

# NOVA SCOTIA PYRAMID MODEL 2024-2025

## Executive Summary Report

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Promoting Social & Emotional Competence in Nova Scotia's Young Children  
Favorisant la compétence socio-émotionnelle des jeunes enfants de la Nouvelle-Écosse



**Early Childhood  
Collaborative  
Research Centre**

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge that the evaluation of the Pyramid Model was conducted in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded ancestral territory which remains the homeland of the Mi'kmaq Nation. This territory is covered by the Covenant Chain of Treaties of Peace and Friendship signed between 1725 and 1779. These treaties are affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada and recognize Aboriginal Title (which is embedded in both the 1763 Royal Proclamation and in section 35(1) of the 1982 Constitution Act). The treaties are living agreements that establish the rules for an ongoing Treaty relationship between nations.

We pay respect to the knowledge embedded in the Mi'kmaw custodians of the lands and waters and to the Elders, past, present, and future.

*This is a photo of the Shubenacadie River. The Mi'kmaq have traversed the Shubenacadie River and the lakes to its south as a major transport route since time immemorial.*

# INTRODUCTION

The Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children is an evidence-based, positive behaviour support framework for educators to promote social and emotional development and address challenging behaviours. The framework organizes evidence-based practices to build the capacity of educators to support all children using a coaching approach to professional development and skill development. The goal of the Pyramid Model initiative is to support the social and emotional health of all children across the province.



In response to the need to support social and emotional competence in the early years, Nova Scotia began implementing the Pyramid Model in 2018 at select regulated child care programs (referred to as the “RCC Cohort”) in 2018 followed by implementation of the Pyramid Model into select Pre-primary Programs (referred to as the “PPP Cohort”) beginning in 2019. The Pyramid Model implementation transitioned from a pilot with DEECD to a program integrated within the Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services (NSECDIS) in three phases over several months (July 2021 – January 2022). To support this transition, various new positions have been created and hired such as additional Coach Team Leads and Inclusion Coaches, a Learning and Development Specialist and a Data Management Specialist.

As of April 2025, there are a total of 52 RCC programs and 113 PPPs participating in Pyramid Model in NS.

The purpose of the following executive summary is to illustrate the findings from the evaluation of the Pyramid Model implementation across Nova Scotia in response to four evaluation questions, identified and discussed in subsequent sections of the executive summary.

<sup>1</sup> Hemmeter, M. L., Santos, R. M., & Ostrosky, M. M. (2008). Preparing early childhood educators to address young children's social-emotional development and challenging behavior: A survey of higher education programs in nine states. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 30(4), 321-340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053815108320900>.

# DATA COLLECTION

## Acronyms

- ECPW-Q: Early Childhood Professional Well-Being Questionnaire
- ELCC: Early Learning and Child Care
- ELCF: Early Learning Curriculum Framework
- DEECD: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- NSECDIS: Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services
- PPP: Pre-primary Program
- RCC: Regulated Child Care
- RIFL: Responsive Interactions for Learning

## Evaluation Questions

## Data Collected

1. How can Pyramid Model help support the overall professional well-being of educators?

- Early Childhood Professional Well-being Survey (n=314)

2. How do programs/educators experience support from Pyramid Model?

a. What implementation supports do programs need to enable sustained high-quality practices for children's social emotional development?

b. How do early childhood programs engage families in supporting children's social and emotional development?

- Program Interviews (n=60)
- Learning Environment observations (n=10)
- Pyramid Model Educator Survey (n=44)
- Pyramid Model Family Survey (n=66)

3. How does implementation of Pyramid Model influence responsive interactions among educators?

- Educator Observations using the Responsive Interactions for learning (RIFL-ed) Tool (n=61)

4. How do children demonstrate the development of social and emotional skills in Pyramid Model programs?

- Photo-Documentation (n=6)

# 1. How can Pyramid Model help support the overall professional well-being of educators?

## ECPW-Q

To measure well-being, a validated instrument was used called the Early Childhood Professional Well-Being Questionnaire (ECPW-Q). This tool measures nine senses of well-being:



Sense of Security



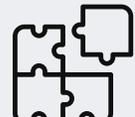
Communication



Comfort



Self-respect



Contribution



Affinity



Agency



Efficacy

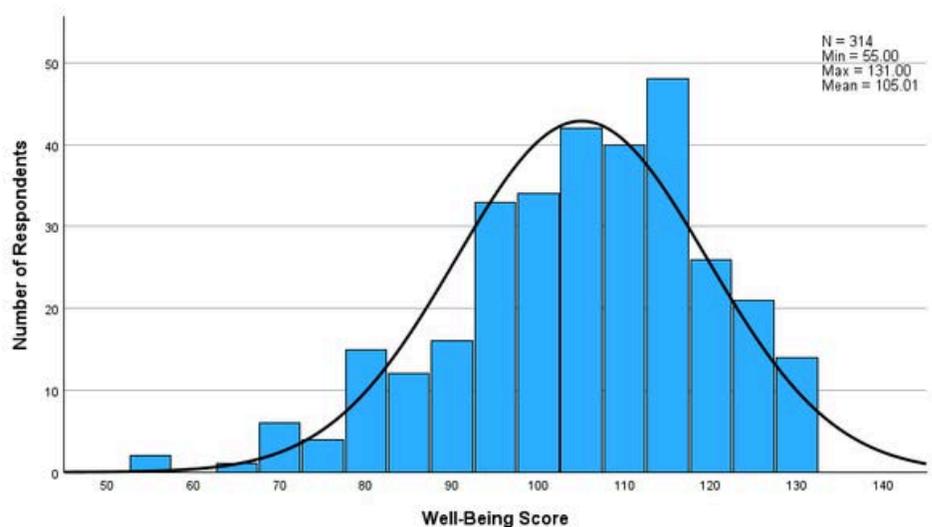


Engagement

## Nova Scotia ECE Overall Well-being

The highest possible score to rank on the ECPW-Q is 135 and the overall mean well-being score was 105 (range of sample 55–131). This result is similar to previous research.

To explore the differences in well-being score between early childhood professionals that have been coached in Pyramid Model (n= 20) compared to those that were not (n=394) a nonparametric test<sup>2</sup> was used (Mann-Whitney U test).



There was no statistical significance ( $p > 0.05$ ) between those early childhood professionals that **were coached in Pyramid Model** (mean well-being score of 103.8) compared to those that **were not** (mean well-being score of 105.1).

<sup>2</sup>Nonparametric test are used with small samples sizes and when results do not follow normal distribution.

## 2. How do programs/educators experience support from Pyramid Model?

### What implementation supports do programs need to enable sustained high-quality practices for children's social emotional development?

Ten program sites across Nova Scotia currently participating in the Pyramid Model were invited to participate as case studies.

Multiple perspectives ranging from parents to directors/leads and Pyramid Model staff were interviewed, allowing for an examination of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of each program and their participation in the Pyramid Model.

Five themes were identified through analysis across the data collected.



#### SUSTAINABILITY

Only one RCC discussed the connection between Pyramid Model and other ELCC initiatives:

- RCC consultants and directors specifically indicated that there needed to be further clarification of Pyramid Model's alignment and integration with provincial ELCC initiatives.

#### COACHING AND SUPPORTS FOR EDUCATORS

Suggestions for improvement of Pyramid Model supports were provided by directors/leads, consultants, and coaches:

- Using a team coaching approach;
- Beginning coaching educators in the youngest learning environments;
- Establishing a program pedagogical leader;
- Establishing educator peer supports;
- Encouraging coaching outdoors.

#### COMMUNICATION AND PERSPECTIVES OF FAMILIES

- Most programs had strong communications with families, including in-person and online connections.
- Most parents felt that their children's social and emotional development was supported at their program
- Some parents at PPP and RCCs appeared to have a limited knowledge of Pyramid Model.

#### LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

- Progress is being made toward program-wide implementation in RCC programs.
- Some programs reported spillover effects of Pyramid practices on non-coached educators and on inclusion staff.
- There may be an opportunity for further expansion of the Pyramid Model across francophone PPP programs.

#### EVIDENCE OF IMPROVEMENT

- Some programs in both RCCs and PPPs observed the following impacts of coaching:
  - Increased educator confidence;
  - Positive changes in educator practices;
  - Improvements in children's social and emotional skills.

## 2. How do programs/educators experience support from Pyramid Model?

### What implementation supports do programs need to enable sustained high-quality practices for children’s social emotional development?

#### SOUTH SHORE REGIONAL CENTRE FOR EDUCATION (SSRCE):

#### DR. JOHN C WICKWIRE ACADEMY & PETITE RIVIÈRE ELEMENTARY

**Communication:** Overall, programs appear to support positive and regular communication with parents about children’s social and emotional growth. For example, in Petite Rivière, there is strong communication and relationships with parents who often visit the program. Both programs could provide some more communication about the Pyramid Model and its practices.

**Educators:** Educators were described as noticeably more prepared to support children’s social and emotional development through Pyramid Model practices.

**Coaching:** Creating a clear plan for how these roles (Consultants and Pre-primary Leads) can work together to support the program’s continued use of Pyramid Model after graduation would further support sustainability of practices.

**Leadership Team:** The SSRCE regional leadership team has been supportive of encouraging these programs’ educators to continue using Pyramid Model practices after graduation and views Pyramid as a supportive resource for the overall learning environment.



#### DR. JOHN C WICKWIRE ACADEMY

LOCATION: LIVERPOOL, NS

EDUCATORS GRADUATED: 2/2

YEAR PROGRAM STARTED PYRAMID

MODEL: 2019



#### PETITE RIVIÈRE ELEMENTARY

LOCATION: PETITE RIVIÈRE, NS

EDUCATORS GRADUATED: 0/1

YEAR PROGRAM STARTED PYRAMID

MODEL: 2021

## 2. How do programs/educators experience support from Pyramid Model?

### What implementation supports do programs need to enable sustained high-quality practices for children’s social emotional development?

#### CAPE BRETON VICTORIA REGIONAL CENTRE FOR EDUCATION (CBVRC): FERRISVIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL & BROOKLAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

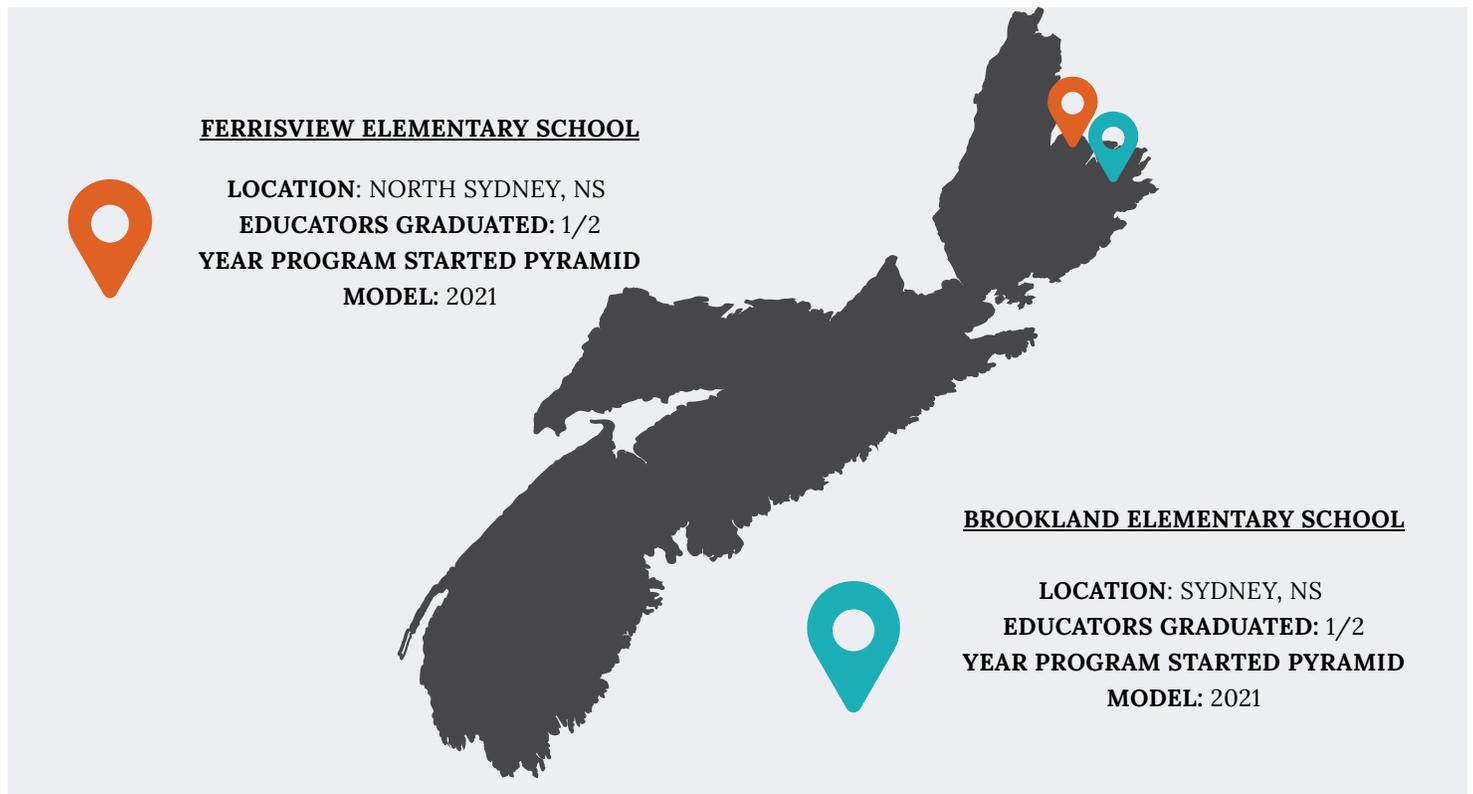
**Communication:** The programs’ communication with families is strong through both online and in-person connections, though there are challenges with finding a family representative for the regional leadership team.

**Educators:** Coaches indicated that educators have also shown positive change in their practices and the setup of their learning environment in alignment with the Pyramid Model.

**Coaching:** The coaching relationship was described as supportive and felt to be a useful external accountability tool for programs. Despite having several coaches due to staffing challenges, the programs have developed strong relationships with their coaches.

**Social and Emotional:** Multiple participants perceived that children at Ferrisview Elementary and Brookland Elementary had shown progress in their social and emotional skills, such as being able to problem-solve with peers, as mentioned by the coaches. Parents across both programs noted that their children were able to share their feelings with them.

**Leadership Team:** The programs’ communication with families is strong through both online and in-person connections, though there are challenges with finding a family representative for the regional leadership team.



## 2. How do programs/educators experience support from Pyramid Model?

### What implementation supports do programs need to enable sustained high-quality practices for children’s social emotional development?

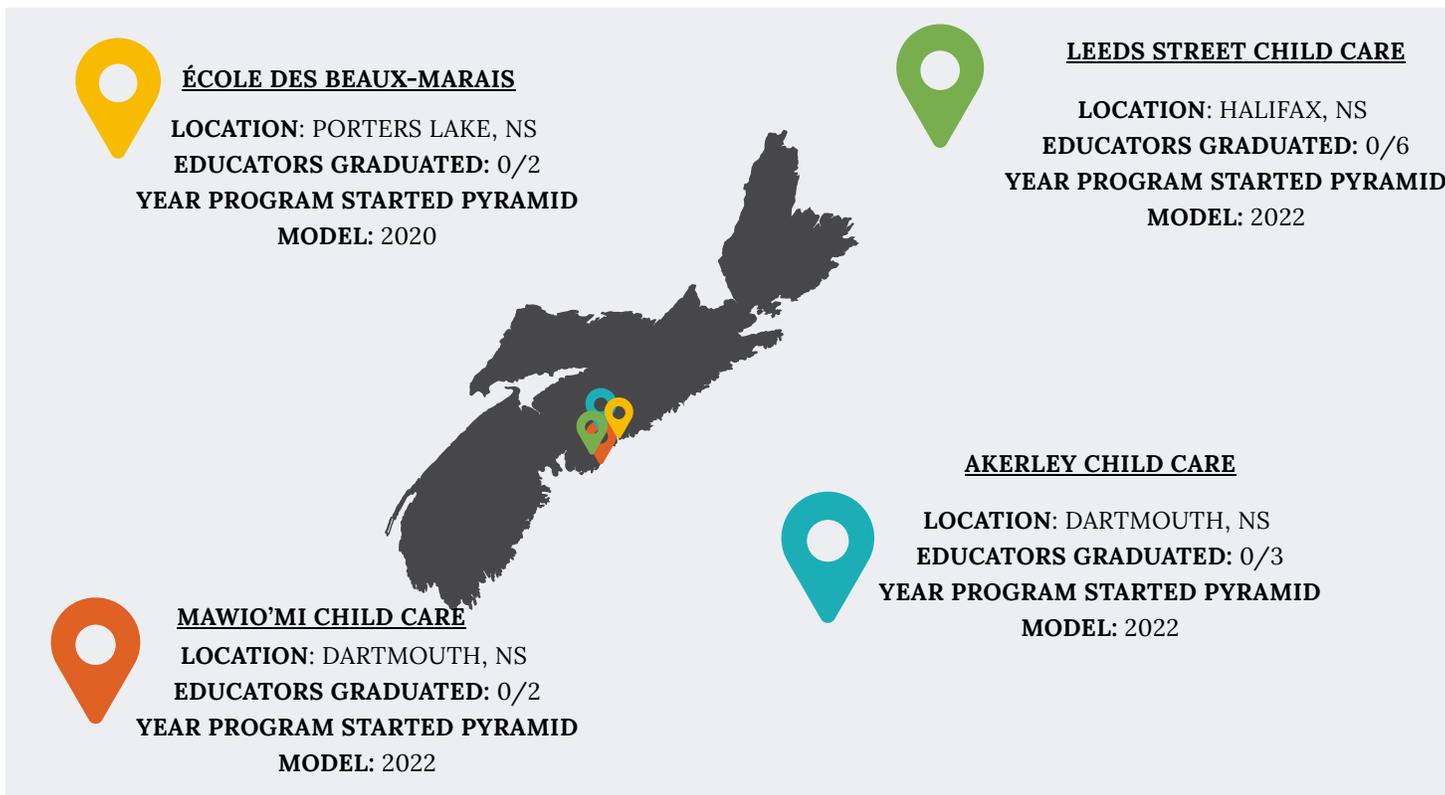
#### CONSEIL SCOLAIRE ACADIEN PROVINCIAL (CSAP): ÉCOLE DES BEAUX-MARAIS

**Educators:** École des Beaux-Marais was already a strong program according to the Consultant prior to Pyramid coaching, but they now have shown greater consistency in implementation of Pyramid-specific strategies such as visual schedules and revisiting expectations before transitions.

**Coaching:** They were described as potentially having the capacity to support internal coaching.

**Communication:** The educators communicate with parents about social emotional learning, the Pyramid Model, and other related issues as they arise.

**Support Team:** This program is supported by an additional team of consultants and coaches who established a Pyramid Model Support Team to ensure that their goals are aligned with both Pyramid and NS early learning expectations and initiatives.



#### NSCECE LAB SCHOOLS:

#### AKERLEY CHILD CARE, LEEDS STREET CHILD CARE, MAWIO'MI CHILD CARE

**Communication:** It was said that there is good communication between families and the childcare centre. One educator had been facilitating family engagement sessions to support parents in taking the time for their own mental health well-being. Parent interviews also suggested that there is good communication between children and families and with regular ‘parent teacher meetings’ where they can discuss children’s well-being and strengths.

**Educators:** All three programs reported that they felt there was considerable educator-specific growth. The programs overall reported feeling confident in their ability to support all children in the program. The educators were described as eager to learn and to adopt Pyramid Model into their own practices.

## 2. How do programs/educators experience support from Pyramid Model?

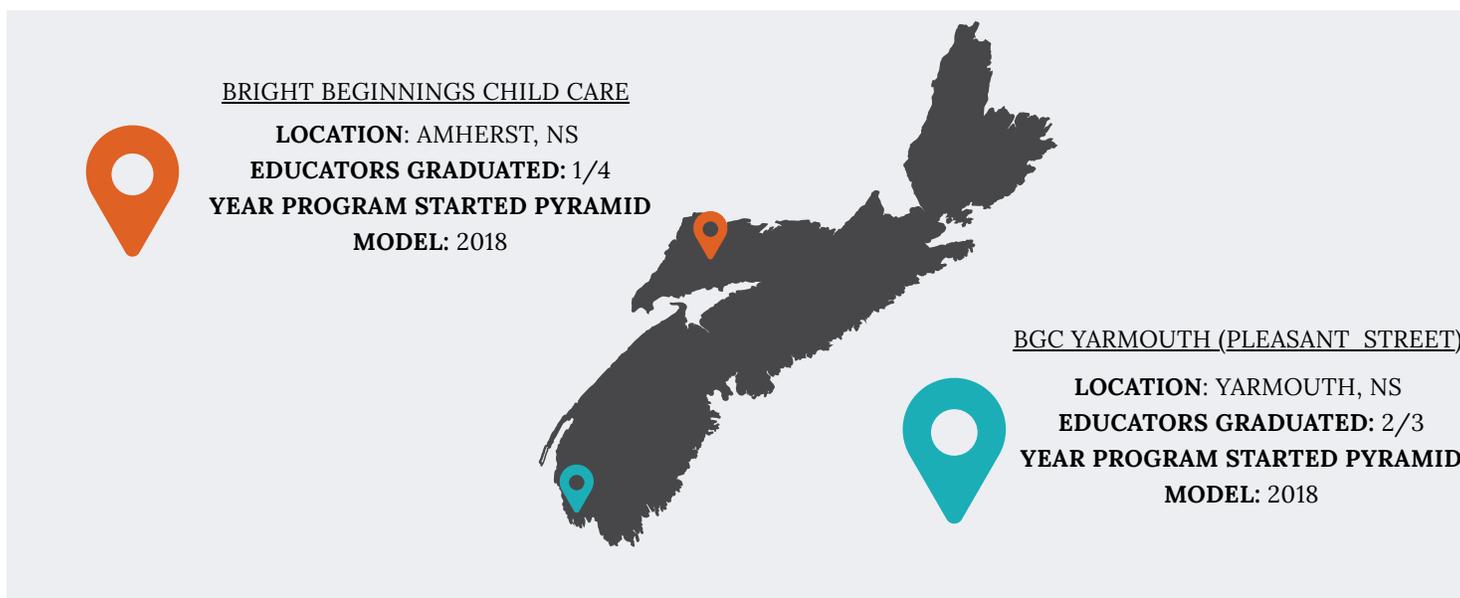
### What implementation supports do programs need to enable sustained high-quality practices for children’s social emotional development?

#### BRIGHT BEGINNINGS CHILD CARE CENTRE

**Communication:** The Leadership Team also discussed a plan to make their families engage more actively by providing them with summarized data to help them engage with the Pyramid Model. Visual schedules and sharing the backpack series with families has been a continued success bridging the gap between centre and home environments.

**Leadership Team:** Bright Beginnings has seen more consistent Program Leadership Team meetings and has been seeing progress since its initial stages during COVID-19. It was mentioned that the Leadership Team meetings were a great space to support the program with their Pyramid Model practices.

**Educators:** It was also reported that educators who are not currently being coached in Pyramid Model were also engaging in these practices, which assisted with enhancing buy-in from educators and improvements in children’s behaviour.



#### BGC YARMOUTH (PLEASANT STREET)

**Coaching:** The coach also mentioned that they heard the educators say that the “framework is what we need to do, and Pyramid Model is how we do it”. This helps the program understand that Pyramid is not necessarily something extra but is congruent with DEECD initiatives.

**Communication:** Parents shared positive feedback regarding the program's communication about their children's social and emotional development. Additionally, at the time of our visit, the program had an information board that shares current classroom events, and how social emotional development is linked to Pyramid Model practices and the NS ELCF.

**Educators:** Educators, supported by their coaches, have found great value in recording and reflecting on what practices are going well and what needs to be improved.

**Leadership Team:** The leadership team is recognized as strong and supportive, playing a crucial role in the program's Pyramid Model implementation journey. They have also been instrumental in developing an action plan for when staff feel like they are unable to problem-solve on their own (due to challenging behaviors). The coach team lead expressed how they feel it could help promote staff wellness.

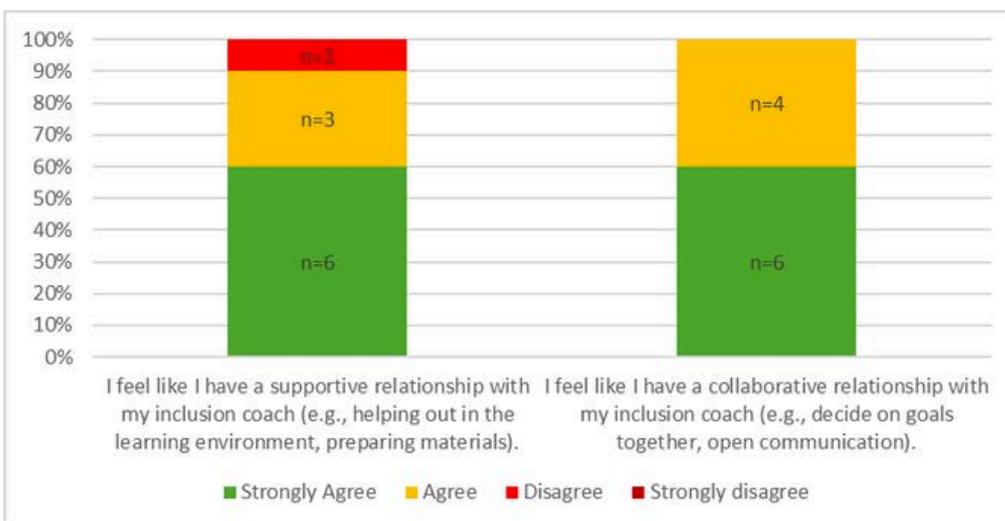
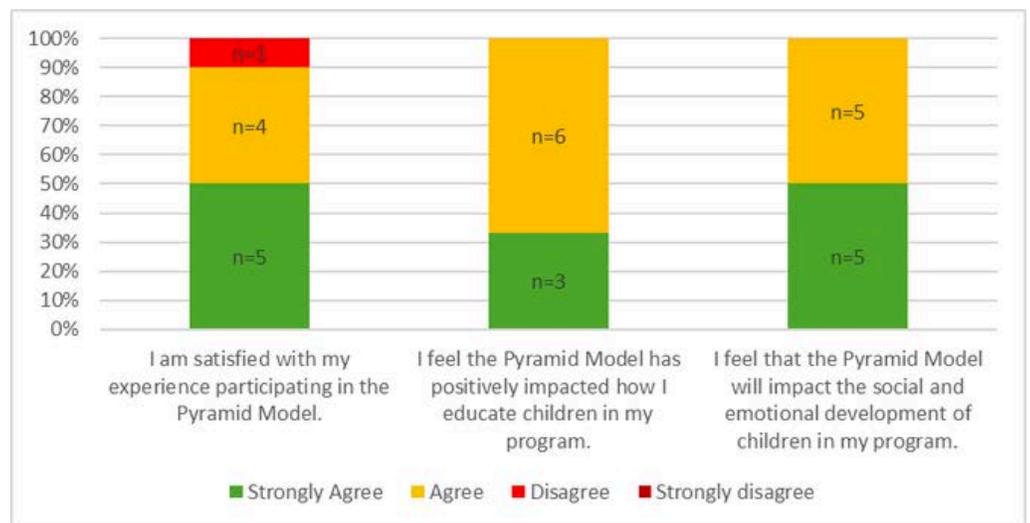
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What implementation supports do programs need to enable sustained high-quality practices for children’s social emotional development?

### EDUCATOR SURVEY

Ten respondents provided information regarding their involvement with Pyramid Model Coaching.

These educators indicated that they strongly agreed that Pyramid Model has an effect on the social and emotional development of children at their program.



Almost all of these respondents felt very supported by their Pyramid Model Inclusion Coach (n=9).

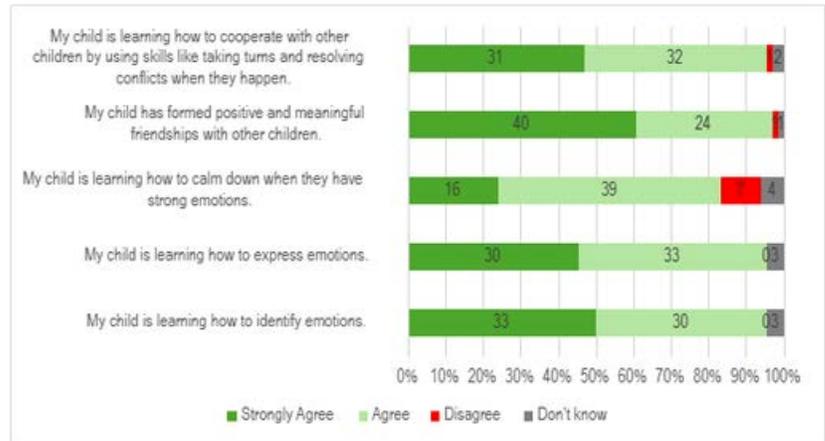
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### How do early childhood programs engage families in supporting children's social and emotional development?

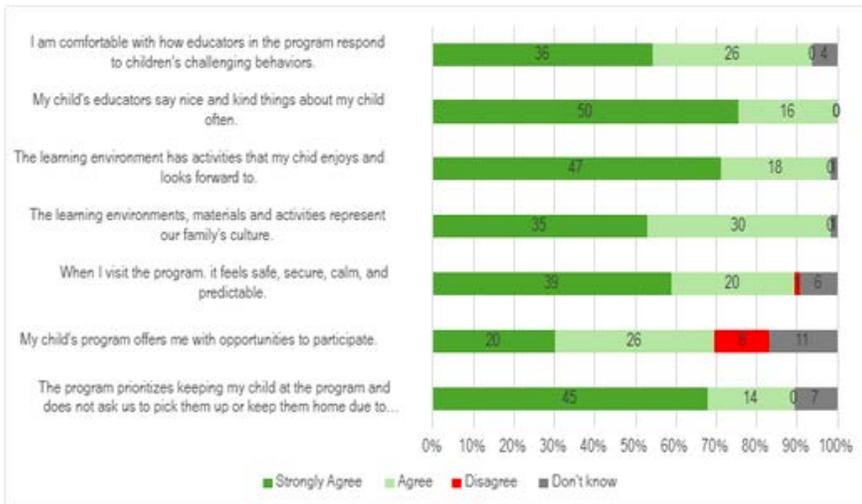
#### PARENT SURVEY

A total of 66 parents completed a survey from the case study programs (38 from RCC programs and 28 from the PPP). The questions were organized into three main categories:

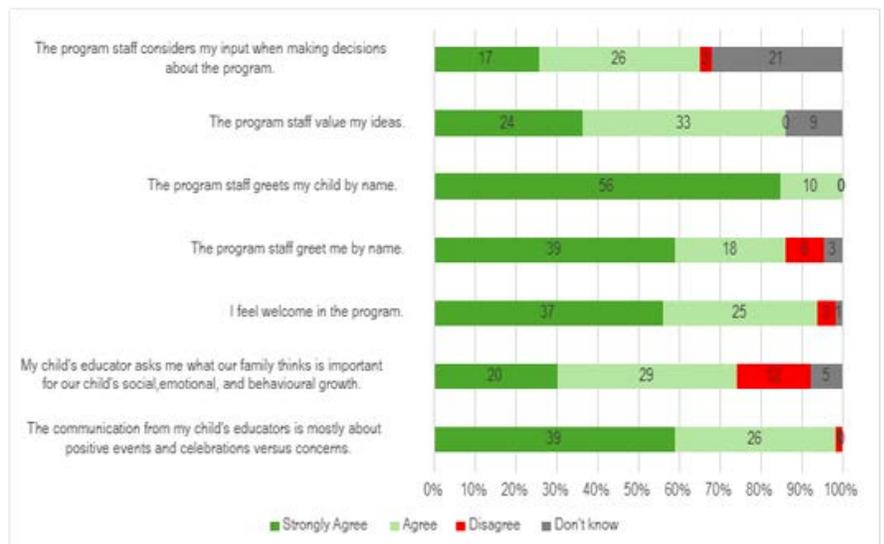
Parents' perceptions of their child's social and emotional development.



Overall welcoming nature of the early learning environment.

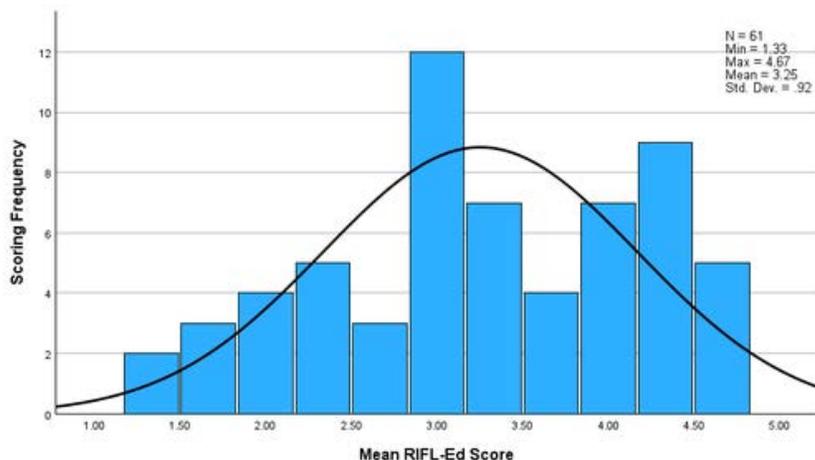


Communication between the centre and the families.



### 3. How does the implementation of Pyramid Model influence responsive interactions in early learning and child care programs?

The RIFL-Ed captures the notion that educators within an environment are significant contributors to overall program quality through their engagement with the children in their care. Measuring Pyramid Model educators' responsive interactions for learning may provide us with insight as to how the Pyramid Model impacts the quality of a program.



A total of 61 RIFLs were completed during data collection of the program case studies (RCC cohort (n=39) and PPP cohort (n=22)).

**The overall average for the RIFL scores for all 10 programs was 3.25** (lowest possible score being 1 and the highest being 5).

**Mean RIFL score of Pyramid Model Educators**

n=16  
Mean 3.90



**Mean RIFL score of non-coached Pyramid Model Educators**

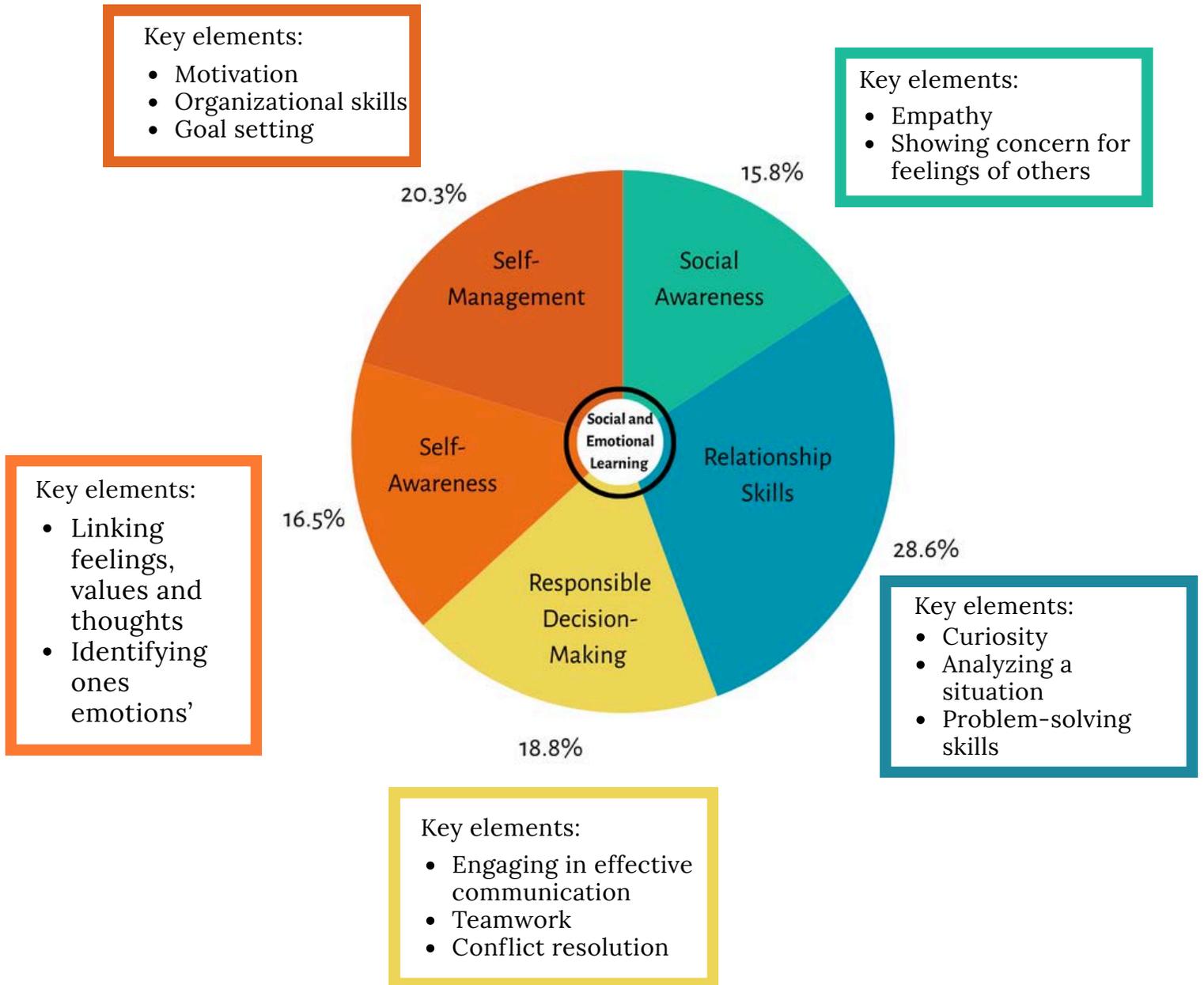
n=35  
Mean 3.02

An independent samples Mann Whitney U Test<sup>3</sup> was used to explore if the difference between the two groups, which found a statistically significant difference (p-value < 0.0012) with a medium effect size (~0.5). This means that RIFL scores are most likely higher because of Pyramid Model involvement; however, we did not yet control for other factors that could have also played a role in these differences (i.e. education, years of experience).

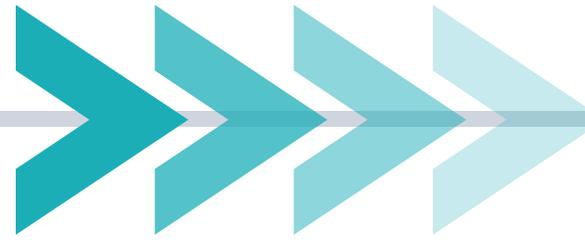
<sup>3</sup> This test compares the two independent groups to determine if there's a statistically significant difference in their mean scores. By doing this, we were testing the null hypothesis, which assumes that the two groups being compared have the same mean (or that the distributions are identical).

## 4. How do children demonstrate the development of social and emotional skills in Pyramid Model programs?

Photo documentation created by the programs was analyzed using the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework. This framework features five competencies that are embedded within larger social and environmental systems. The five competencies surrounding social and emotional learning.



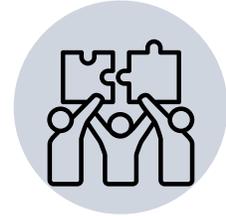
# Recommendations Moving Forward



## Alignment of Pyramid Model to Nova Scotia ELCC

The alignment and long-term vision of the Pyramid Model needs to be clarified and communicated across the NS early learning and child care context. This needs to be integrated alongside the early learning curriculum framework (ELCF) and provincial goals for inclusion.

Considerations for alignment with the NS context need to be clearly communicated to all those involved with supporting and implementing the Pyramid Model.



## Relationships and engagement with families



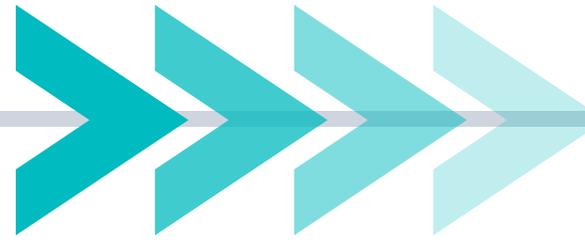
Throughout this evaluation, programs identified a need for further enhanced engagement with families.

Although families had high level of trust and good communication with programs their children were attending there is a lack of what the Pyramid Model is and how it impacts their children.

One challenge around family communication regarding Pyramid Model in Nova Scotia may be how and when information is being shared.

Programs may benefit from guidance to determine how best to engage families with the Pyramid Model and their children's social and emotional learning (e.g., social media engagement about Pyramid, offering workshop events, etc.).

# Recommendations Moving Forward



## Exploring connections with schools

Another area for exploration is the connection of the Pyramid Model to schools, in particular to support the transition into elementary classrooms and alignment with the recently updated Code of Conduct and the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

The **Early Development Instrument** collected in Nova Scotia offers a potential measurement tool that could be used to explore the potential impact of Pyramid Model on children exposed to Pyramid Model. This may also help to illustrate the possible linkages between Pyramid and the ongoing policy reform for inclusion in schools.



## Building program capacity to sustain implementation progress



There is a need to focus on building program capacity to sustain Pyramid Model practices among programs that have reached fidelity.

Participants from the case study programs suggested that clarity on post-graduation plans could support sustained practice. As Pyramid Model is deeply rooted in the enabling context, programs have a critical role in building support structures to embed supportive principles into program's vision.

It is important to note that the movement toward program-wide coaching among many RCC programs needs to be further examined for its contribution to building program capacity to sustain implementation progress.

# Final Acknowledgements

The authors extend our gratitude to everyone who contributed to the evaluation of the Pyramid Model. This important work was made possible through the dedication, collaboration, and unwavering support of many individuals and organizations.

As we reflect on this work, we also recognize the broader context in which it takes place. We are privileged to do our research and evaluation in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded ancestral territory which remains the homeland of the Mi'kmaq Nation.

We also respectfully honour the histories, contributions, and enduring legacies of African Nova Scotian communities, who have been a part of this land for over 400 years.

Finally, we acknowledge our Acadian and Francophone communities, whose deep roots in Nova Scotia have enriched the province with vibrant traditions, language, and culture.

