



Building a Brighter Future

2023–24 Early Years Public Consultation Report



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Building a Brighter Future for Children: 2023–24 Early Years Public Consultation Report

Prepared by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

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Note from Minister Maguire

Hello,

I am pleased to present the 2023–24 Early Years Public Consultation Report.

The Early Years public consultation conducted across the province was an opportunity to learn about perceptions and reactions to the early learning transformation mid-way through the implementation of the Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care Agreement. More than 1,500 community members participated in person and online, followed by workshops with early childhood educators and operators.

Hearing from parents and caregivers about their needs and hopes for early learning and child care is critical in building a system that works for everyone.

There are many forms of engagement taking place throughout the transformation. This consultation was an opportunity to hear from a diverse group of partners to ensure Nova Scotia's vision for transformation reflects the overall needs and hopes of families and community members across the province. We, along with our network of dedicated service providers, are eager to work together to bring this vision to life.

To all those who participated in this consultation process — thank you.

Brendan Maguire

Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development

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Overview

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCCA), signed by the Province of Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada in July 2021, demonstrates Nova Scotia's commitment to children and families and the historic transformation of early learning. The province is committed to ongoing engagement throughout this transformation. Transparent communication and accountability for public funding are important to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD).

EECD conducted provincewide engagement during the fall and winter of 2023–24, at the mid-way point of the implementation of the current CWELCCA.

The purpose of the consultations was to

- share updates on current actions and strategies related to the early learning and child care transformation, validate direction, and gain perspectives on progress;
- learn about unique local experiences of those interacting with or trying to access services; and
- gather feedback and additional ideas for consideration during future planning.

The engagement happened in two phases beginning with families first, then operators and early childhood educators (ECEs). In total, 1,558 individuals participated.

Priorities

The following were identified as top priorities for families:

- Increase the number of child care spaces across the province.
- Support inclusive early learning and child care through funding programs and training.
- Expand extended and flexible care options, including part-time, evening, and weekend care.
- Strengthen provincial involvement in the child care waitlist management process to ensure more transparent and equitable access for families.
- Maintain clear communication in relation to system changes including families, service providers, and EECD.

The following were identified as top priorities for service providers, including ECEs:

- Effective recruitment and retention of ECEs, especially in rural areas and from equity deserving communities, such as African Canadians, new Canadians, Mi'kmaw, and Acadians/francophones.
- Funding that accounts for rising costs of food, rent, program materials, repairs, and inclusion supports.
- More professional development opportunities and paid professional development days.
- Training in addressing challenging behaviours and working with children with disabilities, especially autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The nature of the concerns of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility partners are unique to their communities. The following were identified as shared priorities for equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility partners:

- Accessing early intervention services for children who are experiencing delay in their development or are diagnosed with a disability;
- Recognizing and appreciating the home language and culture (particularly in terms of food, language, music, dress, or other cultural practice).
- Greater flexibility in care options in terms of hours (part time, after hours) and location (access to outdoor space, on campus, in community).
- Recruitment of ECEs from all cultural communities by operators.

Conclusion

Nova Scotia's vision for transformation is consistent with the overall feedback and priorities of families, community members, and service providers. Participants noted that while there is still a significant amount of work needed, the investments being made in early learning and child care are substantial and are making a positive impact in Nova Scotia's communities. Early learning and child care service providers are eager to collaborate with the province to bring to life the vision of an accessible, inclusive, high-quality, and affordable child care system and families are eager to access the benefits of the improved system.

Learnings from this engagement will continue to inform the implementation of the current Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, and beyond.

This report shares what was heard and indicates where feedback aligns with current and planned actions.

While this report captures a snapshot of progress and feedback during the engagement period, citizens may stay informed on Nova Scotia's child care transformation by visiting childcarenovascotia.ca.

Introduction

A System Transformation Is Underway

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCCA), signed by the Province of Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada in July 2021, demonstrates Nova Scotia's commitment to children and families and the historic transformation of early learning. The goal is to create a high-quality, publicly funded early learning and child care system that is more accessible, affordable, and inclusive.

The [CWELCCA Action Plan](#) (included in the CWELCCA) is organized around four focus areas, or "pillars," forming the basis for the many projects and initiatives associated with the child care transformation. Those pillars are

1. Affordability
2. Access
3. Inclusion
4. Quality



Prioritizing Engagement throughout the Transformation

A key commitment of the CWELCCA is for Nova Scotia to engage with the public, providers, and educators to inform our transformation. While this report highlights insights from the province's most recent provincial engagement, there are ongoing engagement efforts that help the province validate direction, shape and adjust strategies, and evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and

policies that make up the early learning and child care system. Examples of the ways the province is engaging throughout the transformation include the [Minister's Early Learning and Child Care Engagement Table](#), operational working groups, focus groups, surveys, and interviews.

Moving forward, Nova Scotia will continue to rely on sector engagement to ensure strategies, plans, and initiatives are supported by the best information possible, adapting and adjusting to meet the needs of children, families, and communities.

Engagement Overview

Who Participated?

Number of Participants



In total **1,558** individuals participated at different stages of the process.

PHASE ONE: **1,445** community members participated in person and online.

PHASE TWO: **113** service providers (ECEs and administrators) attended workshops.

Who came:

- Parents and caregivers
- Educators and providers
- Health care professionals
- Municipal officials
- Board members
- Inclusion advocates
- Interested community members



1,122 Individual thoughts were shared



20,164 Ratings

Survey Respondent Demographics

53% live in Halifax
82% are employed full-time
92% have children
95% have at least one child under 4
75% do not work in the early learning and child care sector

Top Five Rated Themes in the Survey

- 1 Return-to-Work
- 2 Infant Spaces
- 3 ECE Compensation
- 4 Centre Funding
- 5 Affordability

*A "Thought" is an individual response to the question at the end of the survey.

*A "Rating" is an individual interaction with a participant's "Thought."

NOTE: In phase one, EECD hosted a dedicated session for parents of children with disabilities. In phase two, EECD conducted a comprehensive session focused on inclusion, where our partners and their networks were invited to participate. The insights and feedback gathered from parents of children with disabilities are consolidated under the section entitled [Inclusion: Child Care Where Everyone Is Included](#).

What We Heard

Responses during this engagement highlighted the system's impact on families and stressed the importance of considering what Nova Scotians value in the ongoing changes. Feedback also pointed out opportunities to raise awareness about the positive, long-term effects of quality early learning and child care on children, families, and communities.

Perceptions of the Value of Early Learning and Child Care in Nova Scotia

When asked, *"What do you value about publicly funded early learning and child care?"* the top five responses were as follows:

- It allows parents and caregivers to re-enter the workforce, which boosts the economy.
- It offers important opportunities for children's learning and development.
- It offers opportunities for children to be cared for and nurtured by quality professionals.
- It can positively impact educational outcomes for the public school system.
- It contributes to community building.

When prompted in the survey with Nova Scotia's commitment to ensuring the cost of child care will be an average of \$10/day for children under the age of 6, for most families by 2026, and questioned, *"What does this decision mean to you?"* the following themes, along with their associated thoughts, provided insight into the perceived impact of the transformation on families.

Affordability and economic relief

"This decision means it will be financially 'worth it' for me to return to the workforce. Being in the community and having a sense of professional accomplishment contributes positively to my mental health and the overall well-being of my family."

Accessibility and opportunity for all children

"It's an equity-creating initiative that means that all kids will have access to early learning they wouldn't otherwise have."

Influence on family planning

"Means the idea of having a second child will be financially affordable in regard to having two children in child care."

Feedback by Pillar

This section of the report groups the feedback under the four pillars of the CWELCCA: affordability, accessibility, inclusion, and quality. High-level feedback is summarized in this table.

AFFORDABILITY	ACCESS	INCLUSION	QUALITY
Participants agreed that affordability is critical in providing access to quality child care across Nova Scotia. Many respondents highlighted the need for subsidies and fee reductions to make child care more affordable for larger and low-income families. Some suggested directing the money to those who need it most rather than all families. Many expressed worries about the impact of lower fees on access to spaces and the quality of care. Some expressed concern about the long-term financial sustainability of an affordable early learning and child care system. 	Child care availability was the foremost concern. Participants highlighted that child care plays a vital role not only in families but also in the community, and its availability is directly linked to stability of the local economy. This is especially true for rural communities facing demographic challenges. The key themes that emerged were managing waitlists; limited spaces, especially for infants; the need for more before and after school programs; and Family Home Child Care barriers due to funding and regulatory constraints. 	Participants highlighted the importance of providing better care for children and families by adopting a more inclusive and adaptable approach. They stressed the need for adequate training for culturally responsive care and support for children with disabilities and complex needs. This will help in creating more spaces for everyone. In addition, the participants emphasized the significance of continuity of care and communication with other support services and a smoother transition from early learning to the public education system. 	Participants emphasized the importance of quality early learning and child care. They emphasized adequate compensation for ECEs and funding more professional development opportunities. Other themes included improved communication, safety, and more flexible child care programs (e.g., hours of operation). The importance of open and honest communication between the provider and family also surfaced. Parents feel confident in the learning experience and care that their children are receiving when they are kept in the loop. 

Within each pillar, feedback has been organized in the following ways:

- **Feedback from families/public:** A general reflection on the feedback received from families in phase one.
- **Feedback from service providers:** A general reflection on the feedback received from service providers in response to hearing reflections from families.
- **Progress to date:** Information about actions and initiatives that have already been completed and are in line with the feedback received from families and the service providers.
- **Our plans:** Upcoming actions and initiatives that have been planned and are in alignment with the feedback received during the engagement process.

AFFORDABILITY: Child Care that is Affordable for Families

Feedback from Families

Many shared a sense of relief at the thought of reduced financial stress brought on by the parent fee reduction.

The lowered fees have increased demand, leaving many families concerned about access and quality. With the parent fee freeze, they worry about the financial viability for service providers and the impact that lower fees could have on resources like food, materials, and infrastructure.

Some families expressed that they are looking forward to further reductions, considering the rising cost of living. Many indicated that affordable child care is not a nice-to-have, but a necessity for being able to return to work and pay the bills.

Many participants who earn just above the child care subsidy threshold shared that they find child care unaffordable – they therefore delay returning to work. Some participants requested that the subsidy threshold be raised to accommodate the rising cost of living and that the subsidy be extended to unlicensed care options. Participants asked for a streamlined subsidy application and claim process with faster turnaround times. The current system is time intensive for families and operators.

When asked "Aside from access, which of the following do you most want from a child care service?" the third most common answer was "care with affordable fees" (66 percent). The first and second responses were "care where staff are skilled and caring" (77 percent), and "care where programming and resources are high quality" (67 percent).

"Although the fee reductions have been very helpful, we need more spaces. Waitlists are too long."

When asked "To what extent have 50 percent, on average, fee reductions helped make child care more affordable for you?"

- 25 percent said "child care is very affordable"
- 30 percent said "child care is somewhat affordable"
- 44 percent said "child care is not at all affordable"

Feedback from Service Providers

ECEs and operators agreed that parent fee reductions have increased demand. Many families are keeping their four-year-old children in child care. They feel more comfortable with their children at a centre with younger children, and it is more affordable when the added costs of nutritious food and before and after school care for children in pre-primary are included.

In response to hearing that many families will still find \$10 a day on-average child care for children under 6 unaffordable, the sector suggested considering a higher income ceiling for subsidy, streamlining the subsidy application process, broadening communication to make more families aware of the subsidy program, and implementing an educational campaign to reduce the stigma connected to accessing subsidized child care. Some suggested considering a broader systems approach and interdepartmental co-operation by considering how reduced or subsidized housing, food, and transportation costs could impact the affordability of child care.

Progress to Date

- Removing financial asset criterion made it easier to qualify and should be the first; the second
- Improving online application process to make it easier to apply.
- Reduced fees by an average of 50 percent for children under 6.

Our Plans

- By March 31, 2026, with support of the federal government, fees will be on average \$10-a-day for children under 6. Implementation of this subsequent fee reduction will be coordinated with Child Care Subsidy Program changes and the implementation of a new operational funding model to support sustainable, publicly funded child care.

Cost of Care for Providers

Feedback from Families

Some families and members of the public expressed concerns about the impact of reduced fees on quality in child care settings. They worry that with reduced fees and rising costs of food, materials, repairs, and rent, service providers may have to cut corners in ways that could negatively impact child care program quality.

Feedback from Service Providers

ECEs and operators stressed the importance of making it viable to operate a high-quality centre while offering lower parent fees. Many worry about financial sustainability and are looking forward to accessing a new operational funding model that considers rising costs of important elements of quality child care, including nutritious meals, program supplies, and outdoor play spaces.

"Children need access to quality nutritious meals, art supplies, STEM [science, technology, engineering, math] materials, playgrounds, etc. All costs for these have gone through the roof."

"We can't be going into debt just because we want to offer high-quality care."

"Provide appropriate funding to [service providers] for programming and supports. If ECEs and providers feel supported, there is a better chance more [service providers] will become licensed [which equals] more spots for children."

Additionally, operators stressed that the operational funding model must account for inflation, annual material replacements, infrastructure repairs, professional development, inclusion supports and staffing, and added costs associated with delivering extended and flexible care. They also emphasized that payments from the EECD must be predictable, with clarity around eligible and ineligible expenses, to allow for long-term planning.

Many shared that current funding supports provided by EECD (commonly referred to as "bridge funding" grants) are helping centres remain viable during periods of high inflation, but ad hoc bridge payments do not enable long-term budgeting and planning. Many also shared that the Operational Support Grant is difficult to apply for and characterized by long processing times. This grant launched in December 2022. Program providers can apply if they are experiencing significant financial strain amid parent fee freezes and inflation.

Progress to Date

- Providing ongoing interim funding to providers to help address rising operational costs. This includes discretionary operational support grants, such as the following:
 - The annual discretionary grant based on average daily fees paid in two installments (March and September) each year.
 - Grants provided from the Operational Support Fund, awarded based on application and demonstrated financial need.

Our Plans

- EECD is actively working toward the development of a new operational funding model, with plans to implement by March 2026 in alignment with the introduction of, on average \$10-a-day for children under 6, parent fees. A team of technical experts has been engaged to support EECD with this work.

ACCESS: Child Care that Is Available When and Where It's Needed

Space Availability

Feedback from Families

Due to increased demand and constrained supply, families struggle to find child care spaces. We heard that uncertainty of when a space will become available has widespread effects, especially for women. These include needing to stay home longer than expected, resulting in a loss of individual agency, financial strain, and a sense of burdening extended family members. Many parents who lack care worry about their children's emotional and cognitive development. In rural Nova Scotia, care can be even more challenging to access, forcing people to travel long distances to access the nearest space available or to pay high fees for unlicensed care.

There is a need for spaces for all age groups across the province, with a heightened need for infant spaces. Without access to infant care, women are particularly impacted, creating situations where maternity leaves need to be extended to 18 months or more.

"There are vastly more children whose parents require child care in order to work than there are spaces. It is a HUGE source of constant stress."

Of the 230 survey respondents who had children on a waitlist at the time of the survey, 70 percent of those children were 0–17 months old and 21 percent were 18–35 months old.

Feedback from Service Providers

The sector shared insights on challenges and potential suggestions related to space creation. Common challenges included wait times for development agreements and construction, navigating municipal "red tape," and zoning regulations. Supportive steps could include provincially developed design guidelines for child care facilities, and creating a centralized, streamlined procurement process to reduce costs and wait times for those that want to expand child care in partnership with the province.

Leveraging existing public infrastructure and finding affordable space or available land has been a major challenge for those that want to create new child care facilities, especially in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Operators and ECEs suggested engaging with municipalities, health care providers, and schools with the goals of reducing administrative red tape for those that want to create licensed child care, and leveraging available space in publicly funded infrastructure.

Additionally, the sector stressed the financial and administrative difficulties associated with creating and maintaining infant spaces, which are among the spaces in highest demand. Minimum staffing ratios are highest when caring for infants, meaning it is most costly to meet safety regulations when caring for that age group. There is a need to develop an operational funding model that fully accounts for the true cost to deliver high-quality infant care.

Progress to Date

- Created a progress dashboard, which is updated quarterly: [Information for Families | Child Care Nova Scotia](#).
- Launched a Family Home Child Care (FHCC) Start Up Program: [Family Home Child Care Nova Scotia](#).
- Launched the Minor Infrastructure Program to help providers complete renovations in existing or new locations with the goal of creating more non-profit child care spaces.
- Launched the Major Infrastructure Program for new builds and large-scale space creation renovations, with the goal of creating more non-profit child care spaces.
- Engaged with municipalities, health care providers, and schools to explore potential partnership opportunities with the goals of reducing administrative red tape for those that want to create licensed child care and leveraging available space in publicly funded infrastructure.

Our Plans

- Create 9,500 new early learning and child care spaces by 2026 under the five-year CWELCCA (2021–26) through partnership and sustainable provincial investment.
- Develop provincially approved design guidelines for those accessing funding through the Minor and Major Infrastructure programs.
- Continued expansion of the Nova Scotia Before and After Program.

Flexible Scheduling

Feedback from Families

The desire for more flexible care is a common theme for families, particularly those who work in health care, seasonal industries, hospitality, and retail. Many parents have limited access to part-time or flexible care options, forcing them to either forgo part-time work or pay full-time fees, which can be unaffordable options for many. We heard that there is a particular need for extended care in the evenings and on weekends.

"I wouldn't have to leave my job as a nurse at the hospital if there were extended hours."

"The main industries in our town are health care, fisheries, and the call centre. We need early morning and late evening care, especially during fishing season."

Feedback from Service Providers

The demand for flexible care is not constant, but ebbs and flows based on seasons, local industry, and family need. Policies and processes need to be in place to ensure availability of flexible spaces and staffing. In addition to benefiting the workforce, flexible care opens capacity within the system. Several individuals expressed curiosity about overnight and extended hour spaces and how they might be a solution for some families and communities.

Recruitment and retention of ECEs and support staff for weekends and evenings is the greatest concern amongst operators, especially in rural areas where child care workforce shortages are currently the most prominent. The sector suggested an EECD-vetted substitute roster and financial incentives for those willing to work extended hours. They also raised the need to review regulations and consider staffing ratios and safety needs during extended hours.

Many also emphasized the need for the funding model to account for the costs needed to deliver high-quality, flexible care. Extended hours place cost pressures on food, cleaning, storage, security, utilities, insurance, and staffing.

Regarding demand for irregular scheduling, the sector suggested systemizing how families access extended care hours and how it is provided, with the province playing a coordination role. This could entail floater spaces and flexible hours that are reserved for families in the medical or military sectors, a registration system where families select their needs for the month ahead, and space sharing between two families who need part-time care.

ECEs and operators highlighted the importance of maintaining high quality, safety, and learning standards during extended hours. Considerations included defining curriculum requirements and quality standards for extended hours care.

"Some seasonal workers want it for just one season — but everyone holds onto their spots even when they don't need it."

"We had been thinking about this [flexible hours]; staffing is an issue and then financially it's an issue. We looked to do it; only one family was interested and there's no teacher."

"It would be great if families could just book in and get their schedule monthly. It would save them money."

Progress to Date

- Performed a jurisdictional review to determine best practice approach to flexible care programming.
- Launched an extended hours child care pilot program in Sydney, Cape Breton, targeted at families working in the health care sector.

Our Plans

- Evaluate the province's first extended hours child care pilot in Sydney, Cape Breton, to assess demand, actual costs, opportunities, and challenges.

Waitlist Practices

Feedback from Families

Long waitlists and inconsistent waitlist management practices can significantly impact parents. Many shared that these inconsistencies cause financial insecurity and frustration due to a lack of transparency and fairness. Many parents are unaware of how children are selected to fill available spaces, and, in both rural and urban communities, there is often a “who you know” mentality. Many worry about waitlist practices that potentially discriminate against children with complex needs. This contributes to distrust that every parent and child will receive an equal opportunity to access services. Inconsistent waitlist processes, and lack of clarity at a provincial level around how to apply for services, also creates challenges for newcomer families that are unaware of the long lead times to access care.

“I live in rural Nova Scotia. I have had my child on two waitlists since before they were born. I have not been able to locate care for my child.”

“We did not know that we needed to put our children on waitlists when we first moved here.”

“People shouldn’t have to be getting on waitlists while the child is still in the womb.”

Feedback from Service Providers

Many operators feel burdened and overwhelmed by the effort required to administer and maintain long waitlists. It is both time intensive and emotionally tolling when having to turn families down. Prioritizing and managing intake can be morally challenging as one weighs the unique needs and individual impacts that child care access will have on each individual family. This decision-making process is not taken lightly by child care providers. Currently, intake criteria and prioritization vary between locations, making it challenging for parents to understand the decision-making criteria being applied.

Many operators see the potential benefits of a provincially managed centralized waitlist system where families indicate their preferences and options exist to transparently prioritize parents’ choices with available care locations. In essence, the ideal system would create matches between families and centres, and be guided by fair, equitable, and transparent waitlist policies. Individuals stressed that the system must be easy to navigate, transparent, and consider factors like service

proximity, siblings, parent choice, and child care workers' personal child care needs.

A centralized waitlist management process would need to strike a balance between parent choice, flexibility, and fairness.

Some operators would like to maintain full control over their waitlists, sharing that it can be more easily managed at a centre-level once more spaces are created and demand has lessened.

"I like the idea of a centralized waitlist based on areas/municipalities. Families could rate which local centres they want to go to."

"For me the waitlist is extremely time consuming, there are so many emails coming in each day, I often cannot get back to them for a few days, then I have to spend most of a day answering waitlist questions, a central waitlist would help with this, but it would have to have a way for the parent to choose, and we would need to be able to fill the spots with our staff's children, and siblings of children already at the centre."

"I'm not a fan of centralized waitlist management; we know our families best."

Progress to Date

- Performed a jurisdictional scan to understand options and approaches for centralized waitlist management.
- Began a review to understand the supports and services needed under a publicly funded system of early learning and child care that responds to the needs of children, families, service providers, and partners.

Our Plans

- Consult with families, service providers, and other partners on their experiences with registration process and waitlist management, using the findings to inform options for future services and supports.

Barriers to Providing Family Home Child Care

Feedback from Families

Licensed FHCC plays a vital role in the early learning and child care landscape, especially in rural areas where centre-based care is limited. Participants said that FHCC could be part of the solution if potential providers could easily identify startup support (grants), regulations were clear, and a reasonable income was possible. Past FHCC providers and potentially interested individuals feel the cost to providers outweighs the financial benefit. There is an opportunity to build awareness and trust regarding licensed FHCC. Today FHCC is often perceived as an option of last resort for families.

"We are really lucky to have access to licensed in-home care in a rural community. I think we need more of these kinds of options in our community."

"I considered setting up a family home centre but realized my home would not be equipped for it."

Feedback from Service Providers

FHCC providers expressed the need for further supports including more family home consultants, progressive family home training, and more streamlined processes. Some liked the idea of more flexible models of FHCC that would allow providers to care for more children in their home. For example, allowing a second care provider to work alongside the primary FHCC provider.

Some FHCC providers shared that there is a need for more connections with centre-based child care; that there is an opportunity to share experience, expertise, and resources across programs. Many would like to see more oversight and consistency when it comes to licensing and insurance procurement across both settings.

Progress to Date

- Launched a campaign to educate the public about licensed FHCC and recruit prospective providers.
- Made grants available to
 - help with startup costs through the FHCC Startup Program (\$7,500 startup grant, per location—familyhomechildcarens.ca);
 - provide the FHCC ECE Classification Grant to providers who are classified ECEs;
 - support FHCC providers caring for younger children through the Infant Toddler Grant;
 - provide a Retirement and Benefits Grant to FHCC providers to contribute to the purchase of a self-sourced health benefits plan up to \$1,200/year and to reimburse 50 percent of contributions to a registered retirement savings plan up to \$1,200/year; and
 - offset the impact of the fee freeze via the Discretionary Operational Grant.
- Piloted a two-year diploma program, the ECE Diploma for Family Home Providers, offered virtually, for FHCC providers currently working in the field in order to obtain an ECE level 2 credential.

Our Plans

- Measure the impact of the FHCC campaign on the recruitment of prospective FHCC providers.
- Continue to consult FHCC agencies about service delivery opportunities.
- Implement a new operational funding model to support sustainable, publicly funded child care which will consider options for FHCC.

QUALITY: Child Care That Is Delivered by Well-Compensated and Well-Qualified Professionals

Workforce Supports

Feedback from Families

During the consultation, participants highlighted the significant role of ECEs in the child care system. They stressed that a professional workforce has a direct impact on their confidence and trust in the system given that safety and well-being of children is a top priority for parents.

Many participants shared positive experiences they have had with ECEs and believed that open communication and transparency are fundamental to quality care. However, some participants felt that there was room for ongoing professionalization of the sector and would like to see more consistency in the quality of ECEs across the province and improved opportunities for professional development to ensure high-quality programming.

"We want safe, clean spaces with engaged teachers. We don't want to worry about our children all day and we want to make sure they are with teachers who want to be there." When asked "Aside from access, which of the following do you most want from a child care service?" 77 percent of survey respondents chose "Care where staff are skilled and caring" (top answer).

"It is vital to pay ECEs a fair wage so that excellent people are attracted to and can afford to stay in these positions. Without adequate and quality staffing, any child care system is not sustainable. Also, high staff turnover negatively impacts children."

Feedback from Service Providers

Many operators and ECEs shared that the public sector ECE wage scale, pension, and defined benefits package have been well received. Certainty of an annual wage adjustment, high-quality group benefits, and a pension plan during retirement bring security to many. A few operators shared that recruitment has been easier since the implementation of the new wage scale. Some believe that a greater difference in salary for those classified at an ECE level two (diploma required) versus level three (degree required) could help with recognizing and retaining the most experienced ECEs.

Many ECEs shared that they would feel more supported by having more staff available at centres, suggesting “float” staff to assist during peak periods throughout the day, like when children transition from indoors to outdoors. Additional staffing support for inclusion was another prominent topic (see [Inclusion: Child Care Where Everyone Is Included](#)).

Recruitment and retention arose as prominent themes related to workforce. Many shared that more specific recruitment efforts could more effectively attract the right students for the training program. Operators and current ECEs see an opportunity to educate high school students through co-operative work placements and broad educational campaigns on the role and day-to-day work of an ECE. Standards and consistency for practicum (on-the-job training) outcomes across ECE training institutions could also help students better prepare for their careers and better determine if it is the correct path for them.

Many asked for a review of the classification system, sharing that they would like more transparency regarding decisions to recognize prior education and experience gained outside of Nova Scotia and Canada. Many service providers emphasized the need for faster processing time, sharing that many wait up to two months to be classified, leaving centres with staff shortages.

Progress to Date

- Successfully implemented a provincial wage scale that reflects education and years of experience for ECEs working in provincially funded and licensed child care centres resulting in significant wage increases. ECEs will now experience annual wage adjustments in line with the broader public sector.
- Introduced a defined benefit pension and group benefits plan for ECEs, operators, and support staff.

Our Plans

- Continue efforts to increase the number of level 2 classified ECEs working in the sector to at least 70 percent by 2025–26.

Training and Programming for Quality Improvement

Feedback from Families

Families, early childhood educators (ECEs), and operators consistently emphasized the importance of high-quality programming and ongoing professionalization to improve the consistency and effectiveness of child care across Nova Scotia. A strong connection was drawn between well-trained ECEs and high-quality early learning experiences.

When asked "Aside from access, which of the following do you most want from a child care service?" 67 percent of survey respondents chose "Care where programming and resources are high quality" (second place answer).

"The lack of spaces means there is a lack of choice of what kind of program your child gets into. Parents want choice."

Professional Learning and Development

There is a clear call for mandatory and ongoing training, especially in areas such as working with children with disabilities. Educators highlighted the need for paid professional development days, with a preference for designated days when programs close to allow sector-wide participation in both online and in-person learning. Flexibility in delivery methods and topics was valued, with many pointing to the PP-12 education system as a model.

ECEs expressed a desire for on-site, real-time professional learning that includes time for reflection, discussion, and sharing of best practices. Many also advocated for the creation of structured professional networks or communities of practice, especially to support those in smaller centres or family home settings who have limited opportunities for peer interaction.

There is strong support for a funded mentorship program or pedagogical leadership role to leverage the expertise of experienced ECEs. This would support knowledge transfer, enhance retention, and provide leadership opportunities within the sector. Suggestions also included reduced ratios for new ECEs during onboarding to allow for more personalized training and relationship building.

Program Quality and Consistency

Families expressed a desire for high-quality programming delivered through well-organized operations that support their children's development. Clear communication, transparent policies, and responsive staff were seen as essential to building trust. Many families want the ability to choose a centre or family home child care (FHCC) based on programming and philosophical approach.

Operators emphasized that program quality is directly tied to workforce preparedness. They called for greater consistency across training programs, including standardized practicum frameworks and language, while maintaining flexible options such as fast-track, online, and in-person diploma programs.

Progress to Date

- Piloted a new quality measurement tool as part of the redesign of the Quality Matters program.
- Implemented new professional development modules focused on outdoor play and culturally responsive practices.
- Launched multiple workforce initiatives to support diploma completion and upskilling, including:
 - Accelerated diploma programs
 - Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)
 - Mi'kmaw and Africentric ECE diploma programs (with PLAR options)
 - Online francophone/Acadian diploma program
 - Virtual programs for hard-to-recruit areas
 - Pathways Program for newcomers
 - Ongoing Excellence in ECE Bursary and continuing education funding

Our Plans

- Continue development and implementation of a comprehensive professional learning strategy.
- Continue to increase the proportion of Level 2 classified ECEs working in the sector to at least 70% by 2025–26.
- Continue reviewing ECE post-secondary programs every five years in collaboration with the Department of Advanced Education.

Navigating the System

Feedback from Families

Families shared that they encountered challenges when trying to access child care and supports for their young children. It appears the root cause of these navigation challenges is the lack of clear, concise information that directs parents to available care, applicable policies, and wraparound resources for early childhood.

In addition to noting navigation challenges when trying to access licensed child care, parents also cited the need for greater cohesion between the early learning and child care system (for children that are not yet school aged) and the pre-primary system, with the goal of creating a smoother family transition experience as children age up and out of early learning into either pre-primary or grade primary.

Feedback from Service Providers

The sector suggested partnering cross-departmentally to share information about early learning and child care through schools, municipalities, health services (e.g., information provided during pre- and post-natal visits), community services (e.g., settlement services providers/agencies), and other early years supports and services. The sector, like families, appreciates accessing information on websites that are easy to navigate and place the needs of users first.

Progress to Date

- Created childcarenovascotia.ca which links families and service providers to information about programs, funding, and transformation plans.

Our Plans

- Review and understand the publicly funded wraparound supports and services needed to respond to the holistic needs of children and families.

INCLUSION: Child Care Where Everyone Is Included

All regulated child care centres in Nova Scotia are expected to create and sustain inclusive programs for young children focusing on diversity, equity, accessibility, and quality. This includes providing sufficient staffing, materials, resources, training, and professional learning for staff.

This section summarizes all feedback related to inclusion in the consultation, community conversations, online survey, and targeted consultation.

Building Inclusive Capacity: Funding, Staffing, and Training

Families, ECEs, and Operators emphasized that meaningful inclusion in early learning and child care requires intentional investment in funding, staffing, and training. Inclusion must go beyond access—it must ensure that all children, including those with complex needs, can fully participate and thrive.

Funding and Staffing Supports

Families of children with disabilities and medical complexities expressed frustration with the limited availability of inclusive care options. They emphasized the need for fully accessible environments, one-on-one support, and individualized care that addresses mobility, communication, feeding, toileting, dressing, and behavioural needs. Many also highlighted long wait times for assessments and specialized services and called for better communication and public awareness of early intervention supports.

"We risk leaving behind our most vulnerable participants with insufficient supports and preparation – this intervention is critical to success."

"We have had programs turn down our application due to lack of support staff for our autistic non-verbal daughter. My child should have the ability to fully participate in all programs – provided the proper supports are in place."

"Each centre needs to have staff trained to meet the needs of those who apply."

ECEs and operators echoed these concerns, identifying funding for augmented staffing as the most urgent barrier to inclusion. Many called for a new operational funding model that reflects the growing number of children requiring unique supports and enables higher staff-to-child ratios. There was strong support for flexible, sustainable funding that moves beyond the current “grant-by-grant” approach.

“We don’t have any children with disabilities that need a lot of attention because we don’t have the funding for support staff to be one-on-one.”

“We had to stop a child’s care because we could no longer give them the level of care they needed.”

“The Inclusion Support Grant is calculated based on the presumption that 10 percent of children need additional support. That number is much higher; 40 percent to 45 percent in some centres.”

ECEs and operators called for both pre-service and in-service training on topics such as:

- Neurodiversity and affirming social models of disability
- Adaptive communication technologies
- On-site training with specialists
- Positive behaviour support planning (e.g., Prevent-Teach-Reinforce)
- Trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices

They emphasized that training should be updated regularly, delivered on site, and include opportunities for reflection and peer learning. Inclusion coordinators should receive robust training and be accountable for sharing knowledge with colleagues. Incentives were suggested to accompany additional training and responsibilities.

Other suggestions included:

- Expanding the Pyramid Model to more centres
- Creating a resource lending library with sensory materials, adaptive tools, and multilingual books

Progress to Date

- Increased wages for inclusion coordinators through the provincial wage scale
- Investing \$10 million annually through the Inclusion Support Grant
- Investing \$11.4 million annually to support Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services and the Pyramid Model
- Launched Culturally Responsive Practice Training modules for ECEs
- Increased funding for the work of Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services (NSECDIS) substantially leading to growth in the number of children from underserved communities who are accessing intervention services and getting support to successfully transition and integrate into regulated child care, pre-primary, and school
- Increased funding under the Pyramid Model (PM) for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children. This model of care and province-wide coaching continues to expand across the Province in both official languages, to ensure quality practices in addressing the social and emotional needs of children accessing regulated child care
- Designed relevant Professional Development to build educator and leader capacity in inclusion practises (both at the centre-level and across the early learning and child care system)

Our Plans

- Design a responsive operational funding model to support accessibility and inclusion
- Build sustainable partnerships across departments to fund early intervention
- Evaluate and consider expansion of the Pyramid Model
- Continue to consult with families and the sector as the inclusion strategy evolves
- Ensure consistent inclusion training across post-secondary ECE programs and practicum experiences

Cultural Diversity and Equity

Feedback from Families

Themes of equity and diversity were present throughout the community conversations, particularly in the five tailored discussions with equity deserving community partners. From a workforce and programming perspective, many parents shared the need for more culturally and linguistically responsive programming and representation from providers. Many felt that it dramatically benefits children from equity deserving groups and creates culturally diverse learning opportunities for all children. Parents shared that this would become more important as many communities across Nova Scotia, including rural communities, welcome more newcomers.

"There should be more diverse books, toys, food, and music that reflect diverse communities in all centres."

"My (newcomer) son is shy because he doesn't speak the language. The ECE just lets him play by himself in the corner instead of facilitating socialization and learning with his peers."

Feedback from Service Providers

The sector agrees with families that there is a need for greater cultural and linguistic representation among early learning and child care staff, programming, and materials. Many suggested that child care centres be supported to apply culturally diverse nutritional practices, hold culturally diverse celebrations, and offer culturally and linguistically diverse books, key word language sheets, toys, and dress-up clothes. To achieve diverse representation among early learning and child care staff, equitable and intentional hiring is necessary – some shared that equitable hiring training should be mandatory for all service providers.

Staff should be understanding of the cultures and communities they serve, including habits, values, and beliefs. Pre-service and in-service training should include training on topics related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility; understanding, knowing, and being; as well as linguistic and culturally responsive practice and trauma-informed care.

Progress to Date

- Launched several new ECE programs, including the Pathways Program for newcomers, the Poqji-kina'masulti'kw tel-kina'mujik mijua'ji'jk (Mi'kmaw Early Childhood Education) Diploma, the Africentric ECE Diploma Program, and the online francophone/Acadian ECE Diploma Program.
- Since 2022, the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Branch partnered with EECD's Mi'kmaw Services Branch to provide the Mi'kmaw Ways of Being and Knowing workshop to ECEs across the province, an initiative that will continue to be offered in 2024–25.
- Launched the Culturally Responsive Practice Training modules for ECEs (January 2023).
- Developed the Land-based Learning Program for early learning and child care educators in collaboration with Mi'kmaw community partners and delivered the program in spring 2024.
- Launch the Culturally Responsive Practice Training modules for leaders in fall 2024.

Our Plans

- Develop an inclusion strategy to ensure services and programs are inclusive for all.
- EECD will release an updated Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework to reflect sector and community feedback and emphasize equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism with a distinct focus on supporting educator practice to be culturally responsive.
- Continue to consult with families and the sector as the early learning and child care transformation continues.

Communication and Awareness

Feedback from Families

Parents emphasized that open, consistent, and personalized communication is key to a positive experience. This is especially crucial when a child has complex needs. They also highlighted the importance of regular communication between service providers and ECEs with other supports, such as Health and Community Services, to ensure an integrated approach to care. Many noted challenges accessing assessments and information regarding options and supports for children with disabilities.

All parents want to be informed about their child's experiences, progress, and any concerns that may arise, as it helps them feel more involved in their child's development and well-being.

"As a parent to a non-verbal child, I have no idea how he's doing there unless someone takes the time to talk to me."

When parents of children with disability were asked to respond to the follow statement on the survey "I feel comfortable talking to staff about my child(ren)'s early learning and child care needs," 79 percent selected agree or strongly agree.

Feedback from Service Providers

Many participants agreed that an educational campaign could help address some of the stigma connected to disabilities. Families need to be encouraged to book an assessment as soon as a potential issue is detected, yet, due to stigma, many families wait too long or let their child go undiagnosed altogether for fear they may be turned away from child care. Suggestions to support parent education included having interventionists and other specialists speak at parent meetings, centre staff proactively starting conversations and sharing information packages with families, and a social media and radio campaign communicating services and their benefits were mentioned.

Additionally, the sector suggested communication templates that providers could use to ensure they are asking and sharing pertinent information with families in an appropriate and timely manner. Ensuring language is clear and concise and websites are user friendly was also suggested.

Progress to Date

- Launched the Culturally Responsive Practice Training modules for ECEs (January 2023).

Our Plans

- Work with other departments and community partners to increase access to service and provide navigation support to ELCC Branch programs.
- EECD will release an updated Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework to reflect sector and community feedback and emphasize equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism with a distinct focus on supporting educator practice to be culturally responsive.
- Continue to consult with families and the sector as the early learning and child care transformation continues.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Partners

Families and service providers belonging to equity deserving communities shared perspectives described in other community conversations. The following themes stood out as being specific priorities for each equity deserving group.

Note: The themes identified in the session with parents of children with disabilities are reflected in the section titled [Inclusion: Child Care Where Everyone Is Included](#).

Mi'kmaw/Indigenous Communities

Note that the structure and approach to Mi'kmaw/Indigenous community consultation did not involve capturing quotes from participants.

Feedback from Mi'kmaw/Indigenous Families

Inclusion support arose as a top priority for families who attended the session at the Mi'kmaq Childhood Development Centre. Many asked for better access to early assessment and intervention, noting lengthy waitlists. Families would also like to see more continuity of inclusion support between the Early Years and the public school system, noting the challenge that changing support systems pose for children with disabilities.

Many families emphasized that Mi'kmaw/Indigenous ways of knowing and being, land-based learning programming, and Mi'kmaw/Indigenous recipes should be implemented across all child care settings.

Mi'kmaw/Indigenous families echoed what was heard across the province about the need for more flexible care options, with specific mention of curiosity and interest in learning more about 24-hour care, extended hours at universities for adult learners, and the ability to communicate with early interventionists outside of work hours.

Feedback from Mi'kmaw/Indigenous Service Providers

Mi'kmaw/Indigenous service providers shared that recruitment and retention are pressing challenges, particularly in Mi'kmaw communities. Many leave to become educators in the PP-12 school system as the compensation and schedule is more attractive than for ECEs in-community. Suggestions for recognition include higher wages, leadership opportunities, appreciation letters, and awards.

Many stressed the importance of carrying on Mi'kmaw/Indigenous language, suggesting all centres have access to Mi'kmaw language resources. Land-based learning, storytelling, the Seven Sacred Teachings, and learning respect for Elders could be part of all child care programming. Some suggested that all centres have drums, teepees, smudge kits, Indigenous books and recipes, and space for children to reconnect through sharing circles. Participants would like to see more Mi'kmaw/Indigenous people working in all child care settings.

Operators and ECEs would like specific training for all service providers on autism and ADHD as well as ongoing supports for those working with children with disabilities. Greater access to early assessment and intervention is a top priority for many, particularly those in the Mi'kmaw/Indigenous community.

Progress to Date

- Launched the Poqji-kina'masulti'kw tel-kina'mujik mijua'ji'jk (Mi'kmaw Early Childhood Education) Diploma with PLAR to support Mi'kmaw ECEs working in the sector to earn their diploma.
- Launched the Poqji-kina'masulti'kw tel-kina'mujik mijua'ji'jk (Mi'kmaw Early Childhood Education) Diploma provincially. Fully funded tuition, books, and student fees for students who are new to the sector.
- Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, an organization that advocates for the educational interests of 12 Mi'kmaw communities in Nova Scotia, supported the recruitment for the Poqji-kina'masulti'kw tel-kina'mujik mijua'ji'jk (Mi'kmaw Early Childhood Education) Diploma in Mi'kmaw nations across the province.
- Created and implemented professional development modules to support learning about outdoor play, which include land-based learning.
- ELCC Branch partnered with the Mi'kmaw Services Branch in 2022 to provide the Mi'kmaw Ways of Being and Knowing workshop to ECEs across the province, an initiative that will continue to be offered in 2024–25.
- Launched extended hours child care pilot. The evaluation of this project will inform expansion of similar programs.
- Launched the Culturally Responsive Practice modules for ECEs (January 2023).
- Launched the Culturally Responsive Practice Training modules for leaders (January 2025).
- Released an updated *Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework* to reflect sector and community feedback and emphasize equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism with a distinct focus on supporting educator practice to be culturally responsive (April 2025).

Our Plans

- Continue to offer the Poqji-kina'masulti'kw tel-kina'mujik mijua'ji'jk (Mi'kmaw Early Childhood Education) Diploma and Diploma with PLAR specifically to increase the number of Mi'kmaw ECEs.
- Continue to engage key partners to share resources and work together on a path forward to explore shared priorities under the CWELCCA and the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.

Newcomer Communities

For reader context: Newcomer refers to those individuals/families new to Canada who have been in the country fewer than five years. Immigrants are those that have been in the country more than five years. In the case of those caring for young children at home, eligibility criteria linked to newcomer status may prevent them from participating in the program.

Feedback from Newcomer Families

More communication with newcomer families was a key priority among those who attended the session at Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia. Suggestions include partnering with Family Resource Centres, libraries, YMCA settlement services, and other free community services to communicate about child care options. Communications need to be clearer both from a language and user experience perspective.

Families would like to see more culturally diverse programming, noting that diverse recipes, books, toys, celebrations, and costumes should be available across child care settings. Many would like ECEs to be open to understanding and respecting different cultures and parenting approaches and have the skills to help newcomer children interact with others while learning the language and social norms.

Regarding access, many newcomer families asked for part-time hours or hourly fees. Many want to see centres in safe locations with plenty of outdoor space.

"Many newcomers are juggling several jobs and responsibilities, and many don't have extended families nearby to help. Drop-in and flexible scheduling could be very helpful."

When newcomer parents were asked to respond to the statement "My child(ren) and I feel our culture is respected," 56 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

Feedback from Newcomer Service Providers

Participants shared that communication is a major barrier for newcomers and stressed the importance of providing translation where possible. They suggested that communication between operators and newcomer families be in writing rather than by phone, giving more opportunity for understanding and responding, but that the best first step is for the operator to ask their preference regarding communication.

Culturally inclusive programming was a top priority for participants. They shared that musical instruments, books, toys, key word phrases, recipes, and dress-up clothes from the cultures represented in a program help newcomer children feel culturally safe and accepted and helps other children learn about the world.

Newcomers who were trained outside of Canada appear to face challenges during the classification process. Previous education and experience are not always recognized and processing times are lengthy. The educational program assistant role in the school system offers competitive compensation but does not require additional qualifications – this pathway is appealing to those struggling to be recognized for their prior experience in early learning and child care.

Progress to Date

- Launched Pathway ECE diploma program for newcomers. Fully funded tuition, books, and student fees.
- Launched the Culturally Responsive Practice Training modules for ECEs (January 2023).
- Launched the Culturally Responsive Practice Training modules for leaders (January 2025).
- Released an updated *Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework* to reflect sector and community feedback and emphasize equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism with a distinct focus on supporting educator practice to be culturally responsive (April 2025).

Our Plans

- Continue to offer the Pathways ECE diploma program for newcomers.
- Continue to explore opportunities to enhance newcomer/immigrant representation amongst ECEs.
- Explore opportunities for an ECE certification model which would include processes for assessing applicants with training outside of Canada.
- Continue to consult with families and the sector as the early learning and child care transformation continues.

African Nova Scotian Families and Service Providers

Feedback from African Nova Scotian Families

Families who attended the East Preston/North Preston/Cherry Brook/Lake Loon workshop shared that African Nova Scotian ECE recruitment, retention, and training are top priorities, noting that the Africentric Accelerated ECE Diploma Program is valued.

Participants trust and respect the local child care options. They maintain strong relationships with the providers and the children see themselves reflected in the staff, programming, and community. Partnerships between local clubs and community centres also strengthen the community and build trust.

Many families emphasized the need to create child care settings across the province that are inclusive for African Nova Scotian children, families, and staff. Training and professional development regarding cultural norms as well as access to books, recipes, toys, and music that reflect the community were suggested as ways of increasing cultural representation across child care settings.

Participants want greater access to assessment and early intervention, noting lengthy waitlists, and suggesting more culturally diverse assessors who can deliver culturally responsive assessments.

There is also desire for family support, such as courses for fathers on parenting, reading programs, and support for parents in preparing their children for school.

"We need more programs like the Africentric training program."

"I drive 40 minutes to get here because there is no other day care I would trust my kids with."

Feedback from African Nova Scotian Service Providers

African Nova Scotian ECEs and operators from across the province agreed that more African Nova Scotian representation is required amongst service providers. Some suggested expanding the Africentric ECE Diploma program to accommodate larger two-year cohorts, with annual start dates rather than the current biennial model. Other suggestions to improve recruitment efforts included further communications and marketing regarding available grants, programs and tuition, a virtual

cohort option, a fall and winter start date, continued funding for tuition and books, and expansion of the Africentric ECE Diploma program across training institutions.

Regarding retention, suggestions included networks of support for students, communities of practice for ECEs, designated leadership and mentorship opportunities, and a pedagogical leadership course for African Nova Scotian ECEs.

Many emphasized the need for greater access to training for inclusion. Suggestions included a one-year accelerated program with a specialization in inclusion that would include practicums with Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services and other specialists. In addition, mandatory culturally responsive practice professional development for all ECEs and time during the workday for ECEs to allocate toward course work were suggested.

Suggestions for way to better support families included the following:

- direct lines of communication between service providers and family resource centres
- two-way promotion of ELCC services and Family Resource Centres
- social events and evening courses in ELCC settings
- creative approaches to communicate with community

"When I was ready to give up, it was the advisors, faculty, and other students that pushed me to keep going."

Progress to Date

- Launched the Africentric ECE Diploma Program with an accelerated option through the PLAR program to support ECEs working in the sector to earn their diploma.
- Launched the Africentric ECE Diploma program. Fully funded tuition, books, and student fees for students who are new to the sector.
- Launched the Culturally Responsive Practice Training modules for ECEs (January 2023).
- Launched the Culturally Responsive Practice Training modules for leaders (January 2025).
- Released an updated *Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework* to reflect sector and community feedback and emphasize equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism with a distinct focus on supporting educator practice to be culturally responsive.

Our Plans

- Continue to offer the Africentric ECE Diploma program.
- Continue to consult with families and the sector during the early learning and child care transformation.

Acadian and Francophone Communities

Feedback from Acadian and Francophone Families

French and Acadian families who attended the francophone session in Clare were concerned about recruitment and retention of francophone ECEs. Many shared the desire to ensure francophone ECEs speak French throughout the day, some have witnessed programs running mostly in English despite being staffed with fluent French speakers.

Acadian and francophone families want ECEs to have access to professional learning opportunities in French that support the maintenance of Acadian culture. Many would like to see more resources and programs tailored to the needs of Acadian and francophone communities and that support French and Acadian cultural and language development.

"We need to maintain our language and culture, and it's important children are immersed at a young age."

Feedback from Acadian and Francophone Service Providers

Francophone ECE recruitment and retention is a top priority for operators. Many emphasized the financial losses experienced by early learning centres while recruiting international educators, sharing that more funds are needed for this avenue. Participants requested shorter classification processing suggesting quicker certifications for international, national, and local candidates. They suggested promotional activities to attract local secondary students to the field and more opportunities for internships. They noted that internationally recruited French-speaking ECEs are helpful, but they should not be considered a direct replacement for members of the local Acadian community as they do not have the lived experience or cultural ties to Nova Scotia's Acadian community.

Regarding professional development, service providers would like paid learning time to complete all their professional development obligations. Many stressed the need for modules specifically for training in French that focus on identity constructs, language, and culture. They suggested adding an Acadian and francophone community module, particularly for training offered by EECD. Current challenges include the fact that bringing in out-of-province trainers costs more, there are fewer training opportunities for francophones, and French resources are more expensive.

Participants shared that francophone centres are in a precarious situation in terms of financial stability and human resources. They suggested more out-of-ratio educators to improve programming and prevent closing rooms/services due to staff shortages, more funding for material renewal, and coordination with Université Sainte-Anne to create community-specific programs.

Some service providers shared francophone centres have a double mandate: to offer quality services and to contribute to cultural identity development and maintenance; thus, they require more resources. They would like inspectors/evaluators to speak French and certificates and permits be translated. Many asked for a curriculum framework in French, rather than a translated program. Another suggestion was the development of criteria for francophone centres.

The sector would like to coordinate with all partners and asks for understanding of the value of offering quality programming in French by trained professionals capable of functioning in French.

"Many French centres have French ECEs who speak more English than French with the children. This should not be allowed. There should be standards and accountability when it comes to operating as a French child care centre."

Progress to Date

- Provide full scholarships for the online French ECE diploma program at Université Sainte-Anne.
- Continue to offer all EECD-initiated professional learning in French and English.
- Continue to work with the Department of Labour Skills and Immigration to support recruitment of internationally trained ECEs.
- Release an updated *Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework* to reflect sector and community feedback and emphasize equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism with a distinct focus on supporting educator practice to be culturally responsive (April 2025).
- Embark on a promotional tour focusing on recruitment in French high schools in 2024–25 in collaboration with Conseil scolaire acadien provincial.

Our Plans

- Continue to offer French online ECE diploma program.
- Establish a policy to prioritize classification of international applicants who hold a job offer.
- Continue to consult with families and the sector as the early learning and child care transformation continues.

Conclusion

Nova Scotia's vision for transforming early learning and child care is consistent with the overall feedback and priorities of families, community members, and operators and educators. Participants noted that while there is still a significant amount of work needed, the investments being made in early learning and child care are significant and are making a positive impact in Nova Scotia's communities. Service providers are eager to collaborate with the province to bring to life the vision of an accessible, inclusive, high-quality, and affordable child care system, and families are eager to access the benefits of the improved system.

Learnings from this engagement will continue to inform the implementation of the current (until March 2026) Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, and beyond.