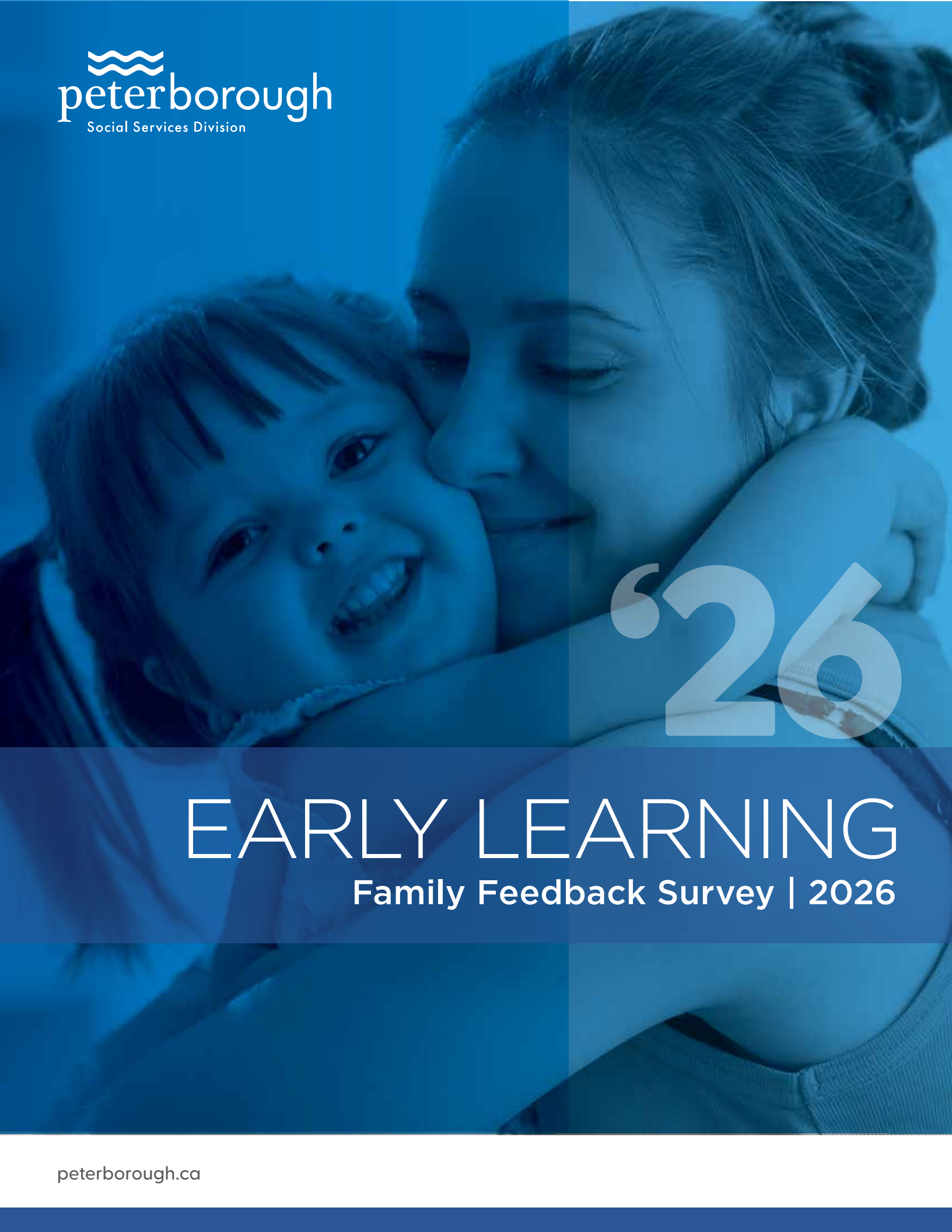




‘26

EARLY LEARNING

Family Feedback Survey | 2026





CONTENTS

Overview	4
Results	6
Early Learning Program Family Usage	6
Child Care System and Processes	6
Participant Demographics	10
Early Learning Program Feedback	10
Conclusion	14

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OVERVIEW

The Early Learning Family Feedback Survey is conducted every other year to assess program quality and family satisfaction with early learning services across Peterborough City and County. This round of the survey was completed in the spring of 2026.

“The staff do an incredible job of being mindful of every family that they have participating in their programs. You can tell the staff have put so much time and thought into catering to the needs of the children who come and often display many chances for families to learn and participate in different cultures and ideas and feel supported and represented.”

The survey provides families and caregivers with an opportunity to share what they value most about their child(ren)'s experiences with the system, as well as areas where improvements can be made.

This report combines quantitative data (e.g., percentages and averages) with qualitative data (e.g., family comments summarized into key themes) to assess overall program quality.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the families, caregivers, and children who took the time to participate and share their perspectives!

Survey Participation

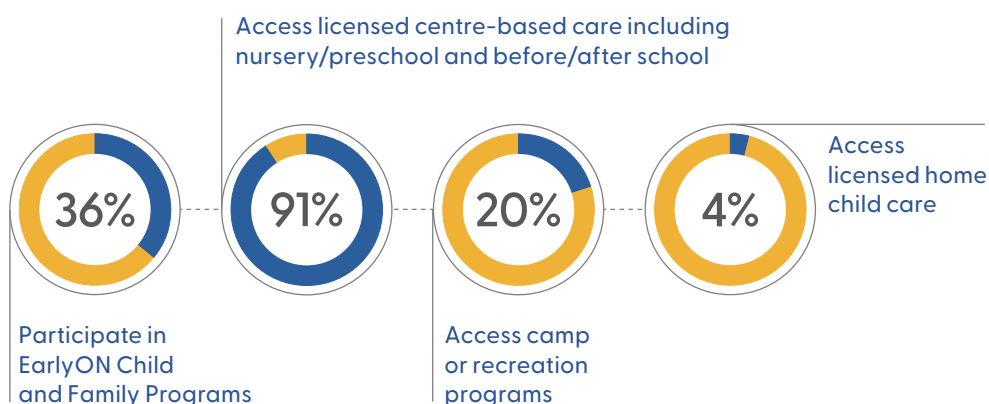
A total of 25 early learning partners participated, representing 100% of the local system. This included two EarlyON Child and Family Centre agencies, two Licensed Home Child Care Agencies, and 21 Licensed Child Care Centres and Authorized Recreation Programs.

- The 21 child care agencies represent 68 sites, of which 65 had valid survey responses (96% representation).
- The two EarlyON agencies operate seven sites, all of which were represented in the survey.
- In total, 695 valid responses were received from families (with some families providing feedback for more than one site), representing approximately 10% of early years service users in the City and County.



RESULTS

Early Learning Program Family Usage



Child Care System and Processes

To better understand how families navigate the system and access available supports, we asked those using child care to share their awareness and use of systems such as CWELCC, fee subsidy, and the child care waitlist. This information will identify opportunities to improve access, clarity, and support.

Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan (CWELCC)

The CWELCC plan was established in 2022 to help support families with child care affordability and access. This has resulted in a 52.75% reduction in parent fees, for eligible age groups.

- 88% of families in CWELCC-enrolled programs report that fee reductions have made a positive difference.
- Families shared that the fee reductions have allowed for greater financial stability and flexibility, as well as reduced stress.

“The reduction in fees have made a significant difference to our family and have allowed us to better participate in gainful employment, and to have more financial stability and less stress surrounding childcare. Having access to reduced fees has allowed me to participate in the labour market in a role that gives back to our local community. I would not be able to do this otherwise.”

Fee Subsidy Usage and Awareness

Child care fee subsidy helps eligible families manage the cost of care. For families who qualify, fee subsidy can further reduce out-of-pocket costs on top of the already lowered CWELCC fees. Families must apply to the City of Peterborough for fee subsidy support.

- 19% of families indicated they may require fee subsidy in order to access child care.
- 14% of families were unaware of the availability of fee subsidy.

Of those that accessed fee subsidy:

- 70% of families felt the eligibility requirements for child care fee subsidy were clear.
- 83% of families found the application and documentation process to be straightforward.
- 69% of families indicated it was easy to find information about Child Care fee Subsidy.

These results indicate that although many families find the process straightforward, there are opportunities to improve the clarity of the fee subsidy process and as well as raise awareness of fee subsidy as an available support for eligible families.

How are we taking action?

To increase awareness and transparency, we will continue to promote the existing Fee Subsidy resources on the Children's Services website along with the eligibility calculator that is available. The criteria and required documents are outlined on this page to ensure families are prepared for the process.

We will also strive to clarify and increase awareness of fee subsidy as an available support that is separate from CWELCC reductions (e.g., via OneHSN page, communications from child care agencies and service providers).

We will be reviewing and modifying our online fee subsidy application by December 2026 to further improve clarity and ease of use, particularly for families accessing camps and recreation programs (as this process differs from centre based child care fee subsidy).

Some examples of promotion and outreach by the Children's Services Fee Subsidy Case Managers in the first half of 2026:

- Participation in System Navigation working group (as part of Community Resilience Action Network, spearheaded by Lakelands Public Health) to better support families as they access services.
- Attended events to promote Children's Services, make connections, and answer questions about fee subsidy and the waitlist including Prince of Wales fun fair and the New Canadians
- Collaboration with Peterborough Wellness Centre for these events and promotional materials
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Centralized Waitlist System (OneHSN)

RESULTS

Families in Peterborough City and County access a centralized system (OneHSN) to join licensed child care waitlists. Of those that used the waitlist system and had children placed in a program:

- 68% of families waited more than a year for a child care space; of these, 1 in 4 families waited more than 2 years.
- 72% of families reported that OneHSN is easy to use.
- 70% of families found it easy to locate the information they needed.
- 86% of families found it easy to update their child's information.
- 50% of families felt that information about how the waitlist works was clear.

Qualitative comments from those that used the waitlist highlights opportunities to strengthen how the system is experienced by families, including:

- Inconsistent or outdated program information.
- No ability to know waitlist position or which programs are at capacity.
- Frequent need to follow up with centres as well as log-in to maintain waitlist status.
- Confusion about program transitions (e.g. aging into one program from another).
- Overall, the waitlist process remains a source of stress for many families.

“Having to log in frequently to keep the application active is very annoying. It would be beneficial for families to be updated on where we sit on the waitlist. Right now, families need to call each daycare site numerous times to inquire whether there is an opening and where we are on the waitlist. This is a waste of time for everyone. If the waitlist system worked better, this would save time for everyone.”

“I had very difficulty (sic) understanding whether or not we would or would not qualify, and only found out that we were just under the qualification after I had done all the work to apply.”

Participant Demographics

How are we taking action?

OneHSN is exploring options to display the number of children on the list and program capacity. At this time, specific waitlist position information is too dynamic to display and would be inaccurate (e.g., different centres have different priority groups, such as siblings, and children aging up also impacts waitlist position).

OneHSN has adjusted the frequency of the inactivity notifications. The time required to log-in has been increased from 30 days to 60, and then 120 days for the next notification. These notifications only take effect if the parent has not logged into the system, and if their child's preferred start date has passed. The goal of the notification is to ensure that families who no longer need care are removed from the lists.

When families first join a waitlist, the initial welcome email now includes details about prioritizing their waitlist selections as well as details on how aging into other programs works.

The Children's Services Team meets regularly with the OneHSN team (at least quarterly) to review support requests and ensure feedback is addressed.

RESULTS

Who are the families attending our programs? Knowing who our families are provides opportunities to offer targeted supports and services (where needed), as well as chances to celebrate and incorporate different cultures, traditions, values, and ways of knowing in our early learning programs.

“An incredibly warm and welcoming environment. They remember my child, interact with him and provide us both with a strong sense of community.”

- 21% of families accessing child care and/or EarlyON Programs identify as part of a racialized group, and 48 different languages other than English are spoken at home.
- 10% self-identify as a person with a disability (visible or invisible) and 9% have a child that has a disability
- 6% self-identify as being part of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community
- Most families indicated they are part of a two-parent family. 7% are a single-parent family, 3% are co-parenting, and 3% are other types of caregivers, such as grandparents
- 15% report income below \$60,000, 19% report between \$60,000 and \$99,000, and 66% report a household income of \$100,000 or above (before taxes)

Early Learning Program Feedback

Program feedback questions were centred around the 4 domains of Ontario’s Early Learning pedagogy, How Does Learning Happen? These questions are displayed as a percentage, indicating how many families said they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Programs included recreation and camps, licensed home child care, licensed centre based child care, and EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

A review of qualitative comments provides additional context to the ratings for each category. The comments were assessed for common themes, which highlighted that while program quality is strong, opportunities exist to strengthen how that quality is communicated and experienced.

Celebrating Wins

Families shared what aspects of the programs they appreciate the most.

Strong, caring relationships between staff and families:

- 97.8% feel valued, respected, and accepted by educators
- 97.2% observe positive interactions between educators and children
- Educators are consistently described as warm, attentive, and genuinely invested in children
- Many families view staff as an extension of their family

Inclusive and supportive early learning environments:

- 97.2% report their child is fully included in the program
- 94.3% feel educators understand their child's strengths and abilities
- 93.5% report opportunities to explore diverse cultures and identities
- Children are supported as individuals, with diverse needs and abilities recognized
- Programs foster a strong sense of belonging and emotional safety

High-quality interactions and responsiveness in the program:

- 97.2% report positive and responsive relationships between educators and children
- 97.0% feel comfortable approaching educators
- Educators are approachable and responsive to questions and concerns
- Families feel heard and supported when issues arise
- Children are supported in expressing themselves and learning in authentic ways

Engaging, play-based learning experiences:

- 97.7% report strong opportunities for unstructured active play
- 98.3% report varied play-based learning opportunities
- Environments provide varied opportunities for exploration, creativity, and active play
- Educators support curiosity and developmental growth

Strong communication in many programs:

- Some families report frequent updates through photos, learning stories, and regular communication
- These practices help families feel connected to their child's daily experiences
- We know that communication apps are the most commonly used communication platform for families in our early learning programs (used by 65% of families) followed by emails (64%), and talks at drop-off/pick-up (55%)

While families are highly satisfied with most program aspects, there are areas that will be targeted for growth and improvement.

RESULTS

Opportunities for Growth and Change

Increased communication and documentation:

- 89% of families report that their child(ren)'s learning is visible through documentation (e.g., journals, photos, learning stories, bulletin boards, conversations, electronic communications, social media posts).
- Frequency and quality of updates vary across programs and classrooms
- Some families receive limited information about their child's day
- Families want more consistent insights into daily routines (meals, sleep, activities, mood)

“Drop off and pick up is busy and we typically do not connect meaningfully at these times. I would love to have a teacher dedicated to greeting parents so there could be a warm handoff and update.”

Strengthening family engagement

- 92% of families feel like an engaged partner in their child(ren)'s learning.
- Limited opportunities for meaningful interaction beyond drop-off and pick-up
- Interest in more events, involvement opportunities, and introductions to staff (e.g., staff bios, meet and greets)

Improving consistency in resource sharing

- 81% of families feel the program provides information and links to other services available in the community.
- While some centres provide strong links to community supports, this is not universal
- Opportunity to strengthen awareness of available services

Comparisons to Previous Surveys

- Increasing family engagement and consistency in communication between centres and parents has been a recurring theme across the 2022, 2024, and 2026 surveys.
- While improvements have been observed in some areas, continued focus is needed.
- Strengthening communication, visibility of learning, and family engagement will remain key priorities moving into 2026/2027.

Each early learning agency has received a summary report outlining feedback from families attending their location. Based on this data, they can develop an action plan to celebrate strengths and address areas for growth specific to their site.

Ongoing professional development opportunities will be provided system-wide, including topics such as family connection, engagement, and pedagogical documentation.

Operators are also encouraged to support relationship-building with families by hosting open houses and sharing staff biographies, helping families become more familiar and connected with educators.

Several centres have adopted Storypark as a communication platform, implemented with support from the City. This initiative helps create consistency across locations and reduces the number of applications used by families with multiple children in care.



CONCLUSION

Overall, Peterborough City and County Early Learning programs are characterized by strong, caring relationships where families feel valued, supported, and connected. **Our educators are our greatest strength**; they are confident and capable, and families report they are warm, attentive, and approachable.

The programs offer inclusive, play-based environments with high-quality interactions, ensuring children feel a sense of belonging while engaging in diverse and developmentally enriching experiences.

We will continue to strive to fully engage families in program and look to find ways to better connect and document children's experiences. We will also explore options to better support families as they access the various early learning system structures, such as the waitlist and the fee subsidy application.

“For both of my children, the program has been a safe and inclusive space. We always feel welcome, valued, and cared for. This group of educators understands how to cultivate a sense of belonging for everyone who walks through the door by building authentic and responsive relationships from the start. We are so fortunate to be a part of this family!”

Key Takeaways

- Families report very high satisfaction with program quality, particularly child-educator interactions and opportunities for play-based learning.
- Communication and family engagement remain the main areas for improvement. This has been an ongoing theme across survey cycles (2022–2026).
- Waitlist and affordability challenges continue to impact families' experience of the system.

How are we taking action?

- Continue to promote visibility of children's learning and daily experiences through documentation, and explore options for staff introductory materials or meet and greet events to facilitate connections with families.
- Improve consistency in sharing resources and supports with families, look for opportunities for collaboration across service providers.
- Enhance clarity and usability of the waitlist system and fee subsidy process wherever possible.
- Monitor progress and impact through future surveys.





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