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Where Are We? How Far Do We Have To Go?



The Early Childhood Education Index 2011

Good early childhood education will improve every child's chance of success. It is fair. It works. It is affordable. It enjoys widespread popularity, and we are already well on our way to making it happen. To help chart our progress, *Early Years Study 3* introduces the **Early Childhood Education Index 2011**.

Improving outcomes for children

The index draws on what is known about how public policy supports quality early childhood programming. A strong and coherent public policy framework produces the best results for children, uses public investments efficiently and effectively and accounts to Canadians for the well-being of our children.

The Early Childhood Education Index 2011 (ECEI 2011) provides a snapshot of provincial early childhood education services. Nineteen benchmarks reflect a common set of core standards essential for the delivery of quality programming. Backed by good data, the index:

- points to the strengths and weaknesses in individual jurisdictions;

- highlights what leading jurisdictions have been able to achieve in practice and
- directs attention toward creating comprehensive early childhood education systems rather than allowing developments to be determined by short-term pressures.

The index is organized into five categories.

- **Governance:** Is the oversight of early education split between multiple departments, or does it have coherent direction backed by policies with goals, timelines and sound service delivery?
- **Funding:** Is it adequate to support program quality and provide reasonable access?
- **Access:** Are there enough programs to meet demand? Are barriers to participation addressed?
- **Learning environment:** Is quality supported by curricula, program standards and trained and adequate staffing?
- **Accountability:** Is there constant quality improvement supported by data collection and the monitoring and reporting of child outcomes? Is research supported and the findings incorporated into practice?

Each category includes benchmarks with assigned values. Each category is rated out of three points, for a total of 15 points. The benchmarks reflect well-established elements of the essentials behind effective early childhood education. Each benchmark is based on one or more of the following three criteria:

- **Proxy power:** Does the benchmark reflect a key component of a quality system of early childhood education that is associated with better outcomes for children?
- **Data power:** Are data available on a timely basis? Are they reliable and standardized?
- **Communication power:** Does the benchmark communicate to a broad range of audiences? Is it understood by the public, policy makers and media?

The data and rationale for the benchmarks are summarized in chapter 5. They are gathered from provincial and territorial government officials, and publicly available research studies and reports. The

most recent available data are used and estimates are explained. The information is supplemented by detailed profiles of each province and territory that are posted at <http://www.earlyyearsstudy.ca>. Because there is insufficient data to populate all the benchmarks, the three territories and First Nations are not included in this round of the index. We hope to address this in subsequent iterations.

Despite the acknowledged importance of early education, there are no common pan-Canadian indicators of progress. As the most recent report of the Canadian Council on Learning notes: “We lack appropriate national measures to provide better understanding of quality, access, financing and policy of [early childhood education] programs ... In addition, the several monitoring regimes that provinces have put in place are not comparable with each other.”¹

ECEI 2011 fills this void. It can be incorporated into other monitoring efforts, including the Early Development Instrument (EDI),² the Forum on Early Child Development Monitoring,³ the Canadian Index of Well-being⁴ and the newly released *New Deal for Families*.⁵ ECEI 2011 provides a baseline; benchmarks may be modified through ongoing dialogue with stakeholders and officials. The intention is to reissue the index every two years.

Three make passing grade

In the first year of the ECEI 2011, only three jurisdictions received a passing grade. Yet there are reasons for optimism. Three years ago, Prince Edward Island would not have been among the top scorers. Only three provinces offered full-day kindergarten; today it's six. Province-wide curriculum anchored in learning through play was the exception instead of the norm. No province had merged oversight for kindergarten and child care.

In contrast, today four provinces have combined their departments, and the monitoring and reporting of vulnerability in preschool-aged children is no longer a rarity. Despite the cancellation of the federal/provincial/territorial child care agreements, the number of child care spaces across Canada has grown by over 20 percent. Half of all children regularly attend preschool, and most provinces could

FIGURE 6.1

Early Childhood Education Index 2011

BENCHMARKS	Value	NL	PE	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
Integrated Governance											
ECE under common department/ ministry	0.5		0.5		0.5		0.5		0.5		
Common ECE supervisory unit	0.5						0.5				
Common ECE policy framework	1		1			1		1			
Common local authority for ECE management and administration	1										
Funding											
At least two-thirds of child care funding goes to program operations ¹	1		1	1		1		1	1		
Mandated salary and fee scale	1		1			1		1			
At least 3% of budget devoted to early childhood education	1					1					
Access											
Full-day kindergarten offered	1		1	1	1	1	1				1
50% of 2–4-year-olds regularly attend an ECE program	1					1	1				
Funding is conditional on including children with special needs	1		1 ²					1			
Learning Environment											
Early childhood curriculum/framework	0.5		0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Alignment of early childhood framework with kindergarten	0.5		0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5				0.5
Programs for 2–4-year-olds require at least two-thirds of staff to have ECE qualifications	0.5			0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5			
Kindergarten educators require ECE qualification	0.5		0.5				0.5				
Salaries of early childhood educators are at least two-thirds of teacher salaries	0.5					0.5					
ECE professional certification and/or professional development required	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Accountability											
Annual progress reports are current and posted (2008 or later)	1		1	1	1	1 ³		1	1	1	1
Program standards for ECE programs (including kindergarten)	1										
EDI or population measure for preschool learning collected and reported	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	15	1.5	9.5	5	4.5	10	6.5	7.5	4.5	3	4.5

Notes:

1 Includes special needs funding

2 In Early Years Centres only

3 Quebec was not a signatory to the federal/provincial/territorial early childhood development agreements where the parties agreed to regular standardized reporting. Quebec has its own mechanisms for public reporting.

provide universal access with staged prudent investments. You could say, we are already halfway there!

We now have many made-in-Canada examples of good practice and the steps jurisdictions took to achieve their results. Their experiences can serve as a guide to others. The index does not suggest that there is only one route to success. Indeed, the two leading jurisdictions reached their destinations using very different methods.

Obviously there is much room for improvement. More children are involved in early education than ever before. However, the split between oversight and delivery still requires too many parents to piece together arrangements to cover their work schedules. The results are stressful for children and parents alike, but also negate the wonderful payback that comes from delivering early education in a way that simultaneously supports children’s learning and their parents’ work. These findings are well documented in chapter 4. Early childhood educators now

receive more professional recognition and have seen modest salary improvements, but training requirements have not kept pace with the growing demands on the profession.

The big story behind the index is that high-quality, publicly funded preschool education for all 2- to 5-year-olds isn’t a utopian fantasy, particularly if it is built on the asset we already have in public education. Much of the groundwork has been laid, many of the tools have been developed and most importantly, universal early childhood education has many, many advocates. They can be found in boardrooms, schoolrooms, science laboratories, health clinics, courtrooms, university classrooms, government offices and home kitchens. Early childhood education leverages the best from other family policies and allows every child to reach her fullest potential.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Canadian Council on Learning. (2011). p. 10.
- 2 www.offordcentre.com
- 3 www.childdevelopmentmonitoring.net
- 4 www.ciw.ca
- 5 Kershaw, P. (2011, Fall).

FIGURE 6.2

Early Childhood Education Index 2011: Total score

