



Region of Waterloo

Early Years Child Care Professional Learning Strategic Plan

DECEMBER 2025

Table of Contents

OVERVIEW	3
ENGAGEMENT & STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS	5
VISION, MISSION & VALUES	7
STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS	8

Overview

Over the next 2–3 years, the Region of Waterloo has an opportunity to move from pockets of strong professional learning to a coordinated, equity-driven system that consistently strengthens practice across the early years sector. This Practical Vision brings the Region’s mission to life by ensuring professional learning is not “extra”; it is a core lever for improving outcomes for children, strengthening the lived experience of families, and sustaining a high-quality, inclusive, and stable early learning and child care system.

At the heart of this work is a simple truth: **children thrive when educators thrive.**

A professional learning system that centres joy, belonging, and professional pride doesn’t just build skills, it strengthens relationships, stability, and care. When learning is relevant, accessible, and grounded in real service realities, it supports educators to rediscover confidence and purpose, reduces isolation and burnout, and creates the conditions for stronger practice. That culture, one where educators feel valued, connected, and inspired, is a core thread running through all four strategic directions and an essential enabler of sustainable improvement.



Bringing it to Life: Shared Roles Across the Region

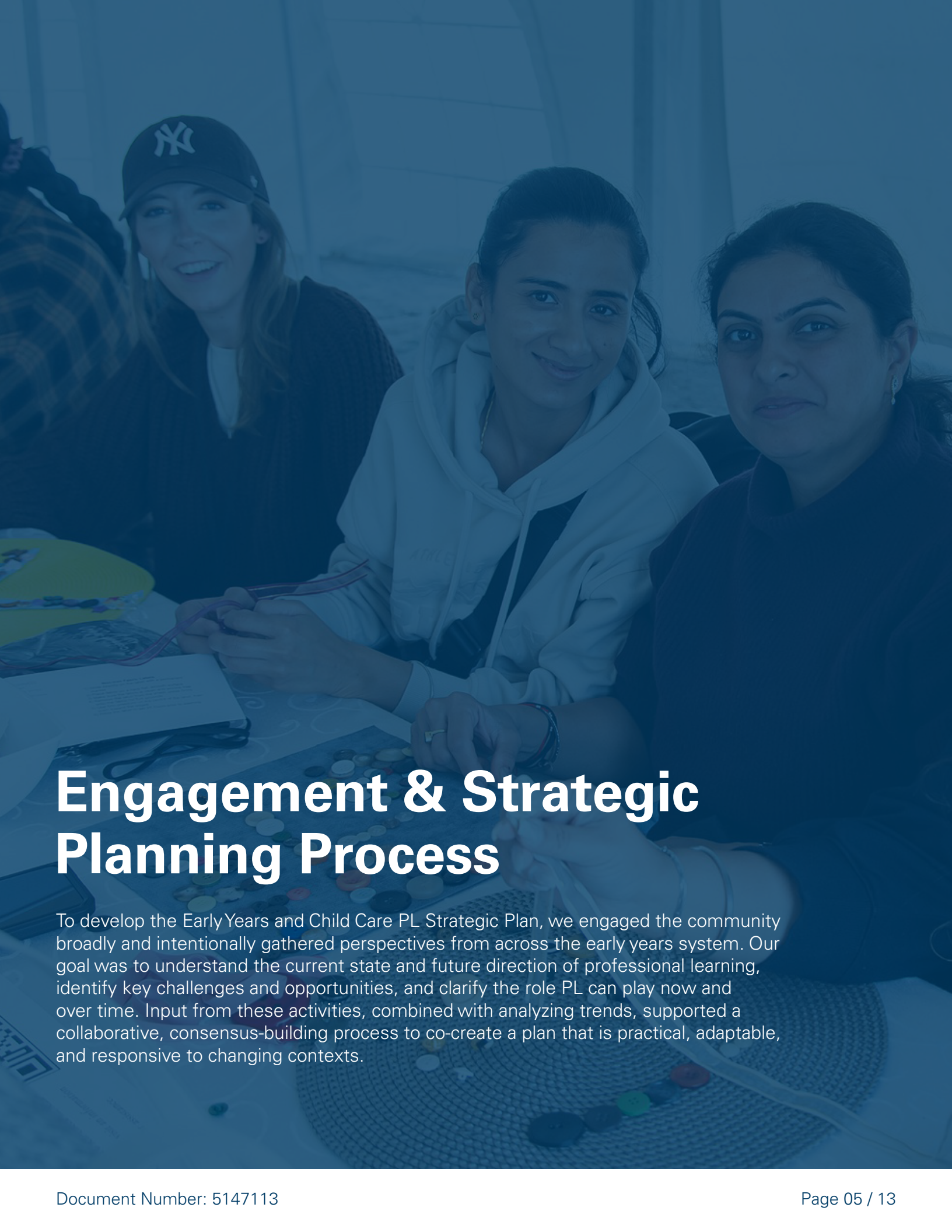
Realizing this Practical Vision will require different parts of the system to play complementary roles. Responsibilities will vary across the ecosystem, but the approach is intentionally shared, so learning becomes more connected, less duplicative, and easier to navigate, while also nurturing a culture where educators feel energized and supported.

Possible roles the Region of Waterloo, Children's Services and the community may play include:

- **System stewards (coordination and coherence):** align efforts across organizations, reduce duplication, strengthen regional clarity, and support shared priorities and infrastructure.
- **Culture keepers (joy, belonging, and professional pride):** model and reinforce environments where educators feel valued, connected, and recognized, ensuring joy and well-being are treated as foundational to quality and sustainability.
- **Equity champions:** champion culturally safe inclusive and responsive programs that continue to grow and evolve through a REDI lens. Learning is designed so all educators, across roles, settings, and communities, can participate meaningfully.
- **Resource hub builders and connectors:** host, mobilize, and share resources regionally making learning easy to access close to where educators work.
- **Learning designers, facilitators and connectors:** develop or support connections to high-quality learning experiences that are evidence-informed, practical, and rooted in real challenges and opportunities.
- **Mentors, coaches, and workforce stabilizers:** strengthen practice and cultivate joy and purpose, through relationship-based supports that build confidence, reduce isolation, and support retention.
- **Community knowledge-sharers and storytellers:** elevate educator expertise through peer sharing (e.g., spotlight talks, showcases, communities of practice), reinforcing leadership and professional recognition.
- **Data and improvement partners:** gather insights, learn from what works, and continuously refine approaches to improve outcomes and close gaps.

Together, these roles support a learning ecosystem that is coordinated, equitable, and deeply connected to what children, families, and educators need.

By intentionally shaping culture, how people relate, make meaning, and show up for one another, we create the trust, belonging, and responsiveness that allow joy to take root across diverse communities and settings. In this way, culture isn't a backdrop to the work; it's a core lever for achieving the desired outcomes, ensuring practices are not only effective, but also affirming, sustainable, and aligned with what children and families value most.

A photograph of three women sitting at a table, engaged in a community activity. The woman on the left is wearing a dark baseball cap with a white 'NY' logo and a dark sweater. The woman in the middle is wearing a white hoodie. The woman on the right is wearing a dark top. They are all looking towards the camera with slight smiles. On the table in front of them are various items, including a large sheet of paper with colorful circular markers, a pair of scissors, and some other materials. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a tent or a similar structure.

Engagement & Strategic Planning Process

To develop the Early Years and Child Care PL Strategic Plan, we engaged the community broadly and intentionally gathered perspectives from across the early years system. Our goal was to understand the current state and future direction of professional learning, identify key challenges and opportunities, and clarify the role PL can play now and over time. Input from these activities, combined with analyzing trends, supported a collaborative, consensus-building process to co-create a plan that is practical, adaptable, and responsive to changing contexts.

Key Activities that Informed the Plan

DOCUMENT REVIEW

Reviewed a range of materials and scanned for STEEP-VTrends (Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political, Values), guiding statements, and strategic implications, using both human and technology-enabled expertise. Documents included federal, provincial and regional strategy and policy reports; international and federal research papers and data reports; and professional college standards of practice reference material. It connects current work to longer-term goals, purpose, and vision.

JURISDICTIONAL SCAN

Interviews with Service System Managers (SSM) and School Board Professional Learning Leaders to capture a variety of insights from within our region and beyond. Content focused on PL strategies and framework implementation.

- One on one interviews with SSM Managers from five regions, including Niagara, Chatham-Kent, Sudbury, Peel and Halton; one Professional Resource Centre (The Halton Resource Connection), and one school board (Waterloo Region District School Board).
 - Qualitative data collected from 8-12 SSM leaders participating at Quality Leadership meeting, October 2025.
-

EXPERT VOICES

Interviews with experts from large-scale business events (Elastic Communications Inc.), and early years sector professional learning practice (Dr. Emis Akbari, Atkinson Centre).

INTEREST-HOLDER ENGAGEMENT INSIGHTS

Multiple engagement methods informed the plan, including workshops, interviews, street-teams, survey data, and previous engagement reporting.

- Fall PL Day (October 27, 2025) collected 206 online survey responses, and 63 ‘street team’ (short in-person) interviews. This content represents a cross-section of voices from all participants at the Fall PL Day (students, educators, child care operators, administrators, etc.).
- Three virtual engagement workshops in the fall 2025. Workshops were open to participants from the Fall Professional Learning Day Working Group, and the Workforce Task Force.

Who We Are

VISION STATEMENT

A thriving early years sector that empowers professionals and uplifts children, families, and communities.

MISSION STATEMENT

To establish a coordinated, equity-driven professional learning system in the Region of Waterloo that empowers every early years professional to enhance their practice, improve outcomes for children, and contribute to a high-quality, inclusive, and sustainable early learning and child care sector.

VALUES

Values are guiding principles. They serve to help guide interactions with internal and external communities.

Values derived from the Insights Reporting for the Professional Learning Model may include:

RESPONSIVE AND INNOVATIVE

We adapt creatively and collaboratively to the evolving needs and growth of our community, encouraging innovation that responds to real-world challenges.

Innovating in response to our community.

EVIDENCE-INFORMED AND DATA-DRIVEN

Our practices are guided by data and grounded in evidence, using insights to inspire new approaches and close equity gaps.

Driven by data, inspired to innovate.

REFLECTIVE AND ONGOING LEARNING

We model continuous learning and reflection, embracing change and new ideas to deepen our collective practice.

Always learning, always evolving.

BRIDGING THEORY AND ACTION

We bring theory to life through action—turning learning into innovation that transforms daily practice.

From theory to transformative action.

RECONCILIATION, EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (REDI)

REDI grounds all our work and guides how we plan, create, and deliver professional learning—ensuring equitable access for educators and supporting culturally safe, inclusive, and responsive early years programs for all children and families.

Rooted in equity and inclusion.

SUSTAINABILITY

We build professional learning that is sustainable and action-oriented by supporting shared roles across the community—ensuring learning is applied in practice and leads to lasting improvements over time.

Shared responsibility, lasting learning.



Strategic Directions

This strategic plan has four Strategic Directions that define the key areas where we will concentrate our efforts to achieve our longer-term goals. They provide a roadmap for aligning initiatives, resources, and decisions.

Embedded across the Strategic Directions, REDI is a shared commitment that grounds our work. The Early Years and Child Care sector is learning about its shared responsibility in addressing unconscious bias and power structures that may exist. Professional learning for Early Years and Child Care programs is expertly positioned to influence young minds and be intentional about breaking generational patterns of oppression and presenting a more equitable and inclusive society during the critical years of brain formation. These strategic directions embrace equity and participation for all involved.

At-a-Glance

IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & THE COMMUNITY

Learning that visibly strengthens programs, and people, through measurable outcomes.

UNIFIED, CONNECTED, & SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

A coordinated approach to support learning.

EQUITABLE ACCESS & INCLUSIVE DESIGN (REDI IN ACTION)

Intentional planning so every educator can participate and benefit.

PROFESSIONAL PATHWAYS, LEADERSHIP & RECOGNITION

Elevating educators as leaders, strengthening professional pride, workforce retention, and stability.

Improved Outcomes for Children, Families & the Community

LEARNING THAT STRENGTHENS PROGRAMS AND PEOPLE,
THROUGH MEASURABLE OUTCOMES.

Professional learning drives better experiences for children and families when educators have meaningful support, practical tools, and time to reflect on and apply learning. This direction focuses on practice improvements that strengthen relationships, cultivate belonging for all, and improve program quality, leading to more consistent outcomes across the Region.

What might be different in 24–36 months:

Professional learning consistently translates into stronger practice and improved experiences for children and families. Educators have practical supports they can apply right away, and the system can point to visible improvements in quality and outcomes.

Focus areas (examples):

- Practice changes that strengthen inclusion, belonging, and child/family experience
- Supports that help educators apply and reflect on learning and change in real settings
- Evidence-informed priorities tied to outcomes and continuous improvement

Unified, Connected, & Supportive Learning Ecosystem

A COORDINATED APPROACH TO SUPPORT LEARNING.

A cohesive regional infrastructure links educators, organizations, and resources through shared platforms and open channels for exchanging expertise. Champions help curate and elevate learning, while centralized coordination reduces duplication and increases clarity. Together, these elements create a connected learning environment that supports collaboration and strengthens collective impact.

What might be different in 24–36 months:

Professional learning is easier to navigate and less duplicative. A coordinated infrastructure connects organizations, resources, and educators across the region, with clearer pathways to access learning, share expertise, and align on priorities.

Focus areas (examples):

- Coordination to reduce duplication and improve clarity
- Shared platform that connects learning
- Stronger peer sharing and cross-sector collaboration improvement

Equitable Access & Inclusive Design (REDI in Action)

INTENTIONAL PLANNING SO EVERY EDUCATOR CAN PARTICIPATE AND BENEFIT.

REDI is embedded into the design, delivery and evaluation of our professional learning approach across the Region. The system works to identify and remove barriers to participation—time, cost, scheduling, location, language, cultural safety and other forms of safety, and technology—so educators across roles and settings can engage meaningfully. Learning is intentionally inclusive and culturally responsive, and guided by transparent data that tracks who participates, whose needs are being met, and where gaps remain.

What might be different in 24–36 months:

Equity is delivered through specific system commitments, not just stated as a value. Professional learning is intentionally designed and resourced so educators across roles, settings, languages, and communities can access and benefit from it. REDI shows up in participation, experience, and impact data.

Focus areas (examples):

- Barrier identification and removal: time, funding, scheduling, location, technology, language
- Culturally responsive professional learning options
- Increasing access to French language training
- Transparent tracking of participation and experience to identify and close gaps

Professional Pathways, Leadership & Recognition

ELEVATING EDUCATORS AS LEADERS, STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONAL PRIDE, WORKFORCE RETENTION, AND STABILITY.

Educators are supported as professionals through mentorship, coaching, leadership development, and clear pathways for growth across career stages. The Region elevates educator expertise through recognition and peer-sharing opportunities (e.g., showcasing promising practices, champion/host roles, communities of practice), helping reduce isolation and strengthen professional pride and joy. This direction builds workforce stability by ensuring educators have meaningful ways to advance, lead, and be celebrated for the impact they have on children and families.

What might be different in 24–36 months:

Educators experience clearer growth pathways and stronger professional pride. Mentorship, coaching, and leadership opportunities reduce isolation and strengthen retention. Recognition systems elevate educator expertise and visibly reinforce the value of the profession across the region.

Focus areas (examples):

- Mentorship/coaching and leadership development across career stages
- “Champion” roles and educator-led sharing (showcasing promising practices, communities of practice)
- Recognition approaches that reinforce professional pride and stability



Region of Waterloo

This Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for building a coordinated, equitable, and sustainable professional learning system in the Region of Waterloo.

Informed by research and broad sector engagement, the plan supports educators, leaders, and system partners in strengthening practice, improving outcomes for children and families, and fostering a culture of joy, belonging, and professional pride across the early years sector.

Developed by the Region of Waterloo, Children's Services in collaboration with Michelle Schurter, Millennial Strategist & Rachel Hofstetter Consulting

