

# Nova Scotia Review of Regulated Child Care

*Consultation Report and Recommendations*



*March 2016*





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## Introduction

Learning does not start on the first day of school. Research shows that the early years are the most important years in a child's development. It is a critical stage that has a significant impact on their future long-term health, growth and well-being.

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*For far too long, early learning and child care have been misunderstood, ignored and under-funded in Nova Scotia. There has never been, until now, an in-depth examination of our regulated child care sector in this province.*

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In January 2015, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development began an extensive review to provide a clearer picture of the strengths and the areas of concern within the sector. The review focussed on five key areas:

- ▶ Accessibility of child care for families;
  - ▶ Affordability of child care programs;
  - ▶ Quality of the programming;
  - ▶ Support and development of the workforce;
- and
- ▶ Structure and governance of the system.

## Research

The review included a study of the most recent research on when and how the needs of our youngest children, from birth to school entry, can best be met.

### **Importance of early learning**

We know that the early years are significant for lifelong health, well-being and success. Research tells us that the trajectories for health (physical and mental health); future health concerns (chronic disease and addictions); educational attainment (literacy and graduation rates); and potential later involvement with crime and the justice system are established early in life (McCain et al., 2007).

Studies show that brain development proceeds at a faster pace between conception and the first day of elementary school than during any other life stage (Nelson, 1999). Between the ages of three and six, the brain's neural circuits undergo a growth spurt, building on earlier neural pathways that manage emotions and behavior (Blair and Diamond, 2008).

In essence, by Grade 1, the foundation for children to succeed – to be able to manage their behaviour, think through a situation, understand their emotions and focus their attention in a variety of circumstances – has been established. These thinking and coping abilities are essential to emerging literacy, numeracy and inquiry skills (Blair and Diamond, 2008). Direct participation in early childhood education opportunities are essential to ensure the trajectories are set in the right direction and that children's early education experiences, effectively support their language, cognitive and social-emotional well-being (Sylva et al., 2009).

### **Nova Scotia data reinforces the need**

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a teacher-completed questionnaire that assesses children's developmental health at school entry. It provides us information on how well children's development is supported in their communities in the early years. It is also a determinant of health and well-being of a group of children later in life.

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*In Nova Scotia over 25% of children arrive at school vulnerable in at least one developmental domain. (EDI) We also know that when children start school behind their peers they often do not catch up.*

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Even with extra supports and remediation programs in school, it is often too late to change the learning trajectories for many children, leading to high school drop-out rates and impacting meaningful engagement in the workforce and community (McCain et al. 2011). For this reason, providing quality early learning environments prior to school entry is key in reducing vulnerabilities and giving children a strong start.

### **Economic benefits**

There is an exceptionally high return to society from investments in early years programming (Heckman 2000, 2008). Although it has been generally expected that the average time to realize such a return is 10–15 years, recent economic studies suggest that returns on early childhood education and development programs can begin to be realized in as little

as a few years (McCain et al., 2011). Investment in early years programming not only has a high rate of economic return but the social fabric is also strengthened when resources and supports are available to all children and at affordable cost.

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*“Early childhood education is economic development, and the research shows it is economic development with a very high public return.”  
(McCain et al., 2011, p. 63).*

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Canadian economic modeling demonstrates that ECD investments both pay for themselves and act as an important stimulus to the economy.

Moreover, the availability of child care increases parental workforce participation, and high quality early childhood development programming will be an important expectation when parents with young families are making the decision whether to live and work in Nova Scotia. We know that to be successful and engaged in the workforce parents must live and work in communities that support them (Hertzman, 2008).

Access to affordable regulated child care helps parents (particularly mothers) participate in the workforce. (McCain et al., 2011). Economists refer to the ‘human capital’ benefits, including reduced health and social costs, for children who attend high quality preschool programs, when they consider the fiscal independence and productivity of working mothers.

Readiness for school, higher graduation rates and future earnings all have a long range economic impact.

## Consultation

One of the most important components of the review was the feedback received through the consultation. The review was extensive:

- ▶ Over 7000 Nova Scotians took the time to respond to a detailed on-line survey;
  - ▶ Focus groups were held in 23 communities and drew more than 400 participants;
  - ▶ Written submissions were also received;
- and
- ▶ One-on-one interviews with key partners were held.

Together, the voices of child care organizations, family home day care owners, family resource centres, early intervention groups, training institutions, parents, early childhood educators, directors and providers/operators of for profit and not-for-profit centers were heard. Their messages, along with expertise within the Early Years Branch of the EECD formed the basis of this report.

## Current Status in Nova Scotia

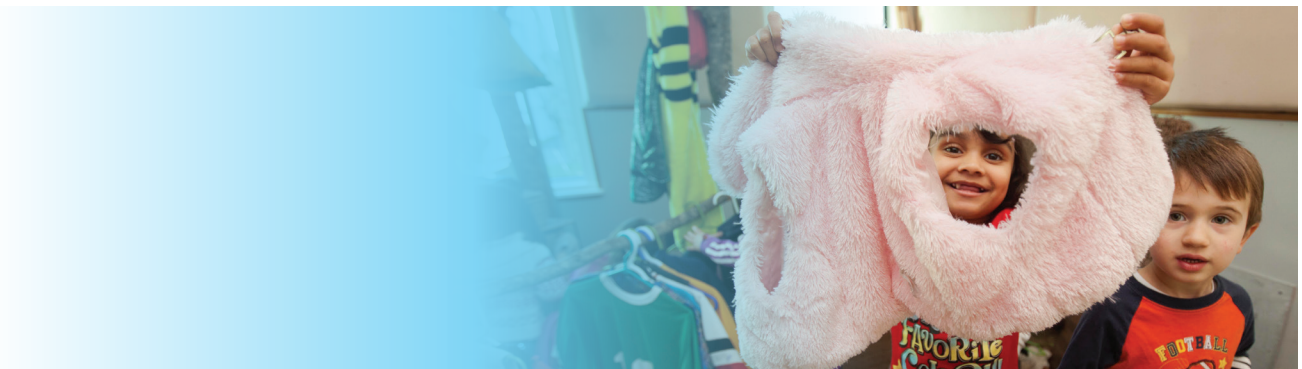
Currently in Nova Scotia, regulated child care is provided through licensed child care facilities, and licensed family home day care agencies. Over 16,000 licensed child care spaces are available in 391 licensed child care facilities throughout the province. There are 207 family homes approved through 15 family home day

care agencies that include over 1200 spaces for young children.

As of September 2015, there are 8 Early Years Centres in Nova Scotia with the capacity to provide early learning programming for 180 children. There is one Early Years Centre in each of the 8 School Boards. In addition, there are 22 early learning programs for 4 year olds, with an enrolment of 455 children across 4 School Boards, with CSAP having 15 of the programs in their schools across the province.

The research tells us that all children benefit from quality early learning experiences, especially in the year prior to school entry. Currently, we know that there are fewer child care spaces, early learning programs and early years centres than there are children. Accordingly, moving forward it will be important to ensure that growth in the early learning and child care sector is strategic and focused on enabling access for as many children and families as possible.

Previously, Early Years, which includes child care, has been the responsibility of the Department of Community Services. However in 2013, the Early Years Branch was formed and staff were transferred to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, to reinforce the importance of learning in the early years, and to strengthen programming and partnerships that support successful transitions for young children into school.



## Consultation Findings: Challenges and Recommendations

The review found that Nova Scotian parents want to use child care facilities, but that there are challenges and barriers that may prevent them from making the best use of the system or accessing it at all. In addition, owners, operators and early childhood educators identified challenges that make it difficult to operate or work in a child care centre.

Recommendations to these challenges are presented under each key area that formed the review. Some comments from those who shared their ideas and time in the consultation are also quoted.

### I. Accessibility of child care for families

#### CHALLENGES

- ▶ Insufficient spaces and limited options are a reality in some parts of Nova Scotia
- ▶ Spaces for infant care are particularly scarce
- ▶ Lack of transportation prevents some parents from accessing programs in their communities
- ▶ Insufficient spaces and programming for children with diverse and special needs need to be addressed
- ▶ Families in all areas of the province find it difficult to navigate the system and to get relevant information for their needs

*"Families need to know what services are available in different areas....A Directory of Services [would be like] a guidance counsellor for parents."*

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Develop a way to share information and resources with families and early childhood educators across the province
- 2) Increase child care options available to families with particular emphasis on how needs vary in urban and rural communities
- 3) Improve access to infant care and to children with special needs

### II. Affordability of child care programs

#### CHALLENGES

- ▶ Child care is inaccessible to many due to financial burden
- ▶ Many parents work part-time or leave the workforce completely due to the high cost of care
- ▶ Subsidy rates for low income parents are the lowest in the country
- ▶ Subsidy support for low income parents is well below the cost of care

*"Make child care more affordable. Otherwise, people must decide between working or staying at home."*

*"There is an entire demographic of families that cannot afford quality, regulated care."*

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4) Update the subsidy program to make it easier for families to apply
- 5) Improve support for low and middle income families to make it easier for them to access child care





### III. Quality of programming

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#### CHALLENGES

- ▶ Nova Scotia is the only province without an early learning curriculum
- ▶ The quality of programming is inconsistent across the province and there is no systematic approach provincially to evaluate the quality of the learning environments
- ▶ Improved processes and incentives regarding minimum standards of health and safety would ensure high quality
- ▶ A greater emphasis needs to be placed on supporting infant and toddler social and emotional learning
- ▶ Approved family home day cares need consistent inspections by department staff
- ▶ Finding a balance between the day-to-day challenges of operating a child care centre and meeting the expectations, including compliance with the Act and Regulations, is challenging
- ▶ Early childhood educators want to be included in policy and planning decisions, including curriculum development
- ▶ Families/parents need to be engaged in a meaningful way in planning and developing the early years system
- ▶ A database of qualified substitutes would facilitate centres in accessing a pool of available and qualified candidates

*"Make the focus of curriculum life readiness vs. school readiness."*

*"Develop and apply consistent standards of quality child care that reflect best practices and emergent, play-based learning principles."*

*"The Department should make greater use of our knowledge and expertise. Ask us for our input and recognize our expertise. We have a lot to offer."*

*"Ensure that all policy and centre decisions are made with the needs of children at the forefront. We must view what we do through the lens of the child."*

*"Embrace parents as major partners."*

*"Go beyond minimum standards."*

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Set standards, guidelines, and curriculum that will focus on best practices and on supporting child development outcomes
7. Implement strategies to support all child care programs in meeting minimum standards of health and safety and in improving quality in their programs
8. Regularly engage families and early childhood educators in the development of early years policies and curriculum

## IV. Support and development of the workforce

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### CHALLENGES

- ▶ Wages for early childhood educators are low and benefits are not generous
- ▶ Recruiting and retaining staff at child care centres is a challenge due to low wages and benefits
- ▶ Early childhood educators often find it necessary to take unpaid time off to pursue further training and education opportunities
- ▶ There are limited training opportunities available for post-secondary education
- ▶ Operators have difficulty finding qualified substitutes
- ▶ There are few opportunities for professionals with related training to work in a regulated child care centre
- ▶ Professional development opportunities are limited and need to be enhanced
- ▶ Not all owners and directors have early childhood education training
- ▶ The process for recognizing out-of-province post-secondary training and credentials needs to be improved
- ▶ Networking between and among early childhood educators and directors is recognized as a valuable practice and needs to increase
- ▶ Networking with department staff is also important and needs to be improved

*"It is evident that many ECEs are not receiving the appropriate grant money or we would not be still hearing of people earning \$12.00 hr."*

*"If it was not for the minimum wage going up, I would be making the same as I was 16 years ago."*

*"Provide professional development during work hours on weekdays.... Staff are missing out on learning."*

*"[We are] inhibited by the lack of ready access to professional development."*

*"ECEs are our biggest resource, we need to support them."*

*"High turnover, minimally qualified and supported staff, limited leadership and limited experience with inclusive practice must be addressed before inclusion can be successful."*

*"We need to transition from competitors to colleagues."*

*"We do not want to hear about changes to [Early Childhood Education] on the news. Call us together to hear it firsthand before it goes to the public."*

### RECOMMENDATIONS

9. Improve wages for early childhood educators
10. In partnership with child care organizations, develop collaborative approaches to solving recruitment and retention issues
11. Improve educational and professional development standards in child care
12. Enhance training and professional development opportunities to enable early childhood educators to maintain and develop their skills and expertise
13. Create opportunities for early childhood educators and directors to communicate and network among themselves and with Department staff
14. Improve process for recognizing credentials and experience



## V. Structure and governance of the system

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### CHALLENGES

- ▶ Structural, system-wide changes are long overdue
- ▶ The current model of funding child care is not effective or sustainable
- ▶ The current model of funding has not been effective in ensuring fair wages and benefits for educators
- ▶ The current model of funding does not respond to the accessibility and affordability needs of families, children and communities
- ▶ There are considerable differences in fees across the province
- ▶ There are considerable differences in how centres allocate their revenue and grant funding, which leads to inconsistencies in wages for staff and services for families
- ▶ An increase in funding to support the child care system was consistently identified as a priority
- ▶ Reporting requirements need to be updated
- ▶ The public does not have a full understanding of the importance of quality early learning and the growth and development of children in the early years

*"We see children with autism in centres as well as children with behavioural challenges and with mild intellectual challenges. We seldom see children with moderate to severe medical issues, children with severe intellectual challenges. Centre directors often say that they would be willing to include these children, but cannot afford to do so under the current resource support formula."*

*"The Province does not fund private schools in the educational system, so why do they fund for-profit daycare where a private company profits from the province? .... This conversation needs to happen, but always gets pushed to the side."*

*"Nova Scotia's limited public policy around ECE and increasing reliance on commercial operators short changes young children of development opportunities, makes it far harder for parents, especially women, to participate in the work force and places significant financial barriers on young families."*

*"Provide more structured, systematic ways for ECEs and primary teachers to collaborate. We are a resource that schools could benefit from using."*

*"Educate the public on what we do, its value. We're not just babysitters."*

*"Educate the community at large about early childhood development, about play, about how children learn, about the critical importance of the early years, about brain development, and so on – share the research!"*

*"Family Home Day Care is a big secret. The government needs to have a campaign to let families know that quality child care is available in homes."*

### RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Improve the structure and governance model to ensure efficiency and sustainability of the child care system
16. Improve funding accountability and reporting requirements to ensure grants are being used as intended
17. Develop additional ways for early childhood educators to collaborate and share best practices on issues related to complex needs and to successful school transition
18. Raise public awareness about the importance of early childhood education and the role of early childhood educators as educators in supporting the development of young children

# Appendix 1

## Parent subsidy per diem

Below is a history of Nova Scotia's parent subsidy daily rates.

NS PARENT SUBSIDY - PER DIEM HISTORY				
	Infant	Toddler	Preschool	School Age
1987	\$13.30	\$13.30	\$13.30	\$13.30
1998-2002	\$14.95	\$14.95	\$14.95	\$14.95
2003	\$15.45	\$15.45	\$15.45	\$15.45
2005-2009	\$19.75	\$17.75	\$16.75	\$15.45
2010-2016	\$22.00	\$20.00	\$19.00	\$17.70

In the last 10 years, the daily rate for parent subsidies for low income families has increased by \$2.25.

# Appendix 2

## Wages for early childhood educators

Wages for early childhood educators in Nova Scotia are some of the lowest in Canada as reported in the You Bet I Care (1991, 1998) and You Bet We Still Care (2013) reports.

Data was collected from surveys of Early Childhood Educators and was widely distributed through public reports.

### Mean Gross Hourly Wage for Early Childhood Educators (Level 2/3)

Jurisdiction	1991	1998	2012
Québec	\$10.25	\$11.04	\$19.13
Ontario	11.51	13.48	17.29
British Columbia	8.94	12.07	17.00
Manitoba	9.29	9.49	16.00
Alberta	6.76	8.36	15.33
Prince Edward Island	7.25	7.54	15.00
Saskatchewan	7.52	10.47	14.92
Newfoundland/Labrador	6.03	6.76	14.00
New Brunswick	6.19	7.12	13.50
Nova Scotia	7.64	8.51	12.84
Yukon	9.58	11.71	N/A
<b>CANADA</b>	<b>\$9.71</b>	<b>\$11.48</b>	<b>\$16.50</b>

*Full- and Part-Time Combined, 1991 and 1998*

# Appendix 3

## Details of the Consultation

### Focus Groups

#### 23 focus groups in the following locations:

- ▶ Halifax (4 sessions, incl. one by video conference for Francophone/Acadian community)
- ▶ Yarmouth (2 sessions)
- ▶ Truro (3 sessions)
- ▶ Amherst (1 session)
- ▶ Sydney (2 sessions)
- ▶ Port Hawkesbury (2 sessions)
- ▶ Sackville (3 sessions)
- ▶ Dartmouth (2 sessions)
- ▶ Kentville (2 sessions)
- ▶ Bridgewater (2 sessions)

#### 409 participants:

- ▶ 359 child care centre licensees and staff
- ▶ 11 representatives from family home day care agencies
- ▶ 15 representatives from early childhood education training institutions
- ▶ 8 representatives from Early Intervention Programs and Family Resource Centres
- ▶ 16 reps from 3 early childhood education advocacy organizations

The cumulative wisdom of all focus groups at an astounding 6,440 years of insight and experience.

### Key Informant Interviews

#### 8 key informant interviews, which included provincial and federal partners

- ▶ Status of Women
- ▶ Health and Wellness
- ▶ Community Services
- ▶ Early Childhood Development System Leadership Group
- ▶ Provincial Early Years Partnership (PEYP)
- ▶ Representatives from School Board staff
- ▶ Early Years Centres Partners
- ▶ Early Years Branch Staff

### Online Public Survey

#### Completed by 7,000 people

- ▶ including 5853 parents

### Written Submissions

#### 20 written submissions

- ▶ recommendations from ECEs, child care agencies, educational institutions, families, trade unions, and public policy organizations.

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