

# The Perceived Value of a Universal Early Learning Program: A Parent Perspective

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Journal of Child and Family Studies [Dec 2021]

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## Background

Developing a supportive and trusting relationship between a child's home and early learning environment is an important part of quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs.

There has been limited research on the value parents/guardians place on universal, publicly-funded, school-based early learning programs.



## Methods

Two related studies were brought together:

1

In 2017-18, four Pre-Primary Program (PPP) sites were selected. 28 families from these sites took part in focus groups.

2

In 2018-19, 14 families from seven communities across Canada took part in focus groups or interviews. This included parents of children who did attend the PPP and parents of eligible children who did not.

## Key Findings

The following are common values participants had in both studies:

### Ease of Access

Participants valued that there was no fee to them. Some found lack of transportation and before/after care to be a barrier.



### Communication

Participants valued communication and relationships with early childhood educators, as well as information about the program. Language was a barrier for some families.



### Early Learning

Participants valued the increased opportunity to learn new skills. For example, they discussed social-emotional skills and play-based education.



### Familiarity with the School Environment

Participants whose children attended PPPs valued the exposure to the school environment and people. They thought it might make the transition to primary easier.



## Conclusion

This study provides an opportunity to consider how to best meet parental needs and expectations while ensuring accessibility for all children.

The purpose of the research was not to generalize the experiences of families, but to provide an exploration of possible parental values of universal ECEC programs.

