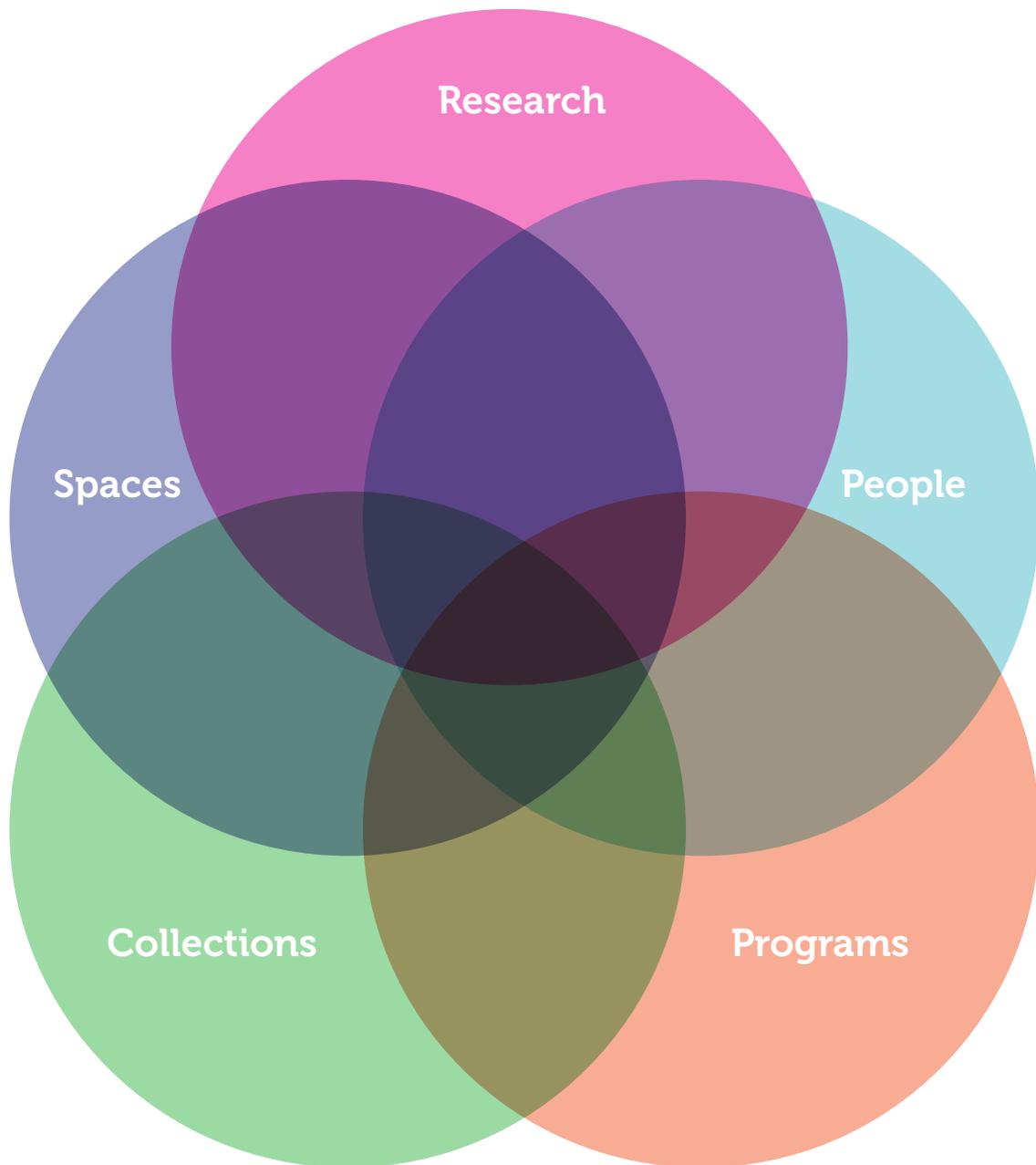


EARLY LEARNING STRATEGY

Our Five Areas of Focus



OUR FOUNDATION

Early learning is a longstanding and key priority at Calgary Public Library. When Memorial Park Library—Alberta’s first public library—opened in 1912, library services for children were an important part of its offerings. The following year, Calgary Public Library hired its first dedicated children’s librarian. Her responsibilities included choosing books for children to read and conducting weekly storytimes.

Over the years, we’ve built on this foundation and our approach has evolved with new knowledge of children’s brain development. Visit a Calgary Public Library location today and you’ll find children learning through play in a 22-tonne red fire engine or interactive children’s area, in addition to accessing a rich variety of collections, and participating in engaging programs. Research on early learning—which takes place from birth to age five—underpins our work. The most important periods of development happen at the very beginning stages of life and play is the principal way that children learn in these early years. Healthy development in early childhood sets the course for a child’s future, leads to kindergarten readiness, and prepares children for lifelong learning and success.

With more than 89,000 kids under the age of five in Calgary, the demographics of our city demand a significant investment in high quality early learning. A smart, literate community is essential to sustaining our city’s economic prosperity. Children and their caregivers must be supported early on, well before kids begin school. Public libraries are uniquely positioned to support engagement in early learning because we are accessible and free. In Calgary, through our network of 19 community libraries (growing to 21 by 2019), and various outreach initiatives and partnerships, we have extensive reach. Every day, we interact with thousands of children, parents, and caregivers, including at-risk and vulnerable populations, and newcomers to Canada. Moreover, we continue to support people as they grow; libraries are one of the only civic services that engage with people throughout their lives. As a centre for lifelong learning, we are committed to creating opportunities for growth and development for everyone, beginning in a child’s early years.

OUR FOUNDATION

New research continues to push us in fresh directions. Our comprehensive approach to early learning means our libraries now have new tools. Calgary Public Library is not just a lender of books—we are an igniter of human potential. This starts in a child's first years, when, through play, they begin to learn and make sense of the world. We are continually crafting new opportunities for engaging young children and their caregivers, both inside and outside our libraries. Just as we encourage children to experiment and try new things, we are embracing such an approach ourselves. We also recognize and welcome the opportunity to work together with the many people and organizations who are actively contributing to early learning in Calgary. We believe that through collaboration, we can leverage collective knowledge, experience, and resources to enhance programs and services, and, more broadly, contribute to building a stronger city together.

The Library is well positioned to take a leadership role and help make a difference in the lives of young children and their families. We are supporting the needs of families in Calgary and surrounding areas, helping to ensure children, in their first five years, develop the foundational skills they need for lifelong learning, and that parents and caregivers are empowered and supported as they help their children learn and grow.

OUR FIVE AREAS OF FOCUS

A holistic and evidence-based approach led Calgary Public Library to identify five areas of focus that form our transformative Early Learning Strategy: spaces, people, collections, programs, and research.

SPACES

Calgary Public Library is building a city-wide network of Early Learning Centres. These vibrant, interactive, and multimodal spaces engage children ages birth to five in play-based learning. The first Early Learning Centre opened at Fish Creek Library in March 2016. Based on the successes and learnings here, and with philanthropic support from individuals, organizations, and municipal, provincial, and federal governments, we've opened Early Learning Centres at five more libraries, including our first nature playground, an outdoor Early Learning Centre at Forest Lawn Library. Indoors or outdoors, these are dedicated spaces for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers to learn through play, and a place where parents and caregivers feel comfortable, safe, engaged, and connected with each other, while interacting with their children. In these spaces, children and caregivers discover five early literacy practices that foster and develop early learning skills: talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing.

Early Learning Centres are intentionally designed to be inviting and enticing to kids, with experiential and moveable activity centres, props, and games, to support play and active learning. In designing our spaces, attention has been given to ensuring they are inspiring, interactive, accessible, attractive, flexible, developmentally appropriate, durable, and print-rich. Use of loose parts in early learning spaces is a special feature of our design because we know how important movement and discovery of small pieces is to children's development. We also know the importance of quiet spaces, so many of our Early Learning Centres contain reading nooks—cozy and contemplative spaces—for more quiet, focused learning.

These spaces are free and accessible to all, and create an experience families might not otherwise have. Early Learning Centres are designed to be open-ended and interactive, so that play within the space is freely chosen by the child. Children are able to engage in the space in the way they choose, opening up a multitude of opportunities for learning based on their interests. These multifaceted spaces nurture children's early learning development in motor, social, language, problem solving, and creativity skills. The spaces are overseen by knowledgeable and experienced staff and supported by our Early Literacy Volunteer Corps, who are trained to engage with visitors in the space and facilitate play-based activities.

Each Early Learning Centre has been designed with a variety of activity centres for families including: a baby/toddler zone; creative writing and art spaces; creative build areas for small and large constructive elements and other manipulatives; light table and sensory play opportunities; reading nooks; and storytelling and dramatic play spaces through use of puppets, costume play, and small and/or large scale theatre areas. See our Design Guidelines (Appendix A) for more details.

- SPACES** Each of our Early Learning Centres is built around a distinct concept, intended to provide inspiration for the space's design and features. Because the spaces are all different, children and their parents are eager to travel throughout the city and visit new community library locations. Currently, children and their families can explore:
- Fish Creek Library | The World is Your Stage
 - Village Square Library | Jungle Rainbow
 - Central Library | The New Adventures of Engine 23 (a decommissioned fire truck turned Early Learning Centre)
 - Quarry Park Library | Read and Play
 - Shawnessy Library | Into the Woods
 - Forest Lawn Library Nature Playground | Eco-Sustainability

Building upon the momentum of the initial trial and testing of Early Learning Centres at Fish Creek, Village Square and Central Library's Engine 23, the Library Foundation identified the Calgary Foundation as a lead philanthropic investor for early learning. The approval of a \$1 million Major and Signature Grant from the Calgary Foundation and an anonymous donor has resulted in the creation of four Calgary Foundation Early Learning Centres, which are scheduled to open at Saddletowne Library, Forest Lawn Library (an indoor space that complements the outdoor nature playground), Signal Hill Library, and Crowfoot Library by the end of 2017.

At New Central Library, opening in 2018, our Early Learning Centre will incorporate full-body play, with safe spaces to slide, crawl, climb, and swing. Our goal is to foster active, play-based learning at every Library in Calgary, and the Library Foundation is currently seeking philanthropic investment to support the creation of these spaces. We're also adding more outdoor play options that incorporate natural elements. Bringing the Library experience outside provides new opportunities for learning, and reinforces our belief that the inspiration the Library provides is boundless.

PEOPLE Staff, partners, and volunteers are integral to our Early Learning Strategy, because without knowledgeable and dedicated human resources, our other efforts will not succeed. We have provided opportunities for staff and volunteers to learn about play principles, early literacy basics, and brain development. They're taking their new understanding into our libraries, as well as into their own lives and networks. We are talking and working with community partners, including Mount Royal University, Bow Valley College, Palix Foundation, The City of Calgary, YYC Plays Sector Development Group, and Vivo for Healthier Generations, to ensure we are delivering the best possible early learning tools to Calgarians.

Experts in early learning have been hired to work for the Library in the design of programs and services. This approach ensures we are using best practices and building and diversifying Library staff capacity. Inside libraries, trained staff are overseeing the new Early Learning Centres, taking on fresh responsibilities, and building stronger connections with young families and children. As they engage with our youngest members in new ways, it's also changing how they interact with all Library members.

Through partnerships with educational and community partners, we have developed a strong professional learning series for staff, to build staff skills around engaging with families in early literacy and learning through play. We continue to work with community partners to enhance our training.

We recognize, as well, the importance of adult connections to kids and supportive mentorship to families. Parents and other significant caregivers are a child's first and best teachers and we strive to support them in building children's early literacy skills, so that children are ready to learn and read once they begin school.

New relationships are also being built among families. Parents and caregivers who come to the Library are meeting other parents and children. These new connections help to combat social isolation and ultimately strengthen the community.

To further support our Early Learning Centres, we created new volunteer roles for adults, who are members of our Early Literacy Volunteer Corps. Following training, volunteers support Library staff by facilitating small activities, engaging one-on-one with children and parents, and keeping play spaces stocked. As a result, volunteers are also building relationships with members, further strengthening the connections that children and adults develop with the Library. Volunteers also participate in outreach activities, including Story Truck visits to day homes, extending connections into the community.

COLLECTIONS Curating collections, including age-appropriate material for early learners, is a longtime strength of Calgary Public Library and its librarians. For decades, parents have relied on us to help select books for their children, and to foster literacy from an early age. In today's digital age of ubiquitous information, we continue to excel at curating resources for our members.

To strengthen access to early learning materials, we have introduced collections organized around themes or interests. Children are empowered when they pick their own materials, and they start to understand who they are and develop a love of reading. Our five thematic collections are: Dinosaurs, Animals, Princesses and Palaces, Things That Go, and ABC-123. To provide easy access for busy parents and caregivers on the go, families and children can also choose a bag full of books. Our Quick Picks selections offer a new way to access assorted age appropriate materials, enabling children to expand current interests and discover new ones. For general collections, we have moved away from traditional shelving toward book bins, so that picture books and board book covers are more visible and easier to browse for both children and adults.

While themed collections, picture books, and board books are all available inside our Early Learning Centres, increasingly, we are no longer simply a lender of books. For example, in November 2016 we introduced a pilot initiative featuring early literacy kits on wheels, which was created through an innovative pilot partnership between Calgary Public Library and YMCA Calgary with a philanthropic investment from Imperial. Read and Play Early Literacy Kits, available to be checked out for three weeks from Quarry Park Library at Remington YMCA, contain toys and books for children, and a parent's guide full of rhymes, songs, activities, and tips to help build early literacy skills. This donor-funded pilot brought together the Library's expertise in cognitive literacy and YMCA Calgary's expertise with physical literacy. The wildly popular kits come in six themes: Nature, Farm Animals, Things That Go, Dinosaurs, Moving and Shaking, and Fun With Food.

PROGRAMS Early learning programs at the Library are targeted and sophisticated. They are enriched through strategic partnerships, and are increasingly being delivered outside the Library's walls. We are spending more time in the community, meeting people where they are.

In 2015, we launched Library Month at Your Daycare. For one month, Library staff and volunteers visit daycares, to interact with preschoolers through story time, songs, rhyme, and play, and to educate daycare staff and parents about early learning principles. Staff and volunteers visit the same daycare once a week for a month and use the same songs and rhymes each week, so children and daycare staff can learn them. Its success spurred us to expand the program model to day homes in Calgary, piloted with our Story Truck in the summer of 2017. Through these programs, we are reaching people who may not have the ability to come into our libraries, and we are building our reputation throughout the city as a trusted, credible source for early learning support.

We are also travelling beyond Calgary with our Book Truck, taking Library services to neighbouring Indigenous communities. Book Trucks contain collections that support reading interests for all ages, including books for babies and picture books, and also offer free library cards.

Inside our walls, we are regularly exploring new ways to strengthen early learning opportunities and make our programs more accessible and inclusive. We are committed to designing early learning programs that meet diverse community needs and support inclusivity. As an example, Dual-Language Storytime provides an opportunity for parents and children whose home language may not be English to participate in an early learning experience that supports the development of home language literacy skills and English. We have also recently begun exploring new opportunities to collaborate with the Indigenous community to bring Indigenous culture and heritage into our storytime programming for parents and children. For example, in Fall of 2017 we will be piloting new programs including: Indigenous storytime with Shirley Hill, which will bring traditional oral stories, songs, and dance to our drop-in storytime programs; and the delivery of Grandmother Turtle program, in partnership with the Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society, a learning program for children and parents based on the Seven Sacred Teachings of love, wisdom, respect, truth, humility, honesty, and courage. The Indigenous way of life is built around these seven teachings, and the teachings are passed on through song, play, dancing, drumming, and traditional storytelling.

Additionally, play is being incorporated into more programs, such as our popular Words and Wiggles program for children ages birth to five and Colossal Calgary Playdates for children ages birth to three that aim to create different ways of thinking about play for children. Colossal Calgary Playdates show parents that play can happen with simple everyday objects found in the home and that opportunities for learning are limitless.

RESEARCH Research in early learning has guided our past efforts, and continues to shape our present practice and push it forward. We've learned from the invaluable work of academics at the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, The Palix Foundation, Mount Royal University's Centre for Child Well-Being, Alberta's Early Child Development Mapping Project, and The First 2,000 Days Network. Research extensively informs our work, from the design of our Early Learning Centres based on cognitive development research into literacy skills development, to programs and services for children and their families that support learning and growth, to learning opportunities provided for staff and volunteers on early literacy, brain development, and play.

We are developing and trialing sophisticated new Library programs, services, and spaces. Such experimentation has guided our plans for the New Central Library, where our Children's Library and Early Learning Centre, encompassing more than 16,000 square feet of space, will open in 2018. Meanwhile, in September 2017, 15 students earning a Bachelor of Child Studies from Mount Royal University will work with the Library on multiple early learning projects as part of a Capstone course, including supporting our Early Learning Centres.

Looking forward, we will continue to infuse the results of research into our approach, and we hope to contribute to new research in the field, ultimately pushing the world of early learning forward in libraries globally. Enabled through philanthropic investment, our long-term goal is to create the world's first applied research centre for early childhood learning in a library. This living laboratory would be a place to trial innovative new ways to help unlock the potential within all of us. Academic learning would extend from a post-secondary setting into libraries, where our laboratory would help build better evidence-based programs and services.

OUR FUTURE Calgary Public Library wants to ensure all Calgary's children and parents have access and opportunity to maximize their learning potential. We're also looking beyond our city, aiming to leverage our impact and provide our early learning tools to children and families globally. We are building a model that can be adapted and scaled, and we will share our knowledge and evidence-based practices with public libraries around the world.

We are envisioning our Early Learning Centres as the best places in the world for children from birth to age five to learn through play. These spaces are an important component of our design of new libraries. By planning for, and building, unique and high-quality Early Learning Centres in every library in Calgary, we will create a network of free and safe spaces for families to curiously explore, both indoors and outdoors. These centres will become destinations, encouraging children and their caregivers to travel to new parts of their city. The design of these centres will be shared broadly, to allow other cities to build these important spaces.

We will continue to build new relationships and strengthen existing relationships with partners, because collaboration is crucial to our work. Our staff and volunteers will continue to receive training and supports to approach their work with knowledge and confidence. We will work to find new ways of fostering social connections with members who need it most, positioning the Library as a significant and inclusive public place that contributes to the fabric of Calgary neighbourhoods.

Our collections and programs will also continue to evolve and expand, to reach all children in our communities. Our Story Truck and programming in daycares and day homes are a start, but we must continue to innovate to provide services that make a difference and are able to reach those who need us most.

Research guides our current approach, and, looking forward, is the area we are most boldly reimagining. By creating the world's first applied research centre for early childhood learning in a Library and exploring research partnerships with post-secondary institutions, we want to build Calgary's reputation as a global leader in early childhood learning in libraries.

Calgary Public Library has and will continue to invest its resources to make this strategy a reality, but it cannot achieve this vision alone. Through the Calgary Public Library Foundation, the Library is actively seeking \$20 million of philanthropic investment in early learning as part of its capital campaign, *Add In*—the Campaign for Calgary's Library.

Underlying these goals is a commitment to constant progress and evolution. While libraries are often perceived as staid institutions, Calgary Public Library is dedicated to embracing experimentation and change, so we can grow and become better, and, ultimately, make a profound difference in all communities.

By The Numbers

177 people have joined the Early Literacy Volunteer Corps since the new opportunity was created to support Early Learning Centres in June 2016.

Read and Play Early Literacy Kits, introduced in November 2016, have been checked out over

2,300 times.

The New Adventures of Engine 23 opened in June 2016.

Since then, **17,513** children and their parents have attended 386 classes at the decommissioned fire truck turned Early Learning Centre.

123,311 children and their families attended 4,634 Early Literacy and School Readiness programs offered by Calgary Public Library in 2016.

Calgary Public Library made **694** daycare visits through the Library Month at Your Daycare program in 2016, reaching people who may not have the ability to come into libraries.

More than **100** Library staff have taken new training on early learning.

The first Early Learning Centre opened in March 2016.

By the end of 2017, we will have **10** Early Learning Centres.

More than **11,000** items were checked out at our Book Trucks in 2016.

The Children's Library and Early Learning Centre at New Central Library, opening in 2018, encompasses more than **16,000** square feet.

92% of Library patrons think the Library is an essential resource for their child's early childhood development.

Appendix A

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR EARLY LEARNING CENTRES

- OBJECTIVES** Early Learning Centres are intended to:
- Create opportunities for imaginative play, and developmentally appropriate interactive experiences, based on cognitive development research on early literacy skills development
 - Nurture children’s development in motor, social, language, and creativity skills in their first five years
 - Ensure parents and caregivers are comfortable, engaged and can socialize while attending to their children
 - Support caregivers in learning about early literacy development, how they can help their child in the journey, and why it’s important
 - Create spaces where staff can easily and effectively engage with children and their families around early literacy activities

- DESIGN PRINCIPLES** The principles we follow when designing our Early Learning Centres are:
- Inspiring
 - Interactive
 - Accessible
 - Attractive
 - Flexible
 - Developmentally appropriate
 - Durable
 - Print rich

- THEMATIC AREAS** Talk, Sing, Read, Write, and Play are represented in the following areas:
- Baby Nest (developmentally appropriate kids areas)
 - Active Play/Explore (built ins, tunnels, and imagination blocks)
 - Create (Lego tables, colouring tables)
 - Perform (sharing stories, puppet theatre, musical instruments)
 - Cozy & contemplative (cozy reading areas, puzzles, nature)

SUCCESS CRITERIA

Early Learning Centres must have:

- Activities that are appealing to any gender
- Activities for all ages between 0-5
- Activities that grow with the child
- Activities that address the complete child, specifically the following areas of development:
 - Verbal Linguistic → Word Smart
 - Logical Mathematical → Math Smart
 - Bodily-Kinesthetic → Body Smart
 - Musical-Rhythmic → Music Smart
 - Spatial-Visual → Picture Smart
 - Naturalistic → Nature Smart
 - Interpersonal → People Smart
 - Intrapersonal → Self-Smart
- Activities addressing children with differing needs (mobility, vision, hearing, cognitive)
- Activities where caregivers can engage with children's learning
- Activities that are scalable and can be adapted to a wide variety of spaces
- Information for caregivers about early learning that is accessible
- Flexibility for activities to be adapted and changed over time
- Clear demarcation among the thematic areas
- Amenities appropriate to the audience: washrooms, nursing area, stroller parking, and seating
- Acoustic treatments to absorb excessive noise and ensure a positive library experience for other patrons
- Clear site lines to ensure caregiver comfort
- Professional development for library staff so they are familiar with early literacy development and their role as play ambassadors

SPACE DESCRIPTIONS**Active Build (Floor Space)**

The types of building activities here will focus on gross motor skills and collaborative building activities; things like Imagination Playground blocks, large foam Lego bricks, Octoplay, wooden blocks or other “large build” materials. This space is a more physically active place promoting large scale building and planning (engineering), developing spatial awareness, skills building and creative thinking. Through play with build materials, make-believe will also occur, giving children a chance to act out real-life situations, work through worries and fears, and use their imagination to solve problems.

Furniture and Materials Options:

- Imagination Playground Blocks (medium); or
- Other play materials like foam Lego bricks, Octoplay, wooden blocks, etc.

Space and Resource Requirements:

- Open space for play and materials
- Cleaning of materials (volunteers)
- Storage for large play materials when not in use

Small Build (Activity Tables)

The types of activities here will focus on small motor skills and collaborative building activities; things like puzzles, Lego Duplo with figurines for storytelling, blocks, Magformers and stackable materials promote smaller scale building, fine and gross motor control, numeracy, sorting, problem solving, social skills development and creative thinking. To promote other small build activities, some libraries will have a light-table, where similar activities can be found, but which also offer sensory experiences as part of play.

Furniture and Materials Options:

- Activity table 48” L X 30” W, with 4 chairs. (For small children, tables will be 22” high, and for school-aged, 27” H.)
- Bins for materials storage. 1 bin per table, but can be switched for different activities, so each location will have a minimum of 4 bins
- Light table, requiring power, where space and use allows

Space and Resource Requirements:

- Storage for bins and materials. Can be in work areas or in public area (locked)
- Space for minimum 1 table and 4 chairs – though children will likely interact with the table in standing position

Creative and Art Space (Activity Tables/White Board/Chalk Board)

The Creative Space facilitates creativity connected to fine motor development skills and small scale activities. This space could include activities such as colouring, writing, play dough, and other sensory and art based activities. Locations would determine best fit for activities and might opt to offer featured times throughout the day where other sensory art materials are available for patrons to participate in (facilitated by staff or volunteer), with the option of offering colouring and writing materials throughout the rest of the day when not actively facilitated with supports.

Furniture and Materials Options:

- Activity tables 48" L X 30" W, with 4 chairs. For small children, tables will be 22" high, and for school-aged, 27" H. These can be interchangeable with the small build tables
- Bins for materials storage. 1 bin per table, but can be switched for different activities, so each location will have a minimum of 4 bins
- Magnetic chalk board, mounted at a lower height for kids, minimum 24" X 36" to max 36" X 60". With magnets
- Magnetic whiteboard, mounted at a lower height for kids, minimum 24" X 36" to max 36" X 60". With magnets
- Art materials storage car
- Some locations may have flannel graphs integrated into wall space

Space and Resource Requirements:

- Storage for bins and materials. Can be in work areas or in public area (locked)
- Wall space for chalk board or whiteboard

Storytelling/Dramatic Play (Theatre, Flannel Graph, Fire Truck, Open Ended Materials)

Storytelling and play can happen anywhere, however, with additional resources like a puppet theatre, flannel graphs, small stage, or child sized fire truck, the opportunity to bring children's imagination to life is that much more enhanced. Things to include in this space are things like puppets, hats, scarves, and loose parts to inspire pretend play. These opportunities provide space for children to think symbolically and develop oral language and storytelling skills. As children pretend, they talk about what they're doing. They practice putting thoughts into words. Dramatic play helps develop narrative skills as children make up a story about what they're doing. This helps them understand that stories happen in an order: first, next, last.

Furniture and Materials Options:

- Small puppet theatre
- Fire truck (regular or small)
- Dress up materials (scarves, hard hats)
- Puppets
- Flannel graph

Space and Resource Requirements:

- Space for puppet theatre, minimum 50-100 square feet, including a small audience participation
- Storage for loose parts
- Soft materials cleaning (fabric – sent out for cleaning)

Baby/Toddler Area (Cruiser Centre, Play Mats, Sensory Elements)

The design intention of the space is to create a toddler/infant oriented space that supports fine motor, gross motor and early literacy skills in an environment that is both stimulating and safe. With padded crawl mats and rugs, and easily accessible storage for younger audiences (cruiser centre) as well as collections of board books, spaces are geared towards children 0-24 months and families. Additional elements in the space will include toddler play games and activities (mirrors, crawling obstacles, large scale sorting activities, in some locations a toddler-scale light cube).

Furniture and Materials Options:

- Cruiser centre with mirror and storage 48" L x 15" D x 18" H
- Light cube 16" cubed
- Wall mirror and pull-up bar
- Soft rug (size appropriate to space)
- Padded mats

Space and Resource Requirements:

- Space for crawl mats (outside of high traffic areas)
- Power for light cube (for charging)
- Space for cruiser centre

Reading Centered Spaces

Reading can happen everywhere in Early Learning Centres! Some locations have built-in nooks, providing opportunities for rest and reading integrated throughout the space. Furniture to encourage joint reading among parents/caregivers and children can be found throughout Early Learning Centres for families to enjoy the rich collection infused among the space.

Furniture and Materials Options:

- Stools, benches or lounge seating for caregivers and children to read together
- Soft seating for small children
- Tables and chairs for small children
- Reading cube for children to sit in together

Space and Resource Requirements:

- As space allows

Parent Resources

Communication targeting parents and caregivers of young children will be incorporated throughout the space. Several comfortable adult sized pieces of furniture should be arranged in this space facing in towards the activity zones – allowing for caregivers to supervise independent by children. Parent resources reinforces messaging regarding early literacy skills and the connections between play and learning.

Furniture and Materials Options:

- Adult seating
- Messaging (sprinkles, suggested activities or quotes) on walls or shelving
- Print resources (handouts, books on parenting, magazines, etc.)

Space and Resource Requirements:

- As space allows

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