

Families' experiences of a universal play-based early childhood program in Nova Scotia: Implications for policy and practice

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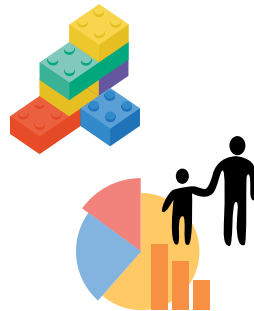
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BACKGROUND

Nova Scotia's Pre-primary Program is a publicly funded, play-based early learning program for children in the year before school entry.

Previous evidence suggests parent's perceptions of play-based learning are influenced by socioeconomic factors and how connected they feel to the school.



METHODS

291 parents/guardians completed a survey about their experiences with the program in the 2017-18 school year. This included:

- How the program supported them and their children,
- The challenges and barriers to accessing the program, and
- Their perceptions of the staff and curriculum.

KEY FINDINGS

Perceptions of program outcomes

Parents indicated the program supported their child's development and would aid in transitioning to their first year of school.

Perceptions of play-based learning

Parents understood the role of play in learning, although higher income and education parents seemed to view play and learning as separate activities.

Similar to previous research, parents shared more favourable perceptions of play when they felt more connected to the school and had better communication with the educators. Unlike previous research, this was true regardless of parents' education or income.



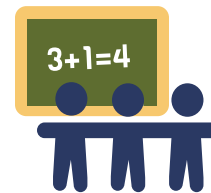
Supporting families

Parents indicated the Pre-primary Program was of good quality.

Parents, especially those of lower income and education, indicated they or a family member would have been caring for their child if the Pre-primary Program did not exist.

Similar to previous research, lower income parents felt the most supported by the program.

CONCLUSIONS



Play is seen as valuable for both academic and socioemotional learning.

To successfully implement new play-based school programs, policy makers should support educators in establishing strong relationships with parents through effective training and resources.



Universal and publicly funded early learning programs, such as the Pre-primary Program, can support employment equity and labour participation by providing affordable, accessible child care.