

# How Demonstration Projects Inform Policy and Practice

Early Years Centres and the Pre-primary Program

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# Nova Scotia

- About 1 Million people
- 8000 births a year
- Regulated child care spaces available for approximately 30% of children (0-5), about 80% utilization
- Aging population

# The state of early childhood

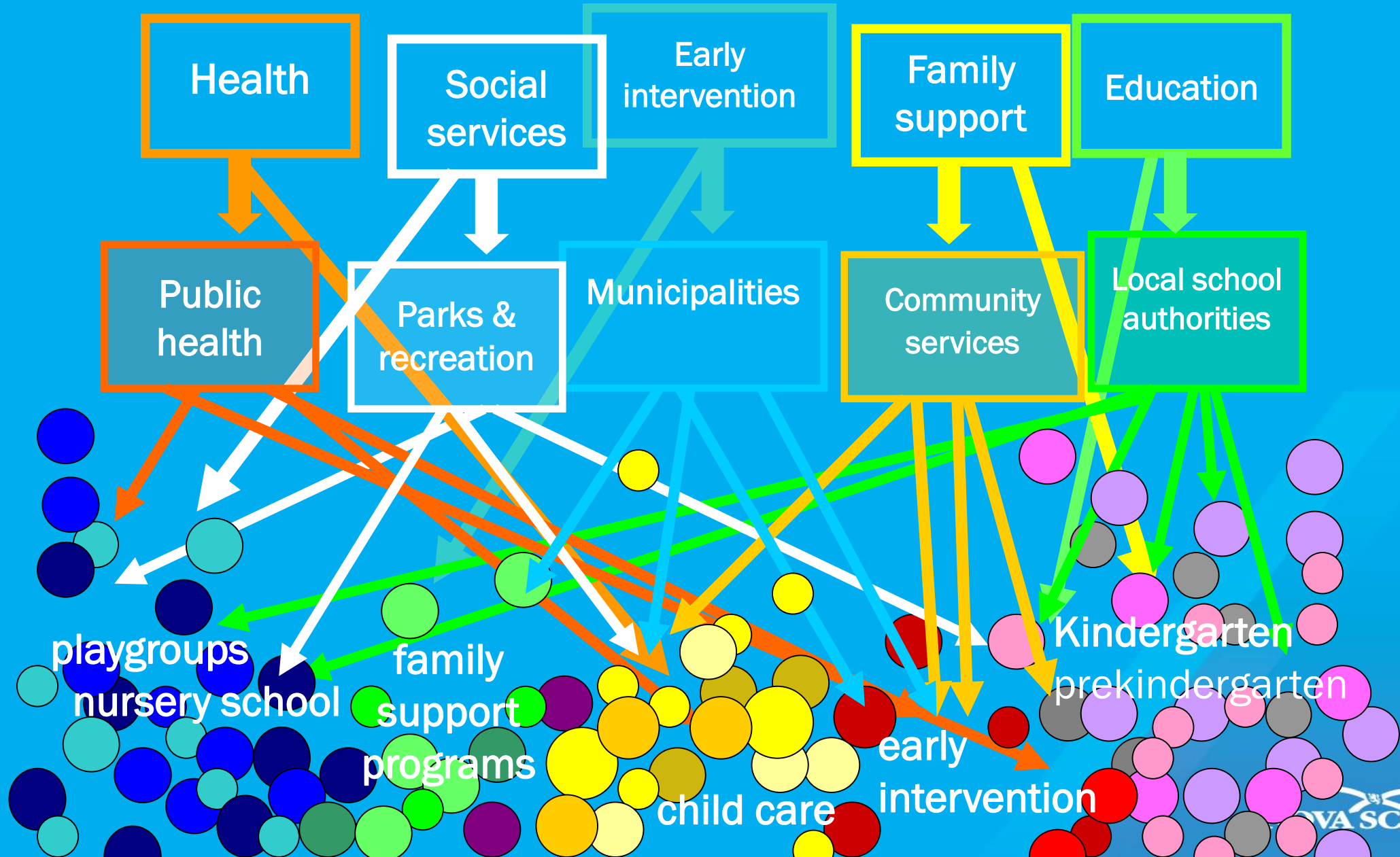
- Providing best start for youngest generation is a growing priority –education, health and economic benefits
- Families needs are diverse and challenging
- Increasing demands and changing context within early childhood, education and health systems

1 in 4 NS children  
experience an early  
developmental  
vulnerability



# Chaos

from Early Years Study 2 (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007)



# The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development



- In 2013 the newly reconfigured Department of Education and Early Child Development (EECD) expanded its mandate through the addition of the Early Years Branch (EYB).
- The EYB was formed in recognition of the need for an integrated system that supports the learning, care, and well-being of children through the prenatal period to age 6 years, bridging the gap between early childhood development and school entry.

# Early Years in Nova Scotia

Early Years Consultation (2012) areas of action:

- Early learning
- Children’s growth, development, and wellness
- Support for families
- The workforce
- Leadership, system integration, and accountability

Minister’s Action Plan for Education (2015) to renew, refocus and rebuild the education system

Cradle to Career: Collaborative Development Plan (2015)

Affordable, Quality Child Care: A Great Place to Grow! (2016)

Canada–Nova Scotia Early Learning And Child Care Agreement (2018)

*“Children are healthy, safe  
and nurtured in their  
families and communities.”*

# Early Years Branch

- Regulated child care of licensed centres and family homes
- Child Care Staff Classification Services
- Child Care Subsidy program
- Early intervention services
- EDI
- Early Years Centres
- Pre-primary Program





# Early Years Centres



- EYB opened its first early years centre in April 2014
- Located in or near schools and are for children age four and under and their families
- Schools provide a stable platform and core funding allows an integrated program that can serve more families more effectively
- Each is tailored to meet the needs of its community
- Learnings from Toronto First Duty and Doveton, Australia

# Early Years Centre Core Services

- A school offered, no fee, play based Early Learning Program for 4 year olds
- Family supports and resources
- Regulated child care responsive to the needs of families



# Goals of the Early Years Centres

- By integrating programs and services at the community level, and enhancing the collaboration of schools and service providers, each Early Years Centre aims to:
  - Improve outcomes for children prenatally through school entry
  - Integrate core programs and services at the community level
  - Increase collaboration between core programs, related partners and service providers
  - Increase access to programs and services for young children and their families
  - Improve program quality



# EYCs across Nova Scotia



# EYC Evaluation (2014-17)

# EYC Evaluation

- Funded by the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation
- Participatory 5-year evaluation (2014-2019)
- EYC logic model and evaluation framework originally developed to guide evaluation



# Data collection (2014-2016)

## Process measures

- Document Review
- Key Contact and Partner Interviews
- Family Focus Group
- Story Sharing

## • Outcome measures

- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) – 3
- Early Development Instrument (EDI)
- Administrative data
- Indicators of Change (IoC)

# Key accomplishments (Yrs. 1 and 2)

- Building trust and relationships
- Strengthening partnerships and community linkages
- Building awareness and understanding, linking families

*“... the tremendous positive response we’ve gotten from other service providers around sharing the space, being part of the program, promoting the program and the engagement to work at something together.”*



# Key enablers

- School and school board commitment
- History of partnership and collaboration
- Willingness, commitment and shared vision
- Flexibility

*“I think as we meet and as we get to know each other better, and get to know what people are doing, it’s amazing to see what people want to do, and how much they want to give, and support and be there”*

# Key challenges

- Linking to regulated childcare
- Lack of clarity on EYC model
- Challenges with integration across key systems, e.g., education, community services, health
- Urban vs. rural differences
- Industrial action (Yr. 2)

*“... people sort of hadn’t really clear information around what exactly was the role of the Early Years Centre. As soon as you hear the word centre, you start thinking about childcare.”*

# Year 3 Evaluation (2016-17)



- Changing landscape – needed to acknowledge contextual factors that influence the EYC model within the changing system
- Guiding evaluation questions:
  1. How are EYCs developing the EYC model?
  2. How are services at EYCs coming together?
  3. How are the EYCs improving outcomes for children and families?

# Key findings: Year 3

Early Learning Program is a success of the EYCs

- Enrollment has increased and program quality is increasing
- Need to increase value and understanding of play-based learning

Family Supports and Services variable across sites

- Limited capacity of EYC staff to build partnerships
- Labour issues limited partnership development

Onsite childcare a consistent challenge for sites

- Variable needs for childcare across communities



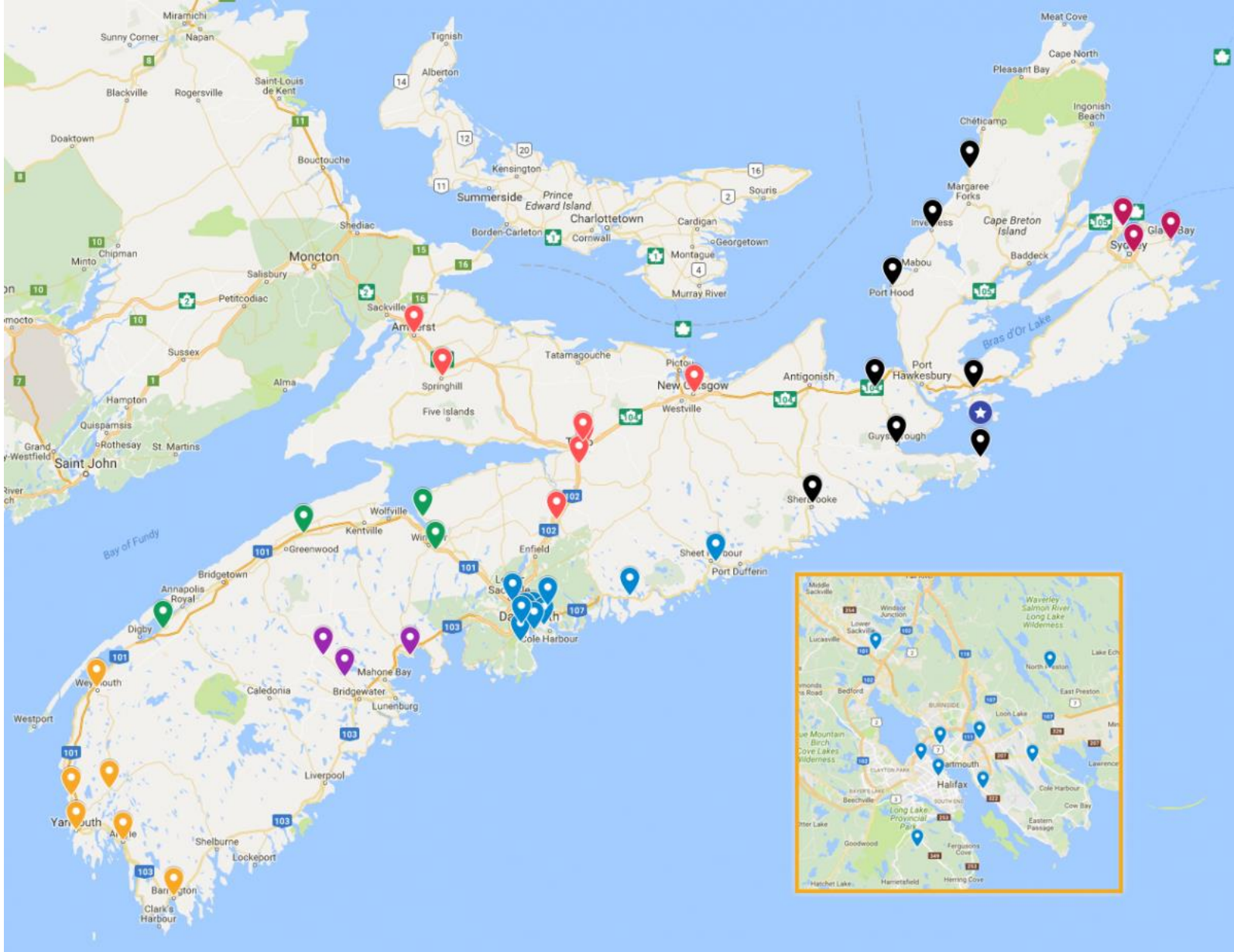
# Shifting to meet new mandates

# Pre-primary Program (PPP)

Announcement of a provincial Pre-primary Program starting September 2017

- Free and universal education for four year olds (voluntary) with trained ECEs
- Play-based program to support young children's development
- Early learning opportunity that is inclusive and respectful of diversity and welcomes the child and the family into the school community
- All existing school based Early Learning Programs / 4+ / *Grandir en Français* transition to PPP
- Following the new NS Early Learning Framework





Phase 1 Pre-primary sites (2018/19)

# EYC-PPP Evaluation (2017-18)

- Evaluation also shifted to include PPP
- Questions guiding the evaluation:
  - To what extent were EYCs and PPP implemented as intended?
  - To what extent do EYCs and PPP reach their intended target populations?
  - To what extent does the organizational structure support the implementation of EYCs and PPP?





# Data collection (2018)



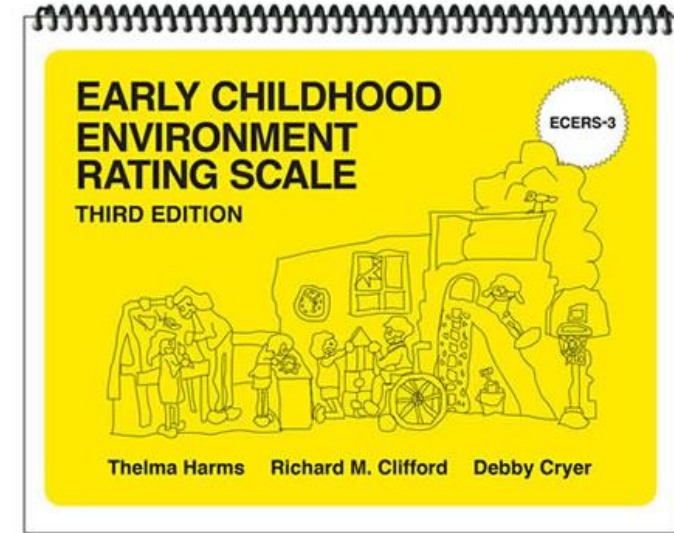
- **EYC and PPP Family Survey**
  - Online and telephone options
  - Promoted through EYC and PPP sites
  - Questions: Experiences, connections to school, impact on family and child, perspectives on play, barriers to participation, demographics, etc.
- **PPP Attendance Data**
  - Will access through PowerSchool
  - # children attending and % of overall days attended

# Data collection (2017-2018)

- Case studies (2 EYC, 2 PPP)
  - Tour of site by research team (pictures of physical spaces)
  - Focus groups: Families, Early Childhood Educators, EYC Site-Management Teams
  - Telephone interviews: Pre-Primary Coordinators/Consultants, School Principal, Early Elementary Teachers, other partners
  - Document Review
  - Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) – 3

# ECERS-3

- The ECERS-3 is designed to assess quality in an early childhood setting.
- Observations focus on the various interactions that go on in a classroom and materials that support these interactions.
- Administered by DEECD



# Knowledge translation



- Technical summary report on the family survey
- One overall report summarizing all data collection methods
- Short summary reports will be provided to the case study sites with their individual findings (e.g., infographic)
- Presentation of results to stakeholders

# Informal learnings so far...

- In-kind support in schools
- Outdoor play
- Inclusion and diversity



## Building local research capacity

# Building local research capacity

- Early Years Research Advisory Committee (funded by the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation and the Les Lois Shaw Foundation)
  - Brought together researchers, policy makers and practitioners across NS
  - Goal was to begin to develop a research agenda that supports early childhood
- Subsequent research studying achievement gaps and early childhood
- Federal research funding for upcoming meeting to determine how to further support collaborations

# Canada Research Chair

## Early Childhood: Diversity and Transitions

- Goal is to enhance well-being during early childhood by ensuring policy and practice supports marginalized families as they transition across early learning environments
- Establishing a research centre to engage research partners and participants in the co-production of policy relevant research



# Our learnings

- Relationships matter
- Flexibility and adaptability is important
- Need to appreciate different roles and priorities



# Going forward in NS

# Weaving new supports for families and young children

- *Creative, Competent and Curious*
- Quality Matters
- Inclusion support
- Pyramid Model
- Strategic growth of regulated child care in areas of need
- Childcare subsidy rate thresholds changed
- Awareness campaign to promote value of an ECE career
- ECE workforce strategy
- Universal free Pre-primary Program for all 4 year olds by 2020



# Discussion

How is research or evaluation informing your work?

How are collaborations happening between research, policy and practice?

# Contact information

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