

Valuing Children, Families and Childcare

New Brunswick
Child Care Review
Task Force
FINAL REPORT



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New Brunswick Child Care Review Task Force Final Report

Province of New Brunswick
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Message from the Commissioners

In June 2015, Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Serge Rousselle created the independent Childcare Review Task Force to provide recommendations for “a path for creating the right conditions for *quality* early learning and childcare that are *accessible, affordable* and *inclusive* and that support parents’ participation in the workforce” by:

- gathering input from parents, early learning and childcare operators and educators, as well as other stakeholders and the public;
- working with the sector to develop options that address the viability of centres within the context of quality services; and
- gathering evidence from the research and exemplary practices in other jurisdictions.

As commissioners, we sought input on the themes outlined in the mandate of the task force. Our first responsibility was to create a space of trust so the people working in, and committed to, quality early learning and childcare could express what was in their hearts and minds about our current realities in New Brunswick. Thank you to those who communicated with us through conversations, consultations, submissions, surveys, telephone calls or emails. We were deeply moved, and we appreciate the respect, thoughtfulness and passion that everyone brought to the conversations. We were struck by the strong sense of community present in the early learning and childcare sector (ELCC).

In writing this report, we were very conscious of the responsibility of accurately and respectfully reflecting the perspectives of the people in the ELCC field, parents, government staff and interest groups. As we met with people, read and analyzed the surveys, focus groups and bulletin board results, we were faced with a range of stakeholders’ unique perspectives. This report strives to reflect the different points of view that we encountered.

We thank Minister Rousselle and department staff who supported us during our mandate. We also express our gratitude to Bonnie Hamilton Bogart and H el ene de Varennes, who assisted us greatly with our research and writing for this report.



Dr. Pam Whitty



Corinne Hach e

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Executive summary

The New Brunswick Childcare Task Force Review was commissioned by Serge Rousselle, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, to provide recommendations for “a path for creating the right conditions for *quality* childcare that are *accessible, affordable* and *inclusive*, and that support parents’ participation in the workforce.”

In the fall of 2015, consultations with early learning and childcare educators, operators, parents and organizations, interest groups, government agencies and arm’s-length government agencies took place across the province. Surveys, focus groups, bulletin board forums and several submissions provided additional information on the current childcare situation in New Brunswick. Extensive analyses, undertaken in conjunction with provincial, national and international research, underpin the findings and recommendations.

Childcare, once considered a women’s issue, is now widely regarded as *a key element of social infrastructure*. Early learning and childcare as social infrastructure requires increased public investment to support curriculum that is well researched, well-funded, thoughtfully implemented and carefully monitored; educators and operators who are well-educated with ongoing access to professional development and education; and local governance and coordination of services.

Accessible, affordable, inclusive and high-quality early learning and childcare support:

- optimal child development and learning;
- parents’ labour force attachment and their ability to increase their income security and standard of living as well as to improve the future prospects of their children;
- job creation;
- higher birth rates;
- inclusion of children with additional needs;
- social inclusion of cultural minority groups;
- gender equality through greater labour force participation by mothers;
- poverty reduction;
- reduced need for social assistance; and
- a more vibrant economy.

The New Brunswick Strategic Program Review, *Choices to Move New Brunswick Forward*, emphasizes the priorities of job creation, fiscal responsibility and improving services for families. Each of these inter-connected priorities can be supported through a high-quality, affordable, accessible and inclusive early learning and childcare system.

As research and experience in other jurisdictions have confirmed increased public investment in regulated childcare results in:

- improved early learning and childcare services for families, continuities in the education and care for young children, and availability and access for parents;
- job creation opportunities in the early learning and childcare sector. (Currently, early learning and childcare employs approximately 4,000 people, mostly women.);
- increased Gross Domestic Product and provincial tax revenues while generating cost savings in reduced dependence on social assistance;
- a powerful incentive to bring new businesses and families to New Brunswick, as was the case with the Initiative ’91 kindergarten implantation; and
- support for provincial government efforts on gender equality and the integration of new immigrant families into New Brunswick communities.

Throughout the consultation process, parents identified the high cost of early learning and childcare services, accessibility and availability as their chief concerns. Operators cited viability of their centres as their central concern. Early childhood educators and operators conveyed the importance of and their passion for working with young children and their families, while recognizing that early childhood education as a profession is undervalued by society, as evidenced by low wages and challenging working conditions.

Recommendations

The recommendations are firmly grounded in the re-visioning of early learning and childcare as social infrastructure, reflecting society’s collective responsibility for the early learning and care of its youngest citizens, while building on current strengths within the province. Providing high-quality early learning and childcare is in keeping with the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, of which Canada is a signatory.

The recommendations are designed to achieve a high-quality, affordable, accessible and inclusive early learning and childcare system for families; one that is sustainable for future generations, by moving the sector toward a system that is publicly managed and supported by incrementally greater public investment *over time*. This transformation can be brought about through government's continuing commitment to sustained funding and high-quality early learning and childcare through curricula and workforce development.

The five overarching recommendations pertain to: governance, educational practices, early childhood education as a professional field of practice, public investment, children's rights and parental engagement.

Governance: High-quality early learning and childcare is *social infrastructure*. A strengthened system will feature greater public funding and public management and a reduced reliance on the market approach to early learning and childcare. Service delivery will be administered locally, within the school districts, using approaches that are collaborative, integrated and more responsive to community needs.

Educational practices: A quality early learning and childcare system requires enhanced professional development that is centred within the two provincial curricula, providing ongoing support for educators and operators. Exemplary educational practices reflect the particular strengths and interests of children and are inclusive and respectful of diversity.

Early childhood education as a professional field of practice means greater access to post-secondary educational opportunities and professional development;

increased staff qualifications over time with a corresponding salary grid; and the creation of a legislated, provincial early childhood body.

Public investment: Through incremental increases in public investments and a commitment to sustained funding, the first priority is the provision of a coherent, publicly managed early learning and childcare system for children from birth to four years; one that would be sustained as a system over time. This will be accomplished through approaches that are comprehensive, collaborative and inclusive of the sector.

Children's rights: The new system protects children's best interests, and the right of every child to develop to his or her potential. It also ensures a respectful regard for diversity within the early learning and childcare setting. Because children depend on their parents/guardians for nurturance and protection, the new early learning and childcare system supports parents' right to be fully engaged in matters pertaining to their children's care.

As described within the report, a systematic approach to well-supported early learning and childcare services is a significant social and economic development program that can positively affect the present and future course of the province. This report offers a path forward to an early learning and childcare system that can provide access for all children to fundamental learning experiences that will deepen New Brunswick's ability to maintain strong populations, strong social programs and a strong economy for generations to come.

Introduction

In this report, we strive to represent the findings of the task force as gathered and analyzed from sector consultations, surveys, focus groups, bulletin board forums, research and promising practices.

There are close to 4,000 operators/educators working within the regulated early learning and childcare sector and 27,000 children in their educational care.¹ In addition to information from a range of consultations, the report draws on a well-established and compelling body of research. The research demonstrates that high-quality early learning and childcare bring fundamental benefits to children and families while being a solid economic investment for New Brunswick in the present and the future. The research resonates strongly with the qualitative and quantitative findings of the consultations, surveys and focus groups, bulletin board forums and submissions.

New Brunswick families, and particularly children, require access to early learning and childcare facilities engaged in exemplary practices. Educators, families, researchers, government staff and interest groups alike echo the research in their understandings that high-quality, accessible, inclusive early learning and childcare contribute to the well-being of children and families as well as create an economic advantage for society, in the present and the future. Although the commission has ended, ongoing discussions and specific structures are required to continuously and accurately understand and support the early learning and childcare requirements of New Brunswick families and the complexities of supporting and maintaining high-quality care and learning environments.

This report builds on the strengths of the New Brunswick early learning and childcare situation, setting out transformative possibilities for children, families and society. This early learning and childcare system can be built over time — a high-quality, equitable system that is accessible, affordable and inclusive for *all* children and families. The recommendations are intended as calls to action. There are immediate and long-term economic and social benefits in building an ELCC system,² while the honouring of the *International Convention of the Rights of the*

Child.³ The overarching principle of the convention (article 3) calls for the best interests of children to be embedded, “in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies.”⁴

Canadian context

Two recent Canadian reports (Ivanova, 2015, and Ferns and Friendly, 2014) confirm that Canada’s investment in early childhood education and care remains short of the minimum public investment recommended by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF). In contrast, public education, available from kindergarten to Grade 12, is a universal public entitlement with a well-educated and well-paid workforce, and ongoing professional development, unlike the majority of early learning and childcare in Canada, which is in a market-driven system and treated as a commodity⁵. At the same time, there is an extensive body of research that demonstrates the short- and long-term pedagogical and economic benefits of significant investments in high-quality childcare for children, families and society.⁶

In Canadian provinces and territories, government policies have not always kept up with societal changes. In relation to other OECD countries, Canada’s

Benefits: Understanding and Addressing Workforce Shortages in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Project. Prepared by the Centre for Spatial Economics for the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council.

1 This is the number of spaces within regulated early learning and childcare. At any one time all spaces may not be occupied.

2 Heckman, J.J. 2008. The Case for Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children. In: *Big Ideas for Children: Investing in our Nation’s Future*, 49-58; R. Fairholme. 2009. *Literature Review of Socioeconomic Effects and Net*

3 UNICEF, (1990). Convention of the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>

4 Katherine Cavell, Children’s Rights Centre, Cape Breton University.

5 Ivanova, I. 2015. Solving BC’s affordability crisis in childcare. Vancouver, BC: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; Ferns, C & Friendly, M. (2014). *The state of early childhood education and care in Canada 2012*. Moving Childcare Forward Project (a joint initiative of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Centre for Work, Families and Well-Being at the University of Guelph, and the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba).

6 Heckman, J.J. 2008. The Case for Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children. In: *Big Ideas for Children: Investing in our Nation’s Future*, 49-58; R. Fairholme. 2009. *Literature Review of Socioeconomic Effects and Net Benefits: Understanding and Addressing Workforce Shortages in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Project.* Prepared by the Centre for Spatial Economics. for the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council.

spending on early learning and childcare has been very low. In 2008, Canada tied for last place among 25 OECD countries in terms of benchmarks reached.⁷

There are longstanding and common challenges for childcare services across Canada in achieving high quality services. These challenges, with the exception of Quebec, and increasingly Prince Edward Island and Manitoba, include:

- severe shortages of spaces, especially for infants, children with additional needs, families working non-standard hours, indigenous and rural/remote communities;
- financial vulnerability of services due to underfunding;
- centres rely on parent fees as a main source of revenue. This often places regulated childcare out of reach for many families;
- widespread reliance on unregulated childcare — the only affordable and available option for most parents;
- difficulty attracting and retaining qualified educators in part because of low wages and devaluation of childcare work; and
- uneven program quality.⁸

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1970) was the first study of its kind to propose a national childcare program in Canada. Since then, there have been three major attempts by federal governments to develop a national childcare strategy: the 1986 Task Force on Child Care (Katie Cooke Task Force), the 1987 Special Committee on Child Care, and the Multi-lateral Framework Agreements cancelled on February 6, 2006.⁹

From 2006 to 2015, federal government childcare policies consisted of specific tax benefits for parents and direct monthly payments to parents. These policies were inadequate in addressing the challenges noted above, and they have had the effect of maintaining and promoting the belief and practice that childcare is a private matter rather than a public investment. In 2016, the prevailing approach to childcare across Canada remains a market model. With the exception of Quebec, and increasingly, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island, childcare operates within what is

referred to as a “mixed-market” model.¹⁰ A mixed-market model means that regulated childcare services are partially publicly financed and publicly regulated but are delivered privately.

As Michelle Piano (2014) notes:

“... without a coherent approach to childcare, Canadian families are forced to weave through a complex web of federal initiatives including: Child Care Expense Deduction, the National Child Benefit; which includes the Canada Child Tax Benefit; the National Child Benefit Supplement and Child Disability; the Universal Child Care Tax Benefit; and the Child Tax Credit.”¹¹

With the newly elected federal government, there are optimistic signs of a significant policy shift. The federal government has indicated that it will work collaboratively with provinces/territories to develop a national early learning and childcare policy framework to assist in funding support for accessible, affordable, quality childcare.

New Brunswick context

In the 1960s and 1970s in New Brunswick, as in the rest of Canada, changes in the roles, responsibilities and career motivations of women resulted in their increasing participation in the workforce. Within New Brunswick, the increase in the women’s workforce was accompanied by an increase in childcare centres. In 1974, recognizing the need for childcare legislation, and, following recommendations from the Teed Report (1973), the provincial government passed the *Child Day Care Act* (1974), since replaced by the *Family Services Act*, Part II, and Day Care Regulation 83-85 (1983). During the past three decades, numerous New Brunswick policy and funding initiatives related to early learning and childcare have developed.

The Office for Childhood Services was established in 1989 to coordinate provincial government policy development and program planning for childhood services across all departments. While childcare

7 UNICEF, *The Childcare Transition*. Florence, Italy: Innocenti Research Centre, 2008.

8 Conference Steering Committee. *Childcare in Canada by 2020: A vision and a way forward*. A discussion paper for Canada’s 4th national childcare policy conference, ChildCare2020, 7.

9 <http://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/12/02/canada’s-history-never-was-national-child-care-program>

10 In the “mixed” model, public funding is contributed to both sides of the market economy — the “demand side” and the “supply side.” Demand-side funding flows directly to individuals (parents) through the tax system as credits or deductions, or parent fee subsidies. Supply-side funding flows directly to approved early learning and childcare programs in the form of grants or direct public provision of childcare services.

11 Michelle Piano (2014). *Are We Ready For Universal Childcare in Canada?* (2014) Canada 2020 Analytical Commentary No. 6). Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Canada 2020.

was not central to the strategic framework *Playing for Keeps! Improving Our Children's Quality of Life* (1991), it was recognized as a family support. In the same year, the provincial government established universal full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds. The University of New Brunswick and the Université de Moncton delivered the Initiative '97 teacher education program so that newly hired kindergarten teachers could attain a bachelor's degree in early childhood education qualifications over eight years. Education for five-year-olds became a universal right, which recognized the importance of early learning, while still maintaining a split system of care and education for the youngest children. In addition, with the unplanned loss of five-year-olds to childcare, the sector underwent a difficult financial adjustment.

By 1994, with a growing body of research came the recognition that quality early learning and childcare was equally as important for children's learning as for parental labour force participation. The *Policy Framework for Child Care Services* quickly followed by *New Directions in Child Care Reforms* (1994) established a vision for a childcare delivery system proposing:

“... quality, affordable, accessible centre-based and home-based services for children needing non-parental care primarily because their parents are working, training or studying.”¹²

New Directions brought forward initiatives to: improve the quality of childcare; remove barriers to employment; and forge partnerships for a better childcare system. The release of this document, however, was accompanied by the elimination of operating funding grants to childcare centres and a re-allocation of these funds to parental childcare subsidy rates. The provincial government clearly recognized that childcare needed to be affordable for parents, yet the removal of operating grants financially impacted childcare centres.

In 2000, and coinciding with the release of the influential *You Bet I Care Child Care Study* (2000),¹³ the then-department of Family and Community Services developed a provincial early childhood agenda supported by federal-provincial funding (2000-2005). Specific initiatives from *Greater Opportunities for New Brunswick Children: An Early Childhood Development Agenda*

(2001-2002) included: the Quality Improvement Funding Support (QIFS) program to support working conditions for staff, equipment and materials funding, support to the Distance Training Initiative for childcare staff, and the introduction of the Enhanced Support Worker program to childcare access for children with disabilities and additional needs.

By 2005-2006, the federal government with the provinces and territories had established bilateral agreements for a national system of early learning and childcare based on quality, universality, accessibility and developmental programming. This new funding continued building on the *Greater Opportunities* initiatives and was further used to increase the daily subsidy and eligible income thresholds under the Daycare Assistance Program (DAP). In 2006, the federal government cancelled these agreements, putting an end to extensive federal funding and impacting provincial early learning and childcare initiatives.

Regardless, from 2001 through 2007, New Brunswick continued to build on the initiatives introduced in *Greater Opportunities*. It created the New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund which supported the development of the Early Learning and Childcare curriculum frameworks in both English and French and provided space creation supports and tuition reimbursement funding to individuals completing their early childhood education certificate.

The provincial government released its *10-year Early Childhood Strategy, Be Ready for Success* (2008). While *Be Ready for Success's* focus was broader than early learning and childcare, a number of its key commitments were aimed at ensuring that early learning and childcare services would be of high quality. There were continued investments in the training, recruitment and retention of early childhood educators, and curriculum supports. The provincial government continued to support the New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund, made significant changes to QIFS and gave renewed attention to the parent subsidy program. However, it cut professional development and materials funding to facilities, replacing them with a one-time curriculum materials investment.

In 2009, the Commission on Francophone Schools recommended the integration of early childhood into the collective education project. In 2010, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was formed, bringing together K-12 and early childhood services. Within the newly formed department, early childhood services have been streamlined in two streams of services respecting both official languages as a mean of aligning the duality of the school system

12 Province of New Brunswick. 1994. *New Directions: Child Care Reforms*.

13 In follow-up to the release of the study, *You Bet I Care* in November 2000, representatives of the childcare sector identified the key issues in New Brunswick that affect the quality of child day services and submitted recommendations for government action that would most enhance the quality of early learning and childcare in New Brunswick.

as a foundation to create a continuum of learning. Linguistic duality is legislated for the public school system and does not cover early childhood services.

This movement of early childhood into an education department has taken place in eight Canadian provincial/territorial jurisdictions. The report, *Putting Children First: Positioning Early Childhood for the Future* (2012), indicates that the long-term plan for the merged sectors is to create a developmental and learning continuum from birth until age 21, for positive and long-term impact.¹⁴

During the past decade, the increase in investments in early learning and childcare by the provincial government has been substantial. From April 1, 2007, to January 1, 2016, the number of regulated spaces increased from 15,506 to 26,689.¹⁵ The number of regulated centres increased from 470 to 782, and the number of staff increased from 2,511 to 3,864. In 2008, 30 per cent of the staff had post-secondary education.¹⁶ By March 31, 2015, this figure had risen to 49 per cent, with 41 per cent of these individuals having early childhood credentials.

This growth reflected the childcare needs of parents and society, for which the provincial government committed investments to support these services. Furthermore, educators and operators recognize the need for increased early childhood educator qualifications. These changes also reflect support from the New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund, specifically with tuition reimbursement for the early childhood education certificate program.

Continued growth of accessible, affordable, inclusive and high-quality early learning and childcare requires ongoing public investments. Affordability of services for parents, on the one hand, and the viability of early learning and childcare operations, on the other, continues to present challenges. Many parents carry a heavy financial burden during the early child-rearing years, and on the flip side, most early learning and childcare operators face rising costs associated with wage increases and the costs of adhering to necessary and increased quality early learning and childcare standards inherent in the two curricula.

The paradox is that, as a province, we continue to treat early learning and childcare as a commodity rather than building an affordable, inclusive, quality early learning and childcare system. This is particularly problematic when we consider how a high-quality early learning and childcare system, one that integrates early childhood services into a system, and purposefully plans for structural continuities of care and learning across — families, various early learning and childcare services, and school — can address disparities in children's lives.^{17,18}

Dragomir, 2012, a Canadian accountant who has worked with the childcare sector, concluded that childcare does not fit a classic revenue generation model. The typical strategies used to achieve viability and provide a return for investors, shareholders and/or owners do not easily apply to the “business” of caring for young children. Childcare centres have a limited capacity to generate enough revenue to support health and safety requirements, regulated ratios and space per child, etc. In childcare, increasing the revenue means increasing the number of “fee-paying spaces,” leaving two options of increasing revenue in a childcare facility — increased parent fees or increased government funding.¹⁹

14 Province of New Brunswick, 2012. *Putting Children First: Positioning Early Childhood for the Future*, 5.

15 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. January 2016.

16 Province of New Brunswick. 2008. *Be Ready for Success: A 10-year Early Childhood Strategy for New Brunswick*, 8.

17 Health and Education Research Group (HERG). October 13, 2013. New Brunswick Early Childhood Development Centres Study.

18 Melhuish, E. 2013. Why are the Early Years important for long-term development? Research and Policy. PowerPoint Presentation.

19 Dragomir, G. 2012. *Commercial Child Care in Canada: Can Child Care Thrive in a Speculative Investment Market?* Vancouver: PACE Accounting, 10. http://cccabc.bc.ca/act/actions/NFS/files/Commercial_Child_Care_in_Canada.pdf

A multi-methods approach to the study of the task force mandate

The task force conducted province-wide consultations focus groups, online surveys, online bulletin boards, briefs and discussion groups to gather information.

We consulted with:

- parents and the public;
- owner/operators, early childhood educators;
- anglophone communities;
- francophone communities;
- First Nations;
- multicultural association;
- childcare associations;
- government agencies and arm's-length agencies;
- related professional groups/organizations;
- government; and
- individuals.

Quantitative and qualitative information-gathering strategies were used to assist in constructing and validating a current description of early learning and childcare in New Brunswick. This mixed-methods approach aims to triangulate qualitative information and numeric results emerging from different types of data, in this case quantitative surveys to elaborate, or clarify results.^{20,21} Early childhood researchers Siraj-Blatchford, Sammons, Taggart, Sylva and Melhuish, (2008) describe how this approach provides summary evidence required by policymakers as well as practical, exemplar material required by practitioners. Complex contexts such as early learning and childcare demand analysis informed by multiple and diverse perspectives.²² As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) articulate, "the use of multi-methods or triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (p.5). Further, the research consulted becomes a basis for comparing and contrasting findings of the task force.²³

Quantitative information was collected from September to November 2015 through online surveys of parents, the public, early childhood educators and owner/operators. Qualitative information was gathered through online bulletin boards, focus groups, consultations, submissions and conversations. Inferences regarding the meaning of the data were made by comparing the findings from all the data gathering strategies in concert with the research.

In addition, a financial analysis of early learning and childcare services was conducted, specifically related to the task force's mandate. A commissioned report from the Atkinson Center of the University of Toronto on *Child Care in New Brunswick; Social and Economic Impacts* (McCuaig and Dhuey, 2015) was submitted.

Limitations

In every study, there are limitations. In this case, the consultations were time-constricted and fell short in hearing from parents across a wide range of socio-economic points, and from sufficient numbers of First Nations and multicultural groups. We also did not consult with children, the primary participants in early learning and childcare.

20 Grammatikopoulos, V. et al. 2008. Applying a Mixed Method Design to Evaluation Training Seminars Within an Early Childhood Education Project. *Evaluation and Research in Education*. Vol 21, No. 1, 15-16.

21 Schifferdecker, K.E. and Reed, V.A. 2009. Using mixed methods research in medical education: basic guidelines for researchers. *Medical Education*. 43: 637-644.

22 Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sammons, P., Taggart, B., Sylva, K and Melhuish, E. 2006. Educational Research and Evidence-based Policy: The Mixed-method Approach of the EPPE Project, *Evaluation & Research in Education*, 19:2, 63-82.

23 Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 3rd Edition. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc., 2009.

What we learned from parents and families

Parents/guardians hold the primary role in caring for and educating their children. Feedback from 2,140 parents and families was gathered by means of focus groups, online bulletin boards and an online survey administered by a private firm. The respondents in the survey sample were mostly female (89 per cent), well-educated (trade/technical college — 31 per cent, or university — 51 per cent), employed (88 per cent), with a child younger than 12 years of age (91 per cent). Fifty-three per cent earned more than \$70,000 a year. At least 55 per cent of those participating in the survey used regulated early learning and childcare centres and homes.

The survey also showed that 79 per cent of the parents using full- or part-time early learning and childcare (regulated or unregulated), paid the full cost of childcare, while only 10 per cent received a subsidy to help offset the cost of childcare through the Day Care Assistance Program.

The survey results indicate that middle-class families, those earning more than \$70,000 annually, are most likely to respond to an online survey. One interpretation of these results is that middle-class children are the ones benefiting from quality care and early education, potentially furthering the learning gap in school. Indeed, there is a wide body of research that shows how quality early learning and childcare programs address socio-economic disparities and:²⁴

- help to break intergenerational cycles of poor outcomes (high school drop-outs, health problems, poor academic performance, risky behaviours, early pregnancy);

- help children to develop stronger language skills, especially for children living in vulnerable families. Having strong language skills is a strong predictor of literacy success; and
- are the strongest outside-the-home influencers when it comes to early learning.²⁵

Do quality regulated early learning and childcare facilities seem to be most available to middle-class families? Ten per cent of parents surveyed indicated that they accessed the childcare subsidy or Day Care Assistance Program. Among those who do not apply, more than half were aware of the program, but they felt that they would either benefit little or they found the process complicated.

// I have heard I could receive help from the government. I am not sure. It seems complicated and I do not know where to look."

— Parent

The top three challenges identified in the total information gathered from parents were: fees, availability and infant care. Many parents indicated they were at their financial limit; that childcare fees often are equivalent to a mortgage, and perhaps, more surprisingly, that paying for childcare is more expensive than post-secondary education. Availability is another challenge. Some parents put their name on waiting lists while still pregnant. Even then, a space is not guaranteed, as finding a space for an infant is even more difficult.

// We're paying more in childcare per month than our mortgage. And that's with one child. Frankly, I'm not sure that we could afford to have two kids in daycare."

— Parent

// The cost has influenced whether to try for full-time employment vs part-time. It has also been a big factor on our decision to have a second child."

— Parent

24 Campbell, F. A., Pungello, E. P., Miller-Johnson, S., Burchinal, M., and Ramey, C. T. (2001). The development of cognitive and academic abilities: growth curves from an early childhood educational experiment. *Developmental psychology*, 37(2), 231.

McCauaig, K. and Dhuey, E. (2015). *Childcare in New Brunswick: The Social and Economic Impacts*. Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development: University of Toronto.

Mustard, F., McCain, M. and Shanker, S. (2007). *Early Years Study 2*. Toronto, On: Council for Early Childhood Development.

Walker, S. P., Wachs, T. D., Grantham-McGregor, S., Black, M. M., Nelson, C. A., Huffman, S. L., ... & Gardner, J. M. M. (2011). Inequality in early childhood: risk and protective factors for early child development. *The Lancet*, 378(9799), 1325-1338.

25 *Ibid.*

“I only work three days a week and have had trouble finding daycares that are willing to offer part-time.”

— Parent

“I placed my name on two wait lists...when I was three or four months pregnant. They cannot guarantee a spot for my baby yet. I need to get back to them in January. I am the primary earner in my family so I need to return to work. We do not have other options.”

— Mother

“There was a wait list at every daycare that we dealt with for the 15-month age. There is definitely a need for more spaces for that age.”

— Parents

“I would love to see a registered daycare that takes children under two in my town that doesn’t cost a fortune.”

— Parent

If fees are too expensive for middle-class families, and if assistance programs are complicated, this could explain why families may turn to unlicensed childcare centres. Lack of available spaces is a challenge for all families. Many parents expressed a desire to have more opportunities to be involved in childcare. This desire is aligned with information received by the task force from both interest groups and the research reviewed. All sources emphasized the importance of good centre-family relations for the best interests of the child.

Concluding comments

Parents referred to many positive aspects of early learning and childcare, including the availability of the service in their official language of choice, hours of operation, care of children’s health and safety, proximity of the centre to home or work and the fact there are trained educators who develop strong relationships with each child. A high percentage of parents who responded to the survey had secured a space for their child in a regulated centre and indicated they were satisfied. But we heard loud and clear from other parents and interest groups during the consultation process who indicated there was a lack of licensed francophone spaces, especially in larger urban francophone minority communities. All New Brunswick children should have access to an early learning and childcare centre in the official language of their parents’ choice as well as convenient and unconventional hours of operation where qualified educators ensure intellectually engaging, healthy and safe environments.

Viability

Context

The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development has the mandate to represent the public's interest for the safety and healthy development of young children, up to age 12, who are in non-parental care. The department is responsible for the approval, monitoring and investigation of regulated early learning and childcare facilities as defined under the Day Care Regulation 83-85.²⁶ Regulated early learning and childcare services provide a service that allows parents to go to work or study. Equally as important, they provide quality services that contribute to the holistic development and learning of children during the crucial early years of their lives, the social and economic benefits of which are experienced in the present and well into the future.^{27,28, 29}

Early learning and childcare services within New Brunswick, as in most jurisdictions in Canada, operate within a market-model approach rather than a public-management approach which would have core funding.³⁰ Typically, there are two revenue streams for the operation of early learning and childcare facilities: parent fees and government funding. Both for-profit and not-for-profit centres may engage in additional fundraising, however not-for-profit services can access a charitable number, thus potentially providing more funding-source opportunities.

What we learned

Fragility: Throughout the consultations, we heard consistently from the majority of early learning and childcare owners/operators and educators, and in meetings with the three associations,³¹ that viability

and ongoing sustainability of the sector are major concerns. We heard that providing the highest level of quality is affected by insufficient program funding, rising costs such as minimum wage increases, the fluctuation of occupancy rates and other legislated requirements that involve costs. Viability is particularly a challenge in the case of provisions of care and learning for infants to two-year-olds, but this affects stability, viability and sustainability of early learning and childcare services overall for children from birth to four years of age.³² After-school services, either integrated with preschool services or stand-alone, are the most viable spaces in terms of working within a market economy, and in some cases, work to supplement the high costs of infant care.

In 2009-2010, the portion of funding materials and equipment and professional development was eliminated from the Quality Improvement Funding Support (QIFS) program. Many operators and educators referred to this action and they asked these be restored. Owner/operators described how they juggle ratios, cut costs and try to avoid compromising quality and are careful not to add to the insecurity of employees, parents and children. The owner/operators added that the precarious and stressful nature of their day-to-day operations often affect staff morale.

Funding levels to early learning and childcare centres: Public expenditure matters for stability and quality in the delivery of early learning and childcare. Kershaw found that centres that received wage assistance as well as assistance with parent fees were less likely to close after four years than centres not receiving this public support.³³ The only consistent provincial government funding that offsets early learning and childcare operating costs is QIFS. This program provides wage enhancement for educators at \$3.15 per hour for untrained staff and \$5 per hour for trained staff. QIFS is directed at improving staff wages to support recruitment and retention, and thereby, offsetting pressures on parent fees.³⁴ In addition,

26 Government of New Brunswick. *Child Day Care Services Program*. Accessed March 23, 2016 at: http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services_renderer.2736.Child_Day_Care_Services_Program.html

27 Fortin, P. 2015. *Quebec's Childcare System: Public Address* Fredericton Convention Centre, November 4, 2015, 2.

28 Fairholme, R. 2011. *Economic Impacts of Early Learning and Care*. The Centre for Spatial Economics, 2-30.

29 Alexander, C. 2015. *The Economic Case for Investing in ECE*. Public Address, Fredericton, November 4, 2015, 15-30.

30 Friendly, M. 2015. Taking Canada's Child Care Pulse: The state of ECEC in 2015. In: *Moving Beyond Baby Steps: Building a child care plan for today's families*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 11.

31 Early Childhood Care Education New Brunswick (ECCENB), Education and Professionalism Young Children (EPYC), and Education for Quality, Unity and Improving Professionalism (EQUIP),

32 McQuaig and Dhuey, 2015.

33 Kershaw, P., Forer, B. and Goelman, H. (2004). Hidden Fragility: Closure among Child Care Services in BC. Paper Prepared for the Law and Public Policy Panel, Canadian Political Science Association Annual Meeting, June 2004, University of Manitoba, 10.

34 McCuaig, K. and Dhuey, E. November 2015. *Child Care in New Brunswick: The social and economic impacts*. Toronto, ON: Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development. OISE/University of Toronto, 10.

one-time start-up funds for infants, creation of new childcare spaces offered in the minority language of their community, rural and extended-hours spaces are available from the New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund.

Owner/operators cited cumulative market challenges to viability, including increases in minimum wage, which increased from \$7 per hour in 2008 to \$10.65 per hour on April 1, 2016, the escalating costs of food, heating and insurance, and the costs of materials for appropriate implementation of the curriculum frameworks. Competition from after-school programs and local summer camps, which are not subject to early learning and childcare regulations or monitoring, were mentioned as factors affecting viability. Market forces combined with provincial legislation drive up the cost of childcare, reduce parents' ability to pay and leave many centres financially fragile.

// Salaries are 70-80% of the costs of childcare; the required and necessary ratios do not allow flexibility in increasing parent fees as a revenue. Staffing is the biggest cost in a child-care budget. Without sufficient public funding going into a child-care system, increasing staff wages comes at the expense of raising parent fees — something both for-profit operators and many not-for profit parent boards may find unpalatable. Even non-profit operators who understand the importance of raising staff wages to increase program quality often struggle to meet this goal while maintaining financial viability. We are thus offered a false choice between quality and cost, when in fact both are critically important.³⁵

Quality Improvement Funding Support (QIFS): The provincial government introduced changes to QIFS policies eliminating the eligibility of owner/operators of for-profit centres. QIFS is designed to improve wages and to support recruitment and retention of qualified educators.³⁶

The elimination of wage support for those owner/operators of early learning and childcare centres, affecting 260 licences of for-profit services, has had a direct impact on the wages of many of these owner/

operators. In some cases, the unintended consequences have included cuts to service delivery such as the elimination of lunches, snacks or field trips, and/or an increase in fees to parents. Other unintended effects reported during provincial consultations include the reduction of the provision of services for infants and a decrease of staff hours.

These changes to QIFS affected some centres more than others, revealing centre vulnerability related to factors such as the number of occupied spaces, size and location. According to departmental data, three centres have closed reportedly due to QIFS.³⁷ In other cases, owner/operators took various actions so they could retain QIFS. These include: in a dozen cases, women have signed the childcare business over to their husbands; a few changed to not-for-profit; nine sold their business; and some small centres reconfigured as a community daycare home. According to survey data, following the changes to QIFS, 13 per cent of operators said they did not take a salary and 23 per cent said they make less than minimum wage without QIFS.

Viability of early learning and childcare services within a market approach: Penn (2012) states, "childcare entrepreneurs face serious barriers to profitability." She identifies these as: labour costs; capital costs; technology and computerization costs; and costs associated with maintaining a competitive edge. On the revenue side, the challenges are related to small profit margins:

- **Fee income.** Penn notes that, to make a profit, fees must be as high as the market will bear. "Even with childcare subsidies, this kind of fee cannot be met except by high-income families, and in this sense, access to childcare is inequitable."
- **Children with additional needs.** "Where children require extra help — this can only be provided at extra cost."
- **Market volatility.** Small childcare entrepreneurs are more vulnerable to changes in market conditions, and subsequently, have a high failure rate. "There is likely to be considerable turnover" of businesses opening and closing.³⁸

As part of the work of this commission, a financial working group carried out a review in consultation with the sector. The review aimed to examine the

35 Beach, J. and Ferns, C. 2015. From Child Care Market to Child Care System. In: *Moving Beyond Baby Steps: Building a child care plan for today's families*. Ottawa: The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. *Our Schools Our Selves*, Summer 2015, 57.

36 McCuaig, K. and Dhuey, E. 2015. *Childcare in New Brunswick: The Social and Economic Impacts*, 10.

37 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. February 2016.

38 Penn, H. 2012. *Childcare Markets: Do They Work?* Occasional Paper 26. Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 6.

viability of licensed early learning and childcare centres and homes to develop a viability model in alignment with legislative requirements.

In terms of the profitability of services, the analysis found that many factors influence the viability of early learning and childcare facilities (e.g., age groups, occupancy rates, location and number of licensed spaces). It also showed how a lack of full occupancy and use of the full staff-child ratio quickly alter the possibility of profitability. In this analysis, the working group found that despite high rates charged to parents, the staff-child ratios, which are appropriate for infants and two-year-olds, do not allow cost recovery. As well, cost recovery is barely achievable for spaces for three-year-olds. After-school spaces may allow early learning and childcare facilities to make a profit; however, this profit is reduced by the impacts of the losses in other age groups, unless the program is a standalone after-school childcare.

Example of the ratio for infants:	
Average daily rate for one infant (\$32.38) with a staff-child ratio of 1:3	\$97.14
Average daily salary for trained educators per day	\$109.70
Lost per day for three spaces:	(\$12.56)
Annual loss for three people (wages alone)	(\$3,265.60)

It is important to note that this analysis does not include all costs associated with operating a service (e.g., costs related to inclusion of children with additional needs, asking parents to pay full-time rates for part-time care to fund the space, reduced parents fees offered for a second or third child — that reduce profit even more for zero- to four-year-old spaces. The analysis was based on the premise of a 90 per cent occupancy rate. These analyses align with the research, what we heard from the sector, associations, interest groups and other submissions and communications during the consultations.

Concluding comments

Penn (2012) creates a strong argument for moving to publicly managed childcare. In the current market-oriented environment, it is very difficult to operate within a viability threshold, particularly in provisions for our youngest children, where high-quality learning and care provisions have long-term positive effects. Consistently providing quality services for children, affordable rates for parents and good working conditions for qualified personnel requires increased government support and a long-term move from market orientation to greater public investment.

Accessibility — affordability

// Affordability: If you don't have money to pay for fees, it doesn't matter how many programs may be located in your community. Availability: If there are no programs in your community, it doesn't matter if you have enough money to pay for fees."

— Adapted from Flanagan (2014)

Context

The original intent of childcare was to provide care for young children in a safe and healthy environment while their parents worked outside of home. Preschools, typically part-time, were viewed as places that provided learning opportunities for children prior to school. Care and learning, then, were often viewed as separate provisions. Since the 1970s, there has been increased research and recognition that care and learning are intertwined, that learning begins at birth, long before formal schooling.³⁹ Consequently, greater value has been placed on children's early learning, with childcare centres being transformed into early childhood and childcare centres. That the provincial government is mandating the use of its early learning and child care curriculum frameworks is testimony to this shift away from split notions of care and education. The implications of government investments in quality early learning and childcare facilities are far reaching: from children's learning, to reduction of social and economic inequities, to parental participation in the work force.^{40, 41, 42}

What we learned

Parents want quality: The consultations with parents indicated that learning and care together in the earliest years of a child's life were important. Parents who took part in the surveys, focus groups and bulletin board forums want their childcare of choice to have high-quality programming delivered by qualified, well-paid staff. They value continuity of care and learning for their children, and they identified the

importance of large outdoor play spaces, indoor spaces with sufficient educational materials and the provision of healthy snacks and nutritious hot meals.

Fees are high: Information gathered from parents repeatedly mentioned the high costs of childcare and the effects these costs have on their decisions to leave or return to the workforce or even to have more children. Often parents compared the cost of early learning and childcare as equivalent to mortgage payments. This testimony may be part of the reason that New Brunswick's births are rapidly declining. According to Statistics Canada, the number of births has decreased by 425 in the last five years, or about six per cent.⁴³ However, in jurisdictions having family policies that enable female employment (e.g., affordable early learning and childcare and enhanced parental leave), increases in birthrates and advanced economic development are being noted.⁴⁴ When we compare parent fees with other provinces, New Brunswick parents pay 75 per cent of overall childcare costs, while parents in Prince Edward Island contribute 50 per cent and parents in Quebec pay 15 per cent.⁴⁵ Public contributions in New Brunswick are low, making fees an obstacle to affordability for many families.

Parents suggested possible areas for improvement such as the greater use of multi-age groupings and community involvement, recognizing that these changes would mean a higher cost of care. Many parents expressed the need for the provincial government to play a greater role in making early learning and childcare more affordable. They suggested the government control the cost of early learning and child care while increasing funds to ensure quality and access to affordable services and providing parental leave benefits until 18 months.

Are parents paying too much for early learning and childcare? The Department of Health and Human Services in the United States has set the benchmark for affordable childcare at 10 per cent of family income.

39 Kaga, Y, Bennett, J and Moss, P. 2010. *Caring and Learning Together: A cross-national study on the integration of early childhood care and education within education*. Paris, UNESCO, 20.

40 Fortin, P. 2015. *Quebec's Childcare System: Public Address* Fredericton Convention Centre, November 4, 2015, 2.

41 Melhuish, E. 2013. Why are the Early Years important for long term development? Research and Policy. PowerPoint Presentation.

42 Heckman, J. J. 2008. Schools, Skills and Synapses. *Economic Inquiry* 12 (8), 289-324.

43 Statistics Canada. *Births, estimates, by province and territory*. 2010/2011 — 2014/2015. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo04a-eng.htm>

44 OECD. 2012. *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for early childhood education and care*. OECD, 9.

45 McCuaig, K. and Dhuey, E. (2015) *Child Care in New Brunswick: The social and economic impacts*. Toronto, ON: Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development. OISE/University of Toronto, 15.

Recently, Manitoba and Scotland recommended this benchmark be established as the cut-off for childcare costs in their respective jurisdictions.

Table A: Examples of percentage of net family income used for childcare in New Brunswick

	Single parent, 1 income @ \$35,000, 1 preschool child	2 parents, 2 incomes @ \$35,000, 1 infant, 1 preschool	2 parents, 2 incomes @ \$50,000, 1 infant, 1 preschool
Gross family income	\$35,000	\$70,000	\$100,000
Net family income	\$27,551.67	\$54,990.78	\$74,285.30
Daycare expenses (net of DAP)	\$2,861.20	\$15,509.00	\$15,509.00
% of net income spent on daycare before tax deductions	10.38%	28%	20.8%

Statistics Canada data indicates that the median family income in New Brunswick in 2013 was \$67,340. Parents pay a significant portion of their net wages on early learning and childcare. A single mother with one child (between two and four years of age) and a gross income \$35,000 (\$27,551 net) will be eligible for DAP. But childcare costs will still take up 10.38 per cent of her net income (\$2,861) before tax deductions due to the gap between the fee charged by the centre and the fee subsidy rate. In this case, this is a significant expenditure.

A two-parent family earning a combined gross salary of \$70,000 (\$54,991 net), with two children in early learning and childcare (one in infant care, and one in a preschool age space) pays \$15,509 or 28 per cent of net income for early learning and childcare before tax deductions. A family with two parents earning a combined gross income of \$100,000 (net \$74,285) with two children in early learning and childcare (one in infant care, and one in a preschool-age space) pays \$15,509 or 20.8 per cent of net income before tax deductions.

It is important to note that these costs would be more for a family with three or more children, making childcare less affordable. Furthermore, these numbers consider the current costs of childcare to parents. If operators of early learning and childcare services, in fact, invest in their educators to ensure recruitment and retention of qualified staff by providing fair wages and good working conditions (such as health benefits and pension plans), the cost of early learning and childcare to parents would increase significantly.

According to the Canadian Institute of Child Health, it cost \$243,660 in 2011 to raise a child to 18 years of age.⁴⁶ Assuming the costs of raising a child are roughly equivalent for each year of a child's life, the yearly cost of raising a child is about \$13,500 (understanding that the first years of life are the most expensive). In New Brunswick, it costs on average \$7,150 for early learning and childcare for a preschooler, about 53 per cent of the annual cost of raising a child. The cost of early learning and childcare is only one portion of the costs of rearing a child in Canada. Other costs of raising children include food, clothing, health care, personal care, recreation, reading materials, school supplies, transportation and shelter.

Concluding comments

Considering the table above, and parents' comments during the task force consultations, we conclude that the affordability of regulated early learning and childcare is a major financial challenge for many families, particularly for single parents and middle income families with two or more young children. As reported by the parents in the consultations, it is also a concern that the high costs of early learning and childcare might be a contributor to the decline of the birth rate in the province. As well, it is deeply concerning that not all children have access to high-quality learning experiences prior to school entry, therefore widening the learning gap between children who have had quality learning experiences in their early years — a critical and foundational time for learning.

⁴⁶ Canadian Institute of Child Health. *Contextual module: Children and Youth in Canada: The context of their lives*. Estimated cost of raising a child to 18. <http://profile.cich.ca/en/index.php/chapter1/section-4-economic-inequities/134>

Accessibility — availability

“Every province and territory is responsible for monitoring and licensing regulated childcare services according to their provincial legislation and regulations. Regulated childcare services include centre-based full-day childcare, regulated family childcare, school-aged childcare, and in most provinces, nursery schools and preschools. With regulated spaces for only 20.5% of children aged 0-12 years old in Canada, it is assumed that the majority of childcare is provided through unregulated arrangements, either in the caregiver’s home, or in the child’s home, usually a nanny or a babysitter. Kindergarten, provided through the public school system in every province and territory, may also serve as one part of working parents’ childcare arrangements.”

— Finding Quality Childcare

<http://findingqualitychildcare.ca/child-care-in-canada/types-of-child-care>

Context

In New Brunswick, regulated early learning and childcare services cover 27.9 per cent of the child population zero to 12 years of age and 29.1 per cent of children zero to five years of age (2014). In comparison, the average coverage for Canada was 20.5 per cent for children zero to 12 years of age and 24.1 per cent for children zero to five years of age.⁴⁷

Early learning and childcare services are privately delivered services, contrary to kindergarten that is fully publicly funded. Therefore, operators/owners/boards must charge fees to parents to access their services. As of March 2015, 70.4 per cent of early learning and childcare facilities were for-profit and 29.5 per cent were not-for-profit (boards).⁴⁸ The accessibility of licensed childcare services for families depends on fees, location, hours of operation and the age of children for whom the service is offered such as infants, preschool or after-school.

The provincial government issues licences for regulated early learning and childcare. At this time, provincial legislation does not require a formal planning process to determine whether there is a community need for early learning and childcare services or what types of services may be needed in specific neighbourhoods. The decision to apply for a licence to open an early learning and childcare facility rests wholly with the individual or organization making the request. Licensing of new facilities is assured to any applicant who meets all the requirements. The Early Childhood Services Coordinator at the regional level makes this assessment.

⁴⁷ Friendly, M., Grady, B., Macdonald, L. and Forer, B. (2015). *Preliminary data: Early childhood education and care in Canada*. Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit., Table 1, 5.

⁴⁸ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. 2015. *Child Day Care Services: Annual Statistical Report 2014-2015*, 7.

What we learned

Significant growth in regulated early learning and childcare: During the past eight years, as a result of demand and provincial investment in regulated early learning and childcare spaces, the number of regulated spaces has grown significantly, from 15,506 in 2008 to 26,689 January 2016. The configuration of these spaces is as follows: 2,101 infant spaces, 10,762

preschool spaces and 13,825 after-school spaces. Just over one-half the spaces (52 per cent) are filled by after-school children, 40 per cent by preschoolers and eight per cent by infants. These 26,689 spaces for children, zero to 12 years of age, are held by 808 regulated licences owned by 532 operators.

Table B: Percentage growth in regulated early learning and childcare spaces since 2011

	March 31, 2011	March 31, 2012	March 31, 2013	March 31, 2014	March 31, 2015	Jan. 1, 2016	Growth since March 31, 2015	Growth since 2011	% growth since 2011
Infant	1,462	1,598	1,686	1,754	1,970	2,101	131 (12%)	639	43.7
Preschool	9,065	9,594	9,831	10,211	10,707	10,763	56 (5%)	1 698	18.7
After-school	9,792	10,503	11,132	12 591	12,880	13,825	945 (83%)	4 033	41.2
Total # of spaces	20,319	21,695	22,649	24, 556	25,557	26,689	1132 (4.2%)	6 370	31.6
# of facilities	622	662	702	756	782	808	26 (3.2%)	186	29.9

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, February 2016

Factors affecting the availability of regulated early learning and childcare

Variance in the distribution of spaces: Compared to other provinces and territories, New Brunswick has one of the higher rates of coverage in terms of total regulated early learning and childcare spaces per child population.⁴⁹ A detailed analysis of 33 New Brunswick communities shows a wide variance in the distribution of regulated early learning and childcare spaces compared to child populations in those communities.⁵⁰ Because the distribution of spaces was not planned according to need, but rather based on interest by owners/operators, the coverage is highly variable across the province. For example,⁵¹ Moncton and Fredericton have relatively high coverage (39 per cent and 44 per cent, respec-

tively) while other areas have very little coverage (e.g., Dalhousie (13 per cent), Néguaac (10.6 per cent), Minto (9.6 per cent) and Nackawic (six per cent). When the percentages are categorized by age group, inequities begin to appear. For example, Fredericton, with an overall coverage of 44.4 per cent, covers only 15.8 per cent of the infant population and 81 per cent of the preschool population with regulated early learning and childcare spaces.

New Brunswick's *Overcoming Poverty Together* plan established a target to provide regulated early learning and childcare to 65 per cent of children.⁵² Very few communities have met or exceeded this target.

Availability is a challenge for parents: As was reported from parental participation in the online survey, bulletin boards forums and focus groups, availability was one of the major challenges for parents in accessing regulated early learning and childcare. Parents reported difficulty locating the type of childcare arrangements they needed at the hours of operation they required. Currently, there is no central mechanism to determine where the available spaces are located.

49 Compared to other provinces and territories in 2014, New Brunswick had the third-highest rate of coverage in terms of total regulated early learning and childcare spaces per child population, at 29 per cent, after Prince Edward Island (32.4 per cent) and Quebec (30.3 per cent). Source: Friendly, M., Grady, B., Macdonald, L., and Forer, B. 2015. *Preliminary data: Early childhood education and care in Canada 2014*. Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 5.

50 New Brunswick Health Council. April 2015. *Percent coverage: New Brunswick Health Council data: April 1st, 2015 QIFS Spaces Info*.

51 New Brunswick Health Council. 2015. *Percent Coverage: New Brunswick Health Council Data: April 1st, 2015 QIFS Spaces Info*.

52 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2014).

In its 2014 election platform, the government committed to establishing an early learning and childcare registry to help parents access pertinent information on licensed early learning and childcare. Parents who were consulted suggested this new registry should include all the information required to make the best decisions around childcare and that it should be interactive and linked to the school districts. Parents pointed out gaps in service, including a substantial lack of infant spaces and a lack of extended hours, flexible times for drop off and pick up and flexible arrangements for unconventional hours such as to cover shift work, seasonal work and part-time work. Echoing findings from the 2013 childcare consultation process in Newfoundland and Labrador, the shortage of spaces is a source of stress for children and families, an obstacle to parents participating in the labour market and a deterrent to having more children.⁵³

Difficulties accessing Day Care Assistance Program (DAP): DAP provides financial support to help offset the costs of childcare for low-income parents who are working, studying or training. Figures from March 2015 indicate that 5,422 of children with families with lower incomes, benefit from DAP.⁵⁴ DAP does not appear to be well-known to many parents. Parents who have said they were familiar with the DAP received their information through family, friends, early childhood educators or operators. According to survey results, eight per cent of owners/operators indicated they provided information about DAP to parents. In the consultations, some owners/operators indicated they include DAP information in their parent handbook. Some operators said they helped parents to access information and forms for the program.

In the parent information gathered, parents indicated it was difficult to access DAP information and to follow the application process, including eligibility. In addition, parents felt the program was stigmatizing and cumbersome, as they must apply through the Department of Social Development rather than through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. In terms of what could be done to make the application process more visible and accessible, parents suggested the provincial government: increase the amount provided to families (58 per cent); increase public promotions about DAP (58 per cent); provide an online calculator to determine subsidy amount (57 per cent); and introduce an online application process (57 per cent).

53 Newfoundland and Labrador. Child Youth and Family Services. 2013. *What We Heard: 10-Year Child Care Strategy Consultation Sessions (2011)*, 5.

54 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. 2015. *Child Day Care Services: Annual Statistical Report 2014-2015*, 4, 23.

Types of spaces available vary

A growing trend to after-school spaces: From March 30, 2015, to January 1, 2016, 1,132 new spaces were licensed, 945 (83 per cent) for after-school, 56 (five per cent) for preschool, with 131 (12 per cent) infant spaces.⁵⁵ Table B demonstrates this trend toward opening a higher percentage of after-school spaces and confirms what we heard during the consultations.⁵⁶ The reason for the greater licensing of after-school spaces may be that they are the most viable in terms of a market approach to childcare, that more parents opt for full-time employment when their children reach school-age, or that some of the after-school programs offer specialized services such as arts or gymnastics that families and children may want. Viability of licensed after-school programs was noted in the financial study conducted as part of the task force⁵⁷ and also by McCuaig and Dhuey (2015).

Reorientation of infant spaces: During the consultations, we learned that in some instances early learning and childcare spaces initially allocated for infants were re-allocated to spaces for older children. The main reason reported for this type of change is the difficulty in financing infant groups. Given the adult-child ratio (1:3), the costs of early learning and childcare for infants do not cover expenditures for staffing and related centre expenses such as space requirements are higher (e.g., a separate sleep area). Start-up funds for infant spaces provided from the New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund contributes to infrastructure, such as sprinklers, and purchase of equipment and materials, such as cribs and high chairs, but they do not cover ongoing operational costs. Furthermore, the start-up funding criteria require that spaces be kept open for a minimum of two years.⁵⁸ It appears that some are converted to more viable spaces once the required time period has been met.

A need for particular spaces based on parents' needs: In addition to the need for more infant spaces, parents working shifts and unconventional regular hours are unable to access regulated early learning and childcare. For example, although funding for alternative childcare is available, there are particular challenges for shift work and for families whose work is attached to fishing, agriculture or forestry. Childcare arrangements are particularly complicated

55 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2016.

56 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. February 2016. *Percent Growth in Regulated Child Care Spaces Since 2011*.

57 2015. Child Care Task Force — Financial Working Group.

58 New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund, <http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/ed/pdf/ELCC/ECHDPE/CreationOfNewChildCareSpaces.pdf>

when care is required overnight or late into the night with providers, at times, exceeding the 14-hour limit mandated by alternative childcare regulations. In areas where there is seasonal work, early learning and childcare centres cannot afford to maintain unoccupied spaces out of season. Seasonally working parents cannot afford to continue to pay the childcare fees in order to hold childcare spaces out of season. There is fragmentation of children's friendships and learning experiences. Funding for seasonal spaces, previously available through the trust fund, has been discontinued since 2009.

The actual number of occupied spaces: The early learning and childcare licences issued by government permits the operation of an early learning and childcare facility and indicates the number of spaces allowed for each licence. The number of spaces for each age group is based on the age groups requested by the operator and determined by the square footage requirements. Being licensed for a certain number of spaces may not represent the actual spaces available for particular age groups. Some operators reported in the consultations that they have modified the age groups from younger to older for viability, and with government approval, while still maintaining standards.

A study of the match between spaces licensed and square footage made it apparent that, in some cases, the number of spaces approved does not take into account maximum viability. A centre may be licensed for more spaces than it could fill to ensure viability. The adult-child ratio for after-school is 1:15. If a centre is licensed for 35 after-school spaces, it is likely that the maximum children enrolled would be 30, as two educators for 30 children would be more viable than three educators for 35 children. While after-school is used as an example, the same reality applies for all age groups.

Concluding comments

The task force was mandated to provide a path for creating the right conditions for early learning and childcare and to suggest ways to address the challenges parents face in obtaining access to quality and affordable early learning and childcare services. In consultations, family and early childhood educators indicated that there is insufficient access within the current structure for vulnerable children, whose parents may or may not be studying or working. These observations were echoed by educators, operators, interest group participants, family and early childhood educators and coordinators who cited numerous instances where vulnerable children/families were unable to obtain quality early learning and childcare. Interest groups advocated strongly that all children would benefit from quality early learning and childcare in their early years, particularly vulnerable children. A recent Norwegian study⁵⁹ and other long-standing studies support the observation that vulnerable children can be found at all income levels. Additionally, they found children from homes with lower incomes make substantial gains when they receive non-targeted (universal) early learning and childcare services.⁶⁰ The New Brunswick Public Health program Healthy Families Healthy Babies identified 2,349 newborns, or 36 per cent of all newborns, as being at risk for developmental delay in 2014, and these children were found at all income levels.⁶¹

59 Sibley, E., Dearing, E., Toppelberg, C.O., Mykletun, A., Zachrisson, H.D. 2015. Do increased availability and reduced cost of early childhood care and education narrow social inequality gaps in utilization? Evidence from Norway. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*. 9:1. <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40723-014-0004-5/fulltext.html>

60 McCain, M., F. Mustard, and S. Shanker. 2007. *Early Years Study 2: Putting Science into Action*. Toronto: Council for Early Child Development, 30, 32.

61 New Brunswick Department of Health. 2015. Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. CSDS-Public Health. *Total Number of Closed and Completed PHPA Assessments: Newborns with Financial Difficulties and the Priority Score >= 6, 2010-2014..* CSDS-SSRS-PH-256.

Quality

// It is widely acknowledged that the quality of the Early Childhood Education Care staff, and their pedagogical activities, interactions and knowledge have a major impact on children's well-being and development."

— OECD *Starting Strong IV 2015*, p.124

Context

Quality in early learning and childcare is most often categorized as both structural and process.⁶² Structural quality features are legislated and enacted as provincial policies and standards. These include nutrition, health and safety regulations, staff-child ratios, group size, educators' qualifications, curriculum requirements as well as indoor and outdoor space requirements. Process features refer to the nature of interactions and relationships between children and adults, pedagogical leadership, cultural relevance, communication and engagement, consistent, inclusive, and equitable treatment for all children, communication, interactions with parents and community; respect for children, parents and staff and working conditions for staff.

Quality of service has many meanings. Too often, there is a tendency to focus on measurable elements to quantify qualitative aspects of care and learning at the expense of daily practices.⁶³ For example, quantification often is inappropriate when we are working to create and maintain meaningful relationships between children and children, children and staff, between staff and between family members and centre staff. Even in the case of what might be seen as a more quantifiable measure of quality, such as room size or outdoor space requirements, although the size of the space available for children is an indicator of quality, it is also the pedagogically wise use of the space, materials and purposeful planning within that space that contributes to the daily quality of life and learning. This must be considered in what is best for children's care and learning. This is also

the case when, for example, within high-priority⁶⁴ neighbourhoods, a lower staff-to-child ratio might be considered to be in the best interests of children's optimal care and learning.

The provincial government has given particular attention to many structural features. As was made clear in a recent international study on quality (OECD, 2015), it is the process features of quality that are more challenging to implement, yet key for increasing children's educational experiences and outcomes presently and into the future. As noted above, process aspects of quality focus on pedagogical relationships within centres and the mutual reciprocity of relationships between home and the centre. Two key developments set a foundation for these pedagogical and relational aspects: legislation that will increase the training requirements in early childhood education for educators; and the ongoing implementation of the quality assessment tools in each of the anglophone and francophone sectors. With sustained support, these initiatives can make significant differences.

Because childcare is primarily the work of women, there does remain a societal bias that qualifications may come naturally by virtue of being female. Contrary to the naturalness of such work, many educators are very interested in and aware of the need for ongoing education — working with young children is one of the most critical occupations that exist for children, families and society.

What we learned

Ratio: Almost unanimously, educators and operators with whom we consulted agreed that the 1:3 ratio for infants should remain. Very few suggested that ratios for the older age groups be reviewed. New Brunswick's ratios in relation to the rest of Canada fall in the middle range except for children three years of age, where the New Brunswick ratio is the lowest in Canada; one adult to seven children, compared to one adult to eight in much of the country.

Health, safety and indoor and outdoor standards: Operators, educators and parents understand that centres must be clean, not too crowded and have a generous outdoor play area. Indoor and outdoor play spaces, as well as materials and equipment, must meet standards. Early learning and childcare

62 OECD. 2015. *Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*, OECD Publishing, Paris; Beach, J. and Flanagan, K. 2007. *People, Programs and Practices: A Training Strategy for the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in Canada*. Ottawa: Child Care Human Resources Sector Council.

63 OECD(2015) Moss, P. 2007b. *Working with Uncertainty: Developing a work force for a democratic, inclusive and integrated early childhood service*. Keynote at the Set Sail for Quality on and Ocean for Caring. National Child Care Conference, June 15, Halifax, N.S.

64 Also referred to as at-risk.

centres need sufficient equipment and materials, including consumable materials, to engage children pedagogically and enact the curriculum. Inevitably, these expenses contribute to the cost of operating early learning and childcare centres. This is particularly the case where after-school outdoor and playground standards differ from school standards.

Curriculum: Owners/operators and early childhood educators regarded the English and French provincial curricula with pride and frequently mentioned them in relation to quality. They understand that attitudes towards learning, activities, organization of indoor and outdoor spaces and daily organization are all part of curriculum. While most had received professional learning on the curriculum, they felt they “could not do it justice” due to a lack of time and materials to support the curriculum as mandated. They worried that they could not adequately provide the highest level of quality due to the impacts of funding changes over time, including the loss of professional development funds and resources for materials as well as insufficient revenue overall, particularly from birth to four years of age.

Educator/operator survey results point to a desire for more support in the implementation of the curriculum and in the professional learning provided by the provincial government. The parent survey indicated that play is considered to be a key aspect of the curriculum. About one-half of the parents were aware that, in regulated early learning and childcare centres, play-based curricula (one in English, one in French) are mandatory. The survey also found 64 per cent of educators are comfortable with completing training online.

Relationships: Educators and operators alike agreed that their motivation for working in the field was the enjoyment of caring for children and the wish to create positive impacts on the overall development of children. This valuing of relationships could shed light on why educators and operators choose to stay in the field in spite of viability and stress-related issues of the job. Educators, as with parents, recognized the importance of strong relationships and positive interactions when it comes to providing quality early learning and childcare services. To complete the circle, good communication between staff and parents was highlighted as important. Both parents and educators would not want to see the positive relationships suffer because of added financial stress or insufficient professional learning.

Professional learning: Operators and educators expressed a desire for more support to improve their credentials and a desire for increased onsite

professional learning. It was noted that it was more difficult to meet the provincial qualification standards, especially in the rural areas. Some early learning and childcare centre operators indicated they are delivering professional development, yet, only a small portion of educators in the survey indicated the professional development met their needs. Survey results showed there is a desire for more support for ongoing curriculum implementation.

Qualified staff: In terms of qualifications, New Brunswick ranks among the lowest of all provinces and territories with the requirement that one-in-four educators or the director hold a one-year early childhood education certificate. Even with changes in legislation requiring 50 per cent of educators per facility plus the director have early childhood education qualifications, New Brunswick will still have one of the lowest educational qualifications in the country. This is somewhat contradictory given the high-quality curriculum frameworks mandated for use in licensed early learning and childcare centres in New Brunswick.

Although 38 per cent of early childhood educators have a recognized one-year early childhood education certificate, there is no provincial program of certification to recognize early childhood education credentials. A further six per cent have a bachelor’s degree in education or child studies. An additional five per cent have other post-secondary credentials. While the percentage of educators with early childhood qualifications is close to the 50 per cent, this overall average does not reflect individual centres. Departmental staff confirmed that in some centres, 100 per cent of staff have their early childhood qualifications, while others meet the minimum.

Regardless, with this interest in post-secondary education, the educators in the sector value professionalization. Educators were very interested in learning more about learning environments, child development and child guidance. Owners/operators said that it was difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff. The identified barriers for qualified staff entering the profession include low wages, poor benefits and the under-valuing of the profession. In New Brunswick, educators in early learning and childcare centres receive one of the lowest salary rates in Canada within the early childhood sector. Low wages do not reflect the value of early learning and childcare work to society, and often act as a deterrent to attract and keep qualified staff.

In the results of the educator-operator survey, there was some indication the early learning and childcare sector could flourish with appropriate support. A

significant proportion of educators who answered the survey (44 per cent) said they would be interested in becoming an early learning and childcare owner/operator, of either a centre (62 per cent) or a community daycare home (38 per cent). Barriers to operating a centre were described as low financial reward, high stress and too much responsibility. These barriers are well documented within the research.⁶⁵

Post-secondary education: In New Brunswick, the standard credential for early childhood educators is a one-year certificate program. This credential aligns with required qualifications for working in early learning and childcare centres: one in four educators must hold a one-year certificate. There are no required early childhood education qualifications for regulated community daycare homes. There are no business or human resource education qualifications for owners/operators.

As of February 2016, of the 1,580 employees that held either a bachelor of education, a recognized early childhood education credential, and/or university degrees in child study, 1,385 held the recognized one-year early childhood education certificate; 195 educators held either bachelor of education and/or university degrees in child study. Thus 41 per cent of early-year educators had post-secondary early childhood education training, with about eight per cent having non-early childhood education post-secondary training.⁶⁶ Given that 49 per cent of educators are receiving the trained wage enhancements under QIFS, early childhood educators are strongly motivated to become a professional sector.

Working conditions: Many operators and educators felt that quality of service was being affected by increasing costs, inadequate public funding levels, workforce recruitment and retention issues, and fragmentation of services within the sector. High turnover rates impact continuity for children. Each of these factors affects working conditions. Frequently, educators and operators indicated that due to rising costs there was limited funding to contribute to pay increases. In some cases, due to unstable occupancy rates, there is no guaranteed employment for staff. For most staff, there are no pension plans or health-care benefits. There was a sense from the sector and the associations that the profession felt devalued by

the provincial government, the public and schools. This sense was also evident in the operator-educator and parent surveys.

Retention of staff appears to be linked to providing early learning and childcare services on-site for the children of educators. Among those choosing to stay with their employer, 21 per cent have their own children attending the early learning and childcare centre where they work.

Quality in early childhood education and care : The recent *Starting Strong IV* report, *Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care* (OECD, 2015), is an extensive multi-national country comparative study that focuses on five aspects of quality. These include:

- quality goals and minimum standards;
- curriculum and learning;
- workforce quality;
- family and community engagement; and
- data, research and evaluation on quality.⁶⁷

Concluding comments

The results of this OECD study are instructive for New Brunswick. As noted, the aspects of quality most often monitored are structural, and these are monitored through on-site, unannounced visits to review compliance with legislation, as is the case for New Brunswick. The OECD report further notes that process features cannot be monitored very well through inspections. Process features include: play and learning materials, interactions with children and adults, staff work organization, curriculum implementation, collaboration among staff and family engagement. Increasing process quality features requires a strengths-based, on-site relational approach.

65 R. Fairholme. 2009. *Literature Review of Socioeconomic Effects and Net Benefits: Understanding and Addressing Workforce Shortages in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Project*. Prepared by the Centre for Spatial Economics for the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council.

66 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. 2016.

67 *Starting Strong IV* report *Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care* (OECD, 2015).

Inclusion

The principle of inclusion in early learning and childcare is recognized and accepted by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Section 1.3.2 of the Operator Standards (2013) refers to inclusion in childcare service. Child daycare services must be planned to foster the inclusion of all children, which means:

- each child must be provided the opportunity to participate in every activity, routine and learning opportunity;
- activities are appropriate for both the developmental abilities and interest levels of all children; and
- all children are welcomed, supported and valued.

What we learned

When people spoke about inclusion, they typically referred to children with additional needs, vulnerable children and those children who need support in their relationships with other children, even though inclusion in New Brunswick is defined much more broadly.

Challenges with inclusion: All early learning and childcare centres are expected to be inclusive in their everyday practice. Due to the universal nature of public education, inclusion of children within school receives greater funding and supports than within early learning and childcare services. Since the official transfer of early childhood services to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in 2011, the integration of education and early childhood has only been partly addressed. Differences in inclusion requirements between education and early learning and childcare are but one example of the continuing need to address the significant inequity in opportunities to participate inclusively for children between the school system and early learning and childcare.

Information collected from parents, educators, operators, the New Brunswick Association for Community Living and family and early childhood agencies indicated that the demand for inclusion and intervention services in early learning and childcare continues to grow each year. They further report the increase is a consequence of the growing diagnosis of children who need support engaging in social relationships with their peers. To hire additional staff, early learning and childcare centres would need additional financial support.

Parents reported they were often unable to find inclusive early learning and childcare spaces. In spite of the principle of inclusion, not all early learning and childcare centres are able or prepared to accept children with additional needs. Inclusive practices typically require additional staff and/or physical changes to an environment, all of which are additional expenses.

Information from consultations indicated early learning and childcare centres are often unable to take children with additional needs or those who require support with social relationships. On occasion, children have been expelled from a centre or repeatedly expelled from numerous centres due to the lack of capacity to deal with specific social-emotional or behavioral issues. Although the incidents reported are few in number, these expulsions point to the need for more extensive support and professional learning about inclusion for educators including, supporting peer-to-peer relationships.

As well, government funds the wages of support workers, the inclusion of children with disabilities and additional needs in childcare settings while their parents are at work or studying.

Transition from early learning and childcare to kindergarten: It is widely recognized by parents, operators and educators, and staff at the New Brunswick Association for Community Living and family and early childhood agencies that seamless, continuous transition to schools is beneficial for children. Extensive research speaks to the need for continuity and curricular alignment between schools and after-school as well as between early learning and childcare services. Greater alignment between early learning and childcare facilities and schools allows educational interventions to be constant and successful for some children with additional needs.

Professional learning: Appropriate activities for all children depend on the knowledge/competencies and collaborative approach of educators/operators, ongoing continuing education and funding for specific materials. Professional learning specific to inclusion practices for children with additional needs is available through the New Brunswick Association for Community Living through funding from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Training in the program, *Each Child Matters*, supports inclusive and appropriate practices.

The organization uses *Engage Reflect and Plan* training and the Quality Inclusion Measurement Tool. Early learning and childcare centres can refer themselves for this service.

Early learning and inclusion facilitators work across the province in both official languages. Facilitators work with the same centres over time, depending on need, usually for a period of six months to three years, to assist with appropriate inclusion philosophy and activities. There are insufficient numbers of facilitators to meet the demand for inclusion across the province.

The mandate of the New Brunswick Association for Community Living is limited to work on behalf of children or adults, with intellectual disabilities, and their families. It is not the mandate of the association to support inclusion of all children with additional needs. Also, there is greater demand for inclusion support and training than is available due to budgetary allocations and this was confirmed during the consultations. The organization is administered provincially, rather than with Early Childhood Services offices in each school district.

Post-secondary education: Currently the qualifications for childcare educators are among the lowest in the country, and yet we have one of Canada's most comprehensive inclusion policy for K-12 and clear inclusive principles to be followed in early learning and childcare services. The community college offers a one-year early childhood education certificate.

Staffing and support programs for children and families. Parents reported it is difficult for them to navigate through the range of services and funding possibilities available to help support them if they have a child with additional needs. When no diagnosis is provided, there may be little support available, as support is typically tied to diagnosis. Operators and educators indicated consistently that there are insufficient human and material resources for inclusion of all children.

Enhanced Support Worker Program: Funds from this program cover the salary costs of support workers for children with disabilities who need additional help to participate in activities at the early learning and childcare centre while their parents are working or studying. There are more children identified by parents, operators and educators as having priority needs than there are funds available, thus not all families can access a support worker to assist with the inclusion of their children within an early learning and childcare program. In 2015-2016, there were 241 children on the caseload, with 45 identified

who were not able to receive support. Whereas, in 2014-2015, there were 28 children identified and without support.

The Developmental Childcare Program is managed by family and early childhood agencies and provides funding for children who, as part of their identified developmental plan, attend an early learning and childcare centre for up to 12 hours a week. Consultations with family and early childhood agencies indicated that because of eligibility requirements, many of these children are unable to receive support in the first years of life when it would have significant benefits — as the eligibility age is three.

Alternative childcare is available for families that require childcare and where licensed early learning and childcare services are not available while parents are working or studying. The program is available to families with lower income.

The Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) is an interprovincial agency providing educational services, programs and opportunities to persons from birth to age 21 who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard-of-hearing or visually impaired in the anglophone sector. APSEA provides direct support services to families and children, which includes working with staff in early learning and childcare facilities. All children requiring support are served.

For the francophone sector, equivalent services are offered by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The teachers responsible for these services are employees of francophone school districts. All children requiring support are served.

Services related to inclusion are not necessarily offered the same way for everyone. Some services such as those of the New Brunswick Association for Community Living, preschool autism interventions as well as early interventions are funded by government and delivered by a non-government agency. This particularly affects continuity for children in the transition to school, as all services are not under a district umbrella.

Concluding comments

Inclusion implies that all children are encouraged to learn and play together. When fostering inclusion, educators must be well practiced in supporting child-to-child relationships and have an understanding of diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds of children and families in their centres, as well as how to adapt environments and activities. The English and French curricula are strong in this regard. So, too, is the professional development/learning provided by a range of services, noted above. The main challenges

are that parents cannot always find a childcare centre practicing inclusion; centres need ongoing material and qualified staff for inclusion; and programs are funded by different departments, creating discontinuities for children and families. It is critical that services be coordinated and that all children have access to early learning and childcare services.

Finally, as we noted earlier, inclusion in practice and funding currently refers to children with special/additional needs. The definition of inclusion as intended by the provincial government is clearly articulated differently in the New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care curriculum frameworks:

“All children, regardless of race, religion, age, linguistic heritage, social and economic status, gender, or ability are entitled to inclusion in everyday activities and routines. When inclusiveness and equity are practiced, children come to appreciate their physical characteristics and their gendered, racialized, linguistic and cultural identities. They become sensitive to the effects of poverty and begin to contribute to local and global initiatives that address it. Learning requires inclusive and equitable environments where children learn and play within diverse groups, and engage in meaningful, respectful interactions with people, materials and content that embodies diversity.”⁶⁸

«Un milieu de garde inclusif, c'est le milieu de vie que l'on souhaite, non seulement pour les enfants à besoins particuliers, mais également pour tous les enfants francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick. C'est un milieu qui : 1. vise à normaliser les conditions de vie des enfants qui y sont intégrés (volet normalisation du modèle); 2. constitue un milieu de socialisation pour tous (volet participation); 3. est propice à l'épanouissement de chacun (volet individualisation); 4. est accueillant et célèbre la différence (volet unicité); 5. favorise le développement intégral et holistique de tous les enfants (volet intégralité).»⁶⁹

68 Province of New Brunswick. 2008. *New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework*, p. 52.

69 Province of Nouveau Brunswick. 2008. *Le Curriculum éducatif Services de garde francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick, Enfants à besoins particuliers*, p. 24.

Francophone community — a linguistic minority

Context

In the Report of the Commission on Francophone Schools (2009), LeBlanc writes:

“Early childhood intervention entails addressing the assimilation issue upstream and providing for early intervention with young people and their parents in the areas of learning, developmental issues, and identity building.”

New Brunswick's *Linguistic and Cultural Development Policy* (2014) supports those sentiments by proposing strategies that will ensure the best start for every child.⁷⁰ Access to French-language early learning and childcare and other services, training quality, and other factors are part of these strategies, both for the overall development of children and fostering their sense of belonging to the francophone community (Gilbert et Landry 2004, Landry 2003).^{71,72}

In New Brunswick, children live in a majority anglophone context. It is therefore essential that, from birth, francophone children benefit from interactions in French to develop the language skills they need to succeed. According to Corbin and Buchanan (2005),⁷³ when society is majority anglophone, it is necessary to provide children with experiences and services (such as early learning and childcare services) in French to ensure a linguistic balance in the child's life and allow children to develop francophone identities. In our province, assimilation has consequences. In 2011, for example, 20 per cent of children eligible to attend French schools were enrolled in English schools (*Linguistic and Cultural Development Policy*, 2014).

What we learned

Assimilation is a reality shared by a number of partners, associations, stakeholders and parents. Many times, we heard the double concern with respect to both the future of the francophone community and opportunities for the child to develop fully if there is no improvement in francophone early learning and childcare services. Consultations with francophone groups and early learning and childcare services highlighted several concerns that are the same as their anglophone counterparts. Those shared concerns will not be repeated in the sections entitled “Francophone community.” That section is reserved for concerns and consequences that affect francophones only.

Vitality: There is a small number of licensed early learning and childcare facilities that cater to both linguistic communities within the same service. Statistics provided by the provincial government indicate that about 10 per cent of facilities describe themselves as bilingual. From what we heard in the French consultations, educators speak in English to these children and sometimes to a group of children when an English child is present. During consultations, it was stated that very few bilingual childcare centres offer separate classrooms for anglophones and francophones. In terms of the vitality of francophone children living in minority communities, it becomes essential that quality and inclusive spaces be available for francophones, especially for infants and preschoolers, since it is during that period of life that language development and identity building begin. Parents expressed the need for more francophone spaces to allow families to be served in their language. The Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund provides funding for new spaces created in linguistic-minority settings to support this challenge. Since 2010, 28 applications have been approved for 414.5 spaces within minority communities. The fund offers a single amount of \$2,000 per space to create new spaces.

Access: In some regions, there are long waiting lists for enrolling a child in a francophone early learning and childcare centre. Since parents must work, they place their child in an anglophone early learning and childcare service. Within the centre, the child builds relationships with the caregivers and with other children. The child develops a feeling of security in relation to the people around him or her, the physical environment and the activities of the day. Parents

70 Blais, M-C. and Mcken, G. 2014. *The Linguistic and Cultural Development Policy: A Societal Project for the French Education System*, 99.

71 Landry, R. 2003b. Pour une pédagogie actualisante et communautarisante en milieu minoritaire francophone. In: Allard, R. (dir.). *Actes du colloque pan-Canadien sur la recherche en éducation en milieu francophone minoritaire : bilan et prospectives*. Montréal : Association canadienne d'Éducation de langue française, 135-156.

72 Gilbert, A. et Thériault, J.Y. 2004. Vers l'institutionnalisation des services à la petite enfance francophone : entre judiciarisation et compromis politique. *Revue de l'Université de Moncton*. 35:2, 155-172.

73 Corbin, E. and Buchman, J. (2005). *French-Language Education in a Minority Setting: A continuum from early childhood to the postsecondary Level*. Interim report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages. Library of Parliament.

often choose to leave the child in the anglophone centre. We learned from francophone stakeholders that bilingual early learning and childcare is not a proper environment to provide services for families in minority context. The lack of francophone services, particularly for some children with additional needs, will be detrimental to the child's development.

For school-aged children, the situation is similar. The lack of available after-school spaces forces parents to register their children in anglophone early learning and childcare establishments. This reality appears to be particularly problematic in the Moncton region. Being able to offer after-school care to francophone families may mean reversing some of the effects of assimilation.

Consultation participants suggested the school might be the best place to offer childcare for school-aged children. Aligning the various systems to provide childcare before/after class at school could have a positive impact on the children, who would not have to go to another place after class and, most importantly, they would remain in a francophone environment. It would be easier for educators to make connections with what children do during the school day while having access to school facilities.

Another concern voiced by operators within a francophone minority is the recruitment and retention of qualified francophone staff. This is one reason why many spaces are not occupied. An example was provided by an early learning and childcare service which, despite having 136 available spaces, had 60 children on the waiting list due to a staff shortage. Another challenge noted is that 90 per cent of current staff are spouses of military personnel. Military personnel are regularly transferred, which could generate a turnover of staff for this facility.

Quality: Many francophone early learning and childcare services have identified the problem of filling positions with staff who are both qualified and francophone. This situation could be the lack of a training seat at the Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (CCNB). Another concern is linked to the early childhood certificate program offered at the CCNB. While the program is provided in French, there are limitations in its curriculum related to the role of francophone early learning and childcare services in a minority community, or the choice of "parents ayant droits."

Candidates in this program need to explore the role of educators in the development of identity building of children in minority communities. Educators would like training in francisation to offer a better quality

of service for children in francophone early learning and childcares centres who speak mostly English, but will be attending a French school. Interestingly, the French curriculum contains a section on francization and linguistic and cultural identity. The subjects are integrated in the new online course available as of April 1, 2016.

A francophone family and early childhood agency that administers the Early Years Evaluation-Direct Assessments reported that out of 169 children attending early learning and childcare services, 108 children from English and bilingual early learning and childcare had to be evaluated in English as they did not have the linguistic abilities to be evaluated in French. The agency staff concluded that the lack of adequate exposure to French contributes to assimilation and does not facilitate appropriate language development for children who will go on to attend French school. Research clearly indicates the importance of the early childhood period in terms of mastering language for the development of literacy.

A director of an early childhood services summed up the situation by saying:

// I am not sure the educators/operators of childcare centres in minority communities realize the impact of their role in the identity building of children. These are fairly complex sociological issues, and we need to develop ways to popularize everything and teach those working in the sector how they do or can contribute. For this, training is at the foundation... again, it is necessary to ensure that the educators/centre operators have the levels of essential skills needed to take advantage of the tools, activities, or other supports that exist to help them in their identity-building mandate."

Institutional-level official bilingualism: New Brunswick is Canada's only official bilingual province and its education system is organized to have dual systems, independent of one another, linked by common legislation. However, the Early Childhood Services Branch of the department does not have legislated duality.

- Early childhood services are planned and delivered by dual English and French teams that are aligned with the three francophone and four anglophone school districts.
- There are two distinct early learning and child care curriculum frameworks, one in English and one in French, which are mandatory in all licensed early learning and childcare centres offering services to children under the age of five.

The *Linguistic and Cultural Development Policy: A Societal Project for the French Education System*, unanimously endorsed by the Legislative Assembly, gives early childhood development a central focus, due to its importance in the development of identity, language and culture. The plan outlines three strategies to ensure equal access to services in French: greater consistency of services, providing support to parents in their role as first educators, and training and preparation of early childhood personnel working with children, parents and families.

Concluding comments

Duality as it exists in the education sector is the model that best responds to the concerns related to regulated daycare services in a francophone minority environment. It is the means by which daycare services can guarantee accessibility, quality and inclusion to meet the needs of francophone children and families. Duality in regulated early learning and childcare services is essential to the vitality of the francophone community of New Brunswick.

First Nations

New Brunswick is in the traditional territories of the Wabanaki nation, the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqey and Passamaquoddy peoples. On these traditional territories there are 15 First Nations — nine Mi'kmaq and six Wolastoqey/Maliseet. First Nations are extensively involved, in numerous ways, with their early childhood services through federal government funding. For example, Public Health Canada funds Aboriginal Head Start both on and off reserve. Components of the early childhood education program include: culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support and parent involvement.

There are numerous projects funded through the federal government that require renewal, and thus there is a need for sustained funding overall. With approximately 10 licensed early learning and childcare services offered in some communities, provincial licensing is a requirement for their federal funding. In addition, most First Nations have health, education and social services within the community. The recent federal budget (2016) has committed funds for upgrades and renovations of First Nations Head Start programs.

In light of the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report, (2015) and its accompanying calls to action,⁷⁴ it is imperative for all New Brunswickers, including the childcare sector, to better understand the rights and relations arising from treaties and obligations, as all who reside on this territory are treaty people. For those involved in early childhood services, understanding these rights will require various actions including: ensuring First Nations representation on all early childhood working committees, providing educators with professional learning on indigenous history and culture, treaty responsibilities, the intergenerational consequences of residential schools, and developing governance models respectful of indigenous rights. The calls to action also apply to the post-secondary institutions and the early childhood programs they offer.

In our brief consultations with First Nations, more collaboration was called for between the provincial government and First Nations for consistent involvement in decision-making across all levels of early childhood services. This becomes particularly

timely given the new federal initiatives involving the creation of a national early learning and childcare framework. First Nations' participation is vital when regional, provincial and national childcare policies are being developed, particularly to ensure respect and relevance to First Nations language and culture. The indigenous languages of this territory — Wolastoqey and Mi'kmaq — have no official status in New Brunswick, linguistically, culturally, socially or spiritually.

Concluding comments

Deeper cultural understanding on the part of all New Brunswickers supports indigenous children and families as well as relationships between staff and families. With an understanding of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, everyone working in early childhood will have a better understanding of the cultural and linguistic diversity of First Nations in New Brunswick. Relationships with First Nations can be enhanced through a deeper understanding and application of anti-bias education.

Previous New Brunswick reports including *Restoring Hope for First Nations* (2012) prepared by Assembly of First Nations Chiefs in New Brunswick,⁷⁵ calls for the early-years curriculum in First Nations communities to continue to address the indigenous language and cultural needs of First Nations children. An earlier report from the New Brunswick ombudsman, *Hand-in-Hand* (Richard 2010), recommends "...a renewed commitment to opportunity for First Nations children in New Brunswick."⁷⁶ While Richard's report focuses on children in care and possible prevention services for children, early learning and childcare services also contribute to supporting children, families and society by creating, in Elder Imelda Perley's words, "sacred spaces for all children."

74 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.*

75 Assembly of First Nations Chiefs in New Brunswick. 2012. *Restoring Hope for First Nations: A Plan to Break the Cycle of Poverty in New Brunswick's First Nations Communities.*

76 Richard, B., 2010. *Hand in Hand: A Review of First Nations Child Welfare in New Brunswick.* Fredericton: Office of the Ombudsman and Child and Youth Advocate, 90.

Newcomers — immigrants and refugees

Context

According to statistics reported by the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, between 2006 and 2011, New Brunswick's population expanded by almost three per cent and immigration doubled. Throughout the various task force consultations, information related to newcomers' early learning and childcare needs or experiences were not expressed. As noted in the methodology section, this is one of the limitations of this work.

In light of the fact none of the consultations included newcomers, a multicultural organization was added to the stakeholders consulted by the task force. As a way to begin to address this gap, further consultations are required. At the multicultural centre consulted, there is a child-minding program for children while their parents are involved in language training. This centre employs educators and an administrator and operates with parental involvement. Although not a licensed early learning and childcare centre, its staff members aim to parallel the requirements for licensed early learning and childcare and they each have credentials in early childhood education from other countries. As well, the staff have taken part in the Program of Professional Learning (PPL) of the New Brunswick curriculum with which they work. Welcoming newcomers begins with the early learning and childcare sector, where immigrant and refugee families can be welcomed. The anglophone and francophone curricula have content that addresses diversity, inclusion and social responsibility.

The children's program is funded through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. They also are part of Care for Newcomer Education — which supports the care and settlement of young immigrant children. This organization has 160 members, including staff in Fredericton and Moncton. Issues discussed included the need for: ongoing cultural competencies training, support and resources in the early learning and childcare sector overall; structural inclusion; an accessible early childhood education credentialing process; and representation of young immigrant children in government materials.

The provincial government has developed policies to retain immigrants.⁷⁷ The multicultural centre consulted, for example, participates on an early childhood committee in Public Health and another committee in the Population Growth Division at the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. The involvement of the multicultural centre on these committees is an example of how inclusion in policy and practice at the government level can be facilitated. There was also a request that more materials/brochures welcoming newcomers to New Brunswick be representative of cultural diversity. Multicultural centre staff reported that when newcomers read provincial government materials, they tend to look at the pictures, as they typically do not understand either English or French. There was a sense that updating these materials would be a welcomed and welcoming change.

Concluding comments

This consultation brought forward concerns related to: access to child minding services as they are on the waiting list; credentialing of childcare educators who have immigrated to New Brunswick; a shortage of resources containing cultural referents in early learning and childcare services; and social inclusion. In addition, there was a discussion about the need for early childhood staff to have access to ongoing professional learning with cultural materials and educational practices.

Without access to a licensing process, the services of multicultural organizations sit at the fringes of New Brunswick society, working against the vision of inclusion, diversity and respectfulness toward which the province is working. Greater representation of cultural diversity in provincial documentation would have an immediate, visually welcoming effect.

77 Province of New Brunswick. New Brunswick Population Growth Strategy 2013-2018. http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/petl-epft/PDF/PopGrowth/NBPG_Strategy_2013-18.pdf

Additional considerations

In addition to the mandate themes of viability, accessibility, quality and inclusion, six related considerations emerged:

1. structural alignment;
2. concerns related to unregulated childcare;
3. valuing wide-ranging knowledge and experience;
4. multiple early learning and childcare organizations;
5. parallel areas of expertise: Interest groups knowledge and experience; and
6. educators' voices.

1. Structural alignment

Structural alignment as an ongoing process: early childhood services and education. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was formed in 2010, bringing together early childhood services with the K-12 school system. New Brunswick is one of eight Canadian jurisdictions to have restructured in this way. *Putting Children First: Positioning Early Childhood for the Future* (2012) indicates the long-term plan for these merged services is to create a developmental and learning continuum from birth until 21 for positive and long-term impact.⁷⁸

Structural alignment:

- The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is organized into seven regions consistent with the seven school districts. Each district has a director of early childhood services who works with the senior management teams of the school districts and provides leadership in the delivery of services to children from birth to age eight.
- Early childhood services coordinators in each of the seven school districts work with the directors and license and monitor early learning and childcare facilities, investigate complaints and provide program support.
- Early childhood networks that are emerging at the district level and creating joint action plans.
- Family and Early Childhood agencies (formerly early intervention) that work with families with children from birth to age eight, providing additional support to them in cooperation with early learning and childcare centres and schools.

- Within each school district, "Talk with Me," a long-standing speech-language program, supports early language development and communication skills.

Many actions from the *Putting Children First Plan* (2012) have taken place.

During the consultations, we heard the following requests and concerns, pointing out that the alignment between early childhood and education within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is an ongoing process. They are listed here and will inform the recommendations:

- A desire was expressed for greater clarity and actions to be taken, specifically related to facilitating a culture of caring, learning and responsibility for all children across school districts and early childhood services. This is particularly important as children transition from early learning and childcare into school, and with daily transitions as children move from before-school to school, and from school to after-school.
- Many educators and operators said they were unable to see the benefits for early learning and childcare being moved to the education system. From their perspective, the professional learning opportunities, quality and viability of centres had decreased since the merger.
- In terms of accessing parental subsidies, the mandate authority as well as the budget for DAP rests with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, yet the legal authority and the administrative responsibility rests with the Department of Social Development, creating inefficiencies and access issues, as reported by numerous operators.
- Educators and operators reported experiences of discrepancies in policies within and across the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, including: transportation of school-age children to childcare, with some children being transported and others not; conflicting curriculum expectations were reported, inspection protocols of public health, fire marshal and early childhood services coordinators; and differences across the province were experienced in timeframes for securing criminal record and Department of Social Development checks. Consequently, some staff felt working with different interpretations/

⁷⁸ Province of New Brunswick. 2012. *Putting Children First: Positioning Early Childhood for the Future*, 5.

timeframes was a challenge, and they expressed a concern they may be at risk of not following or being able to meet standards.

- In the consultations, there was a desire expressed for more district actions to be undertaken and for communication across the field, district and government to be more multi-directional and go across early childhood services and education.

Kaga, Bennett and Moss in their cross-national study, *Caring and Learning Together*, 2010, describe some of the benefits associated with successful alignment/integration:

- greater quality and consistency across sectors;
- more effective investment in young children;
- enhanced continuity of children's experiences; and
- improved public management of services.

With the placement of early childhood services within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development there is an expectation of a greater emphasis on continuity across the day in children's lives; greater access to affordable early learning and childcare services concern for the workforce qualifications and competence and curricula that will serve as tools for practice.⁷⁹

2. Concerns about unregulated care

In Canada, the issue of the "unlicensed" or "informal" childcare sector has long been on the radar of government officials. In a 1981 policy paper, the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services recognized there was "insufficient support for informal care," given its numerous problems including: 1) quality of care; 2) difficulty for parents finding and maintaining stable arrangements; 3) isolation of caregivers; and 4) lack of readily available information on various aspects of childcare. These issues, plus the absence of public oversight, had been unsolved issues in Ontario.⁸⁰ With the introduction of the *Child Care and Early Years Act* in August 2015, following the death of children in unregulated services in that province, it became the first legislation of its kind in Canada. This planned approach to providing supports and oversight to unlicensed sites has changed the childcare landscape.

Every province and territory regulates family home childcare but also allows unregulated home childcare on the condition that the provider does not exceed the regulated standards for the maximum number

of children of various ages.⁸¹ In New Brunswick, unlicensed providers may care for a maximum of two infants younger than 24 months, four children between the ages of two and five, eight school-age children or five children of mixed age with at least one school-age child and no more than one infant. In the parent consultations, there was an indication from some respondents that smaller facilities were unlicensed and larger ones were licensed.

Compared to other provinces and territories, New Brunswick's rate of coverage in terms of total regulated early learning and childcare spaces per child population is higher than average.⁸² It covers about 28 per cent of children zero to 12 years of age. This indicates⁸³ that New Brunswick has a gap between the provisions of regulated early learning and childcare versus need.

Paul Kershaw (2011), a family policy researcher at the University of British Columbia, estimated that 21 per cent of New Brunswick children receive childcare services from unregulated facilities,⁸⁴ exclusive of parental/family arrangements.

Between 2011 and 2016, New Brunswick increased the number of early learning and childcare spaces by 6,370; therefore, one would conclude that there has been a reduction of the percentage of children receiving services from unlicensed services. Much further work on this topic is needed; however, this estimate does point to both the need for, and the difficulty of, gathering accurate data on such a significant issue.

Currently, unlicensed/unregulated facilities are not required to meet provincial standards (e.g., the use of a curriculum, inspections by public health and the fire marshal, prior contact checks, criminal record checks and First Aid). With respect to monitoring and oversight, the provincial government monitors these sites when complaints of illegal services are received.

79 Kaga, Y, Bennett, J and Moss, P. 2010. *Caring and Learning Together: A cross-national study on the integration of early childhood care and education within education*. Paris, UNESCO, 15.

80 In: Ferns and Friendly, 2015, 2.

81 Ferns, C. and Friendly, M. 2015. *Background paper on unregulated child care for the "Home Child Care: More than a home" project*. Childcare Resource and Research Unit: Occasional Paper No. 28, 5. <http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/Occasional%20paper%2028.pdf>

82 Friendly, M., Grady, B., Macdonald, L., and Forer, B. 2015. *Preliminary data: Early childhood education and care in Canada 2014*. Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 5.

83 McCuaig, K. and Dhuey, E. November 2015. *Child Care in New Brunswick: The social and economic impacts*. Toronto, ON: Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development. OISE/University of Toronto, 15.

84 Kershaw, P. 2011. *Does Canada Work for All Generations? A Report for Canadians in New Brunswick*. Vancouver: Human Early Learning Partnership, 15. http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/publications/Family%20Policy%20Reports%20and%20Resources/does_canada_work_for_all_generations_nb.pdf

There is no mechanism to monitor the safety and quality of these services routinely. In these situations, parents' vigilance is required. It is up to the parents to determine whether the site meets their personal standards of safety and quality.

Many educators/operators and interest groups expressed concern that the lack of oversight in some unlicensed sites may place children at risk of harm, recalling the 2013-14 deaths of four young children in Ontario within seven months in unregulated settings.^{85,86}

Educators and operators explained during consultations that, in their experience, rising parent fees or parents' changing financial situations resulted in families looking outside regulated early learning and childcare for better rates. In some centres, the level of safety, security and quality may be fine; however, they are unknown and unmonitored. Furthermore, tax receipts for services rendered may not be provided. Consultations with early childhood educators and operators suggested that parents seek out unlicensed care since it is typically believed to be a more affordable arrangement. It was also reported that some unlicensed childcare sites advertise their services in public schools. These sites are offering parents a lower rate and provisions of care when children are sick. Regulated early learning and childcare facilities cannot take sick children due to health regulations. Operators requested that if unlicensed sites can be advertised in school, so should the regulated services.

Voices from across the childcare sector and interest groups advocated strongly for the licensing of all childcare centres so that there is regulatory oversight of safety and quality of services.

3. Valuing wide-ranging knowledge and experience

It is evident that there is extensive and wide-ranging knowledge within the early childhood sector. The task force arrived at this conclusion based on consultations with educators, operators, coordinators, early childhood services directors, representatives from Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick

(ECCENB), a provincial association, Education, Quality, Unity and Improving Professionalism (EQUIP in Miramichi) and Education for Professionalism and Young Children (EPYC in Moncton), as well as staff from the family and early childhood agencies.

Educators, operators and coordinators all have front-line experience and, consequently, deep knowledge of the diverse range of structural and process quality features in practice, their strengths and shortcomings. These perspectives derive directly from their work and what in qualitative research is called situated knowledge. In each school district, we heard numerous suggestions that align with other information brought together in this report. Committed, intelligent and compassionate people have a very good, tacit sense of directions to be taken, often aligning with, and in some areas, outpacing research. These suggestions resonate compellingly with *Starting Strong IV* (2015), the recently released international, cross-country study on quality in early learning and childcare.

Operators' and educators' suggestions included:

- increasing the level of staff qualifications and opportunities for upgrading requirements to a post-secondary certificate/diploma and a bachelor's degree;
- creating more partnerships/linkages to enhance/develop post-secondary education programs;
- providing provincewide professional development in infant/toddler care;
- developing a list/registry for each school district of supply early childhood educators who have their criminal record checks and social development checks completed, and ensuring adequate resources to support and maintain it;
- increasing government funding to support process aspects of quality:
 - materials and equipment for ongoing curriculum implementation;
 - human resources for inclusion support;
 - regulatory changes that affect quality, such as the early learning and child care curriculum frameworks;
 - creation of quality indoor and outdoor play spaces, including funding for renovations and naturalizing outdoor play spaces; and
 - public awareness campaign about differences between regulated and unregulated childcare as well as quality early learning and childcare.

Coordinators and early childhood regional directors in all regions are very knowledgeable about the conditions of work in early learning and childcare

85 Marin, A. 2014. *Careless about Child Care: Investigation about how the Ministry of Education responds to complaints and concerns relating to unlicensed day care providers*, 17. <http://www.childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/14/10/ombudsman-report-careless-about-child-care>

86 Ferns, C. and Friendly, M. 2015. *Background paper on unregulated child care for the "Home Child Care: More than a home" project*. Childcare Resource and Research Unit: Occasional Paper No. 28, 4. <http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/Occasional%20paper%202015.pdf>

facilities and the pedagogical opportunities available for children. Consequently, they were able to offer numerous, informed suggestions in support of strengthening children's centres, many of which complement those heard from the educators and operators. These include:

- Increased support to coordinators for curriculum implementation with the support of the Collaborative Assessment Tool as well as ongoing professional development in curriculum delivery. Suggestions for improving quality education and professional development. include:
 - face-to-face courses combined with online modules;
 - owner/operators have to have qualifications and professional development within the first year of opening, including financial management, human resources and vulnerable children;
 - specific funding for replacement staff in centres; and
 - greater school district networking, and greater collaborative decision-making at the district levels. This would better facilitate issues of continuity across the two systems for children and families, coordinate curriculum for children and optimize expenditures.

4. Early childhood organizations

ECCENB, EPYC, EQUIP: When we met with early childhood organizations, they articulated their contributions to early childhood education within the province and offered insights and suggestions. Briefly:

- *Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick* (ECCENB) is a long-standing provincial association engaged in numerous projects funded by government. For example: professional development planning and delivery; leadership; educator and operator competencies; strategic planning; and various studies. It has been active since 2000 and its mandate is to represent, support and promote licensed early learning and childcare services in all communities in New Brunswick.⁸⁷ They spoke to the need for a greater partnership with government.
- *Education, Professionalism and Young Children* (EPYC) is an early childhood education organization located in the Moncton region — with a committed board of directors and a mandate to provide professional development for the Moncton region. It is a volunteer organization responsible for its fundraising. Traditionally, it organizes and delivers an autumn professional development series. It also did an investigation into unlicensed childcare

advertised on Kijiji, of which it found numerous advertisements. EPYC pointed out disconnects between childcare services and schools, and it suggested better connections be developed.

- *Education for Quality Unity, and Improving Professionalism* (EQUIP) is a volunteer organization in the Miramichi consisting of committed directors developing and implementing outreach initiatives. It assesses local professional development needs and delivers both short-term professional development and a regional conference. It pointed to the need for more provincial government attention to unlicensed care, a wage grid, a review of training institutions and the practicum experience, more support for inclusion, and early learning and childcare support for children younger than age three.

There is some crossover in membership with ECCENB, EQUIP and EPYC. EQUIP and EPYC are regional, grassroots organizations that function in English only. They raise funds to present local professional development within their regions, welcoming people from across the province. They do not have access to government funds, as there is no program to which they can apply.

5. Parallel areas of expertise

Interests groups' knowledge and experience: We consulted with representatives from a number of groups with significant knowledge, experience and mandates supportive of children, women and/or society. These groups included: Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation; Pay Equity New Brunswick; Voices of Women Consensus Building Forum; New Brunswick Federation of Labour; Office of the Child and Youth Advocate; the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health; Association francophone des parents du Nouveau-Brunswick, Regroupement féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick and the Early Learning and Child Care Project Board. Each of the representatives articulated much of what we heard from other consultations; each was aware of the research on childcare and childcare in practice as a societal benefit to children, women, families and the economy; and each had insights and suggestions to offer to the task force. There is a benefit of constituting a forum/board where these organizations inform, advise and engage with ongoing complexities inherent within early learning and childcare.

87 <http://eccenb-sepenb.ca/en/>

6. Educators' voices

The parents and participants from the interest groups that took part in the consultations often spoke of the passion and dedication staff had regarding the learning of their children. They also indicated that educators' wages did not reflect the value of their work to society. As one parent said: "I don't want the cost to go up, but I find the educators are not sufficiently paid."

In every session, educators said they feel valued by parents. However, many voiced concern about the need for others to value their work and working conditions, including the public, the schools, the media and the government. Given the media's focus at the time on online inspections, most expressed concern about the negative effects of media attention on their work. They did not necessarily object to online posting of the inspections. However, they expressed the desire for the media and government to speak out on the lack of monitoring of unlicensed childcare.

It was evident in our consultations that district early childhood services staff, educators and operators support early learning and childcare overall. Yet, as noted above, in most sessions, educators spoke about the need for someone to speak up for them. The frequency with which we heard this request points to the need for continuing conversations with educators, to explore more fully mechanisms and spaces where educators can voice their concerns and be heard.

Multiple benefits of quality early learning and childcare

In November 2015, as part of the Child Care Review Task Force activities, Pierre Fortin, an economics professor at the Université de Québec à Montréal, made a presentation on the economic and societal benefits of increased regulated early learning and childcare in Quebec during the past decade. In addition, Craig Alexander, vice-president, economics analysis, at the C.D. Howe Institute, previously chief economist with the TD Bank, presented research on the long-term benefits for children and society when extensive public funds are invested in early childhood services, including early learning and childcare. These presentations were made to ministers of the provincial government with responsibilities related to family, senior government staff in the corresponding departments and a public session to which the early childhood sector had been invited. Highlights of their presentations are below.

Pierre Fortin: Fortin described how the availability of low-fee childcare benefited Quebec families, the economy and (surprisingly) the government's coffers. The increased investments in early learning and childcare led to increased employment, incomes and fiscal revenues, pushing up the Gross Domestic Product by 1.7 per cent (\$5.1 billion). Government spending on social assistance was reduced as more mothers went to work. Also, Québec's birth rate increased significantly. At both the federal and provincial levels, gains in tax revenues exceeded the cost of investments in affordable early learning and childcare. For each additional dollar invested, there was a net benefit of 55 cents for Ottawa and 20 cents for Quebec.⁸⁸

Craig Alexander: Drawing on numerous longitudinal studies, Alexander described how the rate of return on human capital investment is far higher the younger the children are, so the highest rate of return is with zero- to three-year-olds, but it is also significant at the four- and five-year-old age group. The benefits of early childhood education are widespread and positively affect children, parents and the economy. Experiences in the first years of life can impact economic and social success. He emphasized that research has challenged prior misconceptions. Basic abilities can be altered early in life. It is more difficult

to improve a child's learning abilities later in life, and high-quality education prior to school leads to cognitive and language development.

Finally, in his presentation, he reiterated that while all children benefit from strong early childhood education, research shows that children, particularly those living in poverty, benefit even more. Early childhood education programs allow mothers to work, increasing family incomes. The economy needs more skilled workers, and stronger early childhood education programs can support the development of a more skilled population.⁸⁹

Preamble to the recommendations

The commissioners are confident that, if implemented, their recommendations will help move the province forward on job creation, financial prudence and improved services for families, as outlined in the document, *Choices to Move New Brunswick Forward*. Supported by a large body of relevant research, these recommendations lay the foundation for a modernized early learning and childcare system that will support New Brunswick in maintaining strong populations, strong social programs and a strong economy. These recommendations address several priority areas:

Governance

- Moving early learning and childcare toward a system with greater public management and public funding.
- Recognizing early learning and childcare as social infrastructure.
- Developing approaches that are collaborative, integrated and more responsive.
- Aligning early childhood services within school districts as part of a continuum of learning.

Educational practices

- Pursuing ongoing development of a universal high-quality early learning and childcare system.
- Aligning the curriculum frameworks and ongoing professional development.
- Engaging child-focused experiences.

⁸⁸ Fortin, P. 2015. *Quebec's Childcare System: Public Address*, Fredericton Convention Centre, November 4, 2015.

⁸⁹ Alexander, C. 2015. *The Economic Case for Investing in ECE*. Public Address, Fredericton, November 4, 2015.

Early childhood education as a professional field of practice

- Creating a professional early childhood education body.
- Pursuing ongoing engagement of the early learning and childcare workforce.
- Increasing access to post-secondary educational opportunities and professional development.

Public investment

- Sustaining funding over time to:
 - provide an affordable, accessible, inclusive early learning and childcare system for families; and
 - support the sustainability of the early learning and childcare system.
- Developing approaches that are comprehensive, collaborative and inclusive of the early learning and childcare sector.

Children's rights and parent's rights to access

- Focusing on children's rights.
- Acknowledging early learning and childcare as society's collective responsibility.
- Observing respectful regard for diversity within the early learning and childcare setting.
- Respecting the rights of parents to be fully engaged in matters pertaining to their children's care and learning.

Recommendations

Given the findings from the consultations and the research, in some cases the recommendations go beyond the mandate to maintain the principle of the best interests of the child, as per the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

Recommendation 1: Governance

Given the inequities in early learning and childcare with respect to accessibility, quality, viability and inclusiveness;

Given that the market model is less effective in ensuring that high-quality early learning and childcare is accessible, affordable and inclusive, particularly for birth to age four, and as per national and international research and the specific studies conducted for the New Brunswick context;

Given that New Brunswick has a large number of for-profit centres;

Given the number of community daycare homes and their critical importance to families;

Given the recognition of the longstanding commitment and knowledge of women in the early learning and childcare sector;

1.1 We recommend the movement, over the long term, toward a publicly funded and managed system delivered by a not-for-profit early learning and childcare system. Therefore, we recommend that the provincial government:

- gradually move early learning and childcare services toward a more publicly funded not-for-profit system, including access for all children to quality learning and childcare services;
- going forward, new permits be issued for not-for-profit facilities only and encourage and support the established for profit facilities to move to not-for-profit;
- establish a process by which one board of directors becomes responsible for all early learning and childcare facilities within a specific elementary school catchment area as a means of meeting legislative requirements of the not-for-profit service; provide greater public investment for birth to four years of age to stabilize funding;

- prepare a transition plan to a well-planned accessible early learning and childcare system with specific objectives, including well-qualified workforce and a corresponding wage grid;
- develop an appropriate funding and governance model for community daycare homes, such as an agency model;
- align early learning and childcare centres with the school catchment area in which they are located; and
- create an advisory committee consisting of staff and parents from early learning and childcare centres and schools to develop a long-term plan for childcare transitions to school and after-school childcare within districts.

Given the need for alignment among the various early childhood services, located within the departments of Health, Social Development, Education and Early Childhood Development and Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour;

Given that such alignment facilitates quality, inclusion and accessibility when it comes to early childhood services at both the departmental and school districts level;

Given that the best interests of children are served when continuities of services are ensured at the local/district/provincial levels;

1.2 We recommend that all early childhood services for children and families be aligned within the district boundaries and under the leadership of the Early Childhood Services Director, and that together they examine policies, practices, standards, services, and appropriate and timely access to children's files.

Given that the provincial early learning and child care curriculum frameworks for birth to age five are researched-based with exemplary practices and provisions, an integral part of early learning and childcare since 2008;

Given the departmental commitment to a continuum of learning from birth;

1.3 We recommend that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, with regional directors of early childhood services,

develop a comprehensive, consultative plan that, over time, will modernize the early learning and childcare system. Therefore, we recommend:

- four-year-olds remain within the birth-to-age four structure of the early learning and childcare system. This will also ensure that the curricula maintain their child-centred approach and avoid schoolification;
- the department move toward before- and after-school childcare services provided at the child's school. The guidelines for this service may require a policy to ensure the use of school spaces for childcare. After-school services may be provided by an existing program;
- prior to the above action, ensure adequate funding is available for birth to age four, as it is expected that most centres are viable through revenues from after-school programming spaces; and
- school districts establish a substitute early childhood educator list to align with district teacher supply lists, to optimize a centre's capacity to access quality early childhood educators.

Given that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has already taken action with respect to duality in early learning and childcare services by recognizing the need for two separate curricula, one for anglophone early learning and childcare services and the other for francophone early learning and childcare services, by aligning the early learning and childcare licensing and monitoring responsibilities at the district level, and by reorganizing family and early childhood agencies to align them with the territory and language of the school district they serve;

Given that the vitality of francophone communities is based in part on the early life experiences that children have in their mother tongue;

1.4 We recommend that the *Early Childhood Act* be amended to recognize early childhood duality. Therefore, we recommend:

- licensed early learning and childcare services operate either in English or French and that no licence is granted for a new bilingual early learning and childcare service;
- the department ensures equitable access to French early learning and childcare services in all regions of the province; and
- duality, as it exists, in the education sector is applied in the early childhood sector.

Given that a majority of First Nations chiefs have indicated in Restoring Hope: A Plan to Break the Cycle of Poverty in New Brunswick's First Nations communities that they be provided equitable and high-quality early learning and childcare to their children;

Given that First Nations have jurisdiction over their early childhood services, and given the mandate letter of the Prime Minister to the Minister of Families, Children and Communities, that the Minister work with the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs to launch consultations with provinces and territories and indigenous peoples on a National Early Learning and Childcare Framework as a first step toward delivering affordable, high-quality, flexible and fully inclusive early learning and childcare;

1.5 We recommend that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development establish a memorandum of understanding with First Nations and the federal government as they work together on a national early learning and childcare framework, respecting the right of First Nations to govern their institutions.

Given the findings of the literacy task force, as well as current research, and the key role of early learning and childcare in the literacy growth and development of young children;

1.6 We recommend that networks in each district be created, if this has not already been done, to bring together all those involved with literacy initiatives for young children from birth to school-entry age. Early learning and childcare centres and libraries should be pivotal to such networks. Therefore we recommend:

- literacy practices as articulated in each of the curricula be an integral part of these district network initiatives for young children and their families as well as staff.

Given the complexities of early learning and childcare services and the need for clear understandings, coherence and alignment across a number of sectors and jurisdictions;

1.7 We recommend that the provincial government adopt a family policy that recognizes cultural diversity, family diversity and the diversity of needs when it develops guidelines for parental leave, and that it provides financial support for families and early learning and childcare services that meet the different needs of families. These include the inclusion of each child in early learning and childcare

services and any other condition targeting the best interests of the child, as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

.....
Given that a range of interest groups (e.g., Child and Youth Advocate Office, "Regroupement féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick," Pay Equity New Brunswick, Voices of Women, the Association francophone des parents du Nouveau-Brunswick, the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation) are knowledgeable about the overall benefits of a publicly funded and managed early learning and childcare system for society;

Given that the early learning and childcare sector, including educators, operators, government staff and post-secondary educators hold different and intersecting knowledge;

1.8 We recommend that a provincial early learning and childcare advisory board be established with representatives of the abovementioned groups, as well as parents and other key people, to ensure a public discussion of this report and actions going forward. Therefore, we recommend:

- a childcare task force forum be held to discuss this report;
- a preliminary guide to action be prepared from the forum on the report's recommendations; and
- the forum act as an advisory board for the provincial government on issues relevant to licensed early learning and childcare going forward.

.....
Given that educators, directors and owners of early childcare centres recognize the importance of clear communication across the sector;

1.9 We recommend communication processes and decision-making mechanisms be reviewed by the department to facilitate optimal working relationships with the early learning and childcare sector.

Recommendation 2: Educational practices

.....
Given the high-quality, research-based nature of the two New Brunswick early learning and child care curriculum frameworks;

Given the concerns we heard regarding curriculum training and the need/desire for ongoing curriculum implementation support;

Given that curriculum training, continuing education, ongoing implementation support and curriculum-related actions such as play, child-to child interactions,

and family members and centre staff relationships are critical to the quality of an early learning and childcare service;

2.1 We recommend that all actions taken for curriculum support, training and education respect the two curricula frameworks. Therefore, we recommend:

- more resources, both human and material, are made available to support early learning and childcare services;
- the Early Learning and Child Care curriculum frameworks and curriculum training/education be provided and funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, as is the case with school curriculum;
- the curricula implementation be supported as an ongoing process and that this process include regional face-to-face meetings and onsite support making use of the Collaborative Assessment Tool; and
- the creation of curriculum advisory committees, one for each of the anglophone and francophone curricula. These committees will hold regular meetings to review and revise their individual curriculum and recommend professional learning strategies or pertinent changes. These committees will consist of representation from stakeholders including a cross section of parents, service providers of children with special needs, First Nations, immigrants, early childhood sector, post-secondary education and government.

.....
Given the need for better understanding and knowledge of francophones as a linguistic minority;

2.2 We recommend that a strategy and training be developed for francophone childcare staff that will encourage the implementation of effective interventions that fully support identity-building and provide guidance for families in minority settings.

.....
Given the need for better understanding and knowledge of inclusion as a human right, and the duty to accommodate;

2.3 We recommend that an inclusion policy be developed for early learning and childcare. Therefore, we recommend:

- the language of policies regarding inclusion shift from a focus on inclusion move toward a focus on language of diversity and respect;
- additional funding be designated to support this policy; and
- a module be added to diversity training explaining the policy and inclusion as a human right.

Given the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action (2015), Restoring Hope for First Nations (2010) from First Nations communities, and the Hand-in-Hand report from the New Brunswick Child and Youth Office (2010);

Given that all treaty citizens are educated about First Nations history and culture to undertake the actions called for in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission;

2.4 We recommend that indigenous histories and culture be included in all initial training to promote early learning and childcare services that are socially inclusive, culturally and linguistically responsive, and of high-quality.

Given that in 2016, there were licensed early learning and childcare spaces for approximately 28 per cent of children younger than 12;

Given that this percentage shows the vast majority of children, excluding those in the care of families and friends, are in services not required to comply with standards and regulations;

Given that unregulated services are not required to implement one of the two early learning and child care curriculum frameworks;

Given concerns and examples provided through the consultations of unregulated and potentially illegal child-minding sites;

2.5 We recommend that the department review the current complaint monitoring process for unregulated services and establish a proactive process to oversee unlicensed services. Therefore, we recommend:

- the department immediately review its process for investigating unlicensed services for children's interests;
- the implementation of a public awareness campaign concerning unregulated childcare services, including the differences between licensed and unlicensed and illegal services, and promoting safety and quality early learning and childcare centres;
- that regulated early learning and childcare services have a visual sign, such as a logo, that is clearly quickly identifiable for parents and the public;
- the department design a transition and incentivizing process to support unlicensed services that would like to become licensed; and
- the department review the possibility of requiring unlicensed services to become registered.

Recommendation 3: Early childhood education as a professional field of practice

Given that research indicates the importance of early childhood education in the development of a high-quality early learning and childcare system;

Given the emergence of early childhood education as a professional field that requires:

- deep system changes including attributes that define professional occupations;
- deep and broad conversations are needed and inclusive of the field's diverse roles, settings and aspirations.⁹⁰

Given that New Brunswick ranks among the lowest among the provinces and territories with respect to required staff qualifications;

Given that there is no provincial program of certification to recognize the credentials of early childhood educators;

Given that most educators, directors and operators find work conditions, including salary and social benefits, not aligned with the work they do;

Given that the research states that more equitable working conditions including equitable wages and benefits attract and retain qualified educators;

Given that women's advocacy groups whose mandate is to improve women's working conditions state that the salaries in early childhood sector are not equitable and fair;

3.1 We recommend that, with careful planning and over time, the department ensures early childhood education qualifications for all educators and operators working with young children be increased and supported with appropriate compensation. Therefore, we recommend that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development:

- establish a certification process for early childhood education that includes competencies for credentials for educators and directors/operators;
- develop in partnership with key partners, a training strategy to increase the qualifications of early childhood educators and directors/operators working in regulated early learning and childcare facilities;

⁹⁰ National Association for the Education of Young Children. Oct. 25, 2015. *Fulfilling the Promise of Early Childhood Education: Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Professional Field of Practice*. <http://www.naeyc.org/blog/fulfilling-promise-early-childhood-education>

- in collaboration with the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, establish a work-study strategy to support educators in regulated early learning and childcare facilities to obtain their credentials while working;
- immediately work in partnership with the sector to establish a legislated college of early childhood education to regulate the profession;
- implement a wage floor enshrined in legislation and tied to a certification model and
- increase early childhood educators' salaries using the process of certification and pay equity.

Given that the Quality Improvement Funding Support program contributes to the recruitment and retention of qualified staff;

3.2 We recommend that Quality Improvement Funding Support be maintained.

Given that high-quality early learning and childcare depends on post-secondary education and ongoing professional development;

3.3 We recommend that colleges and universities review admission criteria and ensure that early childhood programs — birth to eight — exist or are established. Therefore, we recommend:

- revisiting the admission criteria for the early childhood community college programs to increase the requirements;
- ensuring that a post-secondary early childhood program working group with membership from government, community colleges and universities be established/re-activated;
- this working group plan and build a provincial post-secondary early childhood education, with programs including early childhood education agreements between colleges and universities; and
- within a comprehensive post-secondary program in early childhood education, ensure that students have the option to move seamlessly from a one-year certificate to a two-year diploma to a four-year degree.

Given that the new Early Childhood Services Act will increase the training requirements for educators and directors, we recommend:

3.4 That New Brunswick's Community Colleges ensure a sufficient number of seats for early childhood education candidates.

Given that the New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund provides tuition reimbursement for early childhood educators obtaining a one-year certificate, we recommend:

3.5 The New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund continue to be supported in providing tuition reimbursements for early childhood education programs.

Given that there is no legislated professional early learning and childcare body;

Given that we acknowledge and support the valued roles played by our early childhood educators;

Given that the early childhood sector has identified the challenge of having one collective voice;

Given that the lack of a collective voice can hinder professionalism and need for a profession to have certification and a common code of ethics;

Given that the existing associations have a voluntary membership;

3.6 We recommend that a professionally legislated early childhood body be formed to register and regulate ethical and professional standards for early childhood educators.⁹¹ Therefore, we recommend:

- that the provincial government supports this professional association by providing the necessary resources for its first year of operation.

Recommendation 4: Public investments

Given the provincial government's intention, as articulated in the Strategic Program Review, is to invest in children and families;

Given there are significant challenges with the viability of early learning and childcare centres, particularly with spaces for children from birth to age four;

Given that a large body of robust research demonstrates that investment in services for very young children results in the highest return on investment for children, families and society;

Given that affordable early learning and childcare results in greater workforce participation by women;

⁹¹ See Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators established in 2007 through the Early Childhood Educators Act. www.college-ecce.ca

Given that women's participation in the early learning and childcare workforce contributes to provincial taxation revenues and gross domestic product (GDP);

4.1 We recommend consistent incremental increases in public investments to build a sustainable early learning and childcare system for children from birth to age four.

Given that the task force's financial review demonstrated the impact of the adult-child ratios have on the costs for infant-to-24-months-old children which significantly exceeds the fees that can be charged to parents;

Given that there is insufficient revenue, mainly from parent fees, to cover the costs of early learning and childcare that are driven by the required adult-child ratios for children under the age of three;

4.2 We recommend that budgetary rules and processes be established for funding to regulated facilities. Therefore, we recommend that:

- ongoing funding be prioritized to birth to age four, where adult-to-child ratios are lower;
- operating grants be re-established for materials and that funds for professional development be more accessible to all educators;
- funding be provided when changes in legislation require that facilities incur significant expenses; and
- immediate funding be provided for licensed early learning and childcare facilities that are more vulnerable.

Given that moving to a not-for-profit early learning and childcare system will take time to enact;

Given that knowledgeable and committed women have substantially contributed to the establishment of the early learning and childcare sector over many years;

4.3 We recommend that government continue providing current funding to existing for-profit early learning and childcare services during the transition period toward a public-service, not-for-profit model.

4.4 We recommend that the women in both for-profit and not-for-profit centres who have made longstanding contributions to the field be actively engaged in planning and implementing this transition.

Given that many parents find regulated early learning and childcare very expensive, and they find it challenging to afford these services;

4.5 We recommend that public funding be gradually increased to support the viability of early learning and childcare services while maintaining parent fees at an affordable level so that quality early learning and childcare is accessible by all parents and children.

Given that regulated early learning and childcare typically follows conventional work-week hours;

4.6 We recommend that a review of the range of family childcare needs outside of conventional work hours be undertaken.

Given that many parents are unaware of the Daycare Assistance Program (DAP), that the application process is difficult and potentially stigmatizing, and that the program is well-funded;

Given that the subsidy to parents for childcare fees does not fully cover the cost of childcare charged by childcare services;

Given the difference between childcare fees charged to parents and the subsidy rate to parents may be prohibitive for low-income families to access regulated early learning and child care;

4.7 We recommend revising the current subsidy model to better meet families' financial needs. Therefore, we recommend:

- that the eligibility criteria be revised to be more accessible to more parents;
- that the subsidy amount take into account the number of children in early learning and childcare in one family;
- the use of an online application process with an online calculator; and
- a review of the sliding scale of the subsidy be undertaken to ensure fairness to families.

.....
Given that, from birth, continuities in children's lives between families, early learning and childcare centres and schools contribute to children's well-being;

Given that there are insufficient funds to support children with additional needs;

4.8 We recommend additional resources, and access when necessary, to ensure successful inclusion within early learning and childcare services. Therefore, we recommend:

- financial support to facilitate the hiring of enhanced support workers. Salaries of support workers should be equivalent to that of early childhood educators and include quality improvement funding support;
- the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop a strategy, in cooperation with school districts and representatives of early childhood services, with a view to better aligning services prior to school. This includes transition from childcare services to school in terms of inclusive education and the transfer of certain resources that should continue to support children when they start school, if that is in the best interests of the child; and
- those children, in their own right, have access to quality early learning and childcare services before the age of three even when their parents are not working.

Recommendation 5: Children's rights and parents' rights to access

.....
Given that Canada is a signatory on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child since 1989;

Given that the province is strongly bound by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;

Given that the New Brunswick Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the United Nations convention within New Brunswick;

Given that the Child Rights Impact Assessment is used regularly to screen all policies and legislations affecting children;

Given that the early learning and child care curriculum frameworks mandated by the provincial government acknowledge and incorporate the best interest of the child as per the United Nations convention;

5.1 We recommend that the provincial government apply principles inherent in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by:

- ensuring all children have access to quality regulated early learning and childcare;
- ensuring that access to quality regulated early learning and childcare is monitored by the Child and Youth Advocate; and
- developing quality indicators from the existing quality assessment tools that are part of the two curricula.

.....
Given that a family is a child's first learning community;

Given that most parents work and the children become members of other childcare communities;

Given parents' right to be fully engaged in matters pertaining to their child's learning and care with respect;

5.2 We recommend that the department work with school districts to ensure there are mechanisms in place for active responsive and reciprocal parental engagement in early learning and care of their child.

A call for transformation: early learning and childcare as social infrastructure

Throughout the 20th century, the provincial government led changes, in both health and education, which required significant societal transformations. Hospitals were managed by religious orders until they became a government-funded universal service. Prior to public schooling as a fully universal service, there were inequalities in the delivery of education from one community to the next, particularly the most vulnerable. The provincial government undertook necessary actions to make quality education accessible to all. More recently, through Initiative '91, the provincial government brought universal full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds into the public school system. This was supported by a new, mandatory university degree program to ensure the qualifications of kindergarten teachers.

In 2010, the provincial government transferred the responsibility for early childhood services from the Department of Social Development to the newly named Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, a move that recognized education begins at birth and that learning and childcare are intertwined.

In the New Brunswick Strategic Review (2015), more services for families are one of the three priority areas identified by the provincial government. In the 2016 State of the Province Address, Premier Brian Gallant pointed to the need for early learning and childcare so women and men can participate in employment, study and training opportunities. The Premier also noted that New Brunswick must make strategic investments now in education, training and innovation to ensure the future of the province.

Today's young families work within a strained economy with limited employment prospects. Higher living costs, including repayment of student loans and childcare costs mean that in the majority of households, both parents need to work, sometimes at multiple part-time jobs. Parents also make careful choices about how many children they will have. Thus, whether for financial reasons or personal choice, an increasing number of two-parent and lone-parent families are in need of early learning and childcare services.

Public policy will need to reflect today's reality. For the betterment of New Brunswick and all of its residents, now and into the future, families require policy that supports their participation in the workforce, while children require and deserve high-quality early learning and care — their rights under the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

A compelling case has been made for the benefits that result from high-quality early learning and childcare. What was once considered a women's issue is now widely regarded as a *key element of social infrastructure*. Quality early learning and childcare, that is well-designed, implemented and monitored, supports:

- optimal child development;
- inclusion of children with additional needs;
- social inclusion of cultural minority groups;
- gender equality;
- women's and families' participation in the labour force;
- job creation;
- poverty reduction;
- reduced need for social assistance;
- higher fertility rates; and
- a more vibrant economy.

These benefits, when addressed appropriately, contribute to a more inclusive and democratic society, a society that collectively honours and values its children, invests in its people and provides an ideal place in which to raise a family.

Appendices

A1: Consultation participants

Early childhood educators and owner/operators

Consultations: The task force commissioners held 32 consultations with early childhood educators and owner/operators in all corners of the province (16 English sessions and 16 French sessions):

- English sessions: Woodstock, Fredericton, Saint John, St. Stephen, Moncton, Miramichi, Campbellton and Bathurst.
- French sessions: Bathurst, Inkerman, Campbellton, Fredericton, Dieppe, Edmundston, Grand Falls and Richibucto.

A total of 279 participants agreed to have their names included in the final report:

Aline Thomas	Carole Guitar	Flora Stewart	Joanne LeBlanc
Alison Lawrence	Caroline Marygold	France Dargavel	Joann Poirier
Alvine Thibodeau	Carol McCluskey	Francine Godin	Jodi Hennessey
Amanda Audette	Carol Meunier	Gillian Bateman	Jolyane Lavallée
Amanda Hatt	Carolyn Drake	Gina Duguay	Josée Richard
Amber Wilson	Catherine Pontbriand	Giselle Melanson	Josée Sonier
Amelia Flewelling	Cécilia Bérubé	Guy Lanteigne	Josyane Gallant
Ami-Jo Johnson	Charlene Dignam	Guylène Daigle	Joyce Arbeau
Amy Butts	Chelsea Bard	Heather Hamilton	Judy Wilson Shee
Amy-Jo Lindsay	Chelsea Strongman	Heather Surette	Julie Hachey
Amy Savoy	Cheryl Allerston	Heidi Miller	Julie Hichey
Amy Steele	Cheryl Brown	Holly Brown	Julie Lagacé
Andrea Milburn	Cheryl Richard	Holly Grace	Julie Leblanc Basque
Andriane Lagacé	Christelle Noël	Ida Haché	Julie Richard
Angela Thorpe	Christina Garland	Isabelle Hébert	Jung Hee Shin
Angie Gould	Christina James	Isabelle Landry	Kaitlyn M'Guigan
Anna-Lee Vienneau	Chris Tracy	Jackie McGraw	Kara McDonald
Anne Charest	Cindy Butland	Jackie Ramsey	Karen Peterson
Anne MacDougall	Cindy Green	James Arsenault	Karie Allain
Annie Boucher	Claudette LeBel	Jana Hanson	Karine Basque
Annik Stewart	Claudette Melanson	Janet Towers	Karly Lapointe
Ann-Marie Adams	Cloria Colette	Janice Sutherland	Kathleen Sullivan
Antoinette Legacy	Connie Wheaton	Janie Stewart	Dunlop
Arleen LaForest	Constance Vautour	Jared Robinson	Kelly Estey
Arlene Anderson	Crystal Gullison	Jeanita Leblanc	Kimberly Ward
Autumn Dignard	Cynthia Dempsey	Jeanne Doiron	Kristan Scott
Azeb Kebret	Danielle Cyr	Jeanne Saulnier	Laura Hooper
Barbara Lapointe	Debbie Doiron	Jean Robinson	Laurie Hoffman
Barb Harrison-Hoyt	Debbie Dugas	Jennifer Coffin	Lee Russell
Barb Lockhart	Debra Betsch	Jennifer Ferrari	Leisa Comeau
Becky LeBlanc	Debra Pattman	Jennifer Lagacé	Lenore Tracy
Bobbie-Jean White	Denise Cormier	Jennifer McAdam	Leona Stewart
Bob Hebert	Denise Gionet	Jennifer Robinson	Lillian Shaffer
Brenda Allain	Diane Williams	Jessica Guignard	Linda Gould
Brittany Sheffar	Dominique Noël	Jessica Hall	Linda Sears
Brooke Agnew	Donna LaRocque	Jessica MacDonald	Lindsay Giberson
Caitie Calvert	Donna Payne	Jillian Allan	Line Landry
Carla Flynn	Eva Sock	Joanne Babineau	Lisa Arseneault
Carole Cormier	Fanie Fontaine	Jo Anne Holland	Lisa Cormier

Lisa Dumaresq Leblanc	Mireille Poirier Godin	Rena Simon	Suzanne Côté
Lisa Roy	Mitch Newell	Renay Martin-Landry	Sylvianne Maltais
Lise Maillet	Mona Clark	Rhonda Trenholm	Sylvie Nancy Thériault
Lise Maillet	Mona Eljabi	Rita DeMerchant	Sylvie Richardson
Lise Maillet	Monia Cyr	Robin Hanson	Synthia Caissie
Lise Plummer	Monica Hachey	Rosalie Horn	Tabetha Beck
Louise Duke	Monique Chabot	Rose Hayes	Tabitha Kneeland
Lynn Brun	Mylène Bourgoin	Rose Legoff	Tammy Spadoni
Lynne B. Thibodeau	Mylène Chiasson	Sabrina Anderson	Tammy Walton
Lynnette Brewer	Nadia Benoit	Sachelle Fidler	Tanya Daley
Maria Branscombe	Nadia Benoit	Samantha Steeves	Tanya MacPherson
Maria Gillis	Nadia Landry	Sam Reid	Theresa Augustus Lei
Marie-Josée Driscoll	Nadine Cormier	Sarah Cormier	Tia Girouard
Marise Melanson	Nadine Morneau	Sarah Gauvin	Tiffany Brooks
Martha Maillet	Natalie Bourgeois	Sarah Thériault	Tina Jones
Martine Arseneau	Natasha Gaudet	Shanon Downs	Tina LeBlanc
Martine Leblanc	Nathalie Lessard	Shari Walsh	Tonya Hebert
Mary Kirkland	Nichole Richard	Sharon Leclair	Tracey Armstrong
Mary O'Donnell	Nicole Godin	Sharon Tayes	Tracy Arnard
Maryse Hebert	Nikki Jacques	Shelby Edison	Trisha Martin
Maureen Dignard	Parise Godbout	Sherry Rose	Valérie Hébert
Megan Bonnell	Pat Currie	Shirley Letourneau	Véronique Girouard
Mélanie Goguen	Patrick Collette	Solange Lagacé	Véronique Landry
Mélinna Brideau	Peggy Clement	Sophie Lagacé	Vicki Newell
Melissa Hoar	Phyllis Carter	Stacey Legault	Viviane Levesque
Melody Kennedy	Pierrette Gagnon	Stephanie Desjardins	Wanda Butt
Michelle Peach	Rachel J. Gaudet	Stephanie Good	Yvette Maltais
Mindy McMinniman	Rébecca Levesque	Stéphanie McGraw	
Mireille Marquis	Regina Ryan	Sue Anne Sock	

Childcare sector associations

- Education for Quality, Unity and Improving Professionalism (EQUIP)
- Education. Professionalism. Young Children (EPYC)
- Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick (ECCENB)

Other groups and organizations

- Elsipogtog First Nation
- Multicultural Association of Fredericton

Relevant government or arm's-length agencies

- Early Childhood Services Coordinators
- Early Childhood Services Directors
- Public Health, Office of the Medical Officer of Health
- Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund Project Board
- Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
- Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation
- Family and Early Childhood educators

Interest groups

- Voices of New Brunswick Women Consensus-Building Forum
- New Brunswick Coalition of Pay Equity
- New Brunswick Association for Community Living

- New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network
- Co-chairs responsible for the development of a ten-year education plan
- L'Association francophone des parents du Nouveau-Brunswick
- New Brunswick Federation of Labour
- Regroupement féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick

Submissions

Submissions were received from:

- The West Side Co-Op Preschool
- Wee College
- L'Académie des Explorateurs
- Family Ties Play Care
- New Brunswick Community College
- Individual early childhood educators
- Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
- Voices of New Brunswick Women Consensus-Building Forum
- New Brunswick Federation of Labour
- New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity Inc.
- New Brunswick Literacy Secretariat
- New Brunswick Association of Community Living
- Regroupement féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick

A2: Childcare availability by community, April 2015⁹²

Community	Infant spaces	Preschool spaces	School-age spaces
Bouctouche area	47	232	223
Salisbury area	41	111	196
Shediac area	97	407	401
Sackville area	29	128	94
Riverview area	0	0	0
Moncton area	18	169	186
Dieppe area	17	38	31
Hillsborough area	21	86	52
Sussex area	32	128	67
Saint John area	11	45	37
Grand Bay-Westfield area	12	75	67
Quispamsis area	46	280	267
St. George area	2	47	27
St. Stephen area	75	263	408
Minto area	59	334	340
Oromocto area	99	349	560
Fredericton area	66	396	497
New Maryland area	312	1,537	2,073
Nackawic area	72	550	1,065
Douglas area	272	1,195	1,072
Florenceville-Bristol area	0	41	145
Perth-Andover area	61	771	778
Kedgwick area	15	65	57
Grand Falls area	185	1,330	1,645
Edmundston area	69	250	463
Campbellton area	36	191	275
Dalhousie area	12	69	98
Bathurst area	89	581	526
Caraquet area	13	169	295
Shippagan area	45	171	219
Tracadie area	10	180	306
Néguac area	23	64	26
Miramichi area	84	455	382

92 New Brunswick Health Council. 2015. *Percent coverage. New Brunswick Health Council Data: April 1, 2015. QIFS Spaces Information.*