

Valuing children, families and childcare ^[1]

New Brunswick Child Care Review Task Force final report

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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.

Region: New Brunswick ^[3]

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