



Accessible, inclusive, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities help people to grow, participate and prosper.

What's Emerging

- Initiatives to support equity, well-being and inclusion of all people are established in education institutions in Niagara. This prior work will inform the intent of the new Niagara Region Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Community of Practice (CoP), to address DEI issues in the community by sharing resources, learning about DEI topics, and incorporating DEI into Human Resource practices.
- Analyzed data from the 2023 MDI survey of grades 4 and 7 students in Niagara elementary schools will inform planning and decision-making to strengthen Niagara children's ability to meet age-appropriate developmental expectations.
- Post-secondary institutions' planning is being affected by broader community factors, including economic impacts of the pandemic, a shortage of attainable housing, shifting labour market demands, increased numbers of mature students looking to upskill, and changes to government policies for international student visas.
- Food security for students is an increasing concern for educators at all levels in Niagara.
- Awareness is increasing that young families' access to quality childcare is essential for economic recovery and development in Niagara; and that strategies to attract and retain ELCC workers should focus on wage increases and expanded access to quality professional learning opportunities.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Continue to strengthen mental health literacy for students of all ages, with a focus on mental health literacy skill-building; student engagement; technology capacity-building; and evidence-informed approaches.
- Continue to monitor Early Development Instrument (EDI) testing and Middle Development Instrument (MDI) survey results for Niagara.
- Pay attention to the proliferation of impacts of technology and automation on both current and future workers. Shifting labour market demands will require supports for workers to access upskill training.
- Support awareness-raising that Early Years learning is a necessary part of education; that investment in ELCC is important for the socio-economic wellbeing of Niagara; and that addressing an ELCC workforce strategy will help to attract and enable young families to work in the region.
- Focus on partnerships between school boards, post-secondary institutions, and industry groups. Do this to support raising students' and families' awareness about labour market demand, and the training opportunities available to help students gain insights into job opportunities.

Indicators

- Levels of Educational Attainment
- Literacy and Essential Skills
- Student Mental Wellness
- School Enrolment Trends and Presence of International Students
- Technology Use and its Influence on Education and Learning
- EQAO Scores
- Early Years Learning



Happening Now

- The Niagara Children's Planning Council shares learning about Infant Mental Health, and population level child development data for Niagara, gathered through the early years ASQ (Ages and Stages Questionnaire); and Early Development Instrument (EDI) kindergarten scores. In late 2023, the new Middle Development Instrument (MDI) self-report survey was administered for the first time to Niagara children in grades 4 and 7.
- The COVID pandemic accelerated government investment in internet access as critical infrastructure. By June, 2024, four SWIFT Broadband construction projects valued at \$21,218,445 will bring better connectivity to an additional 5,646 premises in areas of Niagara Falls, Port Colborne, Fort Erie, Lincoln, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Wainfleet, West Lincoln and Grimsby.
- The focus on student mental health and wellbeing continues to rise. The provincial government is investing in school-based mental health supports; child and youth mental health is identified as important for life success; and post-secondary institutions are seeing 'pandemic fatigue' effects among students.
- Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and Assistants in Niagara earn only slightly above living wage. A 2022 Workforce Collective report shows that an Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) workforce strategy to strengthen access to quality childcare is essential for economic recovery, development and familial wellbeing. From now to the end of 2027, 9,146 children are on the waitlist of licensed childcare in Niagara. Both the demand and capacity exist to support at least 1,143 to 3,048 additional ECE jobs in Niagara.

