

Monitor Assess Share

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION REPORT

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The researcher used a series of open-ended questions and a short survey for educators (Appendix B) to guide feedback around the four lines of inquiry. The majority of interviews took place over Zoom, while some informants opted for telephone calls. Conversations flowed easily with rich, thoughtful feedback. Several participants preferred to answer in writing, or supplemented their Zoom interviews with responses which ranged from detailed documents to emails on specific topics of particular interest to the respondent.

A limitation of the review was the lower response rate among faculty in ECE programs. A small

representative faculty group was identified for participation, attaining a 57% response rate. While a small sample was consistent with the intention of the review, the author suggests caution in interpreting these findings, in large part due to the diversity and breadth of ECE post-secondary education programs in the country (ranging from one-year courses at community colleges and private training institutions, to graduate and doctoral programs at universities). Faculty associated with universities were the most likely to respond and report using the ECER, this is understandable since their students are involved in research.



five categories on ECE policy and outcomes, for a possible total score of 15.

To support communication, a scoring system was adopted to allow for quantifying progress in the regions and to ensure the ability to monitor over time. The benchmarks were meant as a gauge of growth towards a target. Grading systems are not unique to the ECER, used by many social justice organizations as well as mainstream institutions, such as the C.D. Howe Institute, the MacLean's university ranking systems, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and more.

While many standards of quality were identified, the authors were limited to those where data was both available and comparable. Data was collected from public sources such as Statistics Canada and provincial/territorial websites, and the authors worked closely with the regional directors of early years programs to collect, interpret, and present the data. Key informant interviews were included to ensure that the report was comprehensive and captured, as much as possible, the directions taken by the regions. This data contributed to a "Profiles" section in the report, a deep dive into each region that allowed the authors to more directly address noteworthy regional initiatives, innovations, and efforts that could not be captured by the benchmarks.

The initial version of the ECER was launched in the [Early Years Study 3 \(2011\)](#), published by the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation and supported by the [Early Child Development \(ECD\) Funders Working Group](#) and the [Atkinson Centre](#) (University of Toronto). The report then moved to the Atkinson Centre, where academic expertise could further review and improve the report's validity, refine its presentation, and ensure that it remained anchored in scholarly research. The intention was to release updates every three years to capture and report on policy changes. Initially, the territories could not participate because the data

was not available, but by 2017 all of the regions were included.

The report uses the term "early childhood education" and defines it as:

programs for young children based on an explicit curriculum delivered by qualified staff and designed to support children's development and learning. Settings may include parent/child centres, childcare centres, nursery schools, preschools, or school-operated programs such as pre- or junior Kindergarten, pre-primary, école maternelle, and Kindergarten. Attendance is regular and children may participate on their own or with a parent or caregiver. When organized to support parents' labour force participation, early

³ <http://ecereport.ca/en/methodology/>

Narratives explain the report and policy directions, while extensive notes and footnotes further clarify the data and identify limitations and challenges. An accessible website with additional resources was developed, and government briefings, presentations, conferences, and media interviews continue public conversations between reports.

The authors work closely with the regional directors in collecting the data and discussing its presentation. The directors are given an embargoed copy prior to release, and the authors work with them to clarify and explain their sections. Following the release of the report, the directors are brought together for discussion, to review the process and provide input into the report's evolution. Those conversations led to the [addition of two new benchmarks](#) for the 2020 report for a new total of 21, while the weighting of the scoring system remained the same.

Perhaps the best description of the report for this evaluation came from a respondent:

“The Early Childhood Education Report is designed for a specific purpose: to benchmark the performance of provinces and territories in funding, operating, and monitoring their early childhood education systems. It was designed following the concerns raised by the OECD in *Starting Strong* and particularly in relation to Canada's performance relative to Starting Strong criteria. Each jurisdiction gets a single total score out of 15 based on (now) 21 items, which roll up into five sub-scales. The strength of the benchmarking is its breadth, in two senses. Breadth in the sense that governance, funding levels, access, quality, and accountability mechanisms all contribute to the total performance of each jurisdiction as presented by the index. It is not enough to do well on one or two items—a jurisdiction must do well in all areas to get a good score. But breadth also in the sense that both licensed child care and Kindergarten in the school system are considered as part of early childhood education.”



underscoring, by default, the importance of reports such as the ECER.”

In addition, the vast majority of respondents, even those who dislike its format, were quick to point out that ECER helps fill a void. As one respondent said, “The ECER mobilizes knowledge to inform conversations at community, regional, and federal levels.”

Many respondents held out hope that the federal funding agreements’ stipulation of data collection might afford an opportunity to add new benchmarks.

“Hopefully there will be enough common in those agreements to provide richer data and reporting. ECER has done an amazing job in profiling the sector where there is poor data collection. I can only imagine what they will be able to report on with richer data.” Two reporting areas widely seen as missing and where there might be potential for new benchmarks are affordability and quality monitoring. We discuss both of these topics later in this report.

P f e

While a somewhat love-hate relationship with the benchmarks continues, the [provincial/territorial profiles](#) are very well received. Here, the ECER authors have the opportunity to step away from

On average, 65% of these visits were made by users in Canada, leaving 35% as international. For a report that is so specific to Canadian policy, such a consistently large international audience is interesting. This pattern has not changed since analytics started to track it in 2017. An international audience is also acknowledged in Academia.edu, a research-sharing platform, which identifies the ECER as being referenced 1,122 times in 189 universities from 90 countries in 2021. This profile is impressive for a report that targets policy influencers and decision-makers.

The Atkinson Centre has a strong social media presence which, while not exclusive to the ECER report, does reference it. The Atkinson Centre

weekly e-Newsletter has 1,159 subscribers,



most vocal in how the report is used quietly but consistently. One region reported that the report is watched very carefully by “the administrative side (deputy minister, assistant deputy ministersk :.BT11 0 0 o0qpBDC BT11 0 0 11 90 669669.607ond conoOxsgeolitiT

with a minority government, which will fall at some point...people like to think that we have scored a touchdown with those agreements but we haven't. We just have the ball in our hands."

"The Québec translation is excellent, with great terminology and quality of language. This is imperative to it being seen as high quality and credible in Québec."

Ed ca

Although the lowest response rate was among faculty, those who did reply said that they use the ECER in their teaching and have it embedded in

narratives back to child care for labour market participation, the public knows that it has to be quality. Reports like the ECER, [Toronto First Duty](#)

C: Change in ECER scores

Year	NL	PE	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	NT	NU	YT
2011	1.5	9.5	5	4.5	10	6.5	7.5	4.5	3	4.5	n/a	n/a	n/a
2014	6	10	6	8	10	8.5	8	6	4.5	7	6.5	n/a	n/a
2017	8.5	11	8.5	9.5	10	9.5	8	7.5	6.5	7	8	5	5.5
2020	9.25	11.5	9.5	10.75	11.75	8.5	8.25	6.5	4	8.75	9.75	5	5
Change	+7.75	+2	+4.5	+6.25	+1.75	+2	+7.75	+2	+1	+4.25	+3.25	–	-0.5

I ac Ed ca S e

The ECER explicitly links the early years with K–12 education to create a continuum of learning with consistent pedagogy, curriculum, and professional learning. A closer look at the benchmarks relevant to this shows there has been significant growth in this area, with ample evidence that public policy follows the report, especially around public education.

The report hoped to reduce the schism between the early years and primary education. In 2020, all of the provinces met the benchmarks for ECE curriculum frameworks in use, or in development, that are aligned with Kindergarten curriculum. Nine regions require educators in Kindergarten programs to have ECE qualifications. In 2010, only eight regions had curriculum frameworks, five were aligned with the Kindergarten, and only two required ECE qualified educators in Kindergarten. Then six regions had full day Kindergarten compared with ten in 2020. In 2020, eight provinces had integrated early years programs into the ministry of education, up from four in 2011. By 2020, half the four-year-olds

toward it, and holds governments accountable. It has taken four editions for the report to earn this level of credibility and recognition, but now that this stature has been achieved, respondents want it to continue. For example:

“If there was ever a time for this report, it is now.”

“Governments have been ideological in their approach, and this report tends to hold feet to the fire and map a progression of improvements. Going forward, this report will be critically important to monitor an increased public investment in ECE. The foundations who support this have served a vital role, albeit a defacto one, in holding feet to the fire and publicly monitoring and informing the impact of this. The 2023 report will get the most attention. 2019–2023 are the momentous years for this sector, from the devastation of COVID-19 to the federal investment. How will the needle move and what moved it?”

Interest in the upcoming 2023 report reflects this call for increased scrutiny of the sector. Comments included:

“All eyes will be on the next iteration.”

in Québec. This is extremely dangerous to the early years sector where quality is essential. Lowering qualifications to increase space is extremely dangerous and would not be tolerated in any other profession. This has to be closely monitored.”

Respondents described qualifications of staff, salary, and curriculum framework, all of which are monitored in the ECER, as “proxies” or “surrogates” for quality, but increased public investment warrants increased scrutiny of these factors. Many respondents again referenced the Québec experience in illustrating the need for diligence in

Many respondents (47 instances) also responded that quality has to become a tangible benchmark for tracking quality, especially with an increased focus on increasing space.”

same time, several pointed out that the agreements prioritize increased space, greater inclusion, and more accessible fees, while the ECER monitors the construction of a framework upon which to build a quality system. For example:

“There might be overlap between the vision of ECER and that of the federal agreements, but I doubt there will be a perfect match. The next ten years are going to be marked by intense political activism and any metric to inform that activism is going to be critically important. Comparing the provinces/territories further

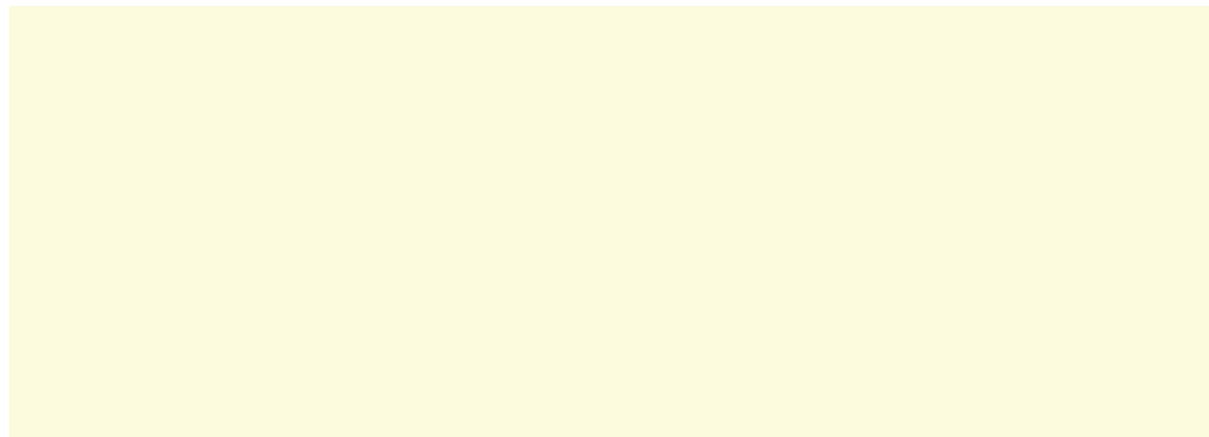
“Regions will have to continue fee subsidies,

SUMMARY

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) report, *Blueprint for a Quality, Accessible, and Affordable System*, is a landmark document that has shaped the national conversation on early childhood education. It has provided a clear vision and a roadmap for a system that is quality, accessible, and affordable for all children and families. The report has been widely cited and has influenced policy-making at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels. It has also inspired a growing public discourse and a groundswell of support for quality and accessible child care, a conversation that peaked during the COVID-19 pandemic when the fractures of existing structures became a tangible block to restarting the economy. The report has also contributed to the federal agreements that are now serving as the foundation of a Canada-wide child care approach, long sought in this country.

The ECER has contributed to a growing public discourse and a groundswell of support for quality and accessible child care, a conversation that peaked during the COVID-19 pandemic when the fractures of existing structures became a tangible block to restarting the economy. The report has also contributed to the federal agreements that are now serving as the foundation of a Canada-wide child care approach, long sought in this country.

While respondents' opinions varied in how important a role the ECER has played in this shift in public policy, there is ample evidence that the "blueprint" presented in the report, in many ways, now characterizes the emerging system. At a time when the quality of early child education is top of mind for all stakeholders, the ECER is seen as the only "road map" in Canada. While by no means



APPENDIX A:

KEY INFORMANTS

Maureen Dockendorf	Government of British Columbia ⁷
Elizabeth Lewis	Government of British Columbia
Asmeret Ghebremedhin	Government of British Columbia
Teresa Butler	Government of British Columbia
Shelley Kapraelian	Government of Northwest Territories
Colin MacDonald	Government of Yukon
Rachel Clow	Government of Nunavut
Jerri Chugg	Government of Alberta
Derek Pardy	Government of Saskatchewan
Shelly Marques	Government of Manitoba
Rob Raos	Government of Ontario
Cheryl Chung	Government of Ontario
Maxx Hollott	Government of Ontario
Joanie Migneault	Government of Québec
Alexandre Baillargeon	Government of Québec
Mélissa Parent	Government of Québec
Claude Lefrançois	Government of Québec
Nicole Gervais	Government of New Brunswick
Diane Lutes	Government of New Brunswick
Josée Nadeau	Government of New Brunswick
Anne Marie Smith	Government of Nova Scotia
Denise Stone	Government of Nova Scotia
Doreen Gillies	Government of Prince Edward Island
Carolyn Simpson	Government of Prince Edward Island
Mary Goss Prowse	Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
Linda White	University of Toronto
Charles Pascal	University of Toronto
Elizabeth Dhuey	University of Toronto
Gordon Cleveland	University of Toronto
Jan Pelletier	University of Toronto (Retired)
Christine Maclean	Mount St. Vincent University
Jessie Lee McIsaac	Mount St. Vincent University
Pam Whitty	University of New Brunswick
Michel Boivin	Université Laval
Pierre Fortin	

Christa Japel	Université du Québec à Montréal
Elin Ibrahim	Red River College Polytechnic
Rob Santos	Red River College Polytechnic
Laurie Kocher	Capilano University
Margo Greenwood	University of Northern BC
Armine Yalnizyan	Economist and Atkinson Fellow on Future of Workers
Craig Alexander	Deloitte Canada
Matthew Stewart	Deloitte Canada
Karen Grey	City of Toronto
Ashley Burger	City of Toronto
Michelle Schurter	Ontario Municipal

APPENDIX B:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/SURVEY

Interview Questions for General Officers

Is the structure of the report appropriate and efficient?

1. Do the benchmarks and scores accurately reflect the status of early childhood services in your province/territory? Why?
2. Is this structure an appropriate way to present the data?
3. Does the provincial/territorial profile contained in the report offer a broader picture of what is happening in your province/territory?
4. Does the report help make cross-country findings more accessible?
5. Are the developers of the report responsive to feedback?

How is the report used?

6. Who pays attention to the report?
7. Is the report helpful in your work?

What impact has the report had?

8. Has the report helped inform early learning and child care policy in your province/territory?
9. Has the report promoted greater collaboration between child care and other early years programming and school based programs i.e. Kindergarten?
10. Is the report useful as an assessment of early learning and child care policy and practice across Canada? Is it redundant to other similar reports?

What considerations need to be made for the report's future?

11. How do you see the report evolving in the years ahead?

S e f A c a d e m i c

[The Early Child Education Report](#) released by the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto is now in its fourth iteration and has enjoyed considerable attention in the Canadian context. The time has arrived for an evaluation. With the recent federal investment in early years programs, a review is particularly timely to help inform and guide future editions.

The evaluation is being conducted by [Dr. David Philpott](#), retired professor of education at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Any questions or concerns can be forwarded directly to him at: david@davidphilpott.ca. While key informants who contribute to the evaluation will be listed alphabetically in the final evaluation report (unless individual anonymity has been specifically requested), at no point will any individual comments be attributed to individual key informants. Complete anonymity is assured, and all documentation will be destroyed as per standard research practice.

Part of the evaluation explores how the report is being used in the academic world, both in teaching and research. As someone who has taught early child education at the post-secondary level, you have been identified as a key informant. You are asked to share your thoughts on two areas: how the report is being used in the academic world and your perceptions of the impact of the report. The two questions are open ended with some probing questions for you to consider in forming a response. The survey should take about 10–15 minutes to complete. Your answers can be entered directly into the text boxes provided and returned to the evaluator as either a PDF or WORD document. Attachments will be separated from the sender's email for later analysis. The only identifying information on the document is province/territory of origin, to explore regional variation.

Your province/territory:

Use of the report:

- Have you followed the Early Childhood Education Report?
- How is it being used in post-secondary education programs?
- How is it being used in research/writing, both student and your own?

Impact of the report:

- What impact has the report had in educator preparation and research?
- What impact has the report had on shaping public policy for early years programs in your province/territory?

Do you wish to add any other thoughts or feedback on the Early Childhood Education Report?

Your time and insight are very much appreciated. Thank you.