

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND



# Education and Early Childhood Development Budget Plan



Delivered by  
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Over the past five years this government has maintained a steadfast focus on education - because we believe that our future is tied to learning in early childhood, the school years, higher education and throughout life.

We have taken significant steps to transform our education system.

Our new budget outlines a plan to strengthen the education and early learning system and build on the foundations we have built in recent years.

Our Preschool Excellence Initiative is one of the most progressive programs in the country.

It represents a fundamental shift in policy focus - from child care to early learning.

In 2010, our government followed through on our promise to transition kindergarten into our provincial school system.

In 2011, we celebrated the first 1,400 children to complete our public Kindergarten program.

To date, 45 Early Years Centers have been implemented across the province. This is a significant step forward in the creation of an integrated Early Learning and Child Care System.

Over 2,600 children are now participating in our Early Learning Centres on a full-time or part-time basis.

In the past three years, literacy scores have improved with the implementation of provincial common assessments.

Spring 2011 primary literacy assessments show that about 85% of all students assessed met expectations in reading, with a further 5 % approaching expectations.

83 % of Grade 3 students met or approached expectations in the 2011 primary math assessment.

We are encouraged by the fact that the number of students experiencing difficulty in our province continues to drop each year.

The number has been cut by almost 20 percent in four years. Further, the number of exempted students continues to fall and is now at 7 percent, or half of what it was in 2007.

We have made significant investments in new schools, classrooms and technology.

Above all, our goal is to ensure that our education is student-centred, valuing respect for the whole individual, respecting gender, language, culture and abilities.

With these objectives in mind, we are strengthening our focus on literacy skills and student achievement.

The 2012-2013 Budget outlines a plan that will continue to strengthen our education system, and build on the major initiatives implemented over the past five years.

We recognize that learning is a process that must be carefully nurtured from an early age. Our investment in early childhood this year is almost \$12 million dollars, up from \$5.4 million in 2009.

We will also be expanding the Best Start Program even further. This year's budget includes a new investment of \$60,000, in addition to the \$90,000 approved last year.

I am pleased to report that an Early Learning Framework, a curriculum document of the Preschool Excellence Initiative, has been developed and will be rolled out across the Island in English and French Early Years Centers in the coming months.

In our first two mandates, Government has committed \$161 million for investments in school infrastructure.

A separate capital budget of almost \$20 million contains funding for school construction, computer and trades equipment, capital upgrades, technology and school bus replacement.

This budget will maintain our low student-teacher ratios, which are among the best in the country.

An additional \$200,000 will be provided this year for services and resources that will benefit children with special needs.

To further promote student achievement, we will implement a new provincial assessment for senior high students that focuses on literacy and math.

These investments are necessary to help students succeed in a competitive global economy and society.

To enhance student achievement, Government will move to a single English school board and realign educational resources within the boards and the department.

This will save taxpayers approximately \$1 million on an annualized basis.

Bringing the English school boards together will provide a more aligned approach for service delivery, reduce duplication, improve efficiencies and role clarity.

We have seen evidence from several other provinces which indicates that amalgamation does save money and improves student achievement in the short and the long-term.

Savings will come from the creation of a single streamlined administrative team; bulk purchasing across a single board and aligning special education and support services across the boards and the department.

The Education Governance Commission made it clear that where student achievement is concerned, the number of boards is irrelevant.

Research shows that the method of trustee selection does not have a significant impact on student achievement.

That is why there will be appointed trustees of the school board for the first two years of the new structure.

These changes will require thoughtful planning and coordination as we move to put a new structure in place by next school year.

To oversee the transition, an Education Transition Committee has been established. It includes representatives from the Department, the Eastern School District and the Western School Board.

As the committee moves forward, it will ensure all staff are well informed of progress. "Education Matters," a newsletter created by the Education Transition Committee, provides regular weekly updates from the committee. Each edition of the newsletter is available on the Department's website at [www.edu.pe.ca](http://www.edu.pe.ca).

As in most amalgamations, some discordance is to be expected, but I think we can all agree that the long term gains in student achievement are most important.

As Minister, I am extremely proud of the accomplishments of our schools, the school boards and our department.

We must be aware of today's fiscal reality and the challenges all governments are facing. As we move forward we need to be innovative and think critically.

We will place a strong emphasis on accountability and fairness in a student-centered learning environment.

And we will make the most efficient use of all our resources.

We will provide teachers with the instructional support they need, and our principals and vice principals with the instructional leadership tools they require.

In our efforts to align support services to students, the Department, in collaboration with the school boards, will further integrate special education services.

Madam Speaker, I believe this budget supports our fundamental purpose – which is to prepare children for success in higher learning and the global workforce, and to help them become good citizens.

Thank you.