

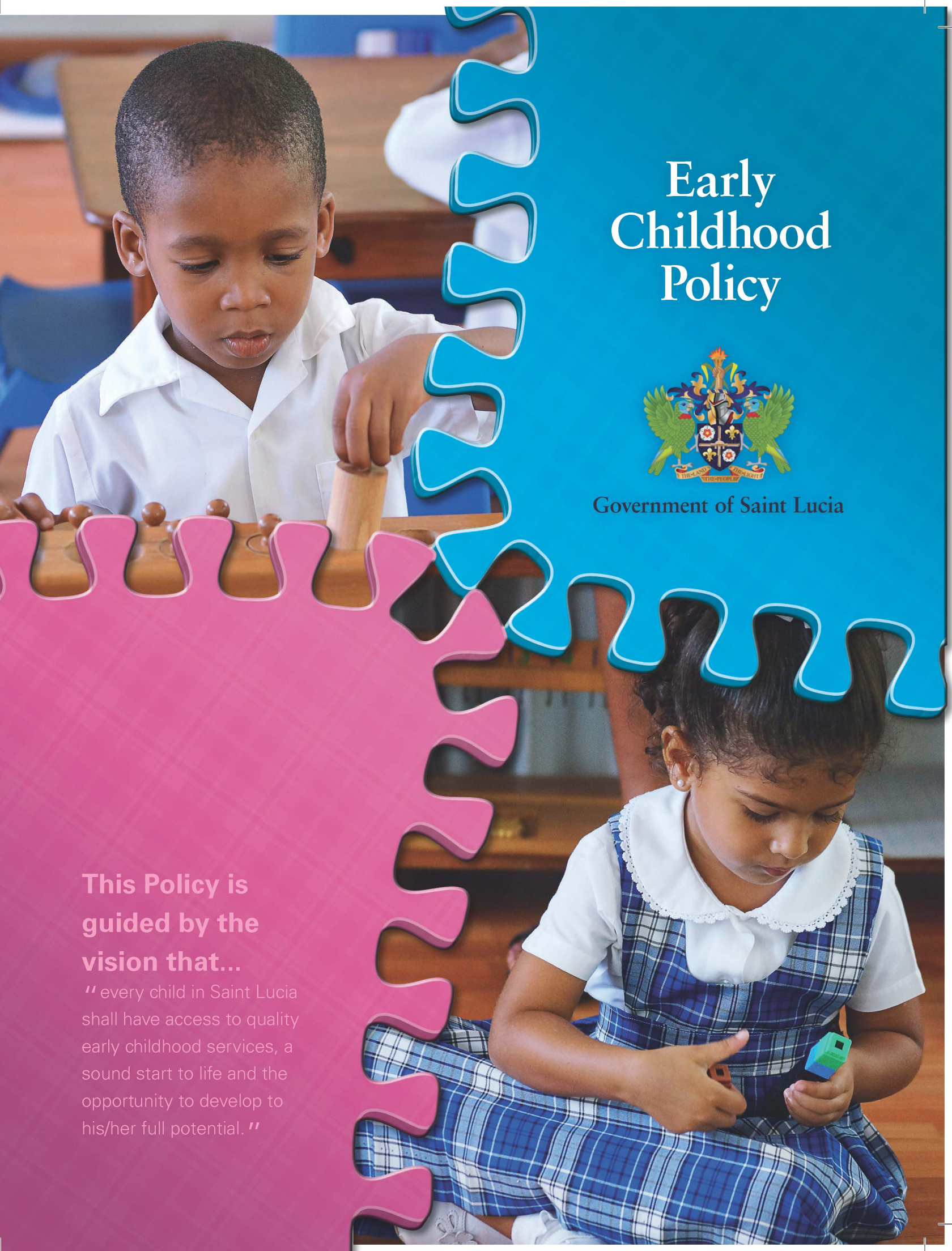
Early Childhood Policy



Government of Saint Lucia

**This Policy is
guided by the
vision that...**

" every child in Saint Lucia shall have access to quality early childhood services, a sound start to life and the opportunity to develop to his/her full potential. "



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Definitions

Competency Based Certification -

means the assigning of professional qualifications to early childhood practitioners as a result of their on the job knowledge, skills and years of experience.

Comprehensive -

encompasses all levels and stages of early years development from birth to eight years, as well as, all the other functions and elements which may influence or affect childcare services.

Early Childhood Centre -

can be defined as a building or converted house which is specifically constructed or designed to provide a service, which caters to the developmental needs of young children from birth to five years. These centres usually operate from as early as 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and should be staffed by specially trained personnel.

Early Childhood Education - Development (ECD)

encompasses the stimulation, nurturing and cognitive programmes that children between the ages of birth to eight years are exposed to and which are suitable for the child's age and stage of development. These can be provided either at an institution specially designed for that purpose or at home.

Home Day Care -

refers to a service rendered to parents/guardians by a care-giver, in the home or other setting identified by the care-giver, for children under the age of five years.

Home Visitation -

is an early childhood service delivery model where the caregiver visits the family and provides early stimulation to children as well as information, support and encouragement to parents.

In-Home Care -

is a flexible form of child care where an approved caregiver or the child's parents/guardian provides care in the child's home.

School-Based Early Childhood Development Centre -

refers to an early childhood centre which utilizes available space in a school and is an integral part of the establishment.

Corporate Early Childhood Development Centre -

is used to describe a centre established by a business or company to provide early childhood services to the children of its employees or other persons in direct contact with the company.

Minimum Standards -

refers to a set of guidelines sanctioned by the Government of Saint Lucia which state the essential requirements for providing early childhood services in Saint Lucia.

Quality -

refers to a system of childcare that exhibits good enough characteristics and practices, within the framework of prescribed standards of operation to impact favourably on the children and their parents/guardians who use the service.



Preamble

As part of its education mandate the Government of Saint Lucia has chosen to focus on universal access to early childhood education for all Saint Lucian children. Achieving this goal would necessitate the adoption of various new modalities in terms of service delivery. It is therefore proposed that the following options be implemented in light of the two basic models of ECE service delivery currently in existence on the island.

1. In the Public model which is government subsidized, the expansion of the RCP to underserved areas, the utilization of excess space in schools and the increased use of existing government centres are all presented as viable access options.
2. In the Private model where centres are wholly owned and operated by caregivers or administrators the use of home schooling, establishment of corporate centres and prospective private centres in underserved areas are all feasible options.

This Early Childhood Policy aims to provide a framework within which the Early Childhood Services in Saint Lucia can be strengthened to facilitate the achievement of the goal of universal access by 2015. It seeks to address deficiencies identified in the current service provisions¹ and to orient the sector in a direction that will ensure that all children of Saint Lucia receive the best possible start in life in achievement of the vision.

¹ Refer to Sector Profile in Appendix 1

This is consistent with local, regional and international commitments on early childhood development that the Government of Saint Lucia has signed on to, viz:

- a. The philosophy, principles and values that underpin the Education Sector Development Plan 2009-2014, being implemented by the Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development and Labour, and especially its focus on quality, equity, access, relevance, teacher development and the need for balanced learning.
- b. Education Act
- c. The World Fit for Children Declaration of April 2002.
- d. The Ibero-American Plan of Action for Children October 2001.
- e. The Kingston Consensus of October 2000.
- f. The Caribbean Plan of Action for Early Childhood Education Care and Development, endorsed by the CARICOM Heads of Government in July 1997.
- g. M.D.G.-Millennium Development Goals
- h. E.F.A – Education for All

- i. The Regional Guidelines for Developing Policy, Regulations and Standards in Early Childhood Development Services, published by the CARICOM Secretariat.
- j. The Regional Framework for Action for Children 2002-2015 approved by CARICOM in 2002, under which all member countries have committed to priority actions by 2011 including:
 - To develop and formally adopt **comprehensive ECD policies** with legislative and administrative reforms required for policy implementation ;
 - To develop, establish and implement national **ECD regulatory frameworks with standards** for early childhood services in keeping with regional and international guidelines/goals:

Importance of Early Childhood Development

Early childhood refers to the period in a child's life between birth and eight years of age. It is one of the most important phases and the period of rapid brain development. During this stage, character is formed and the foundation is laid for many basic social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills that are used throughout life.

A child's ability to adequately develop literacy, numeracy, and social skills are all influenced by the foundation that is laid in these early years. Even though Early Childhood Education spans birth to eight internationally, birth to five is being addressed as the early childhood period in this policy since formal primary education commences at five in Saint Lucia.

An adequate early childhood experience is dependent on the child being exposed to warm, caring environments that he/she trusts, with caregivers that provide opportunities for ongoing stimulation and holistic development. There is no preferred setting where such environments have to be created and they can be effectively developed in a variety of settings including the home, formal day care centres, preschools, libraries and community-based play groups. What is important is that the practitioners have the necessary dispositions, knowledge, skills

and materials to engage the children in developmentally appropriate activities.

Research has indicated that a failure to adequately develop the basic skills in these early years could lead to grade repetition in school and eventual poor academic performance, with a high possibility of anti-social behaviour to follow. Research has also cited a direct link between positive early childhood development experiences for children and participation in later schooling, reduction in participation in crime, reduction in pregnancy in the teenage years, productivity in the workplace and stability in marriage. The earlier positive early childhood experiences begin, the greater the impact on intellectual development, sociability, concentration and independence. However, the quality of early childhood experiences is critical to the success of the outcomes.²

Cost-benefit analyses of the return from investment in early childhood development have consistently demonstrated a high return on the investment³ - as high as 8:1 in some instances. This has led a panel of leading economists to conclude in 2007,⁴

Scope

This policy will apply to all providers of an early childhood service, including owners, caregivers, teachers, and persons appointed by the Government or any other authorised agency to interact with the early childhood service providers.

Vision

This Policy is guided by the vision that *"every child in Saint Lucia shall have access to quality early childhood services, a sound start to life and the opportunity to develop to his/her full potential."*

Policy Objectives

- a. To ensure that all children in Saint Lucia between the ages of birth to five (0-5) have the opportunity to access age-appropriate and developmentally-oriented early childhood services;
- b. To ensure that the quality of early childhood service provision is adequate for the health and safety

² See for example the World Bank Publication "From Early Child Development to Human Development" or the RAND Publication "Investing in Our Children"

³ Perry Preschool Program; Chicago Child-Parent Centers; The Carolina Abecedarian Program; amongst other references in the Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2007: "Strong Foundations" www.efareport.unesco.org

⁴ Copenhagen Consensus for Latin America and the Caribbean, San José, Costa Rica, 22-25 October 2007

of the children and appropriate for their developmental needs;

- c. Increase the percentage of certified and competent early childhood practitioners;
- d. Increase the active participation of parents, community and private sector in the development of the nation's children.

Strategies

- a. Integration of services provided to children to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach to children's needs in the early years.
- b. Creating and expanding early childhood services throughout the country;
- c. Specific targeting and provisioning for children at risk, including children with disabilities, children with other special needs, vulnerable children living in situations of poverty, abuse and neglect and children affected and infected by HIV/AIDS.
- d. Enforcing stipulated minimum service standards and facilitating the implementation of best practices by the providers of early childhood services in day care, preschool and home visitation programmes.
- e. Supporting and facilitating the implementation of best practices by the providers of early childhood

services at the centre level, in order to ensure that stipulated minimum levels of quality provision are achieved and maintained.

- f. Supporting, facilitating and promoting the professional development of early childhood practitioners
- g. Actively involving and supporting parents and guardians in early childhood services for their children.
- h. Regulating, monitoring and evaluation of early childhood services;
- i. Strengthening programming for transition between levels of early childhood development as well as transition to primary education i.e. infant, toddler, preschooler and kindergartener;

Specific Actions

The specific strategies and the actions that will be implemented in pursuit of these identified strategies include:

Integration of Services

The Policy proposes to take two (2) approaches towards achieving the integration of services, viz:

- Promote inter-sectoral collaboration, between the different sectors which provide services to children in the early years – health, education, community



services, private sector as well as any other relevant sectors; and

- Promote integrated management of services where appropriate e.g. in the provision of institutionalized services at the day care and pre-school level.

The specific actions that will be taken in this regard include:

- Establishment of the Council on Early Childhood Education provided for in Section 79 (1) of the Education Act No. 41 of 1999. This Council should have representation from all sectors working on children's issues to ensure that a comprehensive approach to children's development is taken.
- Inter-ministerial collaboration in the development and mainstreaming of child related policies in services for the child from birth to five years, either through or with the active participation the Council on Early Childhood Development.
- Integration of the management and administration of the day care and pre-school services under the jurisdiction of the Early Childhood Services Unit of the Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development and Labour.
- Encouragement and facilitation of partnerships between Agencies and NGOs responsible for children's welfare and the private sector, to promote Early Childhood Development as an integral part of nation building.

Expansion of Services

The Policy envisages the expansion of early childhood services as being achieved through a variety of approaches, including:

- Strengthening the capacity of the parent in the home and other caregivers to provide the appropriate support, especially early stimulation and nutrition, for the birth to three age cohorts;
- Expanding the availability of institutionalized provision, especially for the age three to five cohorts.

The expansion will not be restricted to the establishment of centres and will also include the introduction of innovative services like home visiting programs, mobile toy and book libraries, community education activities and the like.



The role of the government will be to create the conditions that will facilitate Universal access to Early Childhood Development services, while ensuring that acceptable levels of service are provided.

The specific actions that will be taken in this regard include:

- Identification of geographical areas which are under-served by early childhood services.
- Development of a costing model for the provision of early childhood services to inform policy decisions related to expansion of services.
- Provision of incentives and supports for the provision of early childhood services in communities which are under-served, including access to duty-free concessions, tax deductibles and rebates; classification under the Micro and Small Scale Business Enterprises Act, No. 19 of 1998; access to support from the Small Enterprise Development Unit; and access to other relevant government programmes.
- Making excess capacity in public schools available for early childhood services.
- Provision of incentives and supports to business places and sporting facilities with early childhood services within their operations.

- Provision of duty free concession on educational materials coming from overseas to all licensed service providers.
- Development and adoption of standards and regulations to guide the quality of services provided.

Targeting Children at Risk

There are at least three (4) categories of children in Saint Lucia who can be considered to be “at-risk” and in need of special consideration concerning access to early childhood services. These are:

1. Children Living in Poverty
2. Children Infected with/Affected by HIV/AIDS
3. Children with Disabilities
4. Children affected by Migration of Parents/Guardians

The Policy envisages targeting these at risk children as being achieved through a variety of approaches, including:

- Strengthening the capacity of parents/guardians and caregivers in the home to provide the appropriate support, especially early stimulation and nutrition, for the birth to three age cohorts;
- Expanding the availability of institutionalized provision, especially for children from birth to three cohorts.

The Policy also envisages that while government will provide the enabling environment that supports the achievement of access to early childhood services for all, service delivery options will be selected from either public or private modalities. In areas where residents are so inclined, the services could be provided as a community-owned and operated service. The expansion will not be restricted to the establishment of centres; private, corporate or otherwise, but will also include the introduction of innovative services like home visiting programs, mobile toy and book libraries, community education activities and the like.

The policy recognizes that the provision of services to children with disabilities and special needs will require additional resources, above and beyond those required for the average child. Within this

context, the role of the government will be to create the enabling conditions, and facilitate access to the additional resources that will be needed for the provision of such services, while ensuring that acceptable levels of service are maintained.

The specific actions that will be taken in this regard include:

- Identification of geographical areas in which children are living in situations of high risk.
- Designation of early childhood services targeted for “at-risk children” as an “eligible service” for support under the Saint Lucia Social Development Fund (SSDF).
- Provision of incentives and support for the provision of early childhood services in communities where significant numbers of children have been identified as being at risk, including access to duty-free concessions and tax deductibles; classification of identified communities under the Special Areas Development Act, No. 2 of 1998; access to support from the Small Enterprise Development Unit; and access to other relevant government programmes.
- Provision of incentives and support for retro-fitting early childhood centres to accommodate children with disabilities, including access to duty-free concessions, tax deductibles and rebates; access to support from the Small Enterprise Development Unit; and access to other relevant government programs.
- Provision of subventions to programs which accommodate children with disabilities based on an agreed upon payment for each such child provided for by the program.
- Provision of subventions to programs which accommodate children identified as living in vulnerable situations including HIV/AIDS, poverty, abuse and neglect. Such children will be identified using a means test and the subventions will be based on an agreed upon payment for each such child that is provided for by the program.
- Development of Protocols for incorporating children infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS into early childhood programs.
- Education for parents and practitioners on HIV/AIDS, including modalities for addressing the stigma and discrimination related to HIV/AIDS.

- Inter-ministerial collaboration in the programs targeted at children at risk.
- Retrofitting of available capacity in primary schools to provide places.

Improving Quality of Early Childhood Development

The Policy envisages improvement in quality service provision, whether in an institutionalized or home setting as being achieved through a variety of approaches including:

- Minimum standard regulations for the operation of the sector; and
- Facilitation of and support for improvements in early childhood learning environments, in keeping with scientific research findings and acknowledged best practices for early childhood development.

The specific actions that will be taken in this regard include:

- Early approval, dissemination and implementation of Minimum Standards and Operational Regulations for early childhood service providers as provided for in Section 80 of the Education Act, No. 14 of 1999. These Minimum Standards and Regulations should address, inter alia ,



health, fire, safety, staff/child ratio, furniture, management, teacher/caregiver qualifications, insurance and other programming and instructional areas.

- Revision of the National Curriculum in collaboration with the primary school curriculum officers, to ensure child centered principles and harmonisation between the different educational phases, with a focus on emergent literacy. The revised curriculum should specify the learning and development outcomes to be achieved at each level.
- Development of curriculum guides for use by early childhood service providers at each level.
- Review and formalization of the transition process from preschool to kindergarten and Grade one, in order to ensure compatibility in curriculum content and teaching strategies/approaches.
- Establishment and maintenance of one (1) model ECD centre/ Centre of Excellence with an attached resource centre in each Education District.
- Provision of support and incentives for improvements in the physical learning environments, including upgrading of physical facilities and the purchase of appropriate resource materials for use in early childhood programming. These incentives could include the provision of duty concessions, tax deductibles, and access to development support through the Small Enterprise Development Unit.
- On-going research to gather accurate data on the impact of Early Childhood Education, Care and Development Services on children's development.
- Establishment of business plans and cost effective strategies which identify the priorities for action within each ECECD setting.
- Development and implementation of standard operational procedures for monitoring and supervision of standards in all early childhood settings in keeping with regional standards established by CARICOM.

Inclusion of all early childhood settings within the remit of the Educational Districts for the purposes of identifying centres and more effective supervision and monitoring

Professional Development of Practitioners

The policy will encourage the professional development of practitioners by:

- Supporting and facilitating their organisation into a representative body with which the policy-makers can interact. This will make it much easier to involve the practitioners in development initiatives than is possible at present with the only means of involving them being to target them at their respective centres.
- Mandating participation in relevant professional development activities and training.
- Supporting and facilitating a regime for professional certification of eligible practitioners.

The specific actions that will be taken in this regard include:

- Support for the establishment of an organized body to represent the interests of practitioners at community, educational district and national levels.
- Inclusion of authorized practitioner representatives in national policy making institutions including the Council on Early Childhood Education.

- Designation of Early Childhood as one of the eligible areas for receipt of scholarships for tertiary training.
- Inclusion of an Early Childhood option in the Teacher Training program of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College
- Organizing professional development activities specifically targeted at early childhood practitioners on an ongoing basis.
- Inclusion of early childhood practitioners in teacher training programmes refocused to include the professional development of practitioners as early childhood educators.
- Development of a system for the assessment and competency based certification of early childhood practitioners at Levels I (worker under supervision), Level II (semi autonomous worker) and Level III (supervisory position), consistent with the standards which have been adopted at the CARICOM level.
- Harmonisation of pay and working conditions with other sub-sectors within the education system on the basis of comparability and equity.





Parental Involvement

The Policy will support both the education of parents and their participation in the design and functioning of early childhood services.

The specific actions that will be taken in this regard include:

- Support for the formation and operation of Parent-Teacher Associations in all programs.
- Support for parent education programs utilizing a variety of media including workshops, home visits, mass media, social activities at centre level and community level activities.
- Promotion of the value of Early Childhood programmes in parent and community groups.
- Focused messages in a variety of fora – mass media, community level e.g. Billboards, workplace activities, churches - aimed at developing an understanding amongst parents/ guardians of their role as the first educators of their children.
- Provision of clear guidance to parents/guardians on anticipated impact of unhealthy or damaging influences, including those in the environment and the media.
- Identification of popular education methodologies to use in parenting education (and adapt for

use with school aged children in pre-parenting education also).

- Development of modules and training for the providers of Home Day Care Services to ensure the provision of adequate and appropriate developmental programmes.

Application

This policy will apply to all providers of an early childhood service, including owners, caregivers, teachers and persons appointed by the Government or any authorized agency to interact with the early childhood service providers.

Management, Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

The responsibility for managing and monitoring the implementation of this Policy shall rest with the Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, and Labour, through its authorized officers.

The day-to-day activities involved in managing the policy shall be delegated to the Early Childhood Education Services Unit, who shall report to the Chief Education Officer on the implementation of the Policy on a regular basis, as designated by the Chief Education Officer.

Ongoing monitoring shall be the responsibility of the Early Childhood Services Unit in collaboration with other relevant departments of the Ministry Education, Human Resource Development and Labour and the Early Childhood Council. The impact of the implementation of the policy shall be formally evaluated every three (3) years.

The specific actions that will be taken in this regard include:

- Establishment of an inspectorate under the aegis of the Early Childhood Services Unit to assess and report on the performance of all early childhood development settings on all indicators.
- Provision of timely feedback and follow-up for action by the management of the early childhood development centres.
- Development, implementation and evaluation of standard operational procedures for monitoring and supporting the achievement of standards in all early childhood settings.
- Development of standards and protocols for guiding services and interventions to meet the needs of

all children including: vulnerable, special needs and exceptionally gifted children.

- Establishment of screening procedures for the early detection of vulnerable children;
- Assessment of the effectiveness of instructional materials and pedagogy used with all children including: vulnerable, special needs and exceptionally gifted children.
- Evaluation of the impact, coherence and effectiveness of Early Childhood programming and services using established Management Information Systems;
- Organization of professional development activities specifically targeted at assessing the competencies of early childhood practitioners on an ongoing basis.

Implement standards and procedures for licensing and enforcement of regulations. All processes and procedures to guide registration and licensing of early childhood centres including compliance measures and sanctions are detailed in the Minimum Standards and Regulations documents.



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Produced in collaboration with the UNICEF Office for the Caribbean Area

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