

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Role of Early Learning and Child Care in Economic Development

Thursday, June 14, 2018

COMMITTEE ROOM

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

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In Attendance:

Ms. Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. Tammy Findlay - Chair and Associate Professor
Department of Political and Canadian Studies

Dr. James Sawler - Associate Professor
Department of Economics

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Ms. Cathy Montreuil - Deputy Minister

Ms. Shelley Thompson - Director
Early Childhood Development Services

Ms. Denise Stone - Director
Early Years Integration and Community Development



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, JUNE 14, 2018

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

10.00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Keith Irving

VICE-CHAIRMAN
Mr. Hugh MacKay

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone. I'd like to call this meeting to order. Of course, this is the Standing Committee on Economic Development. My name is Keith Irving, MLA for Kings South, and I am Chair of this committee and welcome you all here on a drizzly day.

Today the committee will be hearing from both Mount Saint Vincent University and also the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The subject matter of today's meeting: The Role of Early Learning and Child Care in Economic Development.

I just want to remind everyone to put those electronic leashes to bed, if we could put them on vibrate or tuck them away. A reminder that in case of emergency we'll leave the building through the Granville Street doors and meet at Grand Parade. As well, we have some technical issues with the downstairs washroom so washrooms will be up one level, on the Barrington Street level. I'm sure the commissionaires can point you in the correct direction when you get up there.

I'd like to begin first by having the committee members introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're joined also today by our counsel, Mr. Gordon Hebb and our clerk, Ms. Judy Kavanagh, who keeps me on track and keeps the committee legal and above board.

I'd like to really turn it over to our guests to introduce themselves this morning and then proceed into their presentation. A reminder that primarily for Hansard, we wait to be acknowledged by the Chair before speaking. I'll do my best to keep it flowing and also just to ask all committee members to try to keep the preambles to the questions reasonable so we can get as many questions in as possible.

After the presentations, we'll have questions up until about 11:40 a.m. and then maybe have about five minutes for any closing comments from our guests today.

With that, I will turn it over to our guests and maybe ask Mount Saint Vincent to introduce themselves and then the department. Then I believe we're going to move to Mount Saint Vincent to begin the presentation today.

DR. JAMES SAWLER: I am an economist at Mount Saint Vincent University. I do work on poverty and inequality, which includes early learning and child care.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just to let you know, Hansard will control the mikes for us and we will move from my right to left.

DR. TAMMY FINDLAY: I'm the Chair of the Department of Political and Canadian Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University. My research focuses on issues related to gender and social policy, with a particular focus on child care.

MS. CATHY MONTREUIL: Good morning, I'm the Deputy Minister of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

MS. SHELLEY THOMPSON: Good morning, I'm Director for Early Childhood Development Services. We're responsible for licensing and regulating child care and early childhood education training standards.

MS. DENISE STONE: Good morning, I am the Director of Early Years Integration and Community Development with the Early Years Branch. My primary responsibility at this time is the rollout of the pre-Primary program.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Terrific. Thank you all for being here. We'll move to Dr. Findlay for your presentation.

DR. FINDLAY: Thank you for inviting me. We've made a few attempts at this, so I'm glad that we finally managed to make it work for us all to be together here. I'm going to focus on three key points. I'll try to be as brief as possible. I'm going to talk about the problem, the benefits, and the solution.

In general, the problem is that we continue - in Canada and in Nova Scotia - to have a market-based and uncoordinated approach to child care. This results in three key issues: high fees for parents, not enough spaces, and questions around wages and staff retention. Of course, all three of these contribute to gender inequality. I think in general, we need to improve processes around evidence-based policy-making; I'm going to talk about the evidence today.

You may have seen these slides before - they're used a lot. They show the depressing picture of where Canada fits in comparison to other countries in terms of both spending on early learning and child care and in terms of access to early learning and child care programs.

We also have some comparisons now provincially and territorially. For three waves now, we have a report that compares provinces based on a range of indicators. The good news in this slide is, if you look at Nova Scotia, we have improved over time. The not-so-great news is that we continue to score a fairly low grade. We have 8.5 out of 15, which for the professors in the room is a D. I would prefer us to do better than a D.

There are lots of benefits to investing in early learning and child care. I will spend a bit of time on this, but I also know that most of these benefits are quite well known now, so I would like to spend most of my time talking about how we achieve these benefits. There are benefits related to job creation - I'm going to talk in a minute about job multipliers - increasing labour market participation, increasing the skilled workforce and growing productivity, and increasing the GDP and tax revenue. Cost-benefit analyses show that investing in child care pays for itself, which I'll come back to.

There is the reduction of poverty and income inequality, advancing women's equality and early childhood development, supporting social inclusion, promoting immigrant and population retention and growth, and a really important one for us in Nova Scotia is rural and regional economic development.

Some of you probably had the opportunity to attend Craig Alexander's presentation here in Halifax a few weeks ago. He was speaking to a report that he produced for the Conference Board of Canada. He spoke specifically about the economic benefits of early learning and child care. He talked about increasing the women's labour force participation rate, which is below average in Nova Scotia, and about the benefits of healthy child development, higher future wages and increased productivity, and the ability to reduce income inequality and poverty. He also stressed the cost-benefit analysis, which I'll be talking about here.

There have been many studies now that look at the economic impact of early learning and child care. One of the studies looks at the gross domestic product (GDP) multiplier and shows that it's 67 per cent higher in early learning and child care than it is in an area like construction and 112 per cent higher than in manufacturing. The study also looks at the employment multiplier and shows that 46.8 jobs per million dollars of investment are created, which is again much higher than in other sectors of the economy.

As I said, I want to focus on the solution. We know that early learning and child care has multiple benefits, but how do we actually achieve those benefits? What kind of policy design is going to get us there? The headline is that we need a public, universal, and integrated system of early learning and child care.

What does that system actually look like? Evidence tells us that a good system of early learning and child care has to have some key components. It has to be based on the principle of universality, and I'm happy to talk more about this in question period, but universality is central to building an early learning and child care system. It has to be comprehensive, including full day. What governments consider full day and what families consider full day are often quite different - by full day, I mean full working day.

It has to be publicly funded, it has to be well planned. It has to be based on direct supply-side funding. What we have for the most part in Nova Scotia and in Canada is a focus on the demand side, which is providing funding to parents and then sending them out into the market to purchase services. That's not working. That's part of the market-based approach that I talked about that is problematic. We need supply-side funding that invests in and builds the services so the parents can access them. This is the responsibility of federal, provincial, and territorial governments together.

It has to be non-profit - again, I'm happy to talk more about that. It's really important in Nova Scotia because we have a very high rate of for-profit provision of services compared to other provinces, but not-for-profit services are key to developing a good policy approach.

It needs to be regulated. It needs to be high quality. It needs to be socially inclusive. It needs to be integrated. We've taken some important steps in Nova Scotia. The fact that we have the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development here talking about child care means that we're moving toward an integrated system.

It needs to be democratically governed in a way that is much more broad-based and consultative than we've seen in the past. It needs to respect the principle of self-governance and self-determination for Indigenous peoples.

I want to go back to the market-based point for a moment because it's really key when we think about the economic benefits. One of the pieces I know that was in your information package was from the County of Wellington. They're one of many to point out that you're not going to achieve the economic benefits that can be so great if you keep

relying on a market-based approach. We need a public and universal system in order to actually get the benefits that come along with investing in early learning and child care.

I'm going to end with the words of McCain and her colleagues: "Early childhood education is economic development." Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Dr. Findlay. Dr. Sawler, are you adding to this at all in the initial presentations?

DR. SAWLER: No, I'm just here to answer questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll move then to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Deputy Minister Cathy Montreuil.

MS. MONTREUIL: Good morning, and thanks for the opportunity to speak to you today about the impact of early learning and child care on economic development in Nova Scotia.

Before I continue, I want to introduce my two colleagues here today from the Early Years Branch. Joining me is Shelley Thompson, Director of Early Childhood Development Services, and Denise Stone, Director of Early Years and Integration and Community Development. They are both very knowledgeable about the early years system in Nova Scotia and the positive impact that early learning has on families, communities, and Nova Scotia. I'm pleased to have them with me today.

We have good reason to be optimistic about the impact of early learning and child care opportunities for our children and our province. Many other jurisdictions that have free, universal early learning opportunities in place are seeing those benefits. From their experience, along with research that validates the positive impact of early learning, we know that early learning has a direct correlation to economic prosperity.

Children get a head start on a productive future. Early learning and care is linked to improved developmental outcomes, such as enhanced math and literacy levels in later academic life. It also means families are better supported. Access to affordable and quality daycare means families have the freedom to choose the care needs that best suit them, whether that is to stay at home with their child or to place them in child care so they may return to the workforce.

[10:15 a.m.]

Increasing early learning and child care opportunities for children translates to better, well-paying jobs and increased labour market participation for women. This may be especially relevant in rural areas of our province where employment opportunities may be limited. The economic and social benefits of investing in early learning and child care are impressive. Canadian economists, some of them cited by our colleagues at the Mount,

calculate the cost-to-benefit ratio at between \$2 and \$7 return for every dollar invested, depending on the dimension that is studied.

We know that many Nova Scotians want to live and work in the communities where they grew up. We also know that families want to live in a province that has child- centred policies and priorities - affordable and accessible early learning and child care opportunities support this. Nova Scotians want to see long-lasting economic opportunities that will enhance and advance our province. A strong early learning and care system supports this too.

We recently announced our second-year rollout of the pre-Primary program. It's a program we're very proud of and we know families are welcoming. In fact, we hear from families all the time asking when pre-Primary will come to their school community. For this September, we hope to add more than 130 new pre-Primary classrooms in more than 80 new school communities across Nova Scotia. By September 2020, every family in the province with a four-year-old will have free, universal access to pre-Primary in their community. Come September, and in the consecutive two years that we will continue to expand pre-Primary, we will need qualified early childhood educators to staff these classrooms in communities big and small around our province.

We know there is a renewed interest in the field of early childhood education. In fact, last year at the pre-Primary announcement in early September, staff met a woman who had a son enrolled in pre-Primary and she indicated at that time the introduction of the program spurred her own interest in early childhood education and development, and she was going to pursue ECE training so she could work in the pre-Primary program.

In January, we signed a three-year, \$35 million Early Learning and Child Care Bilateral Agreement with the federal government to make quality, regulated child care more accessible and more affordable for families. In the last two years, we have made more changes to the Child Care Subsidy program than in the previous two decades.

In 2016, we increased the income thresholds so more families would receive the maximum subsidy and increase the daily subsidy rates available to families. Our bilateral agreement has provided us with the opportunity to save families even more money through this program, about \$5 million more per year. We also introduced an infant incentive to operators to ensure that infant care grows and remains affordable.

Our agreement with the federal government will create more opportunities for regulated child care. We are investing in creating 1,000 more regulated child care spaces. We are providing grants to existing operators to meet the child care demands in their communities and, as a result of these and other investments in regulated child care, we are creating opportunities for more early childhood educators in the province.

In the short term, early learning and child care opportunities and investments like the ones we've implemented in Nova Scotia, create career opportunities at home for Nova Scotians. Graduates will know that there is work here for them. Trained early childhood educators who are unable to find work now have options. Nova Scotians who have left for early childhood education careers in other jurisdictions can now come home.

We know that's happening. The pre-Primary program in Sherbrooke, Nova Scotia is staffed by a master's level, trained early childhood educator who lived and worked in Australia as an ECE. She was able to move back to Nova Scotia to work in her field of expertise. She is the lead ECE in the program and is enjoying being back home in her province.

The skills of early childhood educators are in high demand, not just in pre-Primary and regulated child care, but in developmental intervention, family resource, and early intensive behavioural intervention - to name a few fields. These and other opportunities for early childhood educators mean a strong workforce that can invest in the economic prosperity of communities from Cape Breton to Yarmouth.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the economic tie between the financial prosperity of our province and the support for working families. Early learning and child care supports the labour participation of women. As we know, women continue to be the primary caregivers for their children after birth. For some families where child care options are limited and early learning opportunities are not readily available, tough decisions about returning to the workforce are faced. By ensuring that programs like pre-Primary or increased access to regulated child care are available, we ensure that both parents have an equal opportunity to return to the workforce and contribute to the local economy.

But the most compelling evidence is in the long-term economic benefits of early childhood education. At its heart, quality child care and early learning programs like pre-Primary are about setting our children up for success. We are not the first jurisdiction to figure this out. In fact, several other provinces have created similar opportunities for families. Investments in children's early learning pay big dividends for the future health and economic well-being of the child, and by extension, the province in which those children live.

Craig Alexander, the senior vice-president and chief economist for the Conference Board of Canada - probably at the same presentation we were at - evaluated the impact of early childhood education and discovered that it can help raise the future income prospects of disadvantaged children and families. Children who access early childhood education are more likely to complete high school and attend college or university, all of which lowers unemployment rates and raises the ability to earn a higher income.

We believe that children and families come first and that they should always be at the centre of our decision making. The contribution to provide quality early learning programs goes much further, and we will continue to work with our partners to create opportunities for children, families, early childhood educators, and all Nova Scotians.

Thank you so much. We're happy to take your questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have an hour and a half or so for questions. We will have a question and one supplementary to begin with. If we get tight on time, we'll return to just one question - again, try to keep the questions concise. We'll begin with Mr. Maguire.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I think I've taken more notes in the first 20 minutes of this presentation than any other presentation I've been part of. One of the questions I have is, why introduce children - some will say babies - to the education system at such an early age? Why not let them be children? Who wants to tackle that?

DR. FINDLAY: You'll probably add to this, but they will be children. People who are working in these systems are trained particularly in play-based pedagogy. Children learn by playing. They're playing in a different environment than they might be at home. They have the opportunity to play with lots of different communities of children and have different kinds of social experiences. They're guided in that learning by very highly qualified personnel. I think that's part of the answer to your question.

MS. STONE: Leaping off from Dr. Findlay's comments about why put children in school, schools are the hubs of our communities. They're places where people tend to feel very comfortable. Most folks have gone to a school. If not to attend with their children or to bring their children to school, they have been in school themselves, or they're going to a school for community events, et cetera, especially in our rural communities.

Having young children in a public school setting is also beneficial in terms of helping them have a smoother transition into the primary school environment . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. Sorry to interrupt. If you could just move your microphone a bit closer for Hansard. Thank you very much.

MS. STONE: I'll just continue my comment with regard to the transition into Primary. What we've seen through the early years programs that are offered through the eight regional entities and the one CSAP school board is that families feel much more comfortable coming into the school community when they're coming in a year younger.

We've had stories where some families who haven't been comfortable coming into a school environment perhaps due to the experiences that they had as students - parents who have stopped at the sidewalk and weren't comfortable to bring their children in now are feeling very comfortable to come in. As Tammy said, early childhood educators are very well trained in relationship building, welcoming people into environments, making

people feel comfortable, connecting them with their community and connecting with resources.

There is an actual lovely story about a young mom here in Halifax who is that very person, who wouldn't come into the school, had a very challenging educational experience. She has experienced the Early Years Centre and the four-year-old program there. She is sitting on the SAC committee of the school and has completed her GED. That's just one experience of bringing a family into the school one year sooner and that smooth transition into Primary.

We hear from Primary school teachers. I often wait a few days after the first day of school and give a call around to some of the principals and ask, how was the first day - how are those pre-Primary or four-year-olds doing the first day of school? The stories they're telling in terms of the smooth transition - no tears, parents are less anxious, they're feeling very comfortable to be in the school community. We know that when families are comfortable in educational settings, they will be the best advocates and supporters of their children to continue in the school system.

MR. MAGUIRE: You said no tears - wait until they meet my middle child. (Laughter) This is a two-part question. Historically, have you seen an advantage for those that could afford to send their children to a pre-Primary type of environment or a daycare, compared to those that could not? I guess the second part to that question is, I think I need a little explanation on what play-based is.

MS. MONTREUIL: Children at their youngest age, zero to two or zero to three, have the fastest brain development than any other stage in their growth. Students who are - I'm an old educator so they're all students to me - babies and toddlers who are exposed to environments that are highly stimulating and keep all those synapses in their brains firing aggressively, we see better brain development, more brain development. It's not through instruction, it's through play. It's through language and experience.

When we set the table for our youngest kids with rich environments where they play and interact with others and where a highly trained early childhood educator provokes them with just the odd question to stretch their thinking or to expose them to different ways of thinking or different ways of playing with the same kitchen set, they learn faster, they learn more, and they learn better and do better right through their entire school history as they start formal education. That's why those early years are so critical.

When kids are in homes that don't have the capacity to provide that stimulation, they do less well. The kids who are from those homes that may be able to afford daycare, 25 per cent of our kids arrive at school vulnerable through the early development indicator. That's not reserved for subsets of kids, it's kind of a universal score. Great early childhood education is a rising tide that floats all boats.

DR. FINDLAY: This also goes back to the first part of your question, which is when we hear the word “school” a certain image comes to mind. I think for all of us, this will require a cultural change in the way we think about what a school looks like.

For some Nordic countries, for instance, they have early learning and child care programs that are entirely outdoors - the children never come inside. This is in Nordic countries - it’s cold there, but they’ve managed to create programs that are very creative.

All the programs don’t have to look the same. I think that’s another thing to keep in mind - that a public system can still have variety, but they are programs that are designed around the needs of children, as you were saying.

[10:30 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Over to Ms. Zann.

MS. LENORE ZANN: It’s a pleasure to have you here today, thank you so much. I believe I’ve seen some of you at meetings before. Early childhood development has always been one of the subjects I’ve been most interested in because my father actually taught with Jane Norman in Truro 40 years ago and they were teaching then how important the early years were. They were so far ahead of their time. With the students that they had they were looked upon basically like glorified babysitters instead of educators. Now the Jane Norman College is actually called the Jane Norman institute - I was at the graduation - they’re so happy that finally society is accepting the fact that the early years are probably some of the most vital times of a child’s growth and development. I’m very happy to see you here and happy to see the work that is being done.

That said, Margaret McCain of course comes from Truro so I’ve been aware and we’ve been working with her since, I think, 2010 or 2011 on the Early Years, moving it over from the Community Services Department and into the Department of Education.

The McCain Foundation in the study they did in 2011, the author stated, “The research shows the ‘just can’t afford to’ excuse for denying young children their fair share of society’s resources has no substance.” I would have to agree with that and I’ve been saying that for quite some time.

Speaking to the media earlier this year, Minister Regan actually said that in theory she supports a universal subsidized child care plan like the Quebec model but that at this time it’s simply not feasible and we have to live within our means.

My question is - maybe Dr. Findlay or Dr. Sawler could explain to the committee - why does the excuse of living within our means really not have any substance at this point when we’re talking about investments in the early years and early childhood development?

DR. SAWLER: Speakers have referred to studies showing the high rates of return on early childhood education and the effect of early childhood education on female labour force participation.

Before Quebec introduced their plan, Quebec had the lowest rate of female labour force participation in the country. They now have the highest rate of female labour force participation in the country. What has happened in Quebec in terms of financing, a study by Pierre Fontaine, who is a former head of the Canadian Economics Association, a well-respected economist in Canada, he looked at the effects of Quebec's plan on just the finances of the Quebec Government. He found that for every dollar the Quebec Government put into early childhood education they got \$1.05 back. The federal government got an extra 45 cents, so that was just a bonus for the federal government.

How does that work? You have this increase in labour force participation, in employment and incomes. Those people are paying income taxes, they're paying sales taxes, and those funds then come back into the provincial government's coffers.

Now, that's not instantaneous, you've got to make investments up front and then you start getting the returns, just like any type of investment that you're going to have. That return is just the effect on the government budget balance, it doesn't have the effect on the increased productivity that you're going to have from, in the long-term, a better educated workforce as these young people work their way through the system. It does not include all the jobs that are created directly in early childhood education, particularly in our rural areas where we've got lower levels of employment, and it doesn't include the indirect jobs that are created as the funding that goes into early childhood education, because it's very labour intensive, those funds tend to stay in those communities, so now they're spending money and this is your multiplier effect. More money is staying in the community for early childhood education compared to other types of stimulus. The returns on investment are significant, and hopefully that explains some of the channels of how that works.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Dr. Findlay, would you like to add something to the question?

DR. FINDLAY: In terms of the rural piece, that is so essential for us. There was a study conducted in Manitoba that found that the return on investing in child care for rural areas is even higher than in urban centres, because of the reasons that Dr. Sawler outlined. That's a study by Dr. Susan Prentice.

MS. ZANN: That makes sense. It's a really good argument. It's like doing studies on poverty. They say poverty costs. It's better to spend money now rather than down the line. It's actually going to cost more than putting the money in investing in people now - especially in the early years - so that they aren't going to be going to the doctor and spending more money on them later.

It's sometimes hard to talk governments into making those early investments. They're tied to that four-year boom and bust - we have an election coming. It's sometimes hard to talk governments into making those early investments. I think this particular one is so important that we have to keep pushing it as far as we can go.

In 2017, Nova Scotia spent about 1.6 per cent of the annual budget on early childhood education and care. ECE spending averages about 5 per cent to 6 per cent of annual budgets in most other countries. What are some of the outcomes you could expect to see with a higher level of investment? Anybody?

MS. THOMPSON: There's a lot I would like to say on this. One thing to start, all the articles cited in the binder are some of the research that led us to creating the branch back in 2013, moving Early Years programs and services to the Department of Education and renaming that department. It's great to be talking about it in this forum, absolutely.

In terms of investment, it has gone up significantly. Since we came over, about \$20 million more is going just to the program area that I'm responsible for, and that's regulated child care. There's a few other, smaller programs within that but particularly regulated child care. I'll let Denise speak about the investment through pre-Primary as well.

I know we're not at 5 per cent - we're higher, we're more. I think the tides are changing. In terms of some of the outcomes we are seeing and have targeted with our investment, we have been able to introduce a wage floor for ECEs. Again, I don't want to exaggerate because we know there's more work to do, but it has made a difference certainly for ECEs. There's a lot of spinoffs to that.

We were talking about women participating in the labour market. ECEs are largely women working in early childhood education. Those women are all guaranteed a minimum wage that we've set. Any funded child care centre in the province has to ensure there's a minimum wage. A trained Level 2 starts at \$17. We're not saying that's where we want it to cap, and we're investing in regulated child care and child care programs with the idea that they'll be able to introduce wage scales and things like that. That's one investment.

There are so many stories that we could tell. One of them was about a new Canadian, an ECE. She was working in child care. The owner of the centre pushed back a bit when we introduced that wage floor. I was talking with her, sending emails, the regular thing that you would hear about in your own positions. Then one day, she called me, and I thought, what's happening? She actually called me to say, I was a little bit negative about the wage floor, but I'm pleased because one of my employees who is a new Canadian, who came without her family, is now able to sponsor them to come, because \$17 an hour guarantees \$35,000 a year. I'm not proposing that that's where we'd want to be for the expertise and level of training and the type of work that early childhood educators are doing, but it's due to the investment that we made. I think we're on the right path.

Around our subsidy program, that's a program that when we came over from our previous department into the Department of Education, the subsidy program wasn't - and the subsidy is a program that families can apply to for support with their fees. That program was sort of an off-the-side-of-the-desk part of other roles that were happening before we came over to Education.

When we came over, we actually formed a true subsidy team. We have caseworkers in every part of the province that are trained and their focus is on making sure that families who are eligible for this program can access it. We have a team lead who brings forward the issues. We're really thinking about the policy in that program, and we've made some significant changes.

In terms of investment, that budget has gone from \$18 million just a few years ago to over \$25 million this year. Some of the significant changes we made in 2016 was we introduced a new per diem rate. At that point in time, we were trying to close the gap between the actual cost of care and the subsidy - we targeted it around \$10. It's widening a little bit again now. We'll certainly be looking at that.

We were also going to change the turning point in 2016. The turning point is the subsidy program works on a sliding scale. If you're eligible for the maximum you get the maximum support, and then it's a sliding scale down. It was \$20,000 in 2015, so a family that came into the program, if they made more than \$20,000, right away they got on that sliding scale.

We moved it in 2016 to \$25,000. Then just this year in January, we were able to move that to \$35,000. That means that in our program, about 85 per cent of the families are getting the maximum subsidy. Again, when we came over to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, we had about 3,300 families accessing that program. We were entering a phase where families were turning it down because it wasn't enough. Now we're at about 4,400.

Again, we've said families being able to access child care, being able to pay for it, enables them to participate in the workforce, which contributes in all kinds of ways in terms of spending power and economic spinoffs.

DR. FINDLAY: I think your question was about, what are the consequences of this relatively low investment that we have in the province? I think if we go back to the slide where it had wages, fees, and spaces - those are the consequences.

In terms of wages - I just came from a meeting with early childhood educators on the weekend. I've heard them talk about stories about having to use food banks, about not having access to a pension and, ironically, not being able to afford child care in the centres where they're working.

There have been some improvements through the wage grant, but there were also unintended consequences of that, which are that many early childhood educators didn't even benefit from it because they were already making the maximum wage. It was often some of the for-profit centres that were under-paying their educators that benefited from that grant. The entire workforce - which is a female-dominated workforce - suffers because of this lack of investment that we have.

In terms of the fees, it goes back to your question that you asked earlier, Mr. Maguire, about inequality between those parents who can afford good early learning opportunities for their kids and those who can't. Both parents and the children are suffering from unequal opportunities in that kind of system.

In terms of the fees, we were talking a bit about subsidies, which I think we also need to put more emphasis on, as I said, away from the demand side, to the supply side. We should actually be thinking about phasing out subsidies because in many ways they don't address affordability. They don't address supply at all. They don't guarantee any new spaces will be created. We need to focus on building the services in a direct way, in the way that they've done in Quebec.

[10:45 a.m.]

Then in terms of spaces, we miss out on all the opportunities that we've danced around about increasing women's labour market participation. Even for women who are in the labour market, a lack of good child care contributes to absenteeism, high stress, and health issues. There are all kinds of other equality consequences that come from the lack of spaces as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm going to try to move us along. We've had two questions in about a half-hour. I'm conscious that I have a number of people who have questions, so we're going to ask folks to try to be a little bit more concise. I know there's lots of information to share, but there will presumably be other questions drawing that out.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Lohr.

MR. JOHN LOHR: Thank you for your presentation. My question goes to you, Dr. Findlay. You mentioned in your talk that publicly-provided child care was better than privately-provided child care. I know that most child care in Nova Scotia is either private for-profit or not-for-profit. You didn't really flesh out the reasons for that statement. I was interested in why you made that statement. Maybe you could flesh that out.

DR. FINDLAY: It's based on a lot of research that compares the quality of child care provided by for-profit versus not-for-profit providers. There are also major differences between them - I'll put public and not-for-profit in one category and for-profit in the other - around governance.

The importance of public services is that they're democratically controlled by citizens. For-profit services' locations and their fees are entirely up to the private provider. We as a community have no control over whether those services are located in places where they're needed.

They are often located in affluent areas. They have major differences in terms of the wages provided to their early childhood educators often between those two different systems. There are a range of questions around quality and affordability and accessibility.

The research points to the importance of public services. The McCain research all talks about public services. The OECD studies that regularly point to the gaps in Canada's system talk about public services. It's kind of a widespread message now from the research that this is the way to move forward.

DR. SAWLER: I'll just add to that briefly. I know there's a tendency to think that private enterprise is always more efficient than public enterprise. But that's not always the case, particularly when we have instances of market failure and so forth.

In this case, not only do we have an issue in the private system of where the location is going to be and certain advantages to people who have more funds and so forth, but there are also inefficiencies with respect to the use of resources. In private systems, you're looking at marketing, you're looking at promotions, and you're perhaps looking at lobbying efforts. These are funds that are not going directly to providing those services to educate the children, where in a public system you do.

You have issues with respect to regulation. If you're going to ensure the quality, there's a big difference between oversight of a system that has been designed and implemented publicly to realize certain goals, rather than a body overseeing a hodgepodge of private enterprises. The costs of regulation are a lot greater with respect to a private system as well.

Finally, you have problems with respect to - sorry for the economic jargon - information asymmetries, so information for the parents. How is a parent supposed to know and judge whether the particular private organization that they're sending their kid to is as high quality as the one down the street or the one across town? If you have a guaranteed system that's publicly created, the government is doing that for them. That saves a lot of time and effort and makes for a more efficient use of the resources.

MR. LOHR: This is what I think when I hear the answer - I don't dispute what you're saying - but are you comparing a private system as it currently exists with a very low funding regime? You know parents have limited ability to pay, there's very little government subsidy in the private system as it exists now. Are you comparing that, as it exists now, to the future vision you have of a publicly-funded system?

What I'm saying is, would the private system, in a stronger funding model, not be able to achieve all the same things that a public system would achieve? I think you're right because these private systems now will establish themselves where they believe parents are affluent enough to pay. But if they were publicly funded, these private providers would be able to exist in more locations. Do you understand what I'm saying? I'm just asking.

DR. FINDLAY: I do understand, I would encourage you to look at what happened in Australia. They had a very well-developed system where they primarily relied on government subsidies for a large, for-profit child care company, which then disappeared and left the entire country really, without a child care system. That's part of the kind of democratic governance piece that I was talking about.

I also wanted to pick up on a point that Dr. Sawler mentioned in terms of, if we're going to invest public money, the primary costs of child care are in the child care workforce. I'd prefer that we use our public funds to support the workforce development side of child care, rather than to contribute to profit making.

We have the same principles when we think about education or health care. I think it requires us to kind of shift our thinking but we should consider this in the same way that we think about other important public services: their purpose is to serve the public and not to create opportunities for making profit.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moving now to Ms. Leblanc.

MS. SUSAN LEBLANC: A quick comment. I, myself, am a product of the Early Childhood Development Program at Mount Saint Vincent University, from 40-some years ago, but look where I am now. I also am the mother of a child in public, not-for-profit daycare who is about to go into pre-Primary. That only works for me because the particular pre-Primary that he will be going into has wraparound care. I can't imagine what I would be worrying about right now if that wasn't the case.

I do appreciate your comments about the system needing to be universal and universal means that it works in terms of the hours of working people.

We have already spoken about this a little bit but we know that the child care fees impact strongly on a mother's decision to work and, therefore, on the economic security and income security of women. We know that the median financial burden of child care fees on a woman's income averages 29 per cent outside the Province of Quebec - so in places where we don't have universal child care, 29 per cent of the woman's income is affected or engaged.

My question for Dr. Findlay and Dr. Sawler is, can you talk about what that looks like in Nova Scotia in particular, about those numbers, and how is the cost of child care negatively impacting women's economic security?

DR. SAWLER: I don't have any data with respect to those numbers specifically for Nova Scotia. Dr. Findlay may have that data.

I know the government has spent considerable time and resources reforming income assistance. One of the objectives of their new program seems to be to make it easier for people to participate in the workforce. If you look at child poverty rates, a very high proportion of those children are from single-parent households. The lack of early learning opportunities is perhaps the most significant inhibitor for them participating in the labour force. If you can participate in the labour force, if you can get a slightly decent wage, you can get your family and yourself above the poverty line. I think from that standpoint, in terms of the impact on the most vulnerable children, the most vulnerable families, and the women primarily heading those families, this is perhaps the most significant investment you can make.

DR. FINDLAY: In terms of two-parent families - and this is another reason the gender equality lens is so important here - when a two-parent family is making a decision about whether it makes sense for someone to be out in the workforce, it's almost always, in a heterosexual couple, the female partner who, for economic reasons, decides not to be in the workforce. They're going to make decisions around money that make sense for their families. That's a really important piece of the conversation.

MS. LEBLANC: We have already talked about grants and subsidies, how our program here works on grants and subsidies. Can you talk about whether this is a smart way of funding the program to invest in child care? Can you talk about the reasons why it might not be and unpack a little more for us what would be a better way and why?

DR. FINDLAY: As I said, we need to shift away from demand side to supply side. When we create a pre-Primary program, we don't give parents money and tell them to go find a pre-Primary spot for their kids. We've created a really great space for parents to have for their children. We need a system that builds the services for parents to access.

The subsidies don't guarantee that spaces are available. We've had subsidies for a long time. It has not created spaces on its own. It doesn't necessarily address affordability. Lots of parents don't qualify for subsidies, and the subsidies don't fully cover the costs. The costs can keep going up, and the subsidy doesn't necessarily match that.

It also goes to my point about universality. We have this system that's very stigmatizing. Systems that are based on means testing or income testing construct policy in a way that says, these services are for people who are disadvantaged, and these services - often better, higher quality - are for people who can afford them. We don't like two-tiered systems in our other public services like health care. I think part of the problem with the subsidy system is that it doesn't move us in the direction of universality, which is the system that the pre-Primary program is built on, a universal approach. That's how we need to think about the rest of the zero-to-six range of services.

MS. MONTREUIL: The descriptions around moving from and to is well taken. We're in the middle of a big implementation of pre-Primary. We're also looking at increasing spaces, as well as subsidies. Some of these levers are not levers that, if you pay attention to one, are at the detriment of others. As we move into progressive implementation, you have to pay attention to some of the really important factors that the research says you need to pay attention to.

Right now, 60 per cent of the families receiving a subsidy are from single-parent families that now have access to the workforce. In the improvements in Nova Scotia over the four-year study - you saw the colourful graphs up on the screen. Nobody outside of maybe Quebec - even when we look at measuring those measurement bars against Quebec, Quebec's highest score is 10 out of 15. When we looked at our score of 8.5 out of 15 and the progressive steps we have taken on each year and the improvement, we're now in fourth out of the provinces and territories.

We're making good gains, paying attention to the multi-varied factors that Dr. Findlay, in her studies, and certainly the McCain Foundation and others, have provided us. That research is informing the steps that we've taken to date and the steps that we will undoubtedly continue to take around ensuring that any centre in the province that's looking to come underneath the umbrella of early learning and child care supported by our department meets our quality standards, meets our admission standards, adheres to our floors in wages and our caps in terms of parent fee setting.

[11:00 a.m.]

When we talk about what the research suggests, I think all these factors and their end state, we need to remember that we're moving a whole bunch of them incrementally as we implement in Nova Scotia.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Moving now to Ms. Paon.

MS. ALANA PAON: I have so many questions. I'm going to try to compact them down to one or two. Having been an only parent myself to a son and living here in Halifax, having moved from Cape Breton Island at an early age, I can certainly appreciate the challenges that are out there for parents who are trying to participate in the workforce, single parents, or two-parent households but specifically single parents, or only parents in my case. It's very, very difficult. I do appreciate that there have been a lot of healthy strides made in the department to move forward with early childhood education.

I would like to ask a question specifically, and it's something about which I'm very passionate. It's introducing French to children at a very young age. When my son went to *prématernelle* or to daycares here in Halifax, I was very diligent about trying to find daycares that offered French, even if in some capacity, but looking for a bilingual *prématernelle*.

I'm wondering, having just gone to Beau-Port and looking at the system that they have set up on Isle Madame, I know the One Nova Scotia report indicated that we should have a very Nova Scotia-centric approach to this program, that the curriculum should be very Nova Scotia-centric. Keeping in mind that we have an Acadian population as well as all kinds of different new immigrant populations as well, but specifically, we are a bilingual country, and we do have a high proportion of French speakers in our province, especially in the constituency that I represent, I would like to know what is being done at an early age and being introduced in the early childhood program to introduce French to children.

MS. THOMPSON: A few things come to mind. I'll start with our Early Learning Curriculum Framework, which is going to be coming out very soon. It has been piloted. In that framework, we do have a specific goal for young children related to the French language. The curriculum was developed by a large group of people from our early childhood education community.

We have some specific goals that came from the Acadian community that are around language development and supporting culture and heritage and celebrating that to some extent. It's a very distinct goal in the curriculum framework. It was added because of feedback we had received from the Acadian francophone community. We also have a section in our Early Learning Curriculum Framework on our forefounding cultures, so it's very much designed to be inclusive, to speak to people from all parts of the province, and to reflect their experiences.

On a more practical level that you might be interested in, we have partnered with Université Sainte-Anne very recently for tuition support for people to study early childhood education in France. Université Sainte-Anne has an online program. We're providing tuition support through a partnership with them. We'll soon be introducing another bursary that's going to be specifically targeted to bring cultural representation into our training programs. That will be for francophone, Acadian, indigenous, newcomer populations, and African Nova Scotians. We have very much tried, in all our initiatives, to make sure that we are including everybody. That's all I'll say for now.

MS. PAON: With respect to the role of early childhood education and economic development specifically, since that's why we're all here, I would like to know if you could expand on how the new curriculum helps prepare children with a few specifics for success later on in life. Can you expand on that? Can you give me some specifics? (Interruption) Yes, sorry, pre-Primary.

MS. STONE: The new early learning curriculum framework that's coming out is going to be used by pre-Primary. Actually, it has been piloting as we're moving forward. This past year, the pre-Primaries that started in September 2017 were using a draft version of it to get familiar with the document. A cornerstone of that document is building relationships with families and between educators and children.

As Ms. Thompson noted, it's also culturally responsive. The highlight and the cornerstone is the quality and also speaks to the pedagogy of play throughout the document. It is certainly the cornerstone of that, the work that's in that.

The Early Learning Curriculum Framework will be used in pre-Primary, which is a play-based program, again, delivered by trained early childhood educators.

MS. MONTREUIL: Some of the research that drove the development of the programs is the early development indicator out of McMaster University, which looks at five domains of early childhood development.

You asked for a couple of specifics. One big area that play-based learning is focusing on is self-regulation, the ability to wait before you experience something, the ability to plan before you implement, those kinds of things, in an age-appropriate, play-based kind of environment.

The University of Chicago did some studies. By the age of three, children have picked up their parents' attitudes to mathematics, and every jurisdiction on the face of the planet right now is concerned with mathematics. What they learned was, when they observed parents playing with their children, the parents who are not comfortable in math avoid any math language or any math playing. If you give them a pretend apple to cut up, parents who are math-phobic never talk about halves and quarters and equals. Parents who are comfortable do, and there's a big divide.

The other important piece to that research is that, once it's set, it's very hard for the publicly-funded school system to reverse it. There's an instance where putting play into place to have kids naturally explore concepts of mathematics and develop comfort with it sets the table and opens doors differently for them for the rest of their lives. Those are some specific examples for you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let's move on to Ms. DiCostanzo.

MS. RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I'm listening to all this, and I had my two questions almost all answered. I don't know if I should go to those, but maybe I'll elaborate on those.

My two daughters went to the Mount. I live very close to the Mount. Mr. Maguire asked that question about why. The advantages my two daughters have received from going - I think I started them at age three. I couldn't afford full-time, and at that time they allowed me to do three days. But the advantages and the preparation that my two daughters received at the Mount were incredible.

In talking about the pre-Primary, I saw it all. I experienced it all 25 years ago at the Mount. Talking about math, both my daughters ended up very strong in math. I don't know if it was because we did it or the Mount did it, I'm not sure. There was definitely a strength in pre-Primary or whatever they learned. It was very easy for them to adapt to French

immersion and going to school. I had very little experience of negativity at school. It's the opposite - they were very ready. Whatever you did, it gave them a very strong base at the Mount, and I'm so delighted that everybody can afford it now or can be able to use it and not have to worry about cutting corners in order to give your child that education.

I don't know - the Quebec system, it would probably be ideal, but I think having pre-Primary at this stage is a huge investment in our children. I'm very grateful to see what it has done to my children and to know that every mother can have that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you have a question?

MS. DICOSTANZO: Yes. My real question was just about how we can help the newcomers to get into the system and to working as ECEs, and if you have any opportunities for them to be job shadowing. It's very difficult to learn the terminology of that field. I think if you can have them job shadow - they're natural, they do it, they have six or seven kids themselves. It's just knowing what our training and the job shadowing would really help them - if you can provide some services in that, please.

MS. THOMPSON: I mentioned that there is a bursary program that's coming out that will be there to help recruit people into the field.

In terms of mentoring and opportunities to job shadow, one of the initiatives that we're working on is around a work-and-learn model for training. We're also introducing a recognize-prior-learning process so that people will be able to come and show their competencies and be recognized for that and able to work in early childhood education programs. Those are some of the kind of concrete things.

Then we are very pleased that in our curriculum we have focus because we know that children and families are much more comfortable in early childhood settings when they can see and work and meet people who they identify with - when they can see that their children are welcome. Even if they may not speak their home language, that they're aware of it, that they know it's important to get to know a family, to develop a program that reflects all the children's interests and backgrounds in their programs.

More and more, we're trying to ensure that lens is there and certainly our new early learning framework is very much based on those concepts of inclusion and working together and getting to know each other. It's very much about those relationships, which we know are vital.

DR. FINDLAY: Thank you for that question because it's reminding me that I came back recently from a trip to Vancouver for a research project, which looks at the relationship between child care advocates and migrant domestic workers in Vancouver. One of the really interesting things to come out of that conversation was that the members of the migrant domestic worker organizations really wanted some transition planning in

terms of getting them qualified - they're working as in-home nannies primarily - to integrate into a publicly-developing system.

I think that this is a really important piece of the conversation - thinking about how to recognize credentials from other places. People come highly trained from other kinds of programs and thinking about ways that they can efficiently get the information to them about how they can transition and what their place will be in this kind of new developing public system that we're talking about.

MS. DICOSTANZO: It's not only for the new immigrant, but it's also for our children to be exposed to these cultures. I know my niece lives in England and her kids know how to eat - they're introduced to Indian food, introduced to so many different - even as food and talking about the cultures at that age in daycare. It's amazing what having the new immigrants being integrated into a system - what they can bring in for the education of the children.

MS. THOMPSON: Again, I mentioned the subsidy program, but one of the things we have done in that program - because we found that families really want their children to have those experiences to go to child care, even if they may not need it in terms of there may be a parent at home, or it may not be for that reason. We have been fortunate to develop a real team of subsidy workers where their real purpose is to bring people, bring families into the program.

[11:15 a.m.]

They also meet very regularly with our community groups, like the YMCA and ISANS and groups, to make sure that families are getting the information because sometimes they don't know where to look, sometimes they don't understand the forms and the kinds of questions that we ask because they're very much Canadian-based, you know about your tax credit and your CRA Line 236, so we have really made some efforts. Next week we have some meetings planned and we've redone our information brochure with that in mind. We'll be having it translated to a few different languages to make sure that families do understand that that's there and if they're looking for child care, in this case, they can have access to that funding to support the fees.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: I appreciate the acknowledgement and the vision that I guess the universality of access to child care, play-based learning, however you want to express it, is really paramount. Dr. Findlay, it's the number one thing here, at least the first thing. I don't know if you have them numbered in terms of priority, but to me it makes sense that it's at the top of that list.

I did want to acknowledge that on several occasions throughout the meeting today there was, I guess, a recognition or a focus on the for-profit sector and reference to these for-profit organizations being set up in affluent areas and the programming being geared more at the people who can afford them.

I would like to acknowledge and I think it's important that we acknowledge that the for-profit sector has been fulfilling a gap for years that would - the positions they hold and they foster would not otherwise exist in the system today, so I think it's important to acknowledge that the work they do, what they have done, and what they continue to do should be recognized.

These folks are not necessarily making millions in these organizations, like there's caps on parent fees, there's wage floors on how much they can pay their employees, so again, my initial comment about the universality of this is paramount, but I think it's critical that we acknowledge the role that the private sector does play presently and into the future around the delivery of early childhood education.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm going to encourage you to come to a question.

MR. JESSOME: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. My question is, how are we working with the private sector to, I'll call it, transition or move forward towards universality?

MS. THOMPSON: The point is well taken on both sides, absolutely. We do have a mix here in Nova Scotia, it's not quite 50-50 but close. It has emerged over the last many years. One of the things that came out of our child care review in 2016 were some things around that quality and how you ensure it.

I'll also say that in Nova Scotia some of our commercial centres are not sort of what you might think of as, they're not big box centres. Many are run by ECEs, they started them in their homes, 10, 20 years ago, those kinds of things.

MR. JESSOME: Thank you for saying that.

MS. THOMPSON: They are not the sort of corporate entities that you might think of when we say commercial.

That being said, we do want to ensure there's a level of quality across the board. We want families to be able to access and we do know if it's less lucrative in some of the smaller towns, not-for-profit and commercial, neither will open because regardless of the auspice you need to be able to make a go of it, so there's a lot of issues.

Nova Scotia, as we all know, is very diverse in terms of population and we're trying to find the right fits. But we did hear a lot around how we should be very careful with our funding, we don't want to fund centres that may end up closing, all those kinds of things which can happen when it's a sole owner. Through our federal agreement, we're going to be growing child care very strategically, through a strategic growth process.

I will admit that we were in a place, maybe 10 years ago, where you opened a child care centre, you got funding, and we regulated you. We didn't have measures of quality in place - it was really licence-equalled funding. We have moved away from that. We heard from many, many people, from our not-for-profit and our commercial sectors who we work with very closely. We have a few key stakeholder groups that represent both.

Just to wrap up, through strategic growth, we're doing a new approach. We're not doing this "you open it, we'll fund you, and let's see how it goes." We're linking funding to quality, accountability, and compliance for all centres - for all existing centres, not-for-profit and commercial. Through strategic growth, we'll be growing it only when the proposed operator comes forward and can show us how they're meeting the needs.

We have identified many criteria. We know the counties that need spaces. We have a sense of the numbers of spaces we need, a sense of what would make the most sense. We have a really good sense of where we need before- and after-pre-Primary care. We're really linking those kinds of criteria together as well as things like EDI. Our deputy mentioned child development outcomes. We're looking at counties where we know there's some need there and making sure that they open.

One thing is that the first level of approval will be at the community table. Those applications for strategic growth will all come into a community table that's representative of families, operators, and people who actually care about what's going to happen in child care for their community. I'll leave it there.

DR. FINDLAY: I'm glad you point out the variety within the for-profit sector because that's a really key point. I think for single-operator private centres, there are lots of benefits for them in a newly-developing public system.

The model in P.E.I., I think, has lots of merits where they have grandparented in people who did put in a lot of work and fill in those gaps - so recognizing the service that they've provided and bringing them into that system as it unfolds. They have also said that moving forward, it's going to be a public system, so there won't be new private operators entering the scene.

I think that's a really interesting way of thinking about developing a system - building on what exists but moving towards something that we know, based on research and evidence, is the best option.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome, do you have a short supplementary?

MR. JESSOME: As short as you're going to make it, Mr. Chairman. (Laughter)

Can either party here today offer some commentary around your level of engagement with municipalities, with respect to the importance of access to transportation, with respect to being able to sustainably fill your ECE positions?

I'll go back here for a second - it continues to come up that transportation is an ongoing challenge for operators to put people in the positions that they need to fill. What type of engagement has either party had with municipalities around that fact?

DR. FINDLAY: I can't speak directly to the policies that might be happening. I think this is also a key point in terms of the interconnections of these policies.

I was also involved in a research project about women in public services. For instance, transportation and child care were the top two issues. Obviously, they are interrelated. We had a meeting with nurses, and we thought the nurses would spend all their time talking about health care. No, they talked about child care. They work shifts. They need flexible child care. They live in rural areas, and they don't have transportation.

These are all things that we need to think about: the network of policies and how they all work together.

MS. MONTREUIL: To that point, one of the things that has made the launch of pre-Primary so successful is the willingness of the communities to come together. Not every community is the same. Transportation is a pressing issue in one corner of the province and not in others. The local solution tables and the local community tables that wrestle with those issues and come up with unique solutions are finding them.

As we deepen our implementation, the policy side and the more systemic solutions will emerge. It's an ongoing conversation - transportation for sure. In a province that's so heavily rural, it's always a factor in almost any program that we deliver.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Everyone has had a chance for one and a supplementary, so we're going to move to singles. I've got five on the list here. I'm not sure we're going to make it in 15 minutes, but if we do some short snappers we might do that. Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: I'm glad that came up again about for-profits, because they haven't been particularly profitable. I know that they have struggled with regulations. For example, one of my daycares a couple of years ago had to get rid of all their Walt Disney themed dishes. They were very frustrated. They're heavily regulated.

One of the issues that just came up for me about two weeks ago was a lady about 55, who has worked in a not-for-profit all her life. Going back to school is really not an option. She no longer qualifies as an early childhood educator, yet she has done all the courses that were available all her life. Can you tell me about the program to allow those experienced workers to be qualified as experienced? What's possible there? I know it was in the documentation. Can you just explain it?

MS. THOMPSON: We are right now introducing, or working on developing our recognized prior learning process. We'll be piloting that this September. It's designed to enable people to come forward and show their competencies. There's a very distinct set of competencies for an ECE that have been developed, and people will be able to demonstrate that they have those competencies through things like their work experience and prior course work they've done, and some sort of documentation and things that they can use to show how they've met those. That's one way we're doing it.

I would always encourage anybody like that to call our classification services because sometimes there's some misunderstanding around equivalencies and things like that.

We're also looking at our reg review though that will hopefully not minimize or decrease any of the training standard - the rigour of them - but will make it easier for people to demonstrate that they have the skills and competencies needed to work in the early childhood education workforce.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We can get to our final four questions and answers if we stay within three minutes for Q & A. Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: I would also like to acknowledge that when we were talking a little bit earlier about the importance of the play-based education and how it helps with math, let's not forget music and the arts. I think we all recognize now how much of an important part that plays in the development of a child's brain. They have all the studies that show that music also helps with math and sciences, and of course drama, painting - all these different things are great ways for kids to be able to express themselves.

Could you enlighten us about that aspect, and is that worked into any of your plans for the early childhood development years - your programs going forward?

MS. MONTREUIL: Specifically the arts?

MS. ZANN: Yes.

MS. MONTREUIL: The arts are often core to early childhood. They express themselves creatively through music, through movement, through play, through yard play with things like imagination and mud pies and all those things that you could expect to see with our littlest learners. As they engage with the world, they're hard-wired almost for the arts. It's a really foundational piece.

The arts also help people learn to interact with each other, to take turns, to experiment with new feelings like squishy paint and all those kinds of things. It's very sensory and it speaks to the soul of the early learner, for sure.

Foundationally, play-based learning - it would be hard to observe kids at play without seeing the arts reflected. It's foundational. It's core. It really is the medium through which learning happens for kids zero to six.

[11:30 a.m.]

MS. ZANN: Thank you. Yes, I'm a little bit concerned because I'm hearing about art teachers being let go right now in some of the schools. I feel that the play base and the arts need to be followed right throughout your learning curve, not just for the very early years but all the way through. As somebody who has been involved very highly, very much in the arts myself, I know it helped me a lot to get through school. (Interruptions) That was just a continuation.

MS. MONTREUIL: A point of clarification. Just to clarify, I believe that the methodology for teaching art has been changed, not cut. I just wanted to make that a point of clarification.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, we'll move on then to Ms. Leblanc.

MS. LEBLANC: A short snapper, which I'm going to read. In the report from the government's most recent round of consultation of child care, child care providers said that based on what they knew of the pre-Primary program to date and the potential decrease of the four-year-old enrolments, 72 per cent of the respondents considered that these factors would contribute to there being major impacts on the child care centres, specifically because of the decreased enrolment of the least expensive age group of children.

My question for the department is, knowing that the fees from the preschool classrooms have been critical to the economic viability of the child care centres and that there is a clear financial impact for user-pay child care programs, as the four-year-olds and five-year-olds exit, what are you doing to combat that?

I know there are certain grants in place and I'm wondering if you feel those grants are enough and, if not, what else is happening to alleviate that stress?

MS. THOMPSON: Yes, absolutely we're aware of that. That's partly why we're starting to retool. Most recently we've had the space conversion grant which was exactly designed to address that to help centres that are losing spaces or anticipate losing spaces, to really focus on sort of the zero to three, that's our goal, to really shore up zero to three. We know that pre-Primary then comes into effect and then to have the wraparound supports, so through space conversion. Those spaces aren't created yet but we know there will be 100 new infant spaces through that program as well as many more toddler spaces. Those are sort of preschool spaces being converted to serve the younger age groups.

Then another effort was to be able to include the four-year-olds in the after-school and before-school programs, so space conversion grant.

The other thing we've done recently and I can't say we know its effectiveness yet, it's new, but it is an infant incentive. We've heard one of the things around infant care is the cost, it's expensive for materials and the ratios are higher, so staffing expenses. We have introduced a supplement there and we will measure that and at the end of this year get a good sense of what operators are telling us. Those are just a few things we're doing to retool and address that integrated system that has been spoken about and we know has that return on investment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Paon.

MS. PAON: I'm really going to make it a short snapper, I promise.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You've got three minutes there.

MS. PAON: That's fine. Earlier this year the federal government committed \$35 million to early childhood development and to Nova Scotia's daycare program and to the spaces. I'd really like to know, outside of an increase in the subsidy eligibility allowance, where are the priority areas going to be that have been identified for the funding moving forward for this year? I'm looking for specifics again.

I know there's a strategic growth plan that's due to be out soon. When can we expect that growth plan to come out?

MS. THOMPSON: The strategic growth, the plan is out, the applications are out, and we're accepting proposals from those 11 counties. We asked for a proposal date of September 1st, so that's strategic growth and that's where we'll be funding spaces in communities that need them most.

The other two parts - so that's around affordability and accessibility where subsidy also sits. The other two parts are inclusion and quality through workforce development. Those are the other two significant kind of categories in our federal agreement.

For inclusion, we're working on a few different things. There's a new grant that has gone out to child care to support inclusion in early childhood programs, and we're also introducing a new model which I won't get into, but it's called a pyramid model for social-emotional inclusion, which is a fairly significant model designed to support ECEs to include children of all diversities and needs.

In terms of workforce quality through workforce, I've mentioned a few, but it's bursaries for training - there's a lot around continuing education, the opportunity for centre administrators to engage in leadership training, some supports through our ECD support sites, which are sites that are designed to offer resources, supports, and professional development to the early childhood education sector.

Those are the key points and I'd be happy to provide additional information at any point in time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The final question is to Mr. Maguire.

MR. MAGUIRE: Thank you all for being here today. I do want to comment on some of the impact that this has on the private sector. The truth is, before the rollout, these programs were already in place and they were started years before we got in here. I use the example of Rockingstone, which had an early childhood learning centre in the community, and it was extremely successful. It has helped a lot of people who normally could not afford to send their children to private daycare and private child care. It has helped them now and allowed their children to have an equal opportunity and equal start in life. I think as government and as politicians, that's the least we can do.

I would like to know if there has been consultation with the schools before the pre-Primary has been placed into these communities, to accommodate for potential impacts to services in those schools.

MS. STONE: As you said, there have been early learning programs in our schools across the province for quite some time - even before the rollout of pre-Primary. For about four years now, we've had eight Early Years Centres functioning with one component of it being an early learning program. The Halifax Regional Centre for Education had early learning opportunity four-year-old programs, and the CSAP school board has been a great leader in our province in terms of providing four-year-old programs.

When the rollout of pre-Primary came, we already had a great history around early learning in our school buildings, and we built on the relationships that we have established with our regional entities going forward. They have been amazing champions for this program. Folks have asked, how did you do it in a compressed period of time? It was no

less from the co-operation and willingness of the people who are working in the Regional Centres for Education, from the now-executive directors right down to the folks who moved furniture for us to get those programs up and running in September. The partnerships and relationships were strong, and it's continuing.

MR. MAGUIRE: And no sleep. (Laughter)

DR. FINDLAY: I just wanted to add a general note about consultation, because we've had a series of consultations in the province. None of them have been as broad-based as they could have been, and so I just want to make this point in case we are thinking about future conversations.

Many of the consultations, for instance, consult with parents who have children in the system. That means the 70 per cent of parents who don't have access to regulated child care are not part of the conversation. Researchers are often not actively involved in the consultations. I just want to encourage a broader conversation and group of voices at the table when we have these conversations. I think part of the difficulties around our transition that we're having with pre-Primary is because some key voices weren't actively engaged from the beginning.

MS. MONTREUIL: We have active surveys, and have had over the last year, out to the communities, including those parents who have been unsuccessful at getting good quality daycare for their children. I think we've done some deliberate actions to increase our reach in response to Dr. Findlay's concern. Certainly, there's always room for improvement.

In terms of our work with the Regional Centres for Education, our schools, and our principals, most people are starting to say, we want these. We want pre-Primary in our school. It's good for our school. It's good for our community. It's good for the older kids, who mentor the younger kids and see leadership. It's good for our kids to see another employment category in action as models and to inform another layer of career options for them. We know that our employers are saying, we want kids who relate better to other people, who have empathy, who have those kinds of social-emotional learning skills.

When pre-Primary enters a school, it helps the pre-Primary kids for sure, but it also helps that school community develop a whole new wave of opportunity for social-emotional learning, leadership, and community that didn't exist before pre-Primary came in. We've been really happy with our principals who are now starting to ask, when are we next? We're working with them closely because we know sometimes they're already a little full in their building. That's not stopping them from stepping up. I'm proud of them for looking at the opportunities for our youngest kids and for the kids who are in our P-6 or P-8 schools.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. That concludes our questions and answers. Thank you, everyone, for being co-operative with the short snappers and the prologues.

There's time for a few closing remarks. I'll turn it over to Dr. Findlay and then to Ms. Montreuil.

DR. FINDLAY: I really don't have anything to say in conclusion other than just to stress again the need for a system, a universal and integrated system that is well planned - a public system.

MS. MONTREUIL: What I'm learning quickly is that in all things Nova Scotia, there's a Nova Scotian way. We're finding our way forward in the Nova Scotian way with our partners and with our stakeholders. When I had the pleasure of speaking with Mrs. McCain and with Craig Alexander, both were kind of cheerleading from the sidelines, saying, great first steps - keep going.

I'm pleased to join this kind of progressive thinking for our early learners. I think we're off to a great start, and we're well prepared to keep going.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Dr. Sawler, you wanted to weigh in with a final comment?

DR. SAWLER: This is the Committee on Economic Development. I'm wondering if everyone has a clear idea of what they mean by economic development. Ultimately, it is about improving the real welfare and the real opportunities that are available to Nova Scotians.

I've met with many government officials over the last decade or so, more in Opposition. They tend to want to talk to you more in Opposition than when they're in government. I'm often asked, if we could make one investment where we would get the greatest return for our investment, what would it be? My answer is to invest in early childhood education.

We've talked about the reasons for that. You're helping people in two ways. Directly, you're improving their access to these services that improve their opportunities for education and providing them with opportunities to enter and participate in the labour force and all the benefits that go with that, and they're tremendous. Indirectly, you have the indirect economic impact of investing directly in those communities with these high multipliers where funds stay in the communities, they circulate around, and you're enhancing the economy in that way. The returns are significant.

I'm happy to see the detail that is going into the programs. That's great. But you need to put in the investment. You need to put money into this.

DR. FINDLAY: One of my friends would not forgive me for not also mentioning - she's says this all the time - that child care creates green jobs, that it's a green job strategy.

[11:45 a.m.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to thank all our guests here today. I think it has been a very helpful and productive discussion as we have very well woven together early childhood education with our economy.

I want to thank both our researchers, Dr. Findlay and Dr. Sawler, for providing that research that has informed public policy. Thank you to the department for giving us insight into the early childhood education program and the rollout of pre-Primary.

I think we as a country, thanks to our researchers who have looked around the world, are moving towards the challenges you laid before us as researchers. With the federal government now doling out more funds for early childhood education and Nova Scotia rolling out pre-Primary, which is a major social program for our province, we are certainly not all the way to where we want to be, but we're making significant progress right now.

I would like to thank you again for your participation here today.

We'll take a five-minute break and then reconvene for a couple of short business items.

[11:46 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:50 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, I'd like to call the meeting back to order. There's really just one item to deal with here and that is a response by Deputy Minister Bernie Miller with respect to a question from our last meeting with respect to cannabis. That response is in your package. I hope you've all had a chance to peek at that but I think it's a fairly straightforward response to a question.

Is the committee in agreement to accept the letter?

The committee has agreed, that's great.

The next meeting will be following summer break, on September 13, 2018. With that I'd like to adjourn the meeting and wish you all a good summer. I know we'll be seeing each other in the busy days ahead, but have a good summer.

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:51 a.m.]