Pre-primary Program Early Years Centre Evaluation

Overall Report - Year 5 (2019)

Prepared for the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

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Executive Summary

Investments in the early childhood system are underway in Nova Scotia. The Early Years Centres were introduced in 2013 in recognition of a new policy direction that supports the integration of programs and services at the government and community levels. The introduction of the Early Years Centres represented a joint effort of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Regional Centres for Education (RCEs) and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP)[1], in collaboration with community partners, service providers and families. Building on the initial success of the Early Years Centres, the Department launched a provincial Pre-primary Program in 2017 to provide all children with the opportunity to experience the positive learning impacts from attending early learning programs the year before they enter school. The program is being implemented in phases and is expected to be province-wide by September 2020.

This is the final report of a five-year evaluation undertaken by a team comprising researchers from Dalhousie University's Healthy Populations Institute and from Mount Saint Vincent University and funded by the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation. The final year of the evaluation focused on learning about the overall impact of the Early Years Centre initiative, as well as providing formative information to guide ongoing implementation of the Pre-primary Program. Data were collected through focus groups and individual interviews with early elementary school teachers and school principals from four communities that represented original Early Years Centres. An online survey was also completed by families and early childhood educators (ECEs) working with the Pre-primary Program. Finally, attendance information was also gathered through a universal student information system that is used by the Pre-primary Program. This report summarizes all of the data collected to respond to three evaluation questions.

1) What is the impact of the Early Years Centre initiative in the school community?

Qualitative data collected from principals and early elementary teachers suggest that *integration of the Pre-primary Program will take time.* Participants reflected on the changing perceptions of the play-based program within schools since initial implementation and spoke to its *benefits in terms of child development* and assisting with transitions in terms of self-regulation, building relationships, and other social and emotional skills. The program was perceived as supporting children's transitions into school, however some early elementary teachers reported concerns with respect to how the play-based approach impacts perceived academic pressures on children entering Grade Primary. Early elementary teachers discussed *space, materials and other resources available* for the Pre-primary Program, the sharing of these resources and the difference from those available in early elementary. Finally, principals and early elementary teachers suggested that supporting transportation and before and after care is important to ensure universality of the program for all families.

[1] On March 9, 2018 the Education Reform (2018) Act received Royal Assent which dissolved the former regional school boards, with the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) remaining for francophone schools.

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2) What are the current experiences and practices of early childhood educators in the Pre-primary Program?

ECEs seemed to be choosing employment at the Pre-primary Program due to an expectation of better pay, hours and benefits, a learning approach that is more aligned with their own beliefs, and an occupation that was perceived to be more valued by society than other ECE positions. Others are simply looking to re-enter the workforce or are looking for a change in employment. Based on responses from ECEs, the elements of the Pre-primary Program and surrounding school infrastructure are generally supportive of the implementation of the program and ECEs reported comfort implementing the many aspects of the program. The elements that seemed to require additional attention related to the outdoor learning environment, including outdoor play spaces and the availability of resources to support outdoor play.

3) To what extent is the Pre-primary Program reaching the intended target population?

Overall, a total of 3,157 children were enrolled in the Pre-primary Program in 2018-19, which reflected an average of 75% of eligible children (based on Grade Primary enrollment data in 2019-20). Survey responses from families with children who attended the Pre-primary Program suggest the program is generally inclusive, supportive and welcoming of families. The program seems to be providing parents with extra support in raising their family not only through support with parenting but financially as well. The program was also expressed to be supportive to children's development, and families emphasized the benefits of the program and play-based learning on children's language and social and emotional development. Many families felt that these benefits were supporting children's transition into Grade Primary, however, they also felt that increased connection of the program to the broader school would improve this transition by making families feel more welcome in the school building and to join school-wide activities.

Moving Forward

This five-year evaluation has provided formative information to guide ongoing implementation and to ensure the system is supporting families with young children. The implementation process of the Early Years Centres and the Pre-primary Program is complex given the broader system context through parallel shifts in early childhood and education systems. The results from this evaluation suggest that ongoing attention to the processes of implementation will help to bring the program into its full operation to build value of the play-based learning approach and ensure continued connections between the Pre-primary Program and the school community. Additional supports and professional development for ECEs could also be tailored to address the identified areas of need, such as the planning and development of responsive outdoor learning environments. Finally, in order to ensure ongoing and universal access to Pre-primary, families need programs with extended hours that include before and after care as well as transportation options to and from the school site.

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Introduction

Investments in the early childhood system are underway in Nova Scotia. In 2013, the Early Years Branch was formed within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (the Department) in recognition of the need for an integrated system that supports the learning, care, and well-being of children through the prenatal period to age 6, bridging the gap between early childhood and school entry. Following consultations across the province, various policy initiatives have emerged to address system challenges and ensure all children and families have access to the support they need. In collaboration with the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation, the Early Years Centres were introduced in 2013 in recognition of a new policy direction that supports the integration of programs and services at the government and community levels. The vision was that over time, as the integration and collaboration of key service providers become well developed and as programs and services become more aligned, families will have seamless access to the services they need, when they need them. The Early Years Centre model builds on work across the country with a similar vision of seamless access to early childhood education services (Corter, Janmohamed, & Pelletier, 2012; Health and Education Research Group, 2013; Poon, Rowcliffe, Forer, Wiens, & Biferie, 2015). Previous research has shown that such integrated service delivery models have the potential to support families and child development (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007; Patel, Corter, Pelletier, & Bertrand, 2016). The Toronto First Duty model provided an example for implementation as it was also based in school settings (Corter et al., 2012).

The introduction of the Early Years Centres represented a joint effort of the Department and the Regional Centres for Education (RCEs) and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP)[2], in collaboration with community partners, service providers and families. The eight Early Years Centres brought together existing programs and services that support young children and their families within a public school setting, while also providing greater access to early childhood education for preschool children. Building on the initial success of the Early Years Centres, the Department launched a provincial Pre-primary Program in 2017 to provide all children with the opportunity to experience the positive learning impacts from attending early learning programs the year before they enter school (Campbell & Ramey, 1995; Reynolds, 1994, 1998; Sylva et al., 2010, Patel, 2009). In keeping with the principles established within the Early Years Centre model, continued integration and collaboration of key service providers to support families was incoporated in this approach.

The provincial, publicly funded Pre-primary Program is voluntary for families and provides a play-based, no-fee program for children who will be age 4 by December 31 of a given school year, and who live within the catchment area of the elementary school that they will eventually attend. The program is being implemented in phases and is expected to be province-wide by September 2020. The program follows the Nova Scotia Early Learning Curriculum Framework, positioning children as curious, creative, full of potential, capable, and confident (Nova Scotia

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Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2018). The curriculum also emphasizes the important influences that families, cultures, and communities have on children's learning and development. The curriculum framework promotes the use of a play-based approach, citing evidence on the importance of play (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2018). Early childhood educators (ECEs) within the Pre-primary Program use this curriculum framework to guide their daily practices with the children attending the program.

The evaluation

An evaluation team, comprising researchers from Dalhousie University's Healthy Populations Institute and from Mount Saint Vincent University, was hired to monitor and assess the Early Years Centres as part of a comprehensive five-year evaluation funded by the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation. The first three years of the evaluation documented the key accomplishments, enablers and challenges of the Early Years Centres and identified opportunities for further action. To respond to the evolving policy landscape of early childhood in Nova Scotia, the evaluation team has shifted focus to encompass the Pre-primary Program in the Year 4 and Year 5 evaluation. The final year of the evaluation focused on learning about the overall impact of the Early Years Centre initiative, as well as providing formative information to guide ongoing implementation of the Pre-primary Program. The Year 5 evaluation has been guided by the following questions:

1. What is the impact of the Early Years Centre initiative in the school community?
    a. What are the experiences of early elementary teachers and school administration?
    b. What are the conditions for success to imbed the early years within the school?
2. What are the current experiences and practices of early childhood educators in the Pre-primary Program?
3. To what extent is does the Pre-primary Program reaching the intended target population?

Purpose of this Report

This report summarizes all the data collected as part of the Year 5 evaluation. The results presented address the three evaluation questions.

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What did we do?

Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

Focus groups and individual interviews were held with early elementary school teachers and school principals from four communities. These four communities represent four of the eight original Early Years Centres. It was felt these locations best reveal how the Early Years Centre and Pre-primary Program (EYC-PPP) have been integrated into the broader school community. Focus groups with early elementary school teachers were conducted to understand their perspectives on working in an Early Years Centre school. Interviews with principals (current and former) were conducted to understand their perspectives on working in an Early Years Centre school, and their thoughts on what worked well and what needs to be done to further integrate the Early Years Centre and Pre-primary Program into the broader school community. Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the research team. Once the interviews were transcribed, the evaluation team coded the data for categories, themes, and patterns to respond to the evaluation questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). During this process, the evaluation team met regularly to discuss coding and emerging themes from the data. Figure 1 provides a summary of the participants that took part in these discussions.

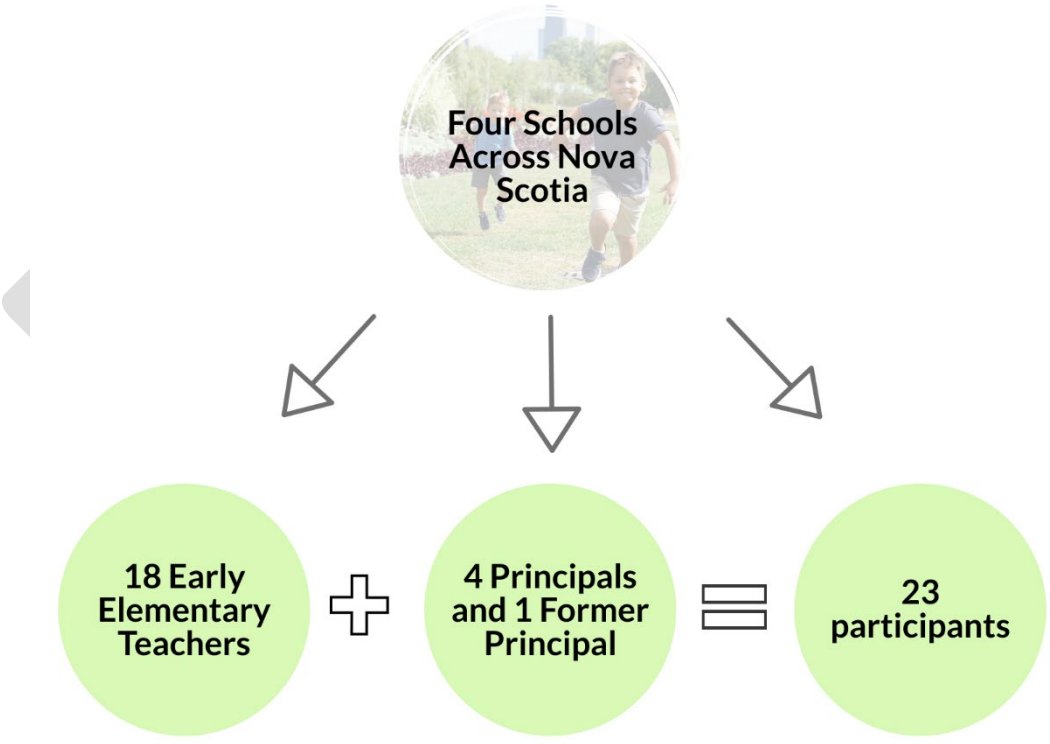

Figure 1. Summary of participants in focus groups and interviews.

Early Childhood Educator Survey

The evaluation team developed an online survey to learn more about ECEs' experiences with the Pre-primary Program. The survey was informed by a scan of the literature and identification of the contextual needs within Nova Scotia. The survey was available for completion online through a secure, university-based platform from May 13, 2019 to June 9, 2019. The online survey link was disseminated to the Pre-primary Program leads of the RCEs and the CSAP, who further distributed the survey to the ECEs in 145 Pre-primary Programs.

Response frequencies were generated and explored from the collected survey data. These findings are presented in Appendix A.

Family Survey

The evaluation team had developed a survey to learn more about families' experiences with the Pre-primary Program in Year 4. The survey was informed by the Year 2 Early Years Centre family survey and the Year 3 Pre-primary Program family survey, a scan of the literature, and identification of the contextual needs within Nova Scotia. The same survey was repeated in the Year 5 evaluation with an additional section of questions for locations with the Before and After Pre-primary Program Pilot. The family survey was available for completion from May 6, 2019 to June 9, 2019. The online survey link was available through a secure, university-based platform and paper versions were also available. The survey was disseminated to the Pre-primary Program leads of the RCEs and the CSAP, who further distributed the survey to 145 Pre-primary Programs. The evaluation team provided posters and leaflets for the Pre-primary Programs to distribute to families.

Response frequencies were generated and explored from the collected survey data. These findings are presented in Appendix B.

Attendance Data

Attendance data were obtained from *PowerSchool* (the student information system used by schools and Pre-primary Programs in Nova Scotia to record attendance) as recorded by ECEs throughout the 2018 – 2019 school year. The Department provided raw scores for these attendance data, as well children's ancestry information to the evaluation team at the end of the school year. The evaluation team examined attendance, absences, and enrollment by region and across the province to help determine the generalizability of family survey data, and to inform analyses of case study data (see below).

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What did we find?

Summary of findings

Qualitative data collected from principals and early elementary teachers suggest that integration of the Pre-primary Program will take time. Participants reflected on the changing perceptions of the play-based program within schools since initial implementation and spoke to its benefits in terms of child development and assisting with transitions in terms of self-regulation, building relationships, and other social and emotional skills. The program was perceived as supporting children's transitions into school, however some early elementary teachers reported concerns with respect to how the play-based approach impacts perceived academic pressures on children entering Grade Primary. Early elementary teachers discussed space, materials and other resources available for the Pre-primary Program, the sharing of these resources and the difference from those available in early elementary. Finally, principals and early elementary teachers suggested that supporting transportation and before and after care is important to ensure universality of the program for all families. Figure 2 provides an overview of the themes identified from the qualitative data collected in the evaluation.

Figure 2. Themes from qualitative interviews and focus groups with principals and early elementary teachers.

Families typically placed high value on the ECEs and their training background. ECEs seemed to be choosing to work at the Pre-primary Program due to an expectation of better pay, hours and benefits, a learning approach that is more aligned with their own beliefs, and an occupation that was perceived to be more valued by society than other ECE positions. Others are simply looking to re-enter the workforce or are looking for a change in employment. Based on responses from ECEs, the elements of the Pre-primary Program and surrounding school infrastructure are generally supportive of the implementation of the program and ECEs reported comfort implementing the many aspects of program. The elements that seemed to be least supportive of the Pre-primary Program's implementation or that ECEs reported being the least comfortable implementing are in relation to the outdoor learning environment, including outdoor play spaces and the availability of resources to support outdoor play.

Survey responses from families with children who attended the Pre-primary Program and Pre-primary Program ECEs suggest the program is generally inclusive, supportive and welcoming of families. The program seems to be providing parents with extra support with parenting but financially as well. The program was also expressed to be supportive to children's development, and ECEs and families emphasized the benefits of the program and play-based learning on children's language and social and emotional development. Many ECEs and families felt that these benefits were supporting children's transition into Grade Primary, however, they also felt that increased connections of the program to the broader school would improve this transition by making families feel more welcome in the school building and to join school-wide activities.

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What is the impact of the Early Years Centre initiative in the school community?

Integration Takes Time

Findings from the Year 5 evaluation suggest that successfully integrating an early childhood program, such as the play-based, Pre-primary Program within the school setting will take time. Principals and early elementary teachers frequently mentioned how time, and the experiences they had throughout the Early Years Centre initiative and Pre-primary program, has influenced their perception of a play-based approach and the value of having an early childhood education component within the school. Participants also spoke to the way that the Pre-primary Program and the rest of the school worked together in a way that allowed for a more authentic integration of the Pre-primary Program in the school community. Some principals and early elementary teachers also spoke to their continued challenges with transitioning children from a play-based setting in Pre-primary to a more academic setting in Primary. This suggests more work is needed to support integration of the program. Some early elementary teachers found children were not academically prepared upon entering Grade Primary. This perceived lack of academic preparedness for early elementary created tension in terms of how the program was perceived and its integration with the rest of the school.

The Pre-primary Program follows a play-based learning approach in adherence to the Nova Scotia Early Learning Curriculum Framework (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2018). The program is intended to give children the opportunity to experience learning through play and assist with their transition into Primary. Some principals and early elementary teachers discussed how, during the first year of the Early Years Centre implementation, they were concerned that the play-based approach would not adequately prepare children for the transition to Grade Primary. These participants noted that this perception shifted over time to be more supportive of the approach. Two principals stated their shift in perception was a result of becoming more comfortable with having an early childhood education program within the schools. They noted that this helped them to better understand the value of play as they were able to directly see how it supported children's development and learning.

Similar to principals, early elementary teachers indicated initial skepticism around the structure of the Pre-primary Program and whether or not it could prepare children for Grade Primary. However, some teachers indicated a shift to a more positive perception of play-based learning once they began learning more about the approach and noticing benefits from children attending the program including better self-regulation skills, other social emotional skills such as sharing, building relationships, and an increased ability to handle transitions throughout the day and throughout the school year.

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"So, I think just like being in a setting that definitely helps them develop social skills. To move from just playing by themselves or playing side by side with a friend… but to interact with other children and play with them that's really important" [Early Elementary Teacher]

"Initially it wasn't super positive because it was "why are they playing all day?" Right? It's—even for me as I started, you can probably remember, it was new for me and I couldn't get my head around "so they're playing all day, how is that going to work?" But I think we've just, we've learned so much of what the play-based curriculum looks like, what those key domains look like, how learning through play kind of evolves" [Early Elementary Teacher]

Principals and early elementary teachers also discussed the value of relationships between school personnel, ECEs, and families in integrating the Pre-primary Program. Participants discussed how working together through open communication helped to make the children and Pre-primary Program staff feel included. This has included inviting the Pre-primary Program children and educators to assemblies, allowing them to use school spaces, and initiating communication between early elementary teachers and ECEs. It appears to be understood that, over time and as the Pre-primary Program continues to be implemented, the relationship between the school and Pre-primary Program will continue to strengthen and further support integration.

"We scheduled library time for them so they would be in our library. If we did presentations that were appropriate for four-year old's to go to, we included them in the presentations. They were given access to the gym they had scheduled time to be outside. Our O-2 program-built materials for the four-year-old program, they helped set up the outdoor play area so we had our kids—our older kids know about the program and supporting it so it was good" [Principal]

"I talked to the [ECE] of one of my kids… I still do, even after school started, I'll go and talk to her about you know, "is this behavior common, did you see this last year and what did you do?" So yeah, it's great to have them there for that reason [Early Elementary Teacher]

Supporting Child Development and Well-Being

The Pre-primary Program was established to facilitate learning during the early years and to do so in a safe, caring, play-based environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of all children (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2018). The program is supporting children's development and well-being through preparation for transitions into early elementary and through the use of play to enhance learning. Early elementary teachers spoke of the increased confidence and familiarity they viewed among Pre-primary Program children as they transitioned to grade Primary. Teachers also described how the Pre-primary Program children appeared to have better self-

regulation and other social emotional skills. Additionally, early elementary teachers and principals discussed that by accessing the Pre-primary Program, educators were able to identify and recognize children who may need extra support in Grade Primary.

> *"I think just like being in a setting like that definitely helps them develop social skills…to interact with other children and play with them, that's really important especially when they move on to primary and that, and when the kids do come to primary that have been in the EYC, I find they're more emotionally ready for some then they would've been if they just came from home. There's less tears [laughter] and almost like they seem to adapt well to that transition..." [Early Elementary Teacher]*
>
> *"Yeah I think one huge great thing about having Pre-primary in the school…it gives the staff a chance to just get them like, aware of any additional needs that may be arising with the children in Pre-primary so that when they're moving to Primary there's—that transition is like smoother for the kids." [Early Elementary Teacher]*

Alternatively, some early elementary teachers expressed concern that their expectations of the Pre-primary Program children's preparedness when transitioning into Grade Primary were not always met. Although an understanding and acceptance of the value of play-based learning seems to strengthen with time among some early elementary teachers, others continued to speak to the perceived limitations of the approach in terms of meeting expectations of preparedness. Aside from chronological age there are no overtly stated prerequisite skills for children as they enter Grade Primary, however, some early elementary teachers stated concern that Pre-primary Program are not used to the school routine and that some children lack certain skills, such as knowing how to hold a pencil and some literacy skills.

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Some early elementary teachers spoke to the academic pressures and a desire to incorporate more play-based programming into early elementary. Two teachers explicitly noted that they found it difficult to incorporate play while still ensuring the children meet the required academic outcomes.

Space, Materials and Other Resources

Participants spoke about the use and availability of resources that were provided to the Pre-primary Program. Early Elementary teachers indicated feeling positive about the resources available to the Pre-primary Program educators and children. They were especially positive about the outdoor spaces and play-based materials.

> *"When they get to primary, not only do they have less time outside, but they don't have as much play so with me, the first month I often hear "when do we get to play?" because they have a different perception. We're still playing, but it is more guided and we're playing games that have actual, you know, they are educational and it is not the same, the situation is not the same, the environment is not the same, so I have to deal with that for the first month." [Early Elementary Teacher]*
>
> *"…it's hard to avoid it's—you're surrounded by that kind of culture and you know I'm coming from that culture as well. Teaching here, it would be really nice just to slow down and you know… but you have to have your one, two, three minutes of whatever it is a day." [Early Elementary Teacher]*

Related to the physical space for the program, some schools were able to locate the Pre-primary classroom close to the early elementary classrooms. Participants indicated that this proximity ultimately contributed to improved integration of the program within the school by promoting increased communication and collaboration between the Pre-primary ECEs and early elementary teachers. One teacher discussed how being in the vicinity of the Pre-primary Program promoted conversations between her and the ECEs about skills that they thought children needed to work on prior to Grade Primary. They said that because their classroom was right beside the Pre-primary Program, the ECEs were able to notice that some of the Grade Primary students required assistance dressing themselves at the beginning of the school year. The ECEs then began to work on that self-help skill in Pre-primary.

> *"…my room is right next door to the Pre-primary Program. I collaborate quite a bit with the Pre-primary staff there as well, so they come up to the play room with my class and we work on kind of a story curriculum together…that kind of thing" [Early Elementary Teacher]*

The proximity of the Pre-primary Program room to the Grade Primary classroom was beneficial not only for the collaboration among educators and increased integration of the program into the school environment, but also, as participants indicated, the proximity allowed for more positive transitions as the children moved from Pre-primary to Grade Primary. Participants suggested that being close to the Primary classroom allowed children to ease into the first year of their formal schooling with an additional sense of familiarity and confidence.

Early elementary teachers also spoke about collaborating with the Pre-primary Program to share their outdoor space and materials. They spoke to how their exposure to the Pre-primary Program materials helped them rethink their own classroom design and choice of supplies. However, some early elementary teachers also expressed a sense of disparity in the distribution of play materials. A few early elementary teachers discussed how they did not have access to the same materials, including furniture, as the Pre-primary Program. Early elementary teachers discussed other resources that were not always available to Primary children.

> *"I like when they go out with their muddy buddy suits on [laughter] right? The Pre-primary kids, so I guess this was the first year I said, "well hey, they need these suits in grade primary as well." So we bought a whole set again, right? So again, it's kind of seamless" [Principal]*

> *"To have that play based learning that we feel to follow suit with the Pre-primary Program, our classrooms are not physically environmentally comfy enough to set up like how they are." [Early Elementary Teacher]*

Early elementary teachers and principals spoke about the requirements to ensure universal access to the Pre-primary Program. Before and after care and transportation were viewed as crucial for further accessibility, consistent with previous evaluations. To address the expressed need for before and after care for Pre-primary Program children and their families, the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development and Communities, Culture and Heritage piloted new before and after programs within eight schools. The Before and After Pre-primary Program Pilot (BAP-PPP) was offered in Pre-primary Programs from January to June 2019 and was open to children of all ages, not just Pre-primary Program children. The pilot was intended to test the delivery of onsite before and after programming for the provincial Pre-primary Program that incorporated a newly developed set of delivery and program standards for municipal and recognized non-profit recreation and licensed child care providers focused on movement, physical literacy, and outdoor play (Government of Nova Scotia, 2019). One teacher

> *"We've had [the Pre-primary Program] for a number of years now and I know at first for some parents it was hard to drop off their kids at nine o'clock because of their work schedules. So, I think it was really good when they started the before and after care program here, like that really helped a lot of parents out and then more students were able to access it." [Early Elementary Teacher]*

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reflected that once before and after programming was introduced at their school, more families were able to access the program. Participants described how not all Pre-primary sites offer before and after programming, making the Pre-primary Program less accessible to children and parents, especially those parents who work outside the home. One of the principals who participated in the evaluation discussed the difficulty of transportation, especially in rural areas and in those cases where the family does not have their own car.

What are the current experiences and practices of early childhood educators in the Pre-primary Program?

ECEs' experiences in the Pre-primary Program

A total of 268 ECEs took part in the online survey. The majority of ECE survey respondents indicated that they have worked in the Pre-primary Program for seven to 12 months (60%) and are currently in the position as a Lead ECE (56%). When asked where they were employed prior to the implementation of the Pre-primary Program, the majority of respondents indicated they had been working in regulated/licensed childcare (55%) or 'other' (13%). Of those who responded 'other', comments suggest this typically included working as an Educational Assistant in the school system.

Typically, survey respondents decided to take a position with the Pre-primary Program due to preferred pay, hours and benefits, looking to re-enter the field, or seeking a change in employment, according to their open-ended survey responses. Many respondents also commented that they felt that the Pre-primary Program was different from their previous work experiences and others indicated it aligned with their own learning philosophies. Another common response for why respondents decided to work at the Pre-primary Program was the perception that ECEs working in the Pre-primary Program are more valued or seen as more professional than ECEs in other positions in the community.

> *"I chose to take a position with the Pre-primary program because it is a program that utilizes a model that I am passionate about and believe in and it is also the ideal fit for my family's needs." [ECE Survey]*

Survey respondents were asked about their participation in professional development (PD) opportunities since starting to work at the Pre-primary Program. The majority of respondents indicated they have benefited professionally from participating in PD opportunities offered through their current position and the current PD opportunities have supported them in implementing the Nova Scotia Early Learning Curriculum Framework in the program.

When asked to what extent a variety of elements supported the overall implementation of the Pre-primary Program at their school, the majority of survey respondents indicated 'very

supportive' or 'supportive' to all elements. The highest ratings of 'very supportive' were indicated for the team of ECEs at the school (66%), the families (59%), the Pre-primary Program lead (59%), and the Nova Scotia Early Learning Curriculum Framework (57%). The highest ratings of 'not supportive' were indicated for program participation in school-wide activities (12%), available resources to support outdoor play (9%), other school spaces (8%), and outdoor spaces (7%).

Supporting families and children

The majority of ECE survey respondents indicated 'strong agreement' or 'agreement' to a series of statements regarding families' involvement in the program, suggesting that families are generally welcomed into the Pre-primary Program and school spaces, families' culture and identity is respected and reflected through the program, spaces and materials, and the program is meeting families' needs (see Appendix A for full results). Agreement was strongest from survey respondents when asked if families are welcomed into the Pre-primary Program (75%) and if families' culture and identity is respected in the program (73%). Agreement was weakest from survey respondents when asked if families are welcomed to join school activities and if families are welcomed into the school building, with 4% of respondents indicating strong disagreement for each of these statements.

Aside from being generally welcoming and supportive to families, survey respondents were provided the opportunity to comment what they felt was the best part about the Pre-primary Program for families. The majority of comments tended to indicate that the best part of the program is how inclusive it is to all families, how it eases the financial burden of for families, and how it supports the transition to Grade Primary by helping the children and their families get used to the school. Important to note is that these aspects of the program were indicated by respondents to be unique compared to their previous work experiences. Some respondents also indicated that the best part of the program for families is the open communication between families and educators.

> *"In our program, I think one of the big things is to start to feel part of the school community. We begin to build the trust and feeling of safety with families at our level that we hope gives them the positive feelings for the future dealings/interactions with the school." [ECE Survey]*
>
> *"It is a quality program staffed by qualified educators. It is well funded for materials and supplies. It introduces children and their families to school easing many of the anxieties connected with school entry at Grade Primary. It is free and available to all families." [ECE Survey]*

ECE survey respondents were also asked about how the Pre-primary Program is influencing children's growth and development. The majority of respondents indicated with strong agreement that the Pre-primary Program is supporting children's development (87%), will help

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children to transition easily into Grade Primary (81%), and is meeting the needs of children in their school community (72%). ECE respondents were asked what the best part of the program is for children, to which most commented on the program's play-based approach, the enhancement of language and social skills, and the support provided in easing the children's transition into Grade Primary. As previously mentioned, the Pre-primary Program's use of the play-based approach was indicated by many respondents to be a unique aspect when considering their previous work experiences.

> *"It is building a strong foundation for a love of learning using a developmentally appropriate play-based framework and supporting them in their transition to Grade Primary." [ECE Survey]*
>
> *"That they get to gain confidence, independence, social skills, and emotional skills all in an environment in which they feel comfortable and which follows their interests. They also get to meet friends that they will have in Grade Primary and get to be in the same environment where they will be attending school." [ECE Survey]*
>
> *"The relationships they form and the tools they learn to help them in their social and emotional development. The children are given ample time to explore, create and discover. The have the necessary tools, equipment and supplies to foster their imaginations." [ECE Survey]*

In addition to sharing the positive aspects of the Pre-primary Program, survey respondents left comments suggesting ways in which the program could improve for the attending children and their families. The majority of comments indicated that addressing the lack of before and after care, transportation to and from the program, and integration of the Pre-primary Program with the rest of the school will be important for ensuring all families feel comfortable and are able to take advantage of the program. Other comments indicated it would also be beneficial to increase the physical size of the classroom and/or decrease group size, provide more supports for children with identified needs and allow the children to access outdoor playground equipment[3] on school property or provide other options if not.

> *"The hours of the program and transportation is definitely a big challenge for many families. I know quite a few people that are not able to put their children in the Pre-primary Program because they have to work all afternoon. Therefore, they are unable to pick their child up." [ECE Survey]*

[3] All students attending Primary to Grade 12 educational institutions, including the students of the Pre-primary Program, are covered for student accident insurance under the Nova Scotia School Insurance Program (SIP). Although this includes children younger than five years old, the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) rates playgrounds as only being safe for children aged five to 12 years old. MORE HERE – Some playgrounds are rated <5

ECEs' practices in the Pre-primary Program

ECE survey respondents were asked to rank their level of comfort with various elements of the Pre-primary Program. The majority of respondents indicated reported being 'very comfortable' with all of the elements; however, there were noticeably lower levels provided for the elements of outdoor learning spaces (56%) and observation and documentation (52%). The highest levels of 'very comfortable' were indicated for planning and preparing snacks for children (85%), developing relationships with families (85%), implementing an open-snack model (80%) and supporting children's transitions (79%). See Appendix A for the full list of elements that were included in the question and a response summary.

ECEs responding to the survey were asked more about their practices developing relationships with families by exploring how they inform parents about what their child does at the Pre-primary Program. The majority of respondents indicated communicating face-to-face with parents daily and communicating daily or weekly through email, text, social media and/or through displaying pictures and examples of work in the classroom. Survey respondents indicated being less likely to frequently display pictures and examples of work in school spaces.

To what extent is the Pre-primary Program reaching the intended target population?

Enrollment and attendance in the Pre-primary Program

Enrollment and attendance data for the 2018 - 2019 year were received through PowerSchool from the Department on September 26 2019. Attendance data were updated as of September 7 2019. Overall, a total of 3,157 children were enrolled in the Pre-primary Program and had attended for at least one day. On average, the Pre-primary Program offered 170 days for children to attend, to which the average attendance rate was 150 days. Comparing the school-level Grade Primary (2019-20) enrollment to the Pre-primary Program (2018-19) enrollment, an average of 75% of eligible children attended the Pre-primary Program. Figure 3 illustrates the attendance rates by Regional Centre for Education and CSAP.

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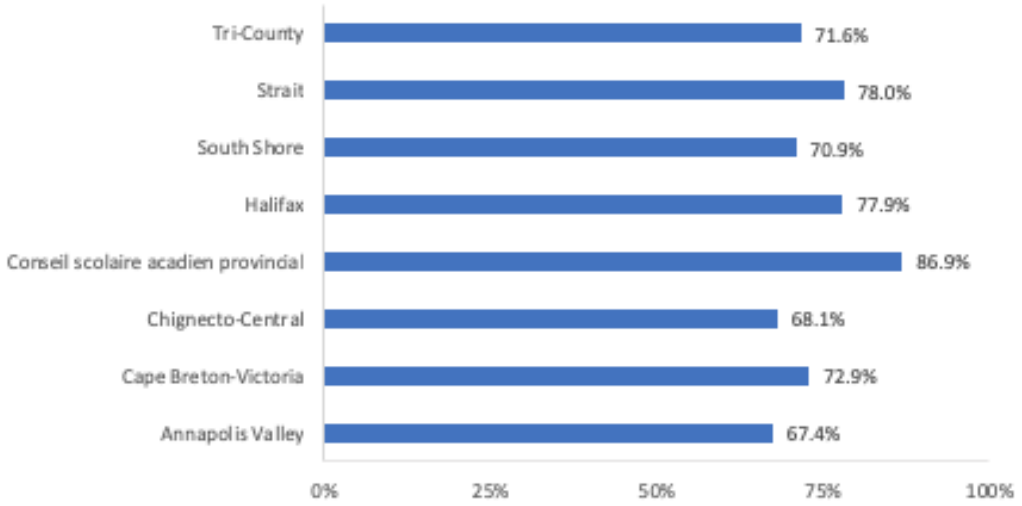

Figure 3. Attendance rates by Regional Centre for Education

Families' experiences with the Pre-primary Program

A total of 964 families took part in the online survey (representing 34% of children enrolled). The majority of family survey respondents indicated that their child was cared for by either themselves or a family member (51%) or a regulated/licensed child care program (27%) before attending the Pre-primary Program and that their child would have received care from themselves of a family member (49.8%) or a regulated/licensed child care program (28%) had they not attended the Pre-primary Program this year. When asked about making the decision to register their child in the Pre-primary Program, the majority of family survey respondents indicated many factors as 'very important', including the expectation of good quality (92%), wanting their child to be ready for school (83%), and feeling welcomed at the school (76%). Also indicated as 'very important' were the factors of the program being located at the school (69%), the program being in a convenient location to home and work (69%), and having the program offered daily (63%). Survey respondents indicated less importance for other factors by providing higher ratings of 'not important' to the factors of the program fitting well with their work schedule (22%), reducing the cost of childcare (25%), and whether or not they had another child attending the same school (47%).

The majority of families who responded to the survey indicated with strong agreement that they would send another child to the Pre-primary Program (82%) and that they would recommend the program to family/friends (85%), suggesting high levels of overall satisfaction. Respondents did provide areas of improvement for the program and, similar to the ECE survey respondents, the majority of comments from families suggested before and after programs and/or transportation to and from the program and increased integration of the Pre-primary Program with the rest of the school would be beneficial.

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Support from ECEs

The majority of family survey respondents indicated with strong agreement that the ECEs are good at facilitating learning (82%) and show interest in their child (88%). Comments from respondents further indicated families' value of the ECEs and their early childhood knowledge and skills.

> *"[ECEs] have been a wonderful source of learning and caring for my son. They have also been a great support to our family. They really know the kids in their class, and you can see the care that they have for every child. I have learned a lot about my own son through the Pre-primary Program. I cannot say enough about the program. I only wish that my son could stay there for another year!" [Family Survey]*
>
> *"It's obvious they [ECEs] are best suited for this environment, with their training. They provide a calm, nurturing space for the children and are in tune with their needs." [Family Survey]*

The majority of family survey respondents also indicated with strong agreement that the ECEs keep them informed about their child's progress (72%) and that they feel comfortable talking to the ECEs (87%). The most common methods of communication included documentation posted in the classroom (72%), direct communication between the ECEs and parents (71%), and the ECEs sharing newsletters/notices/emails (65%). Other forms of communication included the parents asking the ECEs (46%), documentation posted in the school (39%), and communication between the child and their parents (37%). Some survey respondents also indicated using apps and private Facebook groups where ECEs share information, documentation and photographs.

Although communication was generally indicated to be strong by family survey respondents, some respondents indicated wanting more communication around what their child does on a daily basis as communication can be difficult during pick-up/drop-off times when ECEs are busy. This concern came especially from respondents who attended a Pre-primary Program not currently using social media or apps for communicating, and they often commented wanting other methods of sharing such as progress reports or parent-teacher meetings.

> *"My child has learned to care for the educators and I know they treat her well. It would just be nice to have a bit more communication about what they do during the day. I know other schools have an app that they post pictures and updates about their activities." [Family Survey]*

Supporting parenting and family life

The majority of survey respondents indicated either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that they feel readier as a parent (40%; 36%), they have learned ways to help their child(ren) learn and grow (44%; 39%), and they feel more comfortable at the school (57%; 32%) since having their child attend the Pre-primary Program. Overall, the majority of respondents indicated with strong agreement or agreement that the Pre-primary Program has provided them with extra support in raising their family (52%; 37%).

> *"It has been a safe, stable place for my child after some big family/life changes. It has allowed her to grow so much as an individual but she has also learned more than I had even hoped while in the program." [Family Survey]*

Along with these benefits, many respondents commented that the best thing about the program for their family is that it is free, therefore reducing financial strain, and it is flexible in that they can choose how often their child attends the program. Some respondents also mentioned that they were able to go back to work knowing their child is safe and being well taken care of since their child began attending the Pre-primary Program.

> *"We appreciate the opportunity to have this space at no cost. We are low income and while his previous day care was subsidized it was still sometimes a struggle to cover the expenses to have him there." [Family Survey]*
>
> *"I love the flexibility of it, and the support of his Pre-primary Program educators. He started the year going only half days for three days a week, then toward the latter part of the year, we extended to nearly full days, still for three days a week. They have been supportive of our choices, and also made caring suggestions for how to further improve his experience in the program. They always keep the lines of communication open, in a caring and informative way, and I love that." [Family Survey]*
>
> *"Gives me (single parent) a break. Allowed me to go back to work without having to look for and pay for childcare." [Family Survey]*

Supporting children

The majority of family survey respondents strongly agreed that their child enjoys attending the Pre-primary Program (81%) and that the Pre-primary Program has supported their child's development (79%). Survey respondents further emphasized enhanced social-emotional development (i.e. social skills, coping strategies) and language development, and increases in children's confidence since their child's enrollment in the Pre-primary Program. The majority of respondents also indicated that they feel their child will move easily into Grade Primary because of their participation in the Pre-primary Program (79%).

> *"The Pre-primary Program has increased my daughter's confidence, social skill and cognitive abilities. It has been a wonderful experience for both of us and our family. The [educators] are fantastic." [Family Survey]*
>
> *"I wanted my child to have the opportunity to be with other children his age before starting grade primary. As we are from a very rural community, there are no daycares, no parks or anywhere else for this to happen. Thanks to the Pre-primary Program, my son will be entering grade primary with a great group of friends that he already knows and is comfortable with. He is also already familiar with the school and a lot of the staff and he is happy to go to school every day. I believe this will make it easy for him to transition to grade primary and riding on the bus each day." [Family Survey]*

Survey respondents were asked whether or not their child has a diagnosed special need, to which 43 respondents (5%) indicated 'yes' with the majority indicating the special need to be Autism Spectrum Disorder and others indicating a speech delay, hearing impairment or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Children with special needs were indicated to receive various services throughout the school year, especially speech language therapy (88%), developmental intervention (71%), and occupational therapy (48%). Overall, all respondents with a child diagnosed with a special need who responded to the question indicated feeling that their child's needs are being met by the Pre-primary Program ECEs and many indicated the ECEs have exceeded expectations in terms of their understanding and involvement in their child's specific care.

> *"Our son has a diagnosis of Autism and he was made to feel welcomed and very well supported. The staff took the time to meet with us prior to arrival and helping us through transitions. They have provided feedback and we've worked collaboratively on supporting goals. Our son is not only thriving and making incredible gains since starting Pre-primary but he's confident and prepared for Grade Primary." [Family Survey]*

Moving Forward

The early childhood system in Nova Scotia is undergoing significant change. This five-year evaluation has provided formative information to guide ongoing implementation and to ensure the system is supporting families with young children. Taking an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) allows consideration of how child development will be influenced by the different systems and environments to which they are exposed, including close interactions of the family and within the Early Years Centres and Pre-primary Program at a microsystems level, within specific social structures and policies at the exosystem level and broader societal and cultural influences at the macrosystem level (see Figure 4).

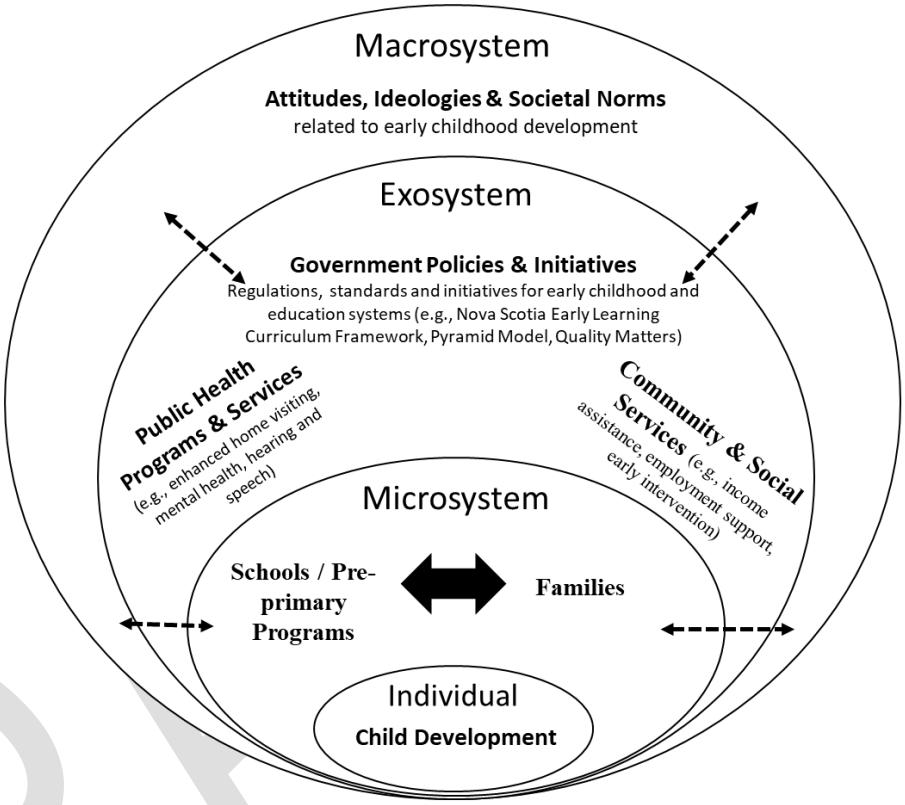

Figure 4. Conceptual framing for the impact on child development

Implementation of new initiatives within a broader system should also be considered as a process, not a one-time event (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005)**.** The implementation process of the Early Years Centres and the Pre-primary Program began in 2013 but has not progressed in a linear manner in the five years since the initial implementation. This is understandable given the broader system context through parallel shifts in early childhood and education systems. For example, a bilateral agreement between the Federal and Provincial Governments was announced in 2018 for Early Learning and Child Care which includes objectives to improve access, quality and inclusion of early childhood support for families (Canada, 2018). The recently announced inclusive education supports for students will also provide inclusion coaches for the Pre-primary Program beginning in September 2019 (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2018).

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It is not unexpected then, in this final year of a five-year evaluation, that a **key finding is that integration of the Pre-primary Program takes time**. The Early Years Centre was initially introduced with a vision toward integrated service delivery, where it was thought that as integration and collaboration of key service providers became well developed and as programs and services become more aligned, families would have seamless access to the services they need, when they need them. A contiuum of integration was initially used with the Early Years Centres to demonstrate progress and identify areas requring further attention through a tool called the Indicators of Change. This was adapted from the Toronto First Duty initiative (Corter et al., 2012) and informed by previous research defining a continuum of interorganizational relationships (Axelsson & Axelsson, 2006; Leutz, 1999; Selden, Sowa, & Sandfort, 2006; Sowa, 2008). The first three levels of this continuum, *co-location, co-operation,* and *coordination*, represent organizational relationships that are less formal and remain fundamentally independent from each other. The fourth level, *collaboration*, is a shift into a more formal arrangement with a recognition of shared values and goals and a longer-term commitment. At this stage, resources and rewards begin to be shared between organizations. The fifth and final level, *integration*, represents furthering formal arrangements between organizations to the extent that policies, processes, and governance structures are created, shared, and adopted by partnering organizations and prior organizational boundaries are moved and integrated (Selden et al., 2006; Sowa, 2008). The integration of the Pre-primary Program into the host school can also be considered through a similar contiuum of integration, were the program begins by being co-located within the host school and moves toward sharing information, coordinated actvities, regular interactions and finally seamless delivery with the school system. Table 1 provides details of the continuum for both the Early Years Centres and the Pre-primary Program.

Table 1. Continuum of integration for the Early Years Centres and Pre-primary Program

	Co-location	Co-operation	Coordination	Collaboration	Integration
Early Years Centres	In the same place and serving the same community, but no organized connection	Interaction occurs on an irregular and informal basis	Beginning stages of a relationship between organization moving towards a formal arrangement	Formal relationships established with a sharing of values, missions, and goals	Organizations are fully integrated in their planning, services and funding.
Pre-primary Program	Operates in same school but no connection between	Some sharing of materials, invitations to school events	ECEs invited to staff meetings and starting to	Regular interactions and joint efforts to	Full integration of program within the school;

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	program and school		identify joint needs	work together.	seamless for families.

Finally, it is important to note that there is inherent complexity at the initial few stages of implementation toward program integration, as it requires change to the status quo and confidence in the decision to adopt the new practice (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). The figure below describes the implementation stages of the Early Years Centres and Pre-primary Program, from the initial exploration to the future sustainability.

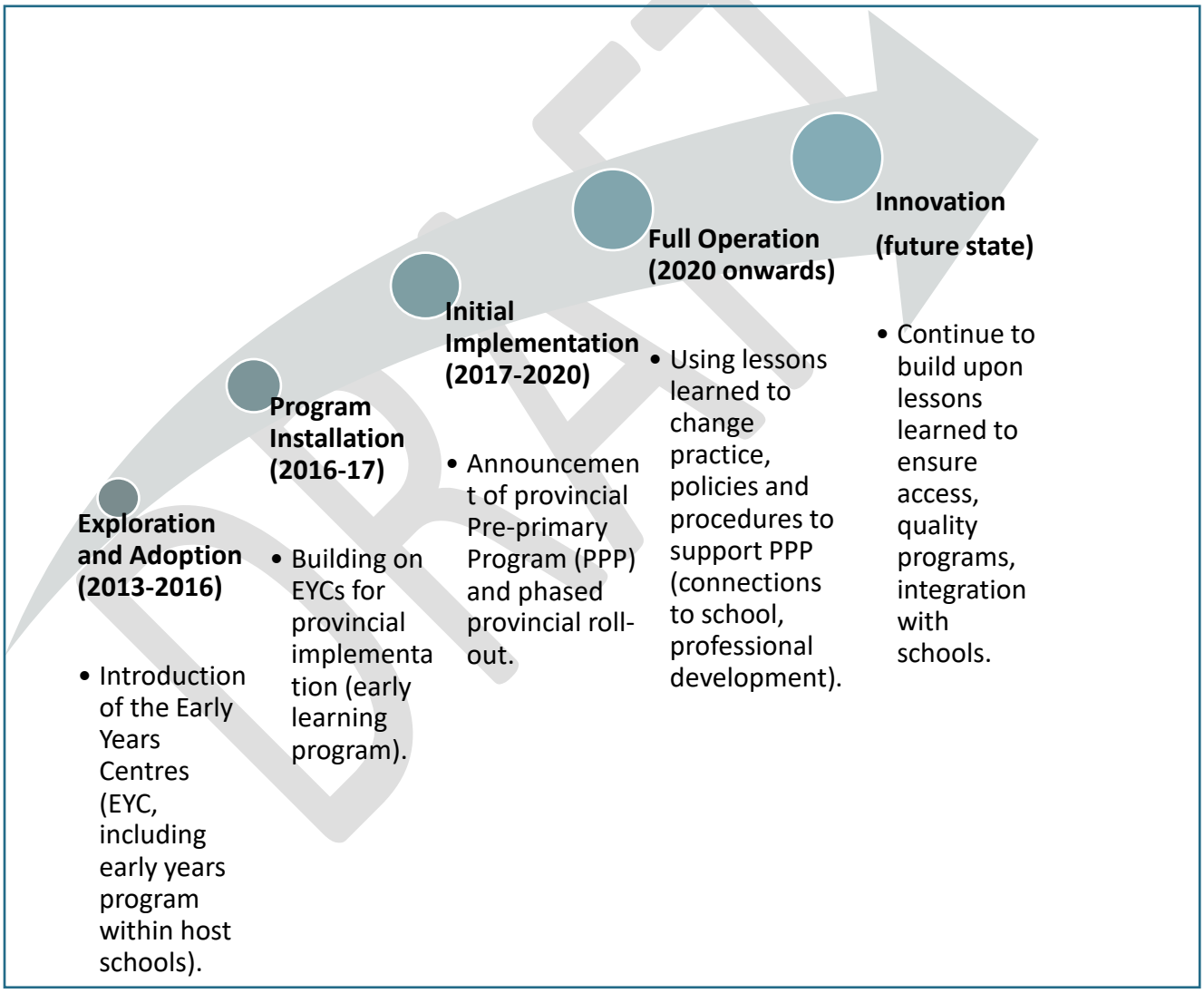

Figure 5. Implementation stages of the Pre-primary Program

As described in the figure, the Pre-primary Program has built upon the exploration and adoption of the Early Years Centres which began in 2013. The achievement of the early learning program for four-year old children in the school community was identified as an achievement and opportunity for province-wide implementation. The phased implementation of the Pre-primary Program began in September 2017 and has allowed for ongoing learning on behalf of all of the players including department officials, regional centres for education/Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, principals, teachers, ECEs, and families. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to continue to use the lessons learned from implementation to ensure that policies and procedures are supporting practices of the program. The results from this evaluation suggest that ongoing attention to the processes of implementation will help to bring the program into its full operation to build value of the play-based learning approach and ensure continued connections between the Pre-primary Program and the school community. Additional supports and professional development for ECEs could also be tailored to address the identified areas of need, such as the planning and development of responsive outdoor learning environments. Finally, in order to ensure ongoing and universal access to Pre-primary, families need programs with extended hours that include before and after care as well as transportation options to and from the school site. As future shifts to the early childhood and school systems are expected in a changing system, it will be necessary to be innovative and to respond to lessons learned to facilitate successful implementation and future sustainability of the Pre-primary Program.

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Appendix A

Early Childhood Educator Survey

Response Frequencies

Q. Which Regional Centre for Education/CSAP do you work for? [266 respondents]

Regional Centre for Education/CSAP	Frequency (%)
Annapolis Valley Regional Centre for Education	25 (9.4%)
Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education	43 (16.2%)
Chignecto-Central Regional Centre for Education	42 (15.8%)
Conseil scolaire acadien provincial	22 (8.3%)
Halifax Regional Centre for Education	58 (21.8%)
Strait Regional Centre for Education	25 (9.4%)
South Shore Regional Centre for Education	23 (8.6%)
Tri-County Regional Centre for Education	28 (10.5%)

Q. In months and years, how long have you worked in the Pre-primary Program? [248 respondents; Open-ended question coded in order to generate frequencies]

Time working in Pre-primary	Frequency (%)
0-6 months	16 (6.5%)
7-12 months	149 (60.1%)
13-18 months	11 (4.4%)
19-24 months	72 (29.0%)

Q. Are you currently in the position as a Lead ECE? [266 respondents]

Position	Frequency (%)
Lead ECE	148 (55.6%)
Not Lead ECE	115 (43.2%)
Prefer not to answer	3 (1.1%)

Q. Where were you before the Pre-primary Program was implemented in 2017?

Previous work	Frequency (%)
Working in regulated/licensed childcare	145 (54.5%)
Another school-based early learning program (e.g., Grandir en français, ELO, 4+, Early Years Centres)	31 (11.7%)
Working in a community program (e.g., family resource, Boys and Girls Club, YWCA)	12 (4.5%)

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Working at home with my children	3 (1.1%)
Working at home with other children	7 (2.6%)
Working outside of the ECE sector/profession	29 (10.9%)
Prefer not to answer	4 (1.5%)
Other (please describe):	35 (13.2%)

Q. In your position as a Pre-primary Program Early Childhood Educator, how would you rank your comfort in the following elements of the program? [264 respondents]

Program element	**Not comfortable (%)**	**A little bit comfortable (%)**	**Comfortable (%)**	**Very comfortable (%)**	**Prefer not to answer (%)**
Implementing quality-based programming	0	3 (1.1%)	66 (25.0%)	193 (73.1%)	2 (0.8%)
Creating an inclusive environment for all children and families	4 (1.5%)	5 (1.9%)	64 (24.2%)	190 (72.0%)	1 (0.4%)
Developing relationships with families	0	4 (1.5%)	35 (13.3%)	223 (84.5%)	2 (0.8%)
Talking to families about the play-based program	0	5 (1.9%)	67 (25.4%)	190 (72.0%)	2 (0.8%)
Supporting children's transitions	0	2 (0.8%)	52 (19.7%)	209 (79.2%)	1 (0.4%)
Observation and documentation	1 (0.4%)	13 (4.9%)	111 (42.0%)	137 (51.9%)	2 (0.8%)
Outdoor learning spaces	7 (2.7%)	20 (7.6%)	86 (32.6%)	147 (55.7%)	4 (1.5%)
Planning and preparing snacks for children	0	2 (0.8%)	34 (12.9%)	225 (85.2%)	3 (1.1%)

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Implementing an open-snack model	6 (2.3%)	10 (3.8%)	33 (12.5%)	212 (80.3%)	3 (1.1%)

Q. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement in regard to professional development opportunities with the Pre-primary Program. [264 respondents]

Statement	**Strongly disagree (%)**	**Disagree (%)**	**Agree (%)**	**Strongly agree (%)**	**Prefer not to answer (%)**
I have benefited professionally from participating in professional development opportunities offered through my current position.	8 (3.0%)	27 (10.2%)	128 (48.5%)	92 (34.8%)	9 (3.4%)
Current professional development opportunities support me to implement the Early Years Curriculum Framework in the Pre-primary Program.	8 (3.0%)	31 (11.7%)	145 (54.9%)	69 (26.1%)	11 (4.2%)

Q. To what extent do the following elements support the overall implementation of the Pre-primary Program at your school? [Varying number of respondents]

Element	**Not supportive (%)**	**A little bit supportive (%)**	**Mostly supportive (%)**	**Very supportive (%)**	**Prefer not to answer (%)**
Indoor Pre-primary Program spaces (e.g.,	2 (0.8%)	18 (7.6%)	85 (35.7%)	130 (54.6%)	3 (1.3%)

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program room) [238]					
Other school spaces (e.g., gym, library) [238]	18 (7.6%)	48 (20.2%)	56 (23.5%)	113 (47.5%)	3 (1.3%)
Outdoor spaces [238]	16 (6.7%)	42 (17.6%)	91 (38.2%)	87 (36.6%)	2 (0.8%)
School-wide policies [238]	12 (5.0%)	39 (16.4%)	112 (47.1%)	70 (29.4%)	5 (2.1%)
Program participation in school-wide activities [237]	29 (12.2%)	44 (18.6%)	65 (27.4%)	96 (40.5%)	3 (1.3%)
Available resources to support the preparation of snacks [237]	10 (4.2%)	29 (12.2%)	79 (33.3%)	116 (48.9%)	3 (1.3%)
Available resources to support outdoor play [237]	22 (9.3%)	61 (25.7%)	82 (34.6%)	71 (30.0%)	1 (0.4%)
The Early Years Curriculum Framework [237]	5 (2.1%)	14 (5.9%)	76 (32.1%)	136 (57.4%)	6 (2.5%)
Your team of Early Childhood Educators at the school [237]	7 (3.0%)	13 (5.5%)	56 (23.6%)	157 (66.2%)	4 (1.7%)
Support from families	3 (1.3%)	7 (3.0%)	85 (35.9%)	140 (59.1%)	2 (0.8%)
Support from school administration	12 (5.1%)	33 (13.9%)	63 (26.6%)	124 (52.3%)	5 (2.1%)
Support from school	13 (5.5%)	56 (23.6%)	80 (33.8%)	82 (34.6%)	6 (2.5%)

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teachers and staff					
Support from Pre-primary Program lead (with your Regional Centre for Education/CSAP)	8 (3.4%)	25 (10.5%)	55 (23.2%)	140 (59.1%)	9 (3.8%)
Support from the Pre-primary Program Consultant (with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development)	9 (3.8%)	26 (11.0%)	65 (27.4%)	130 (54.9%)	7 (3.0%)

Q. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement in regard to families' involvement with the Pre-primary Program. [229 respondents]

Statement	**Strongly disagree (%)**	**Disagree (%)**	**Agree (%)**	**Strongly agree (%)**	**Prefer not to answer (%)**
The Pre-primary Program is meeting families' needs	0	9 (3.9%)	120 (52.4%)	98 (42.8%)	2 (0.9%)
Families are welcomed into the Pre-primary Program space	1 (0.4%)	12 (5.2%)	42 (18.3%)	172 (75.1%)	2 (0.9%)
Families are welcomed into the school building	9 (3.9%)	24 (10.5%)	77 (33.6%)	116 (50.7%)	3 (1.3%)
Families are welcomed to	10 (4.4%)	31 (13.5%)	85 (37.1%)	95 (41.5%)	8 (3.5%)

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join school-wide activities					
Families' culture and identity is respected in the program	1 (0.4%)	0	57 (24.9%)	168 (73.4%)	3 (1.3%)
Families' culture is reflected through the program, resources and space	1 (0.4%)	6 (2.6%)	93 (40.6%)	125 (54.6%)	4 (1.7%)

Q. How often do you inform parents about what their child does at the Pre-primary Program? [229 respondents]

Form of communication	**Never (%)**	**A couple times a year (%)**	**Monthly (%)**	**Weekly (%)**	**Daily (%)**	**Prefer not to answer (%)**
Communicate with parents face-to-face	3 (1.3%)	5 (2.2%)	1 (0.4%)	16 (7.0%)	200 (87.3%)	4 (1.7%)
Communicate with parents through email, text, social media	24 (10.5%)	13 (5.7%)	32 (14.0%)	89 (38.9%)	61 (26.6%)	10 (4.4%)
Display pictures and examples of work in the classroom	0	4 (1.7%)	20 (8.7%)	98 (42.8%)	104 (45.4%)	3 (1.3%)
Display pictures and examples of work in school spaces	40 (17.5%)	23 (10.0%)	41 (17.9%)	59 (25.8%)	60 (26.2%)	6 (2.6%)

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Q. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement in regard to children's growth and development. [224 respondents]

Statement	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Prefer not to answer (%)
The Pre-primary Program is supporting children's development.	2 (0.9%)	2 (0.9%)	23 (10.3%)	195 (87.1%)	2 (0.9%)
I feel children will move easily into Grade Primary because of their participation in the Pre-primary Program.	1 (0.4%)	6 (2.7%)	33 (14.7%)	181 (80.8%)	3 (1.3%)
The Pre-primary Program meets the needs of children in my school community.	1 (0.4%)	5 (2.2%)	54 (24.1%)	161 (71.9%)	3 (1.3%)

Q. Do you identify as: [221 respondents]

Identify as:	Frequency (%)
Female	216 (97.7%)
Male	2 (0.9%)
Prefer not to answer	3 (1.4%)

Q. Age in years: [221 respondents]

Age group	Frequency (%)
19-25 years	13 (5.9%)
26-35 years	63 (28.5%)
36-45 years	76 (34.4%)

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46-55 years	57 (25.8%)
56 and over	10 (4.5%)
Prefer not to answer	2 (0.9%)

Q. Which of the following ethnic/cultural backgrounds do you identify? Select all that apply. [221 respondents]

Ethnic/cultural background	**Frequency (%)**
Mi'kmaq or other Indigenous heritage	10 (4.5%)
European descent	108 (48.9%)
Middle Eastern descent	3 (1.4%)
Asian descent	1 (0.5%)
East Asian descent	2 (0.9%)
Acadian descent	21 (9.5%)
African descent	8 (3.6%)
Prefer not to answer	54 (24.4%)
Other (please specify):	26 (11.8%)

Q. How long have you been working in early childhood education? Years/Months. [219 respondents; Open-ended question coded in order to generate frequencies]

Time working in ECE	**Frequency (%)**
0-5 years	41 (18.7%)
6-10 years	51 (23.3%)
11-15 years	32 (14.6%)
16-20 years	41 (18.7%)
21-25 years	22 (10.0%)
> 25 years	32 (14.6%)

Q. Do you have a NS Education and Early Childhood Development ECE classification? [221 respondents]

ECE classification	**Frequency (%)**
No	7 (3.2%)
Yes, Level 1	9 (4.1%)
Yes, Level 2	138 (62.4%)
Yes, Level 3	56 (25.3%)
Prefer not to answer	11 (5.0%)

Q. Tell us about your education background. Select all that apply. [221 respondents]

Education	**Frequency (%)**
High school diploma	119 (53.8%)

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Completed college diploma	152 (68.8%)
Post-diploma certificate	26 (11.8%)
University degree	62 (28.1%)
Post-graduate degree	10 (4.5%)
Prefer not to answer	10 (4.5%)

Q. Does your education background include specialization in Early Childhood Education? [221 respondents]

Specialization	**Frequency (%)**
No	27 (12.2%)
Yes	187 (84.6%)
Prefer not to answer	7 (3.2%)

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Appendix B

Family Survey

Response Frequencies

Q. Please write the name of the school in your community. [897 respondents; Open-ended responses coded in order to generate frequencies]

Regional Centre for Education/CSAP	**Frequency (%)**
Annapolis Valley Regional Centre for Education	59 (6.6%)
Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education	122 (13.6%)
Chignecto-Central Regional Centre for Education	121 (13.5%)
Conseil scolaire acadien provincial	118 (13.2%)
Halifax Regional Centre for Education	162 (18.1%)
Strait Regional Centre for Education	81 (9.0%)
South Shore Regional Centre for Education	72 (8.0%)
Tri-County Regional Centre for Education	162 (18.1%)

Q. Did you have a child that attended the Pre-primary Program in 2018-19? [897 respondents]

Attended Pre-primary	**Frequency (%)**
Yes	893 (99.6%)
No	4 (0.4%)

Q. Which of the following were factors in your decision not to enroll your child in the Pre-primary Program? Check all that apply. [4 respondents]

Factors for not enrolling	**Frequency (%)**
My child was not eligible to attend	1 (0.1%)
I didn't feel my child was ready to be in a school setting	0
I preferred to keep my child care arrangements	0
Prefer not to answer	0
Other (please describe):	3 (0.3%)

Q. How important were the following in your decision to register your child in the Pre-primary Program? [893 respondents]

Considerations	**Not important (%)**	**A little bit important (%)**	**Somewhat important (%)**	**Very important (%)**	**Prefer not to answer (%)**

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Reducing the cost of childcare	223 (25.0%)	112 (12.5%)	188 (21.1%)	363 (40.6%)	7 (0.8%)
The program was offered daily	96 (10.8%)	52 (5.8%)	174 (19.5%)	563 (63.0%)	8 (0.9%)
The program fit well with my work schedule	196 (21.9%)	67 (7.5%)	180 (20.2%)	427 (47.8%)	23 (2.6%)
The program was in a convenient location to home and work	64 (7.2%)	52 (5.8%)	150 (16.8%)	613 (68.6%)	14 (1.6%)
The program was located at the school	63 (7.1%)	42 (4.7%)	153 (17.1%)	619 (69.3%)	16 (1.8%)
I expected the program to be of good quality	2 (0.2%)	3 (0.3%)	38 (4.3%)	822 (92.0%)	28 (3.1%)
I wanted my child to be ready for school	12 (1.3%)	25 (2.8%)	80 (9.0%)	743 (83.2%)	33 (3.7%)
I had another child attending the same school	415 (46.5%)	32 (3.6%)	71 (8.0%)	313 (35.1%)	62 (6.9%)
I felt welcomed at the school	24 (2.7%)	20 (2.2%)	131 (14.7%)	676 (75.7%)	42 (4.7%)

Q. Before attending the Pre-primary Program, who typically cared for your child? Select the best option. [893 respondents]

Care options	**Frequency (%)**
Regulated/licensed child care program	245 (27.4%)
Approved family day home care provider	91 (10.2%)
Unregulated program in the community	21 (2.4%)
Myself or a family member	453 (50.7%)

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Trusted friend/neighbor	34 (3.8%)
Babysitter in my home	25 (2.8%)
Prefer not to answer	3 (0.3%)
Other (please describe):	21 (2.4%)

Q. Did you receive a childcare subsidy before your child started the Pre-primary Program? [891 respondents]

Subsidy	**Frequency (%)**
Yes	114 (12.8%)
No	739 (82.9%)
Unsure	25 (2.8%)
Prefer not to answer	13 (1.5%)

Q. If your child did not attend the Pre-primary Program this year, who would have cared for your child? Select the best option. [892 respondents]

Care options	**Frequency (%)**
Regulated/licensed child care program	249 (27.9%)
Approved family day home care provider	84 (9.4%)
Unregulated program in the community	21 (2.4%)
Myself or a family member	444 (49.8%)
Trusted friend/neighbor	31 (3.5%)
Babysitter in my home	32 (3.6%)
Prefer not to answer	5 (0.6%)
Other (please describe):	26 (2.9%)

Q. About how many days per week does your child usually attend the Pre-primary Program? [892 respondents]

Number of days	**Frequency (%)**
1	12 (1.3%)
2	25 (2.8%)
3	95 (10.7%)
4	114 (12.8%)
5	646 (72.4%)

Q. If there's a reason you don't send your child to the Pre-primary Program every day, is it because of: Select all that apply. [892 respondents]

Reasons to not send child every day	**Frequency (%)**
Health concerns	340 (38.1%)

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Weather issues	176 (19.7%)
Transportation	110 (12.3%)
My child doesn't feel safe or comfortable	10 (1.1%)
Other costs like packing a lunch or clothing	5 (0.6%)
Lack of before or after school care	58 (6.5%)
Work schedule	120 (13.5%)
I choose not to send my child everyday	177 (19.8%)
Prefer not to answer	95 (10.7%)
Other (please describe):	191 (21.4%)

Q. How does your child usually get to the Pre-primary Program? Select the best option. [889 respondents]

Transportation options	**Frequency (%)**
Drive with family	742 (83.5%)
Drive with others	21 (2.4%)
Walk/bike	66 (7.4%)
Public transit/accessibility transit	10 (1.1%)
Prefer not to answer	1 (0.1%)
Other (please describe):	49 (5.5%)

Q. Please tell us how much you agree with the following statements about you and your family. [860 respondents]

Statement	**Strongly disagree (%)**	**Disagree (%)**	**Agree (%)**	**Strongly agree (%)**	**Prefer not to answer (%)**
I am happy with the quality of the Pre-primary Program.	7 (0.8%)	18 (2.1%)	151 (17.6%)	682 (79.3%)	2 (0.2%)
The Pre-primary Program has given me extra support in raising my family.	14 (1.6%)	69 (8.0%)	316 (36.7%)	443 (51.5%)	18 (2.1%)
I feel my culture and identity is respected by staff.	3 (0.3%)	6 (0.7%)	224 (26.0%)	591 (68.7%)	36 (4.2%)

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I feel my culture is reflected in the program, resources and space.	7 (0.8%)	22 (2.6%)	269 (31.3%)	506 (58.5%)	56 (6.5%)

Q. Please tell us how much you agree with the following statements about your child. [860 respondents]

Statement	**Strongly disagree (%)**	**Disagree (%)**	**Agree (%)**	**Strongly agree (%)**	**Prefer not to answer (%)**
My child enjoys attending the Pre-primary Program.	0	8 (0.9%)	155 (18.0%)	695 (80.8%)	2 (0.2%)
The Pre-primary Program has supported my child's development.	3 (0.3%)	12 (1.4%)	156 (18.1%)	683 (79.4%)	6 (0.7%)
I feel my child will move easily into Grade Primary because of their participation in the Pre-primary Program.	6 (0.7%)	19 (2.2%)	147 (17.1%)	677 (78.7%)	11 (1.3%)

Q. Please tell us how much you agree with the following statements about the Pre-primary Program early childhood educators. [859 respondents]

Statement	**Strongly disagree (%)**	**Disagree (%)**	**Agree (%)**	**Strongly agree (%)**	**Prefer not to answer (%)**
The early childhood educators in the Pre-primary	0	9 (1.0%)	91 (10.6%)	752 (87.5%)	7 (0.8%)

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Program show interest in my child.					
I feel comfortable talking to the early childhood educators in the Pre-primary Program.	2 (0.2%)	7 (0.8%)	97 (11.3%)	746 (86.8%)	7 (0.8%)
The early childhood educators in the Pre-primary Program keep my informed about my child's progress.	10 (1.2%)	53 (6.2%)	170 (19.8%)	618 (71.9%)	8 (0.9%)
I feel that the early childhood educators are good at teaching my child.	7 (0.8%)	10 (1.2%)	128 (14.9%)	703 (81.8%)	11 (1.3%)

Q. Please tell us how much you agree with the following statements about the Pre-primary Program. [859 respondents]

Statement	**Strongly disagree (%)**	**Disagree (%)**	**Agree (%)**	**Strongly agree (%)**	**Prefer not to answer (%)**
I think that play is an important part of the Pre-primary Program.	0	3 (0.3%)	135 (15.7%)	715 (83.2%)	6 (0.7%)
I understand how play helps	0	2 (0.2%)	146 (17.0%)	704 (82.0%)	7 (0.8%)

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to support my child's learning.					
I would like to know more about how play helps to support my child's learning.	65 (7.6%)	197 (22.9%)	302 (35.2%)	220 (25.6%)	75 (8.7%)
The Pre-primary Program is well connected to the rest of the school.	26 (3.0%)	113 (13.2%)	294 (34.2%)	399 (46.4%)	27 (3.1%)
The Pre-primary Program has helped me with information and access to other community programs and services.	28 (3.3%)	186 (21.7%)	312 (36.3%)	270 (31.4%)	63 (7.3%)
I would send another child to the Pre-primary Program.	10 (1.2%)	7 (0.8%)	108 (12.6%)	705 (82.1%)	29 (3.4%)
I will recommend the Pre-primary Program to family/friends.	10 (1.2%)	7 (0.8%)	97 (11.3%)	728 (84.7%)	17 (2.0%)

Q. Please tell us how much you agree with the following statements since your child has attended the Pre-primary Program. [859 respondents]

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Statement	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Prefer not to answer (%)
I feel more comfortable at the school.	6 (0.7%)	44 (5.1%)	275 (32.0%)	491 (57.2%)	43 (5.0%)
I trust the school more.	9 (1.0%)	59 (6.9%)	304 (35.4%)	436 (50.8%)	51 (5.9%)
I am more involved in the school.	24 (2.8%)	201 (23.4%)	319 (37.1%)	252 (29.3%)	63 (7.3%)
I feel more connected with the school community.	16 (1.9%)	125 (14.6%)	341 (39.7%)	332 (38.6%)	45 (5.2%)
I have learned ways to help my child(ren) learn and grow.	17 (2.0%)	91 (10.6%)	337 (39.2%)	381 (44.4%)	33 (3.8%)
I feel more ready as a parent.	22 (2.6%)	118 (13.7%)	313 (36.4%)	343 (39.9%)	63 (7.3%)

Q. What do you know about what your child does at the Pre-primary Program? [859 respondents]

How much you know	Frequency (%)
I do not know what my child does every day	31 (3.6%)
I know a little bit about what my child does every day	100 (11.6%)
I know some about what my child does every day	296 (34.5%)
I know a lot about what my child does every day	432 (50.3%)

Q. How do you find out what your child does at the Pre-primary Program? Select all that apply. [830 respondents]

Ways of knowing	Frequency (%)
My child tells me	724 (87.2%)
I ask the Pre-primary Program educators	378 (45.5%)
The Pre-primary Program educators tell me	591 (71.2%)
The Pre-primary Program educators put pictures and examples of work up in the classroom	595 (71.7%)

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The Pre-primary Program educators put pictures and examples of work up in the school	326 (39.3%)
The Pre-primary Program educators share newsletters/notices/emails	543 (65.4%)
Other (please describe):	100 (12.0%)

Q. The school in your community is offering the Before and After Pre-primary Program Pilot from January to June 2019. Is your child attending this Before and After Pre-primary Program Pilot? [55 respondents]

Attending Before and After Care	**Frequency (%)**
Yes	13 (23.6%)
No	42 (76.4%)

Q. Which of the following were factors in your decision not to enroll your child in the Before and After Pre-primary Program Pilot? Select all that apply. [40 respondents]

Reason to not enroll	**Frequency (%)**
Child care arrangement were already in place	19 (47.5%)
Did not have enough information	2 (5.0%)
The additional financial cost	10 (25.0%)
Prefer not to answer	2 (5.0%)
Other (please describe):	11 (27.5%)

Q. How important were the following in your decision to register your child in the Before and After Pre-primary Program Pilot? [13 respondents]

Considerations	**Not important (%)**	**A little bit important (%)**	**Somewhat important (%)**	**Very important (%)**	**Prefer not to answer (%)**
The cost	4 (30.8%)	3 (23.1%)	3 (23.1%)	3 (23.1%)	0
The program was offered daily	1 (7.7%)	3 (23.1%)	1 (7.7%)	8 (61.5%)	0
The program fit well with my work schedule	4 (30.8%)	3 (23.1%)	0	6 (46.2%)	0
The program was located at the school	1 (7.7%)	1 (7.7%)	2 (15.4%)	9 (69.2%)	0
I expected the program to be	1 (7.7%)	1 (7.7%)	2 (15.4%)	9 (69.2%)	0

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of good quality					
I wanted my child to have more opportunities to play outdoors and be physically active	1 (7.7%)	2 (15.4%)	3 (23.1%)	8 (61.5%)	0

Q. Before attending the Before and After Pre-primary Program Pilot, who typically cared for your child before and/or after the hours of the Pre-primary Program? Select the best option. [12 respondents]

Care options	**Frequency (%)**
Regulated/licensed child care program	4 (33.3%)
Approved family day/home care provider	2 (16.7%)
Myself or a family member	6 (50.0%)

Q. About how many days per week does your child usually attend the Before and After Pre-primary Program Pilot? [12 respondents]

Number of days	**Frequency (%)**
1	0
2	2 (16.7%)
3	2 (16.7%)
4	0
5	8 (66.7%)

Q. Are you receiving the available childcare subsidy for the Before and After Pre-primary Program Pilot? [10 respondents]

Subsidy	**Frequency (%)**
Yes	4 (40.0%)
No	6 (60.0%)

Q. Why are you not using the available childcare subsidy for the Before and After Pre-primary Program Pilot? Select all that apply. [6 respondents]

Reason for no subsidy	**Frequency (%)**
I was not eligible for the childcare subsidy	4 (66.7%)
I was not aware that there was a childcare subsidy I could apply for.	1 (16.7%)

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The childcare subsidy application process was complicated/confusing	0
Prefer not to answer	1 (16.7%)
Other (please describe):	0

Q. Does your child that attended the Pre-primary Program have a diagnosed special need? [819 respondents]

Diagnosed special need	**Frequency (%)**
Yes	43 (5.3%)
No	760 (92.8%)
Prefer not to answer	16 (2.0%)

Q. What services or community supports did you receive before the Pre-primary Program? Select all that apply. [42 respondents]

Services/community supports	**Frequency (%)**
Developmental Intervention	30 (71.4%)
Occupational Therapy	20 (47.6%)
Speech Language Therapy	37 (88.1%)
Physiotherapy	8 (19.0%)
Psychology	11 (26.2%)
Mental Health	10 (23.8%)
Recreation Therapy	0
Prefer not to answer	0
Other (please describe):	12 (28.6%)

Q. Do you have concerns about your child's development and learning? [776 respondents]

Development and learning concerns	**Frequency (%)**
Yes	60 (7.7%)
No	701 (90.3%)
Prefer not to answer	15 (1.9%)

Q. Did someone at the Pre-primary Program invite you to share these concerns? [59 respondents]

Invite to share concerns	**Frequency (%)**
Yes	38 (64.4%)
No	19 (32.2%)
Prefer not to answer	2 (3.4%)

Q. What is your relationship to the child that attended the Pre-primary Program? [810 respondents]

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Relationship	Frequency (%)
Mother	686 (84.7%)
Father	90 (11.1%)
Grandparent	18 (2.2%)
Aunt or uncle	0
Guardian	6 (0.7%)
Prefer not to answer	6 (0.7%)
Other	4 (0.5%)

Q. How long have you lived in your neighborhood? [810 respondents]

Length of time in neighborhood	Frequency (%)
Under 6 months	17 (2.1%)
6 months-1 year	78 (9.6%)
1-3 years	151 (18.6%)
3-5 years	129 (15.9%)
5-7 years	99 (12.2%)
Over 7 years	323 (39.9%)
Prefer not to answer	13 (1.6%)

Q. Does anyone in your family identify as a member of the LGBTQ2+ community? [810 respondents]

LGBTQ2+	Frequency (%)
Yes	60 (7.4%)
No	695 (85.8%)
Prefer not to answer	55 (6.8%)

Q. Which of the following ethnic/cultural backgrounds do you identify? Select all that apply. [810 respondents]

Ethnic/cultural background	Frequency (%)
Mi'kmaq or other Indigenous heritage	45 (5.6%)
Acadian descent	158 (19.5%)
European descent	357 (44.1%)
African descent	27 (3.3%)
Middle Eastern descent	18 (2.2%)
Asian descent	28 (3.5%)
Prefer not to answer	200 (24.7%)
Not listed above, please specify:	72 (8.9%)

Q. What is the highest education completed by any family member in your home? [810 respondents]

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Education	Frequency (%)
Completed junior/middle school	12 (1.5%)
Completed high school	115 (14.2%)
Completed community college or technical college	304 (37.5%)
Completed undergraduate university degree	155 (19.1%)
Completed graduate/advanced university degree	200 (24.7%)
Prefer not to answer	24 (3.0%)

Q. If you are comfortable in sharing, please tell us what is your current household income before taxes from all sources? [810 respondents]

Income	Frequency (%)
Less than $20,000	44 (5.4%)
$21,000-$40,000	102 (12.6%)
$41,000-$60,000	92 (11.4%)
$61,000-$80,000	102 (12.6%)
$81,000-$100,000	84 (10.4%)
More than $100,000	200 (24.7%)
Unsure	25 (3.1%)
Prefer not to answer	161 (19.9%)

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