial number believe that government should not only regulate or limit monthly fees charged by child care programs, but regulations should extend to other fees such as waitlist and registration fees, and penalties charged when parents are late picking up a child



*As a single mom/residential parent to a small child, the universal program has been lifechanging to my stability. Big thanks to the many hands that are helping to invest in our future. – Survey respondent*

## Type of fees that should be regulated



Additionally, 93.5 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that legislation should ensure that early childhood educators receive fair wages.

## Other recommendations

**Subsidies** for summer camps



**Regular** wage increases for early childhood educators to ensure retention

**Standardize** wages and benefits, mirroring school practices

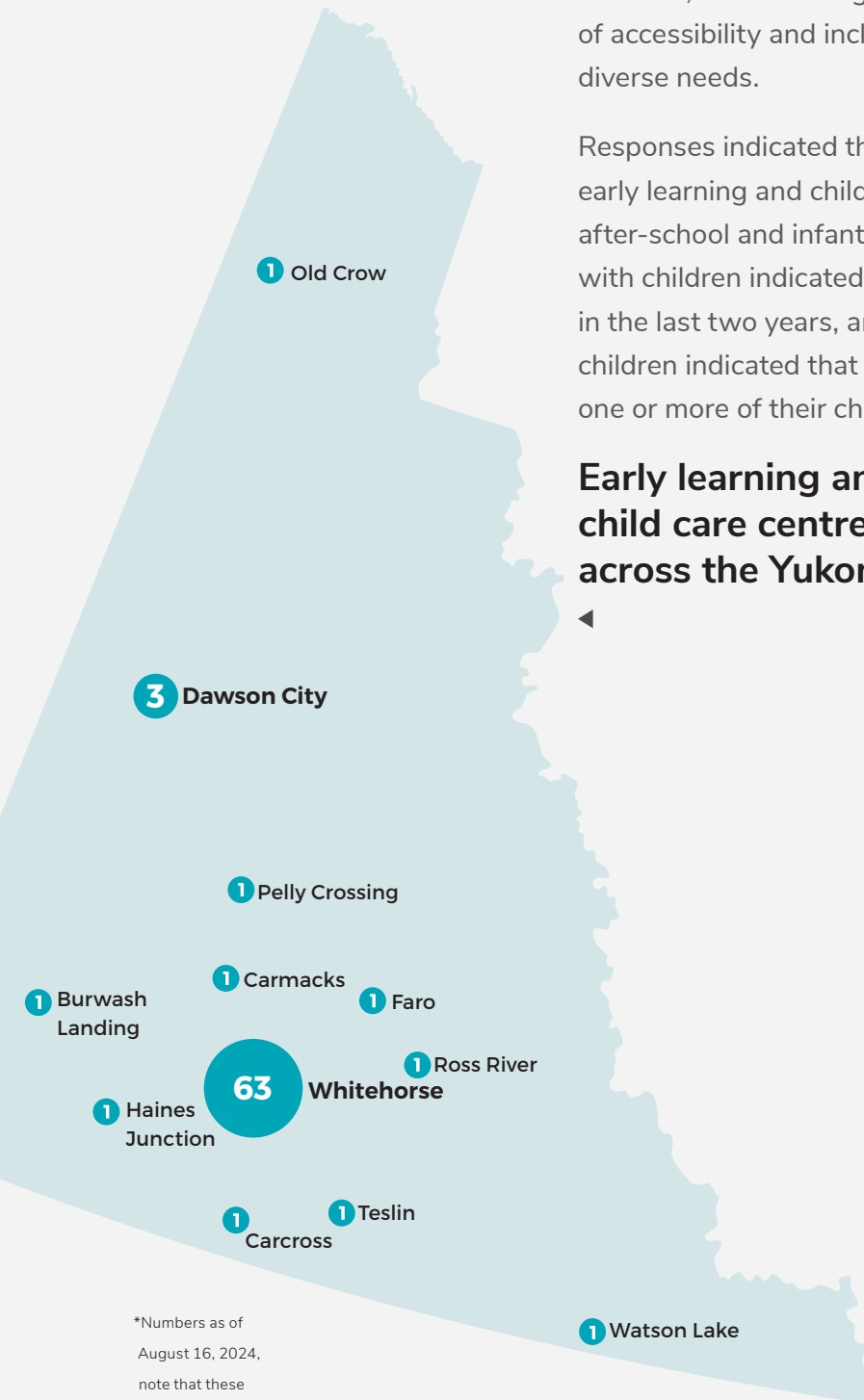


## Accessibility

In both the parent/caregiver survey and the public engagement sessions, there was significant crossover between the principles of accessibility and inclusion as they relate to children with diverse needs.

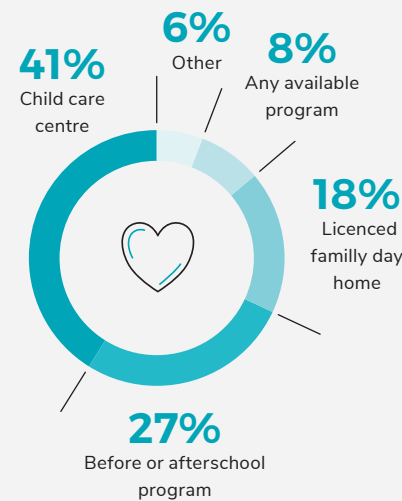
Responses indicated that parents/caregivers are struggling to find early learning and child care for children of all ages, particularly after-school and infant spaces. Fifty two percent of respondents with children indicated that they had difficulty finding child care in the last two years, and thirty one percent of respondents with children indicated that they are currently looking for child care for one or more of their children.

### Early learning and child care centres across the Yukon\*



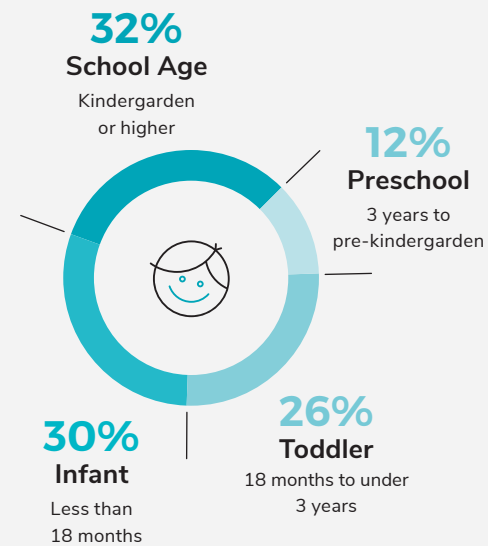
\*Numbers as of August 16, 2024, note that these numbers can change.

### Type of child care sought



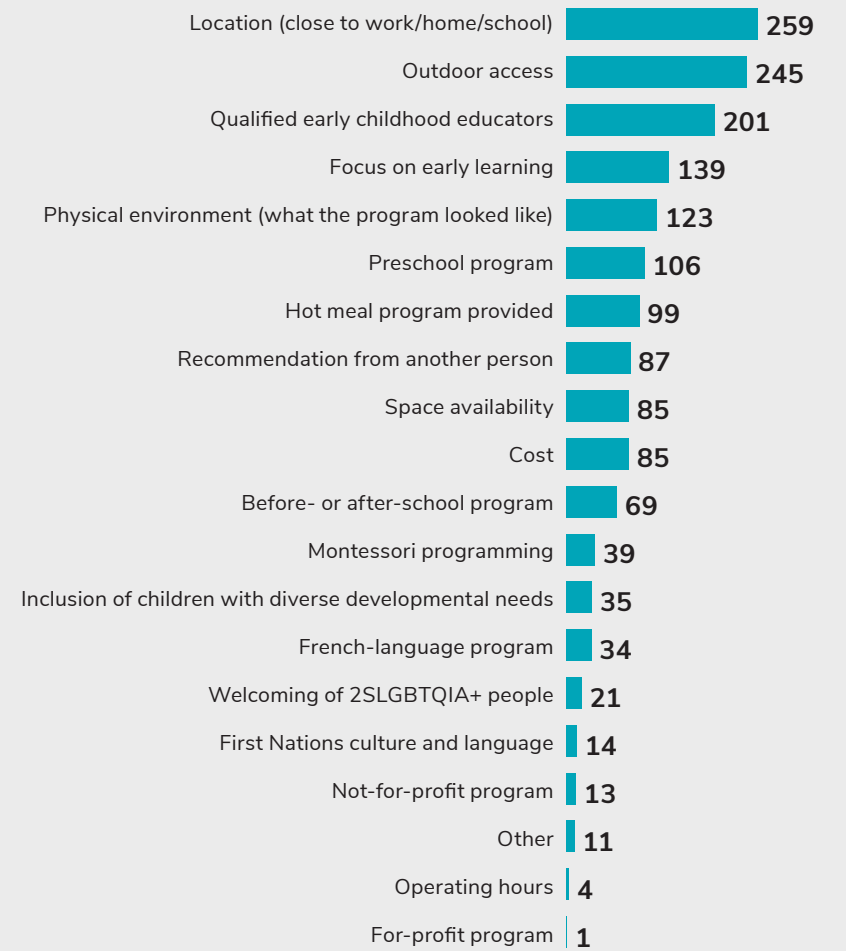
In Whitehorse, the Downtown neighbourhood was the most popular for respondents looking for child care, followed by Porter Creek/Kulan/Taylor, Whistle Bend and Copper Ridge. Outside of Whitehorse, responses indicated that Haines Junction and Dawson City were the communities with the most parents/caregivers looking for child care.

### Age group sought for child care



When looking for early learning and child care, parents/caregivers were seeking programs located close to either work, home, or school, followed closely by programs that have access to outdoors (either outdoor space accessible from the program, or outdoor activities offered by the program). Many also regarded qualified early childhood educators and centres with a focus on early learning as very important factors.

### Factors considered when choosing a child care provider



### Other recommendations

**Before** and after-school care located in schools or close by with free transportation

**Centres** that meet physical accessibility requirements



## Inclusion



There was a clear preference for programs that included First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing, French language programs and programs that welcomed 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. This highlights the importance of language, culture and supporting safe and welcoming early learning and child care environments.

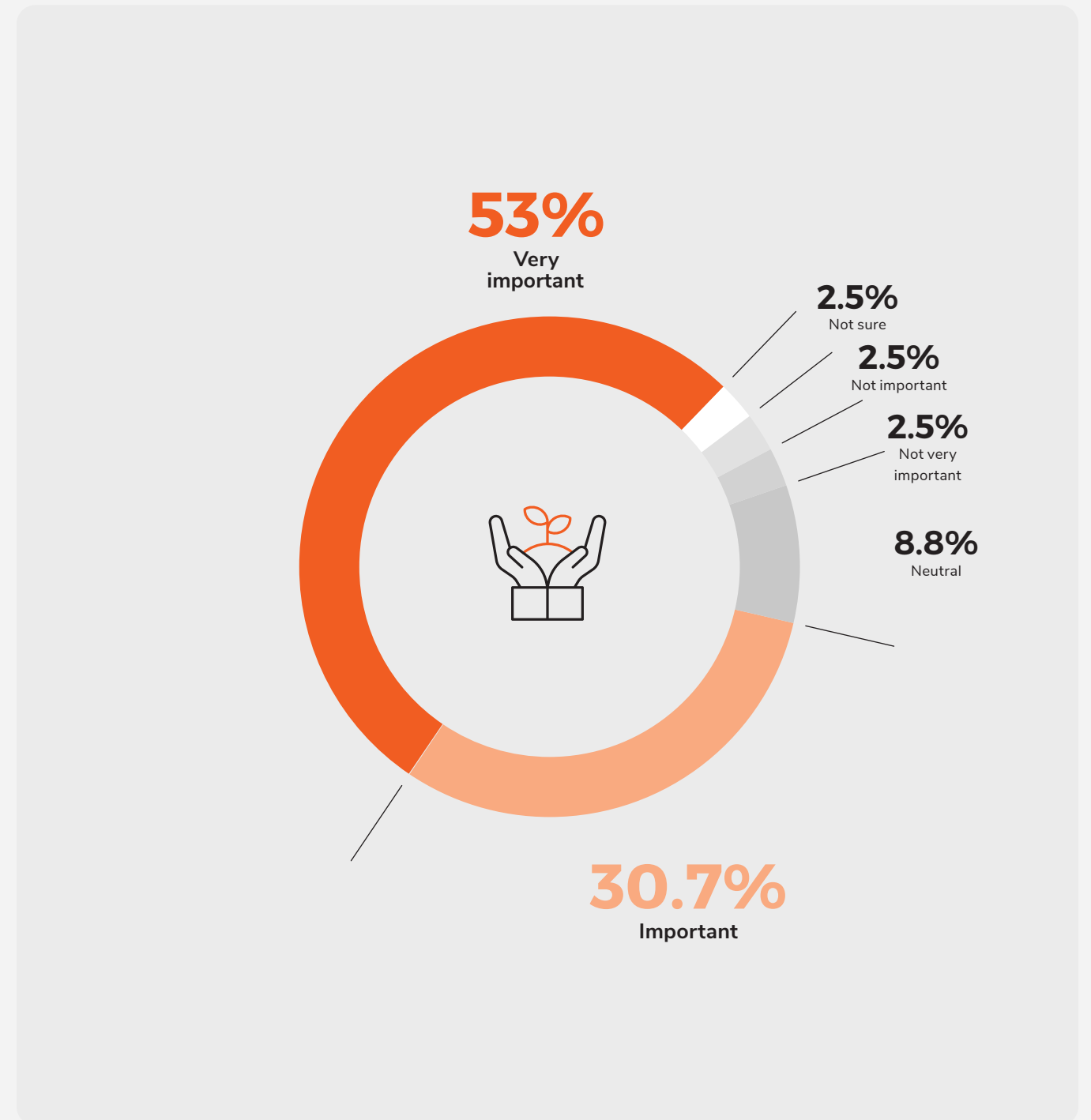
Respondents to the survey indicated the importance for children with diverse developmental needs to be included in licensed child care programs. This underscores the need to ensure that early learning and child care programs are accessible and supportive for children of all abilities.



*I had to call every daycare in town to find one that would accept my child with diverse needs. This is a huge issue and should definitely be regulated or at least written into policy by the government, both federally and territorially.*

– Survey respondent

## Importance of inclusion of children with diverse developmental needs in licensed child care programs



A child wearing a light blue puffer jacket over a grey sweater and light blue jeans is standing in a grassy field. The child is holding a large, colorful hula hoop (yellow, orange, and blue) around their waist. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and a bright sky.

## Early learning and child care sector perspectives

Most participants who took part in the public engagement expressed enthusiasm in the process. They felt that by sharing their thoughts, they could help improve outcomes for the children they teach and care for every day. In fact, at every meeting, participants said they felt hopeful for the first time in years about their profession. The reason being, that they were starting to see public recognition of their work as professionals.



## Quality

Participants prioritized quality as the most critical principle guiding their work, viewing it as the foundation from which other principles derive. Participants also felt that implementing measures to ensure high quality early learning and child care programming was the area where the most work was needed. Consequently, most comments from participants centered on enhancing the quality of early learning and child care in the Yukon.

### Child to educator ratios

We heard from early childhood educators, owners and operators, Yukon First Nations government officials, Yukon University instructors and students, and representatives of the Yukon Child Care Board, that the child to educator ratios are too high. The infant to educator ratio was cited repeatedly as an example. All agreed that lower ratios would allow educators to address the individual wellbeing and developmental needs of the children in their care.

Some participants felt adding a requirement for educators to work in pairs would provide additional supports for children and for the educators themselves. This was seen by participants as beneficial for the mental wellbeing of educators, while also promoting additional care for the children.

### Call for an early learning framework

At each session, there was a consistent request for an early learning framework to guide educational programming in early learning and child care programs. This issue was of particular importance for the Yukon Child Care Board.

It was noted that this framework should be flexible enough to accommodate various programming models, including those focusing on outdoor education, First Nations cultures and Francophone culture.

Most participants agreed that the British Columbia Early Learning framework, currently in use in many early learning and child care programs and taught at Yukon University, serves the Yukon well but felt a Yukon-specific framework should be developed in time.



*It takes a village to take care of children, not just parents so I think it is my responsibility to do the right thing for children.*

– Engagement session participant



*It's always important to remember what's best for the child, and when I think how critical the attachment is in the first year and the first eighteen months of life, how can I provide that to four infants at once?*

– Engagement session participant

## Professional recognition, certification, and training of early childhood educators

Participants strongly advocated for recognizing early learning and child care professionals as educators within the Child Care Act. They emphasized changing references from “child care worker” to “early childhood educator” to underscore professionalism and move away from the perception of early learning and child care as mere babysitting.

Many participants spoke in some way about the need to modernize certification processes and criteria for early childhood educators. Opinions varied on what these criteria should look like and what the prerequisites for working as an early childhood educator should be. While some favored diploma graduates, others supported

alternate pathways to certification based on competencies, experience, and education, acknowledging barriers to university-based programs in this field of work.

Despite differing views on certification criteria, there was strong consensus from both Whitehorse and rural community participants on the need for continuing education for early childhood educators. Many owner/operators and educators noted frustration from parents/caregivers when programs close for professional development, suggesting that recognizing early childhood educators as professionals and mandating professional development, like teachers, could garner more support.

There was also a push for a legal requirement that the individual in charge of an early learning and child care program have minimum qualifications, such as a diploma in early childhood education, strong leadership and communication skills, knowledge of the Yukon cultural landscape and extensive experience working with children. This would promote quality education and care, as well as increase professionalism in the sector.

In addition, First Nations governments' representatives who engaged in the process want to participate in defining the competencies required for early childhood educators working within their traditional territories.

### Other recommendations

<b>More</b> outdoor access/spaces	<b>More</b> clarity on cold temperature policy/regulation for operators	<b>Create</b> communities of practice for operators and educators	<b>Resurrection</b> of the Yukon Child Care Association	<b>Develop</b> strategies to appreciate and honour the efforts of early childhood educators by improving working conditions, thereby boosting retention rates.
<b>Expand</b> definition of “school-age” to include children registered in kindergarten	<b>Create</b> a registry of early childhood educators working in the Yukon	<b>Review</b> the maximum sound levels allowed in early learning and child care programs	<b>Funding</b> to early learning and child care programs should depend on the quality of care they provide	<b>Increased</b> funding for operators to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand square footage per child</li> <li>Build or create space for creative, gym, sensory and quiet spaces</li> <li>Make their facility more accessible</li> <li>Expand allowable expenses for program enhancements</li> </ul>



## Affordability

Participants in the engagement sessions primarily emphasized the need for increased funding for early learning and child care programs and educators, though some also addressed concerns about affordability for parents.

Rural operators in particular pointed out the increased costs in small Yukon communities, lower incomes within rural families and the necessity for foundational supports in early learning and child care programs such as meal programs, and at times, provisions like diapers and suitable clothing for children.

In the early childhood educators' sessions, there was a call for increased wages and benefits such as sick leave.

For some, it was about access to funding to upgrade their education and the possibility of expanded bursary programs to support post-secondary early learning and child care education.

### Other recommendations

**Increase** accessibility and affordability of drop-in spots



**Educator** wages should recognize experience and competencies

**Increased** funding to ensure all early learning and child care programs can provide meals to children

**Restore** funding for cleaning to the levels that were provided during COVID-19

**Provide** the ability for early learning and child care programs to increase parent fees to match the annual consumer price index



## Accessibility

Participants across all engagement sessions strongly agreed that early learning and child care programs should be accessible to every child, no matter their needs.

### Other recommendations

There was consensus that financial support should be available to help make the necessary physical infrastructure changes to welcome them.

**An** early learning and child care navigator in the department to assist new immigrant families and families of children with diverse needs to find the best space for their child

**A** registry of supported child care workers for operators to access

**More** professional development training to support educators to work with developmentally diverse children

**Increase** availability of 24-hour and emergency care



**More** professional development opportunities overall, including support for program closures for professional development days





## Inclusion

### Inclusion of diverse needs

Throughout each session, participants called for increased support for children with diverse or special needs. This included proposals for dedicated “inclusion” workers in every early learning and child care program, funded separately by the department and not counted in Child to educator ratios.

There was also a call for increased professional visits related to child development and specialized training for early childhood educators; working with these children.

There was strong consensus of the importance of bringing all children together, no matter their abilities or needs. The challenges in meeting these needs were clearly expressed by those addressing this issue.

### Cultural inclusion

Recognition of all cultures and the need for all cultures and individuals to feel safe and respected in early learning and child care programs were universally acknowledged to be important by all participants in all engagement sessions.

“*Excited to know our First Nations culture and traditional ways is accepted into our daily programming in the Child Care Family Day homes. I included the “daily” as this is the children’s way of life.*”  
 – Engagement session participant

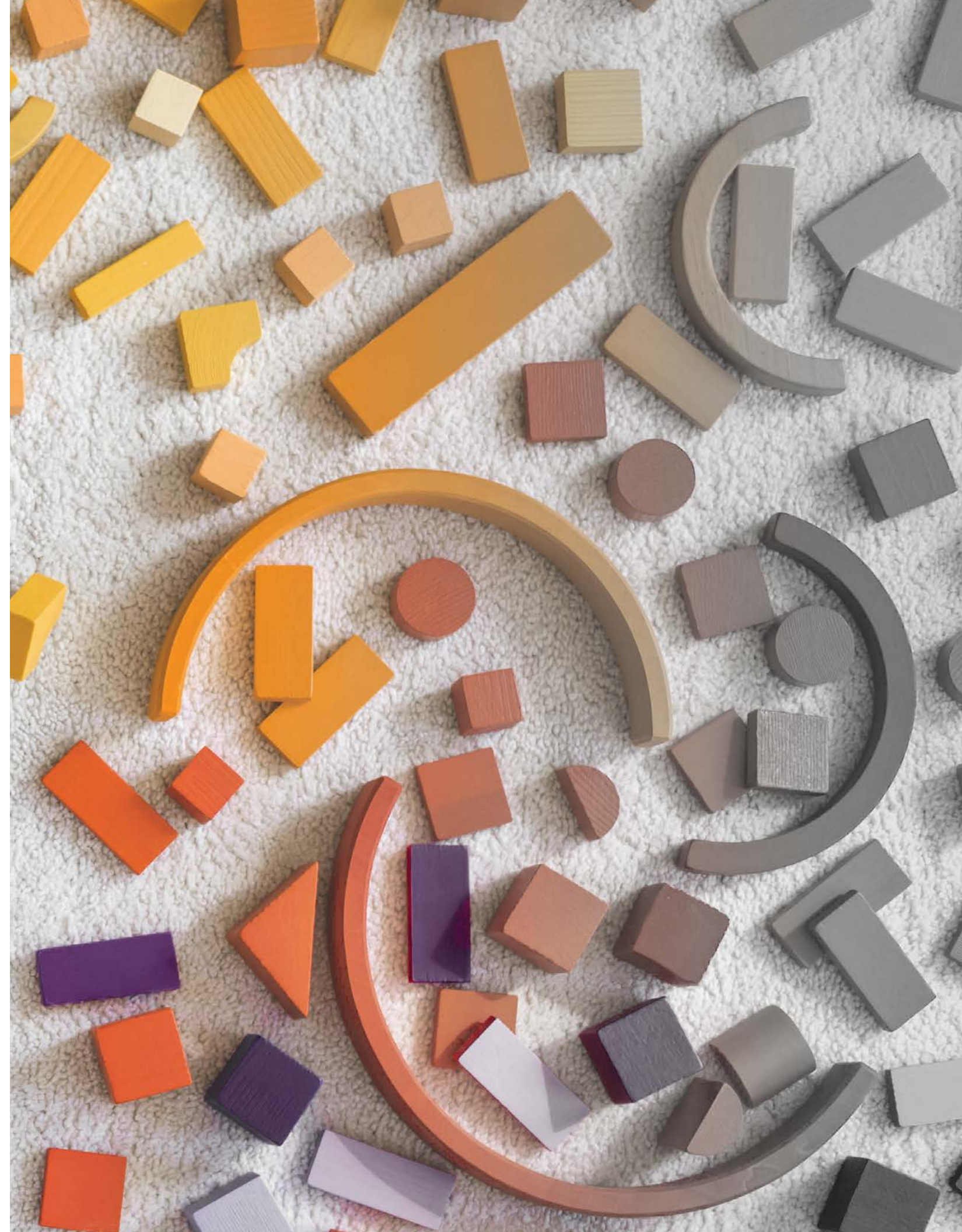
Recognizing that each Yukon First Nation has its own distinct culture, there was a call for defining how First Nations cultures would be recognized and how early learning and child care programs could work with the First Nation(s) in their community to ensure competencies for educators as well as what would constitute proper cultural education.

Yukon First Nations government officials who participated in the engagement sessions spoke to the importance of their First Nations cultures being taught in early learning and child care centres.

The Francophone community expressed their desire to receive services adapted to their linguistic and cultural needs and wanted to see this reflected in updated legislation.

### Other recommendations

<p><b>Definition</b> of “inclusion” in legislation</p>	<p><b>Provide</b> funding to early learning and child care programs based on a set of “inclusion” markers</p>		<p><b>Community-driven</b> circle of practice</p>	<p><b>Inclusion</b> of a French-speaking representative on any committee or working group related to early learning and child care services to ensure the voice of the French speaking community is heard</p>	
<p><b>Promote</b> more parental involvement, and community involvement in early learning and child care programs</p>		<p><b>Easier</b> pathways for Francophone educators in the field to practice in the Yukon</p>	<p><b>More</b> Indigenous early childhood educators</p>	<p><b>Additional</b> programming on Yukon First Nations cultures within early learning and child care programs</p>	<p><b>Orientation</b> for early childhood educators who are new to the Yukon and/or Canada.</p>





## Next steps



The Department of Education remains committed to working with First Nations governments, the Yukon Child Care Board, parents/caregivers, early learning and child care program owners and operators, educators, and early learning advocates as we continue the work of building a high-quality early learning and child care system that is inclusive, affordable, and accessible.

The feedback received in this engagement will be used to inform the drafting of the new Act. The input received emphasizes the importance of collaboration and a relationship-based approach to modernizing early learning and child care in the Yukon.





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