



Learning and Education

Having access to inclusive, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities is essential for people to grow, participate and prosper.

Happening Now

- Progress toward the Niagara Children's Planning Council Community Goal is being measured by Early Development Instrument (EDI) scores. The EDI is a questionnaire completed, every 3 years, by Ontario kindergarten teachers, measuring children's ability to meet age-appropriate developmental expectations in five key domains:
 - Physical Health & Well-Being
 - Social Competence
 - Emotional Maturity
 - Language & Cognitive Development
 - Communication Skills & General Knowledge.
- In 2018 in Niagara, EDI data was collected for 3,606 Senior Kindergarten students. The 2018 EDI results for Niagara show that:
 - Vulnerability in the Physical Health and Wellbeing Subdomain increased.
 - Vulnerability in the Social Competence Subdomain is higher than the provincial average.
 - Vulnerability in the Emotional Maturity Subdomain remains of concern; it is higher than the provincial average for the third time in a row.
- Educators, students, families and education institutions at all levels are experiencing significant challenges due to the unpredictability of changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A range of initiatives exist for older adults in Niagara to engage in community-based learning. Examples include: Third Age Learning Niagara; Lifelong Learning Niagara; Public Library programs; local municipal recreation programs; Cyber Seniors; and the TECH CONNECT project.
- A total of 22 EarlyON Family Centres in 16 zones across Niagara offer high-quality drop-in programs for children from birth to six years of age, their parents and caregivers.



What's Emerging

- Concerns around student mental health and well-being have been on the rise for 2 or 3 years, and are being exacerbated by COVID-19. Educators are anticipating challenges in this regard upon return to in-person school attendance.
- The Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) Working Group of the Niagara Children's Planning Council is working with school board partners to pilot the MDI tool with grade 4 and 7 students. Gathering data for children ages 7 to 12 will support measurement of impact and focused decision-making.
- Addressing students' food security is the focus of a range of initiatives. Evidence shows that 15.1% of households in Niagara are food insecure, above the 12.7% rate for Canada. Food insecurity is more prevalent among households with children than those without children. It is cited as one of the "top ten threats to the well-being of children in Canada". The Niagara Food Security Network emphasizes: "to effectively and equitably address food insecurity is to address inadequate income for individuals and families".
- An assessment is being made of the economic impact of COVID-19 on post-secondary institutions in Niagara. Factors include having to shift many programs to a virtual model, a decline in enrolment, and students having the ability to stay at home while studying virtually. For the 2020-21 school year, the impact on the Niagara economy is estimated to be between \$94.7 and \$117.6 million. The calculation includes effects on the Niagara rental market, public transit ridership revenue, student spending in Niagara, and available labour supply.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Continue to raise awareness of Early Development Instrument (EDI) testing results for Niagara, to guide decision-making about design of programs and services. Investment in early childhood development is an investment in health equity, and the overall well-being of our community.
- Strengthen equitable access to the internet; to technology; and to digital skills and confidence, across Niagara's school boards, post-secondary institutions, and community learning hubs, such as public libraries.
- Pay close attention to the impact of pandemic-related loss of presence of international students in Niagara; and lost opportunities for learners to participate in school boards' continuing education programs.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

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