

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuesday, February 26, 2019

COMMITTEE ROOM

**Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Recruiting Childhood Educators in the 21st Century
&
Appointments to Agencies, Boards and Commissions**

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

Brendan Maguire (Chair)
Suzanne Lohnes-Croft (Vice-Chair)
Bill Horne
Hugh MacKay
Rafah DiCostanzo
Alana Paon
Brad Johns
Lenore Zann
Tammy Martin

[Ben Jessome replaced Brendan Maguire]
[Lisa Roberts replaced Tammy Martin]

WITNESSES

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Cathy Montreuil, Deputy Minister
Denise Stone, Acting Executive Director, Early Childhood Development
Suzanne Cirtwill, Manager, Workforce Development

In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2019

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Brendan Maguire

VICE-CHAIR

Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT (Chair): I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Human Resources. My name is Suzanne Lohnes-Croft. I'm the Vice-Chair but will be chairing this meeting in the absence of our Chair. In addition to reviewing the appointments to the ABCs, we will be receiving a presentation from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, regarding recruiting early childhood educators in the 21st century.

A reminder for everyone to turn your phones off or put them on vibrate. In the room next to us is coffee and tea, and washrooms. If there is an emergency, please exit through the Granville exit and meet at the Grand Parade.

I ask that the committee members introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Our clerk is Judy Kavanagh and our Legal Counsel is Mr. Hebb.

We will do committee business first, so I bring your attention to the appointments for agencies, boards and commissions. Mr. MacKay.

HUGH MACKAY: Madam Chair, under the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, for the Advisory Council on Heritage Property, I move that the appointment of Miranda Romkey as a member be approved.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Mr. MacKay.

HUGH MACKAY: Madam Chair, under the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, for the Sherbrooke Restoration Commission, I move that the appointment of Clarence Humber as a member be approved.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The Department of Health and Wellness, Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Madam Chair, for the Nova Scotia College of Dispensing Opticians, I move that the appointments of Marion Landers-Ripley, Graham Sweett, and Anne Wilcox as members be approved.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: The next one is the Nova Scotia College of Respiratory Therapists. We have three names. I move that the appointments of Jasmine Ghosn, Andrew Mott, and Lauren Randall as members be approved.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The Department of Labour and Advanced Education. Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: Madam Chair, under the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, for the Acadia University Board of Governors, I move that the appointments of Robert Ffrench and Bethany Moffatt as members be approved.

THE CHAIR: I don't know if that's a spelling error, so it's Robert F. French? (Interruptions) No. I thought it was to indicate a middle initial. Okay, thank you. Is there any discussion?

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The Department of Lands and Forestry, Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Madam Chair, for the Board of Examiners under the Scalers Act, I move that the appointments of Jody Hamper as a member, sawmill rep, and Greg Watson as a member, small private land tenure, be approved.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

BRAD JOHNS: Wasn't that easy?

THE CHAIR: It was unbelievable. I think it's who is in the Chair. (Laughter)

I'd like to welcome our witnesses today from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. I ask you, starting with Ms. Montreuil, to introduce yourselves and your position.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Our topic today is "Recruiting Early Childhood Educators in the 21st Century." There is no PowerPoint. Ms. Montreuil has some opening statements.

CATHY MONTREUIL: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the recruitment of early childhood educators and Nova Scotia's comprehensive Early Childhood Education programs. Maybe I will forego the introduction. I was going to formally introduce, but the Chair looked after that for us.

Both of my colleagues here are very knowledgeable about the early years in Nova Scotia and our efforts to attract, retain, and recruit early childhood educators for our province. I'm pleased to have them with me this morning.

Quality Early Childhood Education programs directly impact a child's achievement in later life. When children are engaged in quality interactions with highly-trained

professional early childhood educators, they tend to transition more easily into Grade Primary, do better in school, and experience more positive lifelong health and social outcomes.

However, we do recognize that these programs and opportunities can be out of reach for many families across our province because of the cost or limited options to access a program closer to home. That's why government introduced the Nova Scotia pre-Primary program in 2017. The program gives families of four-year-olds across the province the option to enroll their child in a free early learning program the year before they start school.

We want all Nova Scotian children, regardless of where they live, what their background is, or what their family's socioeconomic status is, to have the same head start in life. At its heart, the pre-Primary program is about setting up our children for success. We're doing this, and we continue to do this.

We opened the second phase of pre-Primary locations in September 2018, which means the program is now available to 143 school communities, has supported more than 3,000 four-year-olds, and has created 411 Early Childhood Education jobs across the province to date. We are on schedule to fully implement the program province-wide by September 2020.

While we have an excellent program, early childhood learning does not begin and end in pre-Primary. In fact, Nova Scotia's pre-Primary program is only one of the important programs that support children and families in our province.

We have a strong and trusted regulated child care sector in Nova Scotia that provides care, early learning and development, and support to thousands of children, from infancy up to 12 years of age, and their families, every year.

We recognize that a comprehensive approach to early years means that while we are making changes to improve affordability, quality, and access in child care throughout Nova Scotia, we must balance that by addressing any impacts as they arise.

We have made significant progress in addressing affordability for families. Changes to the Child Care Subsidy Program in 2016 and 2018 mean more families are eligible for the program and will receive more subsidy than before. We are looking at how we can further improve the Child Care Subsidy Program so that more families can benefit.

We have opened, and continue to open, opportunities for growth in the regulated child care sector. In March 2018, we announced \$8.9 million to create more regulated child care spaces, support for a new infant incentive for child care providers to increase infant spaces, and a one-time grant to support the existing centres to convert their space to meet the changing child care needs of their communities.

Since that announcement, we awarded 51 space-conversion grants in April 2018 to convert 570 spaces. Of those converted spaces, 144 are for new infant spaces. Those operators also received the new infant incentive.

Those investments are making a difference. Earlier this month one of the space conversions in infant incentive recipients, the YMCA of Cape Breton, opened their new infant centre. More good news is on the way, next week the minister will award the remaining \$2.42 million of the \$8.9 million investment that we committed in March 2018. In 2018-19, we have invested \$103 million in Nova Scotia's Early Years system. This includes \$24 million to support the pre-Primary program and about \$67 million annually that goes directly to the regulated child care sector to support wages, staffing, grants, the provision of high-quality inclusive programs, and reducing the cost for families.

A strong, qualified and sustainable workforce is essential to providing quality early learning programs across the province for families and children. We know that as pre-Primary expands and we invest in more spaces for the regulated sector, there will be a greater need for early childhood educators within all Early Childhood Education programs. But we also know that the early childhood education sector, from a national perspective, has faced recruitment and retention challenges documented since the 1990s. Provinces and territories are competing for early childhood educators to meet the child care needs of their jurisdictions.

Here at home we've been working with the sector and other partners to increase the number and quality of early childhood educators and to help employers address their labour force challenges.

As our programs, services, and supports for families grow, we are helping private operators to adapt to a new marketplace and giving early childhood educators more options to practise their profession. This is good for early childhood educators who now have access to more job opportunities and it's good for families who benefit from greater access to care.

Late last year we launched a local marketing campaign to attract Nova Scotians with backgrounds in Early Childhood Education who are not currently working in the field. The campaign also promoted the plentiful opportunities in Early Childhood Education in our province. We will continue to make strengthening the Early Childhood Education workforce a priority.

As we raise awareness of job opportunities, we are also supporting current and potential future early childhood educators to access quality training and professional learning to enhance their skills and to access financial support. We have increased our investments in continuing education, and in the coming months we will introduce an efficient and effective process for recognition of prior learning. This will support existing

early childhood educators and individuals interested in entering the field to be eligible for classification based on experience and prior learning.

We have also increased opportunities for Nova Scotians to access Early Childhood Education training programs. Working with our partners at the Department of Labour and Advanced Education and the Nova Scotia Community College, we invested \$1.45 million in July 2018 to add 135 ECE training seats. Other investments in ECE training include an additional \$166,000 to create a temporary tuition support program for Nova Scotians who choose to attend ECE training programs at any one of the three approved private career colleges in the province.

In the Fall of 2018, we allocated almost \$348,000 for a bursary program promoting cultural representation in Early Childhood Education for Nova Scotians from Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, and immigrant communities, and \$172,500 in tuition reductions for students studying in a French-language Early Childhood Education program at Université Sainte-Anne.

Promoting cultural representation in early years educators is important. Our communities and our children want to see themselves reflected and represented in the programs and services they receive.

In November 2018, we announced a new pilot program in partnership with Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey and the Nova Scotia Community College to deliver an Early Childhood Education training program that will incorporate Mi'kmaq language, culture, and perspectives.

Our efforts in collaboration to support, recruit, and retain early childhood educators is far-reaching. We are working with Labour and Advanced Education to broaden outreach within post-secondary training institutions and improve recruitment supports through Nova Scotia Works; with the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration on international recruitment opportunities; with colleges in other provinces to recruit from their Early Childhood Education pool of graduates; with Communities, Culture and Heritage and the Office of Aboriginal Affairs to build partnerships with African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq communities; and with many other groups to support the recruitment of diverse early childhood educators. This is just what we started last year.

[10:15 a.m.]

To ensure that we have a workforce that is sustainable, valued, and qualified to deliver inclusive Early Childhood Education programs, we will continue to address these challenges head-on.

Our focus for 2019 is threefold: we want to modernize training for the future of Early Childhood Education in Nova Scotia by re-engaging with training institutions to build on the work we've started; we want to strengthen the capacity of employers to support

early childhood educators by reviewing and researching wages, working conditions, and funding models; and we want to enhance the profession through lifelong learning opportunities.

These are changes that must be made through research, informed decision making, and with the consultation of the regulated child care sector. We are committed to collaborating with our partners, maximizing opportunities, and strengthening Early Childhood Education programs and services for all children and families. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will now open up for questions, starting with the PC Party. I ask that you wait to be recognized by me so that Hansard has the opportunity to have the microphones on. Ms. Paon.

ALANA PAON: Thank you so much for your presentation. Having been a mother of a child that needed daycare when I was a young mother, I can very much appreciate that a program like this has been put forward. It certainly would have been of benefit to me as an only parent to my son at the time.

With it and its implementation have come some hiccups. Nothing obviously is an easy road when you're trying to roll out such an expansive program. One of the things that I have come to see - and I've received phone calls in my own constituency office - is that pre-Primary is only during school hours, and that students aren't eligible to take the school bus, so that you still have single parents and parents with restrictive hours at work that are unable to send their children to the pre-Primary program, simply because they don't have transport for their child before and after - but specifically after school, because they're still working.

So my question is: With the implementation of pre-Primary - and I know that there are some private facilities that are reporting that they don't have space to accommodate pre-Primary students in or before after-school programs as well - what is the department looking at doing to be able to accommodate that gap in service?

DENISE STONE: With the rollout of the pre-Primary program, as you noted, whenever you're rolling out a new program such as this, there will be hiccups. However, we did know that there were going to be some issues around transportation initially, and that we would have to at some point address before and after school. So we are planning strategically in terms of getting the children into the pre-Primary program over a four-year phase-in process.

Now we're currently looking at a before-and-after program pilot. We're actually a partner with Communities, Culture and Heritage to do that pilot. We started this year in January, and we're looking at eight sites across the province that are piloting that before-and-after program for us that will benefit the pre-Primary program going forward.

Currently we have about 103 children that are registered in that before-and-after program. The majority of families have chosen to access the after-school piece of the day, but it would have been available to them before and after as well.

The partnership with Communities, Culture and Heritage is an interesting one. It's the first time we've partnered with them on such a pilot, and it's helping them roll out their new Let's Get Moving initiative. The benefit of that to the children is to encourage more outdoor play - to take advantage of our natural outdoor play spaces in Nova Scotia, physical activity and physical literacy for the children. Also it will benefit the early childhood educators in terms of their practice, so really focusing on some professional learning with them, along with our colleagues in CCH, to increase their knowledge and physical activity and outdoor play.

We are partnering with some recreation providers, some municipalities, to roll this out, as well as regulated child care, so there's a mix of the eight sites in terms of the pilots. We are really looking forward to learning more about how it's being implemented. Mount Saint Vincent University is doing the evaluation, in partnership with us and CCH. Once we learn more at the end of the school year, we will have more robust information to be able to inform a roll-up at some point for before and after.

ALANA PAON: If I may ask, how were the eight pilot sites chosen and where are the eight sites? We obviously have a lot of children across the province. I live in a rural constituency, so travel is always a huge concern and it's a huge challenge if you are a family of two parents but especially if you have a family of just one. I'm just curious to know how the eight sites were chosen and also, after the pilot study is done - and I'm very glad to hear that Mount Saint Vincent University is involved, they have an excellent program there - I'd like to know, are there timelines to be able to take that data and then roll out a program that will be available to all children, all schools across the province?

DENISE STONE: We chose the eight sites with a variety of concepts in mind. We have some of the sites that were already existing, that were already providing a before-and-after program; for example, Yarmouth Central was doing before-and-after programs since the inception of the Early Years Centre in that school. We chose a variety of sites that were currently doing before-and-after programming for four-year-old children; we chose sites that were doing after-school care that didn't include pre-Primary children and that will now include pre-Primary; and we chose sites that were not providing any type of before-and-after programming for any child on site. It's a bit of a mix so that we can learn from each type of delivery.

Actually, I'll get a list of the sites from Ms. Cirtwill - she has it in her binder - and I'll read them off to you - I don't want to make a mistake - the before-and-after program sites. They are across the province. We tried to make sure there was representation in each of the regional school boards and the CSAP. We were not successful in getting a site up and running for CSAP. We did work quite hard with them and regional programs to do that but that wasn't a possibility. Also the Cape Breton-Victoria school board, we worked at a

couple of different sites, but we weren't able to be successful there. There are lessons to be learned from that, as well, in terms of rolling out the new program.

I would also like to mention, to enable parents to take advantage of the before-and-after, there were changes in our regulation that changed the definition of pre-Primary child to enable them to attend before-and-after programs. Also, there was a change in subsidy where parents who are choosing to use a part-day program, such as the before-and-after program, that they can access subsidy through this pilot, so we've made a couple of regulatory changes to enable that to happen for this pilot.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Cirtwill, do you want to wait until you find that, and we'll come back to you?

SUZANNE CIRTWILL: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: Deputy Minister Montreuil, you mentioned that the rollout of pre-Primary created 411 Early Childhood Education jobs across the province. I'm wondering if you know, if you've tracked, how many of those early childhood educators came from the regulated child care sector?

CATHY MONTREUIL: Thank you for that question. We have done a little bit of tracking on that, and approximately 52 per cent of the pre-Primary ECE candidates came from the regulated sector into ECE, so that would leave both sectors with a mix of people new to the field and experienced people to the field.

LISA ROBERTS: In 2016, the government reported on a review of regulated child care, and one recommendation was that government work with child care organizations to develop collaborative approaches to solving recruitment and retention issues. The report on the government's 2017 consultation on child care needs stated that over half of the respondents from the child care sector anticipated losing staff because of the pre-Primary program. Then in January of this year, the Nova Scotia office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report, called Unappreciated and Underpaid, found that in Nova Scotia, 82 per cent of the employers who answered the survey indicated that they had trouble recruiting and retaining qualified ECE staff in the past year.

I guess my question is: How have child care organizations and representatives from the sector been engaged in the government's work to address these long-standing and now worsening recruitment and retention issues?

CATHY MONTREUIL: The Atkinson report has certainly been helpful in shaping some of our thinking. Some of the facts and figures in that report predate our

implementation, our setting of a new child care floor and ceiling and those kinds of things, which are helpful to the ECE sector in terms of recruitment and development.

The work that we've been doing with our ECE partners, the work we've opened up in terms of prior learning, acknowledgement, and opportunities, the partnerships, the additional seats have all been done in ongoing collaboration and consultation with the sector in terms of ways that we can get collaborative opportunities to build on the workforce, timelines for those, and some of the methodologies that will address some of the barriers that our sector partners are indicating in terms of people who may be working in the sector and want to avail themselves of higher credentials and how they can access those and what kinds of financial supports. That's my start and I'm sure Ms. Stone has more.

DENISE STONE: We are continually consulting, not only formally through our 2016-17 consultation, but we are regularly in conversation with our partners in the community. We have representative groups, for example: the Association of Early Childhood Educators, newly named; the Private Licensed Administrators Association; and the Non Profit Directors Association. We are continually looping back to them to have conversations about the impacts on the rollout of pre-Primary and the staffing challenges that they're indicating.

We have put out to all of the sector the opportunity for them if they are experiencing some challenges with recruitment. We have quite a few supports that we have in place, which I know Ms. Cirtwill will explain to you in just a moment. We also have been working with centres to create staffing plans if they're feeling stressed with not being able to find staff to meet ratio.

Right now, we have three Early Childhood Education programs that are on a staffing plan, and we only have one program in the province that has had a violation for staffing challenges, so that's not indicating to us at this time that there is a staffing challenge. We know that the rollout of pre-Primary is creating more opportunities for early childhood educators, but we are working with the sector hand-in-hand to work with them on an individual basis and also to address sector issues as a whole.

SUZANNE CIRTWILL: Just further to that, I have been working on some of the recruitment and workforce development initiatives. They all fed from the consultation from those that began in 2015, and 7,000 people had participated in that. They had more than 23 communities. There were focus groups where 400 people participated in that. From that, they built the action plan: Affordable, Quality Child Care. That action plan had 10 different action items around workforce development. From that we've built activities that focus on modernizing training, building and strengthening our employers, and building a professional sector, as well as a culture of lifelong learning. From that we've created activities that focus on changing regulations and improving our training standards.

[10:30 a.m.]

We've been increasing access to training through more training seats. We've been creating more tuition support. We've created the Tuition Support Program so that more people could access training at our private career colleges. We've developed alternative training pathways, such as the recognition of prior learning, the workplace learning model. We're working with our colleagues at African Nova Scotian Affairs, Office of Aboriginal Affairs, and the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration to engage under-represented populations so that we can find more ways to engage them in learning.

We've been engaging with employers to help them with their HR capacity. We're working with Nova Scotia Works, with Labour and Advanced Education, so that their employer engagement specialists can provide that one-on-one support to the employers with their HR recruitment.

We have training that's available to our leaders and our board members that support the centres. There's leadership course work and there's a post-diploma program that's offered at Mount Saint Vincent University that has been recently expanded to the Nova Scotia Community College and is going to be delivered by Université Sainte-Anne in French.

In addition to that we have a number of professional development opportunities that are available to employers or operators and early childhood educators. All of these things we do in consultation with the sector. We contact them on a regular basis. We're working one on one with them. We engage them in different decisions that we're making. For instance, our marketing campaign, when we created these documents, we contacted them, and we talked to them about the language and the pictures and the content. We have a very collaborative relationship with them so that we're working to address their needs as we become aware of them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We'll move to the Liberal caucus - Mr. MacKay.

HUGH MACKAY: Deputy, in your remarks you mentioned, I think, that this is a national challenge and we're competing with provincial and territorial jurisdictions across the country for early childhood educators. I was just listening to the workforce development plans and actions that are being undertaken, which all sound very good.

This sounds very reminiscent, of course, with the recruitment efforts and challenges that we have in the health care sector where we are facing challenges right across the country and internationally for physicians and other health care providers.

We're seeing the success of Nova Scotia's efforts working with our Office of Immigration in recruiting health care specialists to come to Nova Scotia and it's making

an impact already and will make an even greater impact in 2019. I believe there were some remarks towards working with the Office of Immigration for recruitment. I'm wondering what your plans are, where you may be targeting, and where this might help us.

SUZANNE CIRTWILL: You specifically asked about immigration. The federal agreement that was signed provided funding to the province to support four different population groups. We have our Aboriginal community, our African Nova Scotian community, our francophone and Acadian community, as well as the immigrant and newcomer population.

Specific with immigration, we decided to consult with Communities, Culture and Heritage, so we engaged our Nova Scotia Office of Immigration. Rather than just one activity, we decided that this was going to be a multi-pronged approach. We first started out specifically by reaching out to ISANS and the Y, information sessions, just to bring information to immigrants, as well as the people who provide advice and support to immigrants around career choices, so that they understood this profession and we could actually learn about the barriers that they're facing.

From that, we developed the provincial bursary program that we have. The provincial bursary program, up to \$5,500 is available per year for individuals from those four different populations to access funding for tuition fees and books to go to one of our diploma granting institutions - the Nova Scotia Community College and the three private career colleges. We have a number of students that are taking advantage of that program. So that was the bursary program.

To support the employers - because we all know that the immigration process can be overwhelming and it's very complex, we created sort of a short backgrounder on immigration. It talked about the streams that we have available as well as a little bit of a process. More importantly, what was in that backgrounder was contact information for the agencies across the province. Basically what we've been telling people is, don't try to do this on your own; pick up the phone and call one of those agencies and they will walk you through the process.

Speaking to the one-on-one support - we have employers that call us or send us an email and they say, I want to try to hire this person and I don't know what to do - we connect them with Nova Scotia Office of Immigration and they are amazing. They pick up the phone and call our employers directly. So we provide that one-on-one support to help them through that immigration process.

In addition to that, this past summer, the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration launched the labour market priority stream. It's a new stream. Their first letter of invitation was around the National Occupation Classification (NOC) for early childhood educators. We were able to invite 172 individuals - they received a letter of invitation - that had experience in Early Childhood Education, so they were able to come to Nova Scotia.

Where they're working or if they're still here, we don't know that, but at a minimum we know we were able to invite people to come to Nova Scotia. So that was another initiative that happened this past summer.

In the Fall, we had an opportunity to join the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration on their mission to the U.K., which was the first time we've ever done that. They regularly go to different countries and they successfully recruit people to different professions, and we have one of our francophone partners, Le Petit Voilier - they regularly accompany the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration on these missions to recruit francophone ECEs.

So we decided to support our employers by sending somebody to join this mission to represent our employers across the province. We gathered up the job postings and went over, and attended one session in London. Those were structured interviews where we had 27 different pre-screening interviews. We do know that there have been a couple of interviews since then and a couple of people have received job offers. It sounds small, but I think that is actually considered quite a success.

Then they moved on to Dublin where they were able to talk to a number of people in a trade show-like environment to share again information about the opportunities that are in Nova Scotia.

On top of that, we just recently started - one of the things we do know is that this is a regulated profession and with pre-Primary it's not regulated, but there are standards, and certainly we have the licensure to practice. Again, that credential piece and getting that certification can be difficult, so we have reached out to the Department of Labour and Advanced Education and ISANS, and we are embarking on a multi-stakeholder working group. So we are bringing employers and our post-secondary education representatives together, along with our department staff and other experts to clarify that credential pathway for people with international credentials.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Montreuil, you had something to add?

CATHY MONTREUIL: One of the pieces that is starting to take hold as we engage in that kind of work is the recognition that there are now pathways in Early Childhood Education that there haven't been before, and as we build a more coherent, systematic and accessible system, that there are new pathways.

In addition to those targeted markets, we also last year engaged in a "come home to Nova Scotia" - there are pathways in Early Childhood Education waiting for you. Last year I think I appeared before this committee and we read a communication from a mom from Australia who was glad to come home with her family and take up Early Childhood Education as her preferred profession and able to practise it here.

I think it's going to continue to be multi-pronged. It's going to be around the globe and it's going to be helping people come in to an emerging career path that has rigour to it and is really important in terms of changing the trajectory of our kids as they grow up. We know that every dollar we put in Early Childhood Education, depending on the study, has a \$2 to \$7 return, in terms of ongoing social systems and economic benefits.

We know this is important work and we need highly skilled people and that we are engaging across Canada with every other province that is also out looking for this, so we're starting to see the ability for people to start to see Nova Scotia as one of their preferred stopping spots in this career path.

HUGH MACKAY: If there's one thing I appreciate as much as come-from-aways, it's come-back-from-aways, so I'm glad that you are looking at that pathway.

There was a mention of the \$5,500 a year scholarship program for some of the identified populations that were mentioned there. I'm thinking of the seats that have been created, the additional seats that have been created for Early Childhood Education at the Nova Scotia Community College. I'm wondering, are these bursaries going to be applicable for students enrolled in private sector partnerships as well? I believe you mentioned there are some private sector companies or educational firms that are now involved in the program and I'm wondering if you could expand on that.

SUZANNE CIRTWILL: The seats that were expanded, 135 seats were expanded through the Nova Scotia Community College. That was this past summer. The cultural bursary is up to \$5,500 and that is available to students from those four populations that I mentioned, to attend either the Community College or any of our three private career colleges. There are three private career colleges that deliver the diploma program: Jane Norman College in Truro, the Island Career Academy in Cape Breton, and the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education in Halifax. That bursary is available to students if they wish to take that program.

In addition, the other financial supports are available for students to attend the private career college, so it's sort of a counteract to the 135 seats because we expanded, we work with the Community College there.

We also instituted sort of a temporary Tuition Support Program, or students who wanted to choose one of the three private career colleges, we have made available up to \$2,000 to reduce the tuition for them to attend those schools.

One of the things - and we do this with our programs - is put the child at the centre but it's also with workforce, putting the learner at the centre. We recognize that some of our learners may have access to other funding, so we have been working behind the scenes to make sure that if a student is already receiving skill development funding through Labour and Advanced Education, we're working with them to say okay, they're getting this, we don't want them to lose that, so we're going to stack our funding.

We've been able to break down the silos that we often hear exist in government and we're working together so we find that okay, the student's getting this, we're going to stack our money on top of it and we'll stack the cultural bursary on top of that, and if they're getting funding from somewhere else, we'll stack the money on top of that. We're able to kind of work our way behind the scenes so that the student can get the maximum amount of funding to go to school.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: I'm curious, one criticism I've been hearing is around inclusion in children with diverse needs. It's my understanding there have actually been some cases where children with unique needs have had to be excluded from the program. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that.

I'm curious to know, is there anything currently being done that ensures that all ECEs are properly trained in behaviour management so students with diverse needs are as well in pre-Primary as all the other children?

[10:45 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Ms. Stone.

DENISE STONE: Inclusion is obviously an important part of any Early Childhood Education program. We are supporting ECEs to respond to children from a diversity lens.

One of the things we've implemented that we are very proud of is our new early learning curriculum framework. In that framework it talks about putting the child at the centre, ensuring that our image of the child is one that is representative, that is respectful of the child's culture and community from which they come, their varying abilities and their holistic development.

We're providing professional learning opportunities for our early childhood educators, post-diploma or post-degree, to ensure they are able to continue their practice and learning more about diversity and inclusion in our province. We've created communities of practice as we've rolled out the curriculum framework where educators can come together and talk about the good parts about being an early childhood educator but also the struggles and the challenges they may have dealing with complex cases, complex issues as we all know that families come with today.

We have offered the opportunity for our early childhood educators not only in pre-Primary but in the regulated sector, to take advantage of having Dr. Sharroky Hollie come to the province and speak to cultural responsive practice. It's a beginning to that particular dialogue.

We create resource and we will be continuing to create resource materials that enable early childhood educators to support children from diverse backgrounds and differing abilities. We've also provided additional grants to regulated child care programs so they can indeed continue to do the work of including children with special needs in their programs.

Earlier, I referenced the fact that we do work quite closely with programs in centres when they are struggling or experiencing an issue. Certainly when we get a call from a sector representative saying that they're struggling, we have our own department staff - our consultants, who are very knowledgeable in inclusion and diversity - who will go out and do a program consultation with them to help them develop a plan to ensure that they are able to include all children in their program.

Another initiative that we've just got under way in the province is called the Pyramid Model. The Pyramid Model is an evidence-based, positive behavioural intervention and support framework for early childhood educators. It is to promote social and emotional development, and also behavioural support.

We know that children come to our programs with lots of different experiences. Quite often when you think about some of these little people, they come with a world of experience in a very short period of time. So you want to ensure that the universal practice that early childhood educators promote is for all children and that is the basis of the Pyramid Model - to have that strong, healthy workforce that is able to provide social, emotional, and behavioural support for all children.

Then as you kind of move up that pyramid, there are some children who might need a little bit more targeted support, so at the top of that pyramid is the number of children who really need intensive support. That's what the Pyramid Model is looking at.

We're doing a pilot project with the Pyramid Model across the Province of Nova Scotia. We've hired navigators for that pilot project. There are about 20 to 50 centres, I think - I'll check the number - that are involved in the pilot that is just getting started. They will have intense, onsite modelling and mentoring in the Pyramid Model and how to problem solve through some of the issues that we're seeing children come with, the complex issues that children are coming with.

I'll just give you a really quick example of how it might work. In the bottom of the Pyramid Model those kind of universal practices would be looking at your daily routine in the early childhood setting and making sure there are not too many transitions in the day. Young children are often challenged with transitions and that's not just children with differing abilities, it's for all children. That would be just looking at your common universal practice.

The next step may be there may be some children who actually do have more significant social, emotional challenges when it comes to transitioning through the day.

The educators would then look at how can we mitigate those challenges for those particular children. Then at the top of that pyramid you may have children who are, because of their circumstance, because of the early experiences they've had in their home life and in community, may need some more intensive structure to that transition. That's when you would call in your additional community supports, for example, developmental intervention, you may be working with Nova Scotia Hearing & Speech.

Of course, we do have a high number of children who are on the autism spectrum disorder who would perhaps come with a team of folks that they would work with to develop a specific personal model to ensure that that child is able to cope with the transitions - so going from a universal practice right up to the top of the pyramid, which would be those few children who need intense behavioural and social and emotional support.

That pilot project is evidence based, as I said. It will be evaluated again by Mount Saint Vincent University over the coming years. We are hoping that once the pilot is completed and the evaluation is done, it will be a model that we'll be able to share across all of our programs and services in Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to Ms. Zann for the NDP.

LENORE ZANN: Thank you very much. I just wanted to say thank you very much for the work that you're doing. I think it is really important work, working with the early childhood education and development. As we've heard many times now lately the zero to four years are so important in the future of children and what happens to them.

I have to say my father worked with Jane Norman in Truro at the Teachers College when it was a teachers' college and they started that early childhood development program 40-some years ago, back when people just looked at early childhood educators as basically glorified babysitters. They said then how important this work was and how the early educators need to be respected and paid properly.

On that note, in January 2019, the CCPA report found that early childhood educators are still considerably discontented about their wages and their benefits in the workforce. Despite the implementation of wage benchmarks and the funding commitments by the government to improve wages, only a small percentage, about 22 per cent, of early childhood educators thought that their pay was fair, considering their background and skills. A significant portion, about 67 per cent, felt their salary does not adequately reflect the work they do.

I was quite shocked actually in 2017 when the government announced they were going to be raising salaries, but they used the outdated 2012 wage benchmark, which was

only \$16.55, which was entirely inadequate, as far as I'm concerned. Does the department intend to update the wage benchmark?

CATHY MONTREUIL: The report that you're referring to also suggested that we should be setting our floor at \$18.10 as our benchmark. Our floor is \$18.73, so we've exceeded the recommendation from that Unappreciated and Underpaid early childhood educator report and certainly continue to work with the sector on the pay thresholds and the levels of qualification for early childhood educators, so it's an ongoing conversation.

Every year or so the Atkinson Foundation, in partnership with McCain and others, issue a Canada-wide report. In that report, since our implementation of pre-Primary and our early childhood educator planning, we've moved from the lowest paid in Atlantic Canada to just second. So we are making progress, and continue to make progress.

I can hand it over for more specifics to my colleagues for sure.

DENISE STONE: With regard to the implementation of the wage floor, the funding that's being provided is asking, or actually to the terms of agreement, it's asking employers if they had been paying minimum wage, to at least bring their wage floor to \$15 for untrained; \$17 for a level 2, which would be mostly a diploma; and then \$19 for a degreed early childhood educator.

The funding that's provided can also be used after that wage floor is met. The operator does have the opportunity to provide additional monies to their staff, if indeed it's part of their wage structure. If they have a salary scale, we would encourage them to work to that scale.

We have set the floor for employers, we've set the conditions for success for employers to be able to provide additional wages for their staff as they go forward. I understand from my colleagues who manage these particular grants that this was just the beginning, that they knew they needed to raise the floor. It certainly was raised but it wasn't intended to be the end of that work.

LENORE ZANN: Thank you very much. I know that at the time, and since then, too, a lot of the people who are running the early childhood daycares are saying that although the money was raised that they had to pay more money to their staff, they didn't have the money and that they needed more money from government in order to not go out of business. That was a major concern.

Along that line there was also a review in 2016 of the regulated child care that concluded that the current model of funding for child care was not effective or sustainable and that the current model is not effective in ensuring fair wages and benefits for educators. It also does not respond to the accessibility and affordability needs of families, children, and communities.

Now although we've seen increased investment through the federal money that has recently been announced, we've not really seen any real change in the funding model for child care. Given that the model itself hasn't changed and you're saying that now we're second in the Atlantic Provinces, I'd like to know what we are in the whole of Canada. Given that the model itself hasn't changed, do you think that the investments that are being made will actually address the concerns about the effectiveness and sustainability of the model?

CATHY MONTREUIL: I just want to correct something I said the last time where I talked about a floor and I should have talked about an average rate wage, I just want to be technically correct. In terms of the breakdown for investments, I spoke earlier to a \$103 million investment and the breakout in terms of a \$67 million investment in regulated child care. That breaks out to \$55 million for provincial funding and \$11.7 for federal, in terms of local investments.

The investment in pre-Primary is the \$24 million at the provincial level and the developmental services is a \$7.9 million investment broken down to \$9 million provincial and \$3 million federal. Finally, the investment in early childhood development and intervention services is \$5.2 million and that breaks out as \$5 million provincial and \$200,000 at federal. I can certainly ask Ms. Stone to follow up if there are follow-ups to that.

DENISE STONE: Ms. Zann, I believe you spoke to concerns for the continuing of accessibility?

LENORE ZANN: The funding model.

DENISE STONE: As you know, we've been working diligently for many years as we came into the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in 2013 and even before that, when we were situated in the Department of Community Services, we are constantly looking at the model of funding. We are looking at what and how we can be flexible in terms of supporting the regulated child care sector as we roll out pre-Primary. The model as it exists today is what we've landed on and we will continue to work with our sector partners to hear their concerns, to revisit the model as we have in the past and to make those adjustments going forward, to make sure we are providing the best structure in terms of our grants and funding as we move forward.

[11:00 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Ms. DiCostanzo for the Liberal caucus.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I have probably a little unusual question in regard to attracting men into Early Childhood Education - what are the percentages that we're

seeing? I know that 20 years ago when my children were at daycare, I rarely saw any because the wages were so low at the time and it was something - it's a motherly thing to do, the child care, but we need to change that, just as we did in education and in nursing and any other, to give a model to the children that this is a man's world as well in taking care and giving early childhood education. If you can just give me an idea of where we are right now and how we attract men into this field as well, that would be really interesting. Thank you.

DENISE STONE: Well that was an interesting question. I have been an early childhood educator for 35 years and I think on reflection of that question, I believe that probably in the 35 years when I was working directly with children in regulated child care I probably only worked with two males, which is unfortunate, because certainly the play dynamic of the classroom when there are male early childhood educators working with you, makes for a more holistic and rich conversation. They bring a very different perspective to the work.

Census Canada looks at about 4 per cent of males working in the Early Childhood Education field. That is certainly low, and we would like to see that higher. As we're rolling out the various strategies for a workforce development, not only are we looking for groups that are under-represented with regard to African Nova Scotians, Acadian, francophone, and Mi'kmaq, we would also be putting that same lens on recruiting male early childhood educators.

Currently right now, I know specifically in our early childhood pre-Primary program, there are quite a few males actually. There's four I am aware of that are working with the pre-Primary program, and I'm sure there are several across the province that are working in regulated child care as well. We would welcome the addition of more males to the field.

CATHY MONTREUIL: In our package are promotional materials and one of them is clearly targeting males to the sector, for sure. Having a diverse and representative workforce continues to be a goal for us and one we work at, no matter what lens of diversity you'd like to put on it.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I was thinking more as well of reaching them in high school because that's when the kids are making decisions and talking to the counsellors in the high schools, that this is a viable field for them, and their salaries are increasing and probably by the time they get into this field it will be very viable work for them. Are we going into the high schools and talking to counsellors about this?

SUZANNE CIRTWILL: Actually, I'm glad you asked that. One of the things we do know is we have to help students early on to make those career decisions. Students tend to make those career decisions based on information they get from their parents, as well as from their guidance counsellors. We are fortunate that because we are in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, we have our guidance counsellor or

consultant, she works a couple of doors down from me. I'm working with her to create materials to reach into the schools - so making sure that the guidance counsellors have the information they need to talk about this profession.

One of the things we did with our cards, we turned this into a poster that is a pdf kind of electronic version that we're going to make sure that every guidance counsellor has and that they can put on their Moodle sites - that's what they use in the school system to reach out to the students so they can begin to have those conversations about career choices. In addition to that, we'll be making ourselves available to go in to have conversations with them and set up our booths, whatever we can do to encourage - because you're right, it is about reaching every student, including men, and trying to get more men into the field as well.

THE CHAIR: We'll move over the PC caucus. Ms. Paon.

ALANA PAON: I would like to go back to the list, and if I could make this not one of my questions, would you happen to have the list available of those eight pilots?

CATHY MONTREUIL: We're just working on getting that eight. If we don't have it by the end of this session, then we'll provide it to the clerk.

ALANA PAON: With the new pre-Primary program described as a universal program, I noted that when we were talking about the rollout of the eight pilots, and I'll be looking forward to seeing where in the province those will be rolling out, it's of grave concern to me when I hear that because of the importance - it's wonderful to hear that there's a recruitment effort specifically for African Nova Scotian, Acadian, and First Nation backgrounds. It's very concerning to me, having a First Nations community as well as my constituency being predominantly Acadian in Cape Breton-Richmond, that there are no schools included in that pilot program to make certain that we're looking at what gaps in service are currently causing us some concern with before-and-after care for students who don't have access or whose parents don't have access to have these children on school buses, and therefore they're being left out.

Specifically, if there's no pilot program that's going on within the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, to me, there's a gap. We're trying to recruit people from an Acadian background to make certain that there's no gap in that cultural component of what we're trying to achieve with the pre-Primary program. I would like to know why they were left out of the pilot program that's rolling out across the province.

DENISE STONE: The CSAP programs were not excluded from the pilot. We did work with them to explore options. We wanted to include them, however, we just weren't able to. They weren't able to secure the right conditions to roll out the pilot. We did work diligently with them to do that. Although the CSAP itself has been providing four-year-old

programs historically, and certainly we have learned a lot from those four-year-old programs that informed our pre-Primary rollout. It wasn't a matter of excluding. We worked diligently with them to include them in the pilot.

I do have the list. I would be happy to read the list for you of the sites. From Chignecto-Central Regional Centre for Education, Oxford Regional Education Centre; in HRCE, Brookhouse Elementary; Annapolis Valley RCE, Clark Rutherford Memorial; in South Shore RCE, West Northfield Elementary; in the Strait, Chedabucto Education Centre/Guysborough Academy; also in the Strait, East Antigonish Education Centre; in Tri-County, Yarmouth Central; and also in Tri-County, Weymouth Consolidated.

CATHY MONTREUIL: I think it's also worth noting that this is a very recent pilot and that some of our invitations were received with: not yet, no. Some of our conversations in the areas where we weren't able to enact the pilot right now were: could we be considered in the next round? That's something that we were welcoming and will be circling back to with those providers. They just didn't feel that, at this time, they wanted to take it on and that they would like to be considered again, and they absolutely shall be.

ALANA PAON: Within that list of eight that I heard, we don't have anybody from Conseil scolaire acadien and I'm not certain what the correct conditions that you mentioned that either the Conseil wasn't able to secure that - the program wasn't able to secure on their behalf to roll out the pilot. I'm not sure what those conditions would have been. Perhaps you can comment on that, but also on that list of eight - unless I didn't hear something correctly - I didn't hear any schools that are on Cape Breton Island so we will not have any data, basically, that is coming from Cape Breton Island. That's a huge gap, from my perspective.

DENISE STONE: We worked with three different potential pilot sites in Cape Breton-Victoria and worked quite diligently to have a pilot roll out in those communities. However, they just felt at the time that they weren't able to commit completely to the pilot. Again, we did ask them though if they would still be interested in being involved in the evaluation so that they could provide to us why they weren't able to be part of the pilot at the time. They all agreed to be part of the evaluation so that they can inform us as to why at that time it was stressful for them to be part of the pilot, so we will gather information from those potential partners that will hopefully be partners in the future.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to Ms. Roberts for the NDP.

LISA ROBERTS: In December 2016, Auditor General Michael Pickup released a report on his office's audit of licensed child care. At the time, the Auditor General found that the department was not managing grant and subsidy programs to make sure that they achieve what they were intended to. I would like to take this opportunity to ask for an update on how the department is monitoring and reporting to make sure grant and subsidy programs have the intended results.

THE CHAIR: Can you clarify what report it was?

LISA ROBERTS: December 2016, the Auditor General's Report.

DENISE STONE: The grant and subsidy programs - we actually have a financial coordinator who is managing the grant and subsidy programs, the oversight of those, to ensure that they are being utilized and accessed appropriately. Each year, and on a regular basis, the persons who are receiving grants from the regulated child care sector complete annual report forms that they submit to the department. Those are reviewed by not only our consultation staff, but also by our financial coordinator who will go through and make sure that the grants are being used adequately.

They are also doing random audits of various programs, and so I believe that there are a number of - they committed to 20 a year. I believe that there have been 12 completed to date, and six or seven are in process now to random selection to make sure that the financial information we're receiving from centres with regard to the grants is being accessed and used appropriately.

LISA ROBERTS: Did you want to add something?

DENISE STONE: I'll just clarify, the goal was 20 - nine have been completed and six are in process, and all have been deemed satisfactory to date.

LISA ROBERTS: Thank you. I am the Immigration spokesperson for our caucus and it's really interesting and positive to hear some of the work that has been happening with the Office of Immigration around some targeted programs that make immigrating more possible for ECEs. At the same time, I'm very mindful of, I think, a very difficult situation for a number of ECEs who completed training in Nova Scotia and then discovered in November or earlier in the Fall of 2017 that, in fact, they had studied for a number of years, invested time and money and dreams into a future in that career in Nova Scotia, only to find out that they were deemed ineligible to stay here. I'm wondering if, given some of what we heard this morning in the opening remarks, do those individuals who really kind of had an incredibly rough go, do any of those programs enable them to actually come and invest in their careers in Nova Scotia that they had hoped to start, based on their training here?

[11:15 a.m.]

SUZANNE CIRTWILL: The students who come in, international students who decide to study in Nova Scotia, if they are studying at an institution that is a government-funded institution, they can receive a post-graduate work visa so they can remain in the province. The students you are referring to unfortunately were studying at a private college

and federal Immigration doesn't allow them to remain in the province for that, so unfortunately those students were kind of caught, as you said, in a situation.

The Nova Scotia Office of Immigration worked with the college and they did make some arrangements to support some of those students, to my understanding. What we've been doing since then is ensuring that the private colleges understand the rules around the post-graduate visa so they can be informing their students who might want to graduate there. Those students who come into the province would be informed of their options going forward.

I do know that some students continue to come in and choose the private career college, they are wanting to return to their homes because they have access to training here and then return home to deliver the programs in their home countries. But those who want to stay know the options they have so they can stay in the province following their studies.

If they are students that come here and plan to stay, they wouldn't be - the international students wouldn't be qualifying for the bursary. The bursary is designed for people who have immigrated here and who have chosen to be living and working in Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We'll move on to the Liberal caucus with Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: Thank you. I'm sitting here listening to all the things you've gone through in the last couple of years to get this program off the ground and obviously you're being very successful with it. I'm very pleased to hear that.

What I'd like to do is just change a little bit and talk a little bit more on the status of the program for the next two years on one of the areas that hasn't received any pre-Primary programs. I'm a little concerned that we might get left out if things go bad or sour, but I know it has not, by what you have been talking about today.

I would like you to maybe talk about that a little bit and then maybe what students, teachers, the schools, and the community are talking about this program as it stands.

CATHY MONTREUIL: I can start. Thank you for the question. Certainly I know there is a year three announcement coming shortly and we are on track for full implementation over the four years, as we've undertaken. We've kept our eye on a number of things - quality, affordability, accessibility, partnerships with the sector, working with the sector as pre-Primary, as part of the Early Years, zero to four, and making sure that those pieces get developed with attention together.

We have a quality ECE curriculum framework for addressing the kinds of things that researchers, like Fraser Mustard and the people who developed the early childhood assessment, the EDI, out of McMaster - that's the name I was looking for - have looked at ensuring that we strengthen in terms of our kids.

This year, for the first time, we are able to ask our Primary teachers if they notice a difference between the readiness and some of the socio-emotional learning of the kids who have gone through pre-Primary compared to the kids who haven't. That will be supported with data over time, but the first qualitative feedback from our Primary teachers is it's making a difference. They're seeing a different set of skills and readiness of kids that are entering our Primary programs.

I think that as we consider things like diversity - and diversity and setting the table for a diverse community starts with our pre-Primary kids and starts with the staff in those centres and the curriculum in those centres and being able to help kids understand and value the diversity that they'll see in their programs from the time they're babies and right through school.

I think that there are many things that we have paid attention to where the research around early years has pointed to. We're starting to see those early dividends. I can't tell you that I've got a year three implementation in my head so I can't speak to you about where those sites are, although I do know that's going to come shortly.

I will pass it over to my staff, but I think that we're in good stead. We have a strong base, and we're investing in our youngest learners in our system and we know that will pay off dividends for years to come.

DENISE STONE: With regard to parents, we have heard from parents both anecdotally and in forming our evaluation, which is being conducted over five years in partnership with the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation. We've heard from parents that they are noticing a difference in their children in terms of their socio-emotional development. They're recognizing that they are able to talk more about child development now that they're having relationships and building relationships with early childhood educators.

They're feeling welcome in the school community. The school is a place that has always been a hub of communities in most places and certainly in Nova Scotia, so they're feeling welcome in the school community. They feel comfortable when their children are transitioning into the P-12 system. They know the school. They know where things are situated in the environment, so that stress that parents often feel when they are transitioning their child into the P-12 system seems to have diminished.

We do know that parents who are engaged in the school community and start being comfortable in the school community earlier on will contribute to their child's success later in their education career. They'll be more invested in the education conversations with their child. They'll encourage them to attend school more. Those educational outcomes will be increased as we engage with families coming into schools earlier on, so parents are finding it a very positive experience.

I had the opportunity last June to travel from one end of the province to the other visiting a variety of pre-Primary sites, which was indeed a privilege to do. Of course, to be with the children was the best part, but I also had an opportunity to speak one on one with the early childhood educators and with the parents who were bringing their children in, dropping them off or picking them up at the end of the day.

Just anecdotally, the positive stories that I heard was certainly, as you mentioned, it has been a lot of work that has happened over the last couple of years. Often, we don't get to enjoy those positive stories, but I did have the opportunity to speak to families and to educators and the difference it has made in their lives. It was significant to me. I felt that the work we're doing was certainly making an impact.

One early childhood educator - it's a story that I think will resonate with me for quite some time - actually left the field of Early Childhood Education for some time and was raising her own children, and when the opportunity came - this was a very rural school - for the pre-Primary program, she hesitated a bit. She thought, am I ready to go back to this work? Things have likely changed - and they have indeed, in terms of practice over the years. But she came back into the field, a little nervous and tentative, but was experiencing a rejuvenation in her practice, in the experiences that she was having, reconnecting with families and children. She said to me, it was the first time in my career that I actually said to my spouse, I'm going to take you out for dinner, so she was feeling very much rejuvenated by her practice.

Also, meeting other educators on the other end of our province in Cape Breton, two sisters in particular who had worked and travelled in the north of Canada and had come home to Cape Breton together. They travelled back together and were actually working in the same pre-Primary program in the school in Port Hood. For them to be able to come home, work, and again, expand and experience their practice in a different way was very positive.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Horne, do you have a follow-up? No.

Okay, we'll move on to the PC caucus, Ms. Paon.

ALANA PAON: I'm going to go back to my questions with regard to the pilot program, the rollout of that pilot. I apologize, but I just want to make sure that I'm clear with regard to - it's not sitting well with me that there are no schools that are going to be represented in this pilot program from Cape Breton Island and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial. You had mentioned specifically that you weren't able to secure the right conditions, or the schools were not able to secure the right conditions in Cape Breton-Victoria as well as any school, it seems, within the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial.

I know full well, because I have visited on numerous occasions, I know many people who work there. École Beauport in my constituency, sur l'Isle Madame, is an extraordinary and important hub for early childhood learning within our community. It is

extremely well-respected. People who work there are loving and kind. The children are in very good hands. I can't fathom why a school like that, which is so well-managed and has such great staff and a wonderful facility - why whatever those right conditions are couldn't have been found, and that's just one of many, obviously, that would exist within the CSAP across the province. What would have been the right conditions that could not be found within Cape Breton-Victoria but as well within any school it seems throughout the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial?

DENISE STONE: One of the challenges was that we had to secure a community partner to provide the program in the schools. That was one condition. We also had to ensure, when we did or if we did secure a community partner to conduct a before-and-after program, that they were able to adopt the shared standards that were developed between our department and CCH. Also, with the development of those shared standards and the implementation of those shared standards, there was pretty rigorous professional development, professional learning, that was offered in the month of December, so they would have had to have had the time to be able to attend that professional learning, which was quite rigorous. There was also the condition of having to communicate out to families with regard to the pilot. The pilot was just running from January to June, so it is a fairly condensed period of time.

To the deputy's point earlier, when we approached programs to potentially be partners, those were some of the challenges that they had. They said it was a quick turn-around time and that if it was indeed longer, they would have been interested in participating.

Again, it wasn't that they were excluded. We did have conversations with several schools and communities, but given the timing, we just weren't able at this time to include them in the pilot. As I said, we did ask if they would be interested to inform the evaluation, and they indeed will be part of the evaluation process.

[11:30 a.m.]

ALANA PAON: I just want to understand timelines. The evaluation process and the pilot project will be between January and June of this year. Training was in December. When was this pilot program first announced and these schools approached? Basically, I'm asking how much headway were the schools and - I was going to say school boards, but they don't exist any longer. They do obviously within the Acadian system. How much leeway was given? Was it a couple of weeks? Was it six months that they knew that this was rolling down the pipe so that they could prepare and make some good choices, have discussions within the schools, and make some good decisions as far as being able to meet all the criteria conditions that you described?

DENISE STONE: The pilot was announced in the Fall. We heard from families that they wanted to learn more about before-and-after programs. They wanted to have that experience. We did have some schools that were already providing before-and-after programs, so we wanted to build on that knowledge that we were getting from those particular programs, especially through our Early Years Centres. As I said, there were several that were already doing before-and-after programs in partnership with community programs, such as the Boys and Girls Club. It was announced in the Fall. Our partnership with CCH, which is unique, was also developed in the Fall of this past year. The January to June timeline was what was announced to be able to do the pilot.

There was significant conversation, reaching out, discussions around how we could include those areas. We just weren't successful at the time to do that, but we'll certainly be including them as we move forward.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP caucus, with Ms. Zann.

LENORE ZANN: Actually, keeping on the track with our own ridings, I have a question about two things in my riding. One is you mentioned the Jane Norman College a little earlier and that there would be some bursaries that would be available for students. Is there going to be any kind of funding that would be able to help that school, that college, in the future? Is there any plan on helping to invest in that?

Also, I'm told by my constituents that there's a plan to put in a space for pre-Primary children at the high school, at the CEC. People are asking why they would use the high school where there are 16- to 18-year-olds and putting a pre-Primary space in that school when there are many other spaces available in the town.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Zann, that would be your question and your follow-up together.

LENORE ZANN: No, that's one question. It's about my riding.

THE CHAIR: There were two questions there.

LENORE ZANN: Yes, well, I would like to hear about both, please.

THE CHAIR: Those will be your two questions.

LENORE ZANN: Fine. Thank you.

CATHY MONTREUIL: I can't speak to the viability of the college. What I can speak to is what we've talked about in terms of supports and bursaries to make the ECE programs that are approved by the province accessible. We continue to do that, and we have outlined that in detail today. That is a go-forward position for us.

LENORE ZANN: What specifically for that particular - how many bursaries and all that kind of thing?

CATHY MONTREUIL: I would need to see if we have it broken down that way by site. However, it's by application to the person who's applying versus to the college to make that program accessible for the individual. At this point in time, I don't know if we know who has applied and how many and who has applied for bursaries, et cetera. It really is an individual applicant process.

The other piece, I don't have much to comment on it because I think you're talking about some news in your community about year 3, and year 3 hasn't been approved or announced yet.

LENORE ZANN: Apparently, it's going to be put into the high school, and people are very concerned. Why would they put little children into the high school environment when there are other spaces available?

CATHY MONTREUIL: I can't speak to a piece of information I don't have. I can't do that. I can tell you that when we do site it's in consultation with our partners, with our ECE experts, with our RCEs, et cetera, and as deputy, I'm insistent that we make those decisions with the children at the centre of the table. That's about all I can say notionally, we will make it in a decision that has children at its centre, in consultation with partners and research. In terms of specific conversations that are happening about a site that I don't know about yet, I can't speak to.

LENORE ZANN: So you don't know about it?

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the Liberal caucus with Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Through you, I have just a couple of questions related to communities like Hammonds Plains-Lucasville. I hear that transportation can create a challenge for recruiting and maintaining staff at our local operations. I'm wondering that if this is the case in other communities, such as Hammonds Plains, outside an urban area, what is the department doing to advocate for enhancements to the way that staff get to and from sites in these kinds of outside urban areas of the province?

SUZANNE CIRTWILL: Transportation is a barrier that many people face, no matter what program you're dealing with or whether they're trying to get to work or getting to training. When I worked with the adult learning division, child care and transportation were always at the top of the list. It is one of the things I know government is working on creating community transportation available in rural communities so that individuals would have the ability to access the Community Transportation Assistance Program.

In terms of individual communities, one of the things we've been doing so far is that most of our focus has been sort of in a broad provincial mandate, looking at what we can deliver across the province. As we learn more and as we're getting more information, I'm starting to talk to individual people and different communities to ask, what are the individual barriers that they're facing? If it's about getting to training or if it's getting to work and if it's transportation, then it's looking at connecting all our partners together, bringing them to the table, and we brainstorm about what we could possibly do.

One of the things we've started to talk about in terms of the training with one community in a rural area that transportation is a bit of a difficulty, looking at whether we work on delivering training in the community, rather than them having to go to another area. We haven't actually fleshed that out, it's really just an idea but that's one of the things.

I think in terms of transportation, like we did with the funding piece, as we learn more, I think it's about bringing all of our partners together at the table and then brainstorming, again we keep the child at the centre, putting the learner at the centre, or the person, what can we do to support them?

BEN JESSOME: Thank you for that answer. Through the Chair, and to shift gears, I understand there's a program for ECEs opening up at Université Sainte-Anne and I'm curious, I guess more broadly, about what the department is doing to seek out and recruit more francophone ECEs.

SUZANNE CIRTWILL: With the francophone community, we know that we have to - it's another area that we definitely want to increase the number of francophone ECEs. Initially, I mentioned the bursary piece, with the Université Sainte-Anne, they are the only diploma-granting institution that offers the program in French. We have provided funding to them to deliver the program.

There are 22 students who have been engaged in learning this year and they're going to be completing the diploma program. We know that Le Petit Voilier works with the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, and they regularly recruit francophone individuals from overseas. In the materials that we create and any documents that we create, we ensure that they're in both languages so that we have a way when we're reaching out to our partners and trying to engage francophone or Acadian students, that they can find information in their language. We're working at that.

In terms of the leadership program, like I said, we have the leadership program for our employers. It hasn't been created yet. The material is still in the process of being translated, and the program is being developed. That will be rolling out for employers to take to increase their learning so they can deliver to workplaces and be comfortable in their language. We're doing a lot of those things.

We have been also reaching out and having conversations with the employer, with people, just learning what barriers they're facing so I can learn more about that. We also

have the benefit of being in Education and Early Childhood Development. Our French programs division has a strong relationship with CSAP and Université Sainte-Anne. We're going to work with them to see if there are other areas we can access and new strategies we can fix.

THE CHAIR: We have time for one quick round, which will be one question, and maybe your replies could be a little briefer. We do have a deadline for time. We will go to the PCs, and Ms. Paon.

ALANA PAON: I am just taking a look here at an announcement that came out - in fact, it was late Fall, November 8th, when the announcement came out with regard to that pilot program. I'm just noticing that on this announcement by Mr. Churchill with regard to the pilot locations, there were actually 10 pilot locations announced back in November. It did include a CSAP site, the Bedford Highway pre-Primary site - I'm assuming that's École Beaubassin - and it also included Herring Cove.

There are two sites here that I think must have dropped off the radar between November and December. I don't want to make any assumptions about why that is, but it seems at that time that they were on board with having at least one site. What happened between November and December that they weren't included in the pilot program any longer?

DENISE STONE: Again, we did approach them. There was high interest to partner with both our department and with Communities, Culture and Heritage to be part of the pilot. However, when conversations began and we started looking at how the pilot was going to roll out, those organizations just made the decision that it wasn't good timing for them. Again, they did commit to being part of the evaluation and to providing their comments on the process.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Roberts for the NDP caucus.

LISA ROBERTS: I appreciate that there's a role for the provincial government and for your department in particular to roll out programs across the province. At the same time, I'm interested to know how the department is working on initiatives that are really springing from the community.

I think, for example, of the Raising the Villages project in Cape Breton, which is very much looking at how you create welcoming and supportive spaces for children from zero to four or zero to five in particular to be supported in warm loving relationships with parents and grandmothers and aunties and et cetera, which has had a lot of buy-in from various municipalities and lots of great grassroots folks. How is the department collaborating where you're not the leader, but other people are stepping up to lead for the benefit of the youngest Nova Scotians?

DENISE STONE: We have a large group of stakeholders that we work with and meet with on a regular basis - it's called the Provincial Early Years Partnership. That partnership group represents a wide variety of organizations, from both government but also community-based programs that work with young children and families. We work with that group, we've developed the Early Years framework actually that kind of guides our work in all areas of early childhood, no matter what organization you are working with, we work with that group to develop that document.

We're thinking about the 21st Century. We're thinking about how we link practice which would be community driven, to policy and to research - our partners from the research institutions like Mount Saint Vincent and their colleagues. Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac who was here to meet with this group several months ago, she is the Canadian research chair in Early Years, so Dr. Jessie-Lee comes to our meetings to inform the research. She engages that group in whatever kind of research they feel they may need from a community perspective. Then we from the department talk about the impacts of research and practice on policy.

I think we have a really good dialogue happening with that group and we engage them in any way we can with the work that is happening. They inform us what is happening in the communities. It helps us to make decisions around policy, as well as them engaging in the research and us hearing about the research and how it informs practice and policy development.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We'll move on to the Liberal caucus with Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I'm excited that I get to ask this question. I know you are trying to modernize the training for the early childhood educators and for the children. My two daughters went to the Mount 20 years ago and the advantage I think is how prepared they were when they got to Primary was incredible.

I just want to know what is happening now compared to 20 years ago, and where we are compared to other provinces that have had pre-Primary. Are we learning from them? What is the training that we're doing - modernizing our training?

THE CHAIR: I'd like to answer that because I used to teach at the Child Studies Centre - but I'll let you, Ms. Stone.

DENISE STONE: I'm a Mount grad twice over. Certainly the practice when I graduated in 1984 - as I said to my children, when dinosaurs roamed the earth - in 1984 certainly we did have quite a rigorous focus on early childhood development at the time. However, knowing now what we know about children, I think the research around brain development that has come out in the last 15 years certainly has changed the way we practice. We've gone from more thematic-based practices into looking really intentionally at child development and brain development, being mindful of the holistic child and not

just what I think we should be doing today, but what children are doing and how we're letting them lead the development of the curriculum.

We've got online training that certainly wasn't available 20 years ago. As I said, the research is just mounds of research that is informing the practice of Early Childhood Education. The intentionality of practising early childhood has certainly changed. The recording and observing of children and the documentation of children's work has changed. Those are all not brand, brand new but certainly new since I practised and graduated in 1984 from the Mount.

We have the privilege of continuing learning from the research because it is coming and changing as our society grows and changes, and it's why I think we're keeping up with the educational standards in this province. We have a good working relationship with our post-secondary institutions and from speaking with colleagues across the country, again that is a privilege to be able to do, they are looking to Nova Scotia for some of the innovative practices that we are rolling out in this province. As we move forward, we'll continue to talk with our colleagues around that.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Montreuil.

CATHY MONTREUIL: I think that in addition to Ms. Stone's comments around how we know more about child development, brain development, the plasticity of the brain, the impact of interpersonal relationships and oral language.

In education we have a saying that says, literacy floats on a sea of oral language. The play-based oral language-focused dimensions to early learning can't be underestimated in terms of their impact. These are where kids develop social-emotional skills, interpersonal skills. There is growing research and concern around our kids growing up in the world of electronics and how that's going to impact their brains now and into the future, and how it impacts interpersonal learning.

So a play-based environment in which interpersonal relationships - with ECEs and kids, with kids and kids, and with parents into that mix - are setting the table for our kids' future brain development, for their acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills, and for their well-being. So our partnership with CCH is an example where the formal learning needs to be augmented with learning about what goes into the body, play-based, enough sleep and the whole balance of childhood development.

Those are the kinds of qualities and knowledge that our ECEs bring into these programs, share with our parents and develop in our kids. We can't underestimate how that sets the table for success into the future for our kids and for Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: That is the end of our time for questions. I'll ask Ms. Montreuil for closing statements.

CATHY MONTREUIL: I just gave them. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: That's what I thought too - an excellent way to end the meeting. Thank you for being our witnesses today and I must say it's good to see that early childhood educators' time has come.

Our next meeting date will be Tuesday, March 26th from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. We will be doing only the appointment to agencies, boards and commissions because the Legislature is sitting.

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:52 a.m.]