



Toronto First Duty: From activist research to public policy change

Canadian Association for Research in Early Childhood
May 26, 2012 Wilfred Laurier University
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TFD Background

- Robust child care movement with 30 years & dozens of reports calling for improved access to child care
- 1995 Royal Commission on Learning – recommends education begin at 3 & be combined with care in schools
- 1999 – Early Years Study popularizes science of ECD and recommends integrated program delivery
- Atkinson Foundation’s Early Years Challenge Fund to create a seamless continuum of ECE services from prenatal to formal schooling
 - City of Toronto (child care, public health, special needs services); Toronto District School Board (4 & 5 yr old kindergarten), Canadian Autoworkers (communications)
 - 5 sites, \$5-M, 5 yr commitment; now in its 12th and final year
- Drives recommendations in EYS 2 & 3

Documenting the benefits

TFD 3rd phase of research

- **Children** – improved school readiness, less draw on special education
- **Families** – less stress, felt better able to support children's learning, more involved in school community
- **Community** – improved EDI scores; improved school/ community connection
- **Educators** – less isolation, professional satisfaction, team protects against 'schoolification'
- **System** - Integration travels with quality
- **Cost-effective** – serves more families for the same costs in ways they prefer to be served

Designed to influence policy

- **Public Policy** - demonstrating and sharing practices in programming and policy
- **See, Touch, Feel** – the possibilities in action
- **Conversation starter** bringing decision-makers together with influencers & practitioners
- **Experiment** with practices of integration
- **Research** documented changes in programming, practice & public policy
- **Communication** - research was central & popularly communicated
- **Tools:** Foundation for Ontario's new emergent curriculum, Indicators of Change, Child Observation Framework
- **Non partisan**

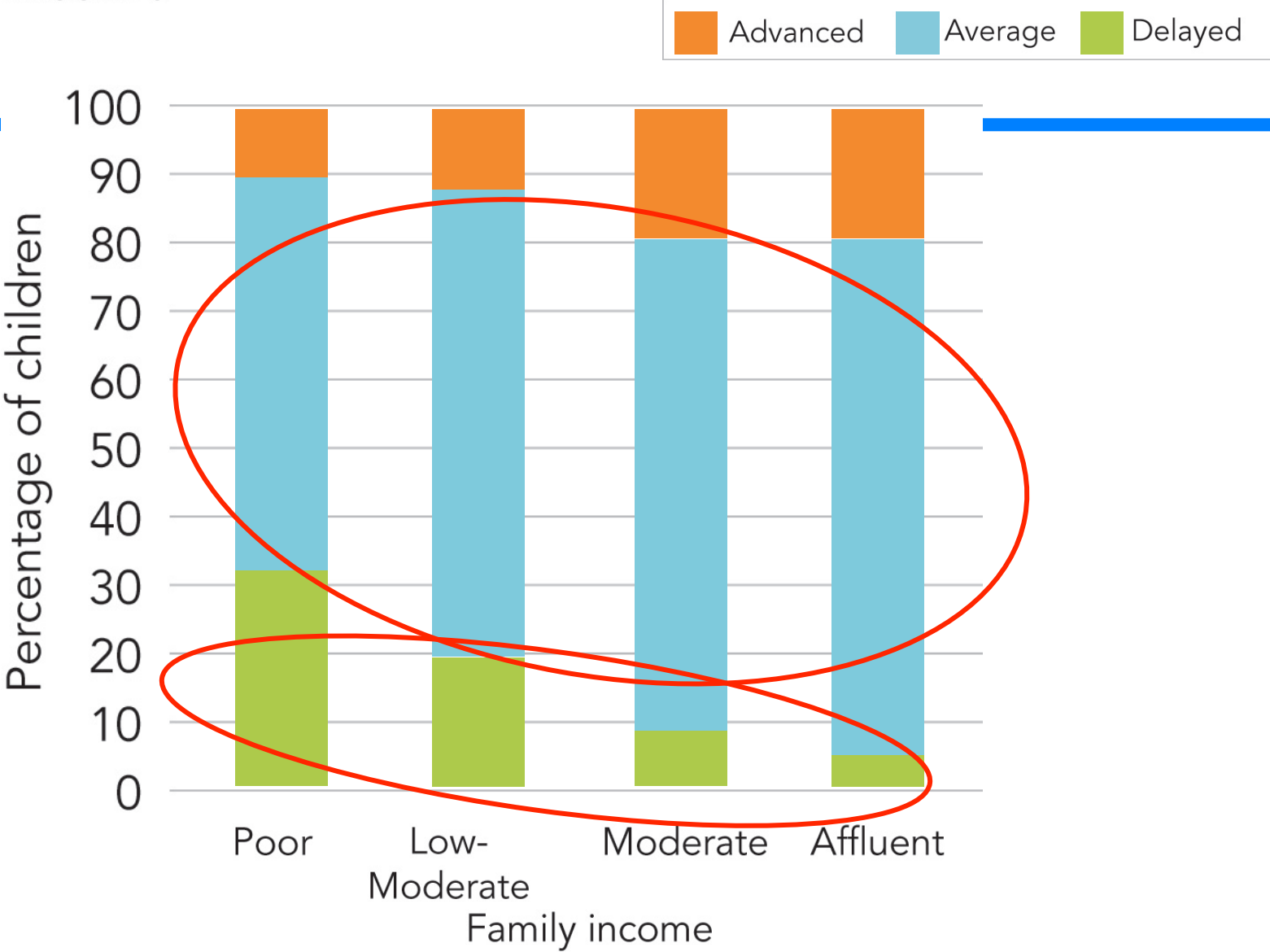
Policy outcomes

- 2004 - Ontario's Best Start
- 2009 - *Our Best Future in Mind* - 0-12 strategy
- 2010 – Ontario legislation for full day school programs for 4 & 5 year olds with educator teams – teachers & ECEs – and extended day options
- Piloting a 0-12 continuum in a First Nations community
- Inspired Early Years Centres in Coquitlam & Mission, BC; Best Start in Peel, Early Child Development Centres in New Brunswick; Smart Start in PEI; extension of Schools Plus & new policy insights in Nova Scotia; feasibility study in Newfoundland & policy and program delivery innovation in Victoria, Australia

Education Act changes pioneered by TFD

- Teaching team in FDK – ‘duty to cooperate’
- Developmental curriculum
- Extended day options
- Universality
- *Unique in the Canadian context*

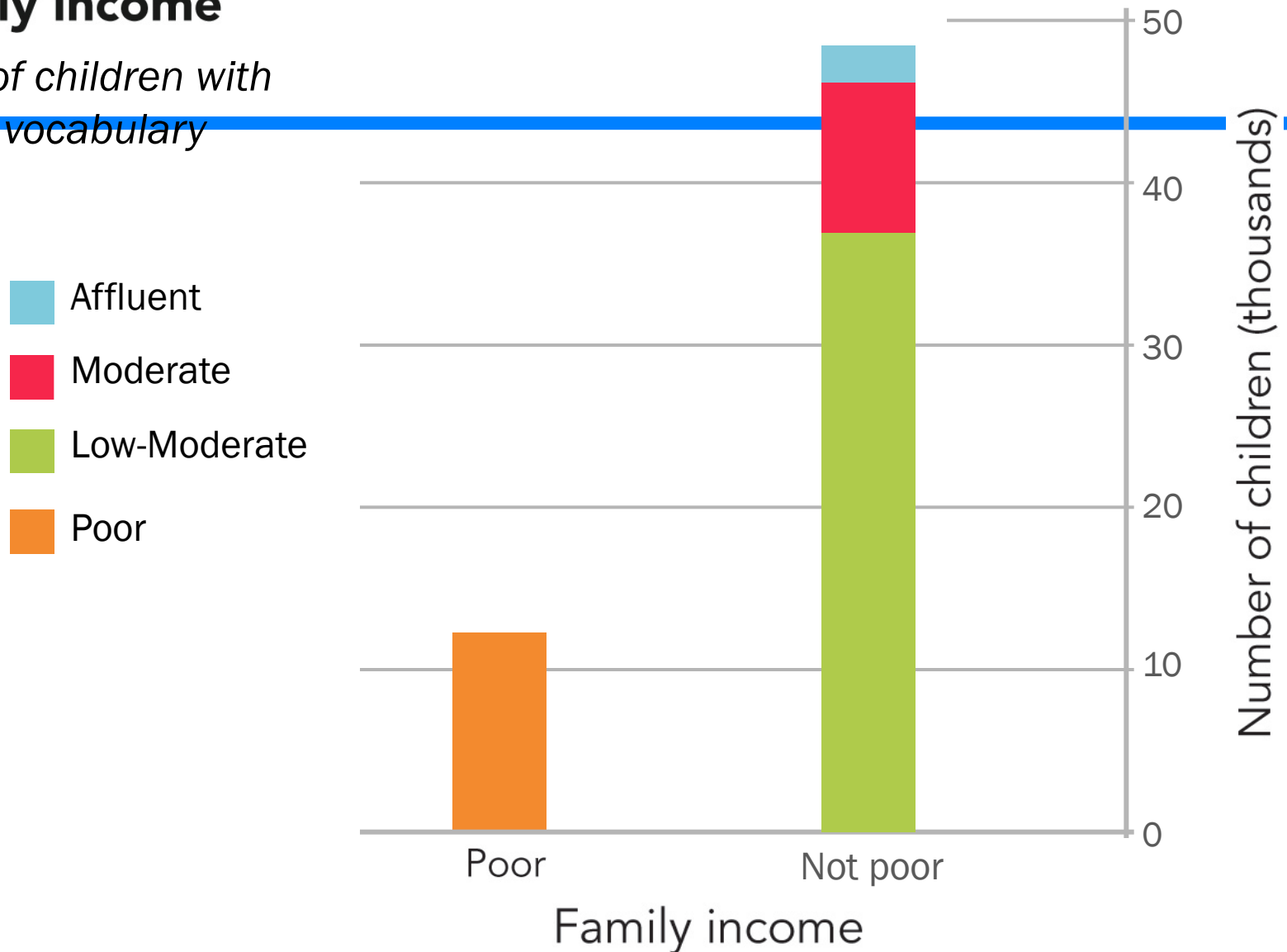
Vocabulary skills in children ages 4 and 5 years by family income



Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada. National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. Cycle 8, 2008–2009. Special tabulation.

Vocabulary skills in children ages 4 and 5 years by family income

Number of children with 'delayed' vocabulary



Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada. National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. Cycle 8, 2008–2009. Special tabulation.

Barriers

- *Structure*: different professional ideologies and departmental and agency cultures
- *Combining universal and targeted programs*: Fractured funding structure
- *Communication*: Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities
- *Resources*: Financial uncertainties
- *Staff*: Disparity in remuneration and working conditions, labour contracts and professional regulation

Scaling up

- Political will & leadership
- Bureaucratic capacity
- Strategy to combine universal versus targeted programs
- Creating the political space
- Costs???

The Quebec example

- 70,000 more mothers are working
- They pay \$1.5-billion annually in taxes
- And draw \$340-million less in social transfers
- Boosting the GDP by \$5-billion

Source: Fortin, P., Godbout, L., & St-Cerny. (2012).

Quebec mothers have:

- Moved Quebec from the bottom to the top in female labour force participation in Canada
- Halved child poverty rates
- Boosted fertility
- Meanwhile, Quebec student test scores have moved from below to above the national average

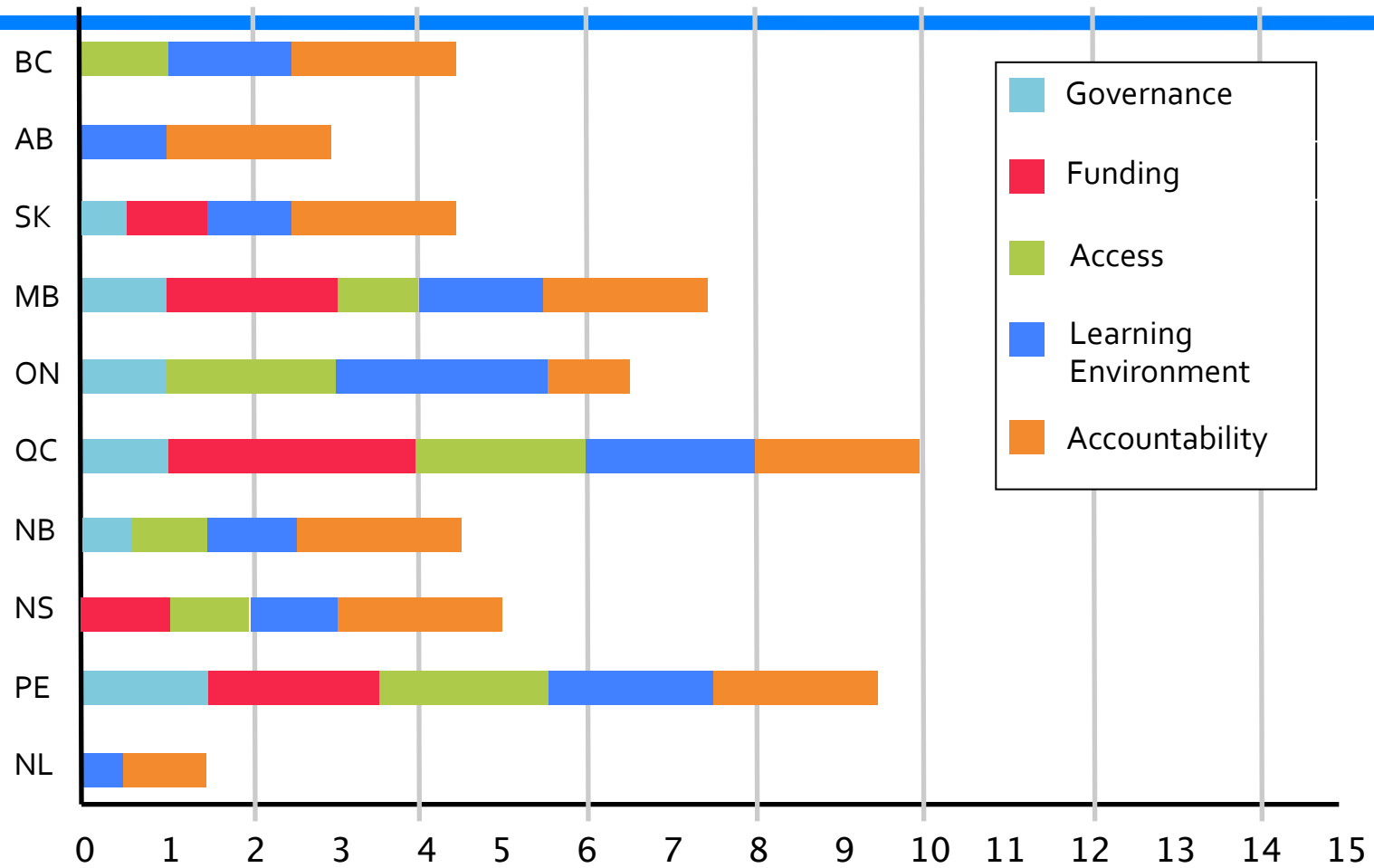
Source: Fortin, P., Godbout, L., & St-Cerny. (2012).

Done right early education and care pays for itself

For ever dollar Quebec spends on ECE, it collects \$1.05 in increased taxes and reduced family payments, while the federal government gets \$0.44

Source: Fortin, P., Godbout, L., & St-Cerny. (2012).

Monitoring progress: Early Childhood Education Index



For more information

- www.toronto.ca/firstduty
- www.earlyyearsstudy.ca

Integration Conference, OISE/UofT

October 22, 23 2012