

Building policy-relevant research to support child well-being in Nova Scotia

Bridging the Gap: Between Knowledge and Practice to Support Children, Youth and Families

Dr. Jessie-Lee Mclsaac

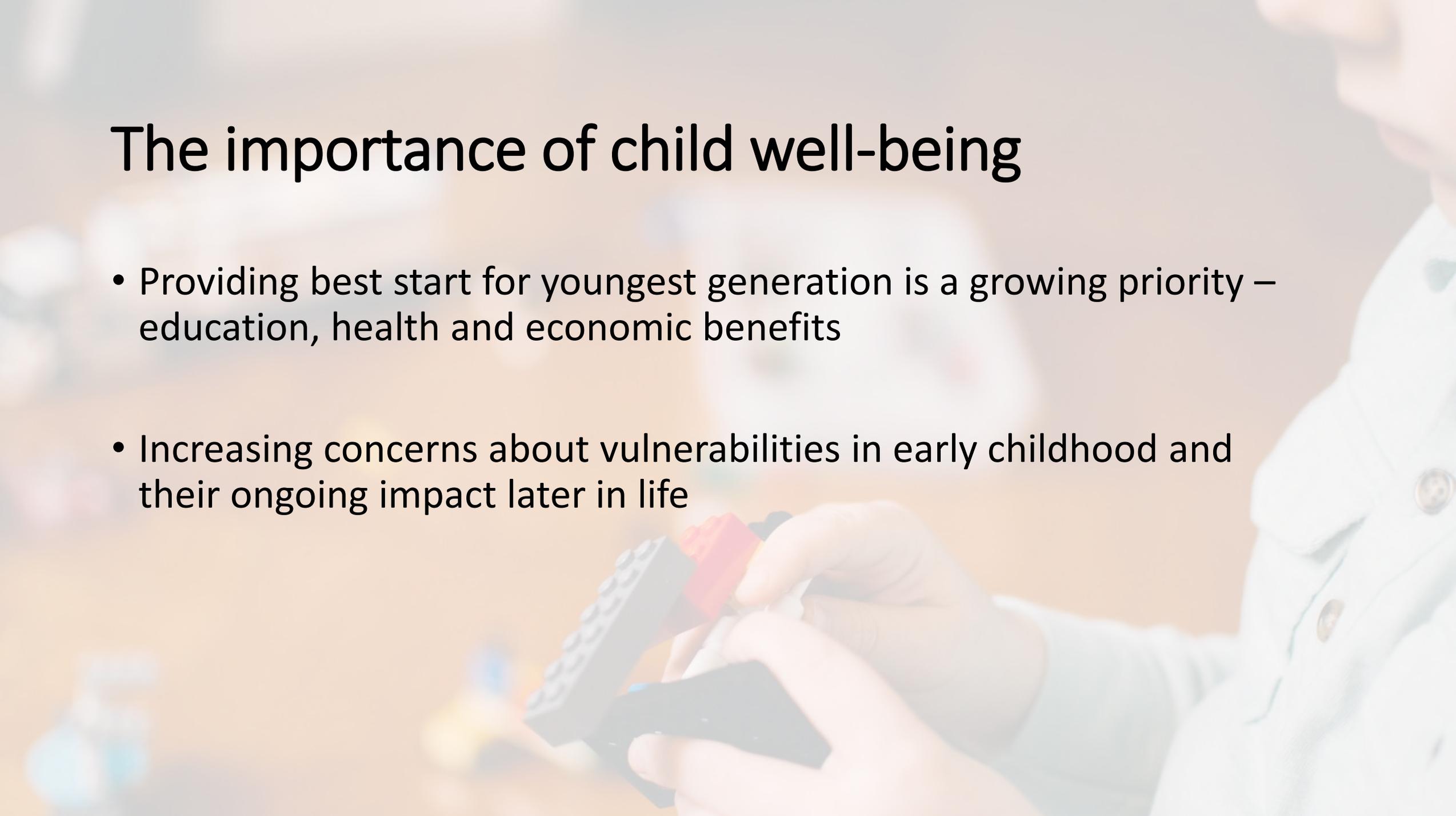
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MSVU Research Day, May 2019



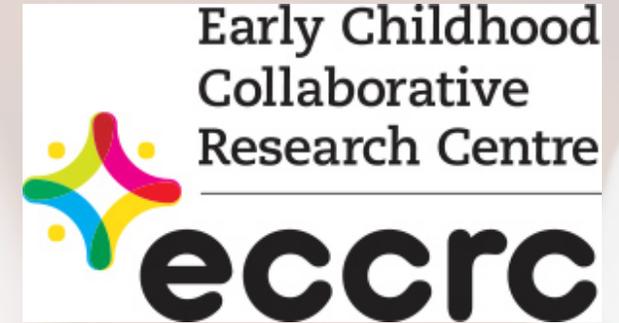
The importance of child well-being

A child's hands are shown in the foreground, playing with colorful LEGO bricks. The child is wearing a light blue button-down shirt. The background is a blurred image of a group of children, suggesting a classroom or play area setting.

- Providing best start for youngest generation is a growing priority – education, health and economic benefits
- Increasing concerns about vulnerabilities in early childhood and their ongoing impact later in life

My CRC program of research

- Goal: To enhance well-being during early childhood by ensuring policy and practice supports families that experience inequity
- Approach: Work with community, policy makers and engage families– to co-produce research that mobilizes knowledge and experiences *for* and *with* families to inform policy and practice



Early Childhood
Collaborative
Research Centre



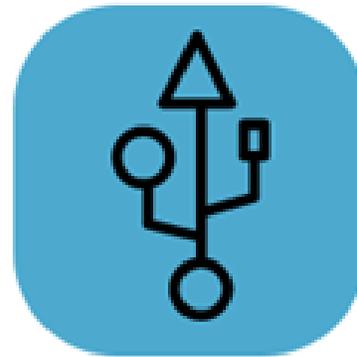
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Population-Level
Evaluation



Knowledge
Mobilization

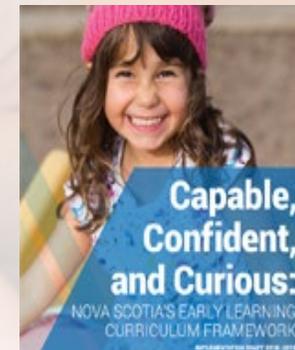


Leveraging
Family Voice



Evolving policy landscape in Nova Scotia

- Greater awareness of the importance of early childhood development and investment from government in policy approaches
- Fed-Prov bilateral agreement funding means more investments in early childhood education and care





Nova Scotia's new pre-primary class gives kids a head start through play-based learning

April 29, 2019 4:27pm EDT

Nova Scotia is rolling out a universal full-day, no-fee pre-primary program, similar to Ontario's and the Northwest Territories' play-based junior kindergarten. (Shutterstock)

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Recent investment in universal early childhood education in Nova Scotia is helping to shape a different future for the province's youngest generation and their families.

Elementary school in Nova Scotia has traditionally started with what's termed Grade Primary, when children are five years old. But now the province [is moving into year three](#) of rolling out a universal full-day, no-fee, early childhood education called the [pre-primary program](#), similar to what is currently offered in both [Ontario](#) and [the Northwest Territories](#)

Authors



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Pre-primary Program

- ▶ Announced Sept 2017
- ▶ 201 school communities will offer the program in Sept 2019
- ▶ Universal access in all school communities on target for 2020-21



Nova Scotia's Pre-primary Program

- No-fee, play-based early education for 4 year olds within school communities
- Led by Early Childhood Educators who follow the Early Learning Curriculum Framework
- Across all seven Regional Centres for Education and le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial



Population-level evaluation

- Participatory 5-year evaluation (2014-2019)
- Evaluation has evolved over time to respond to emerging policy priorities



Co-principal Investigators: Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac (MSVU), Dr. Sara Kirk (Dalhousie University)
Co-investigators: Dr. Joan Turner and Dr. Christine McLean (MSVU)
https://www.ednet.ns.ca/earlyyears/earlyyears_centres.shtml

Evaluation (2017-18)

- All Pre-primary Programs

- Attendance Data
- Family Survey

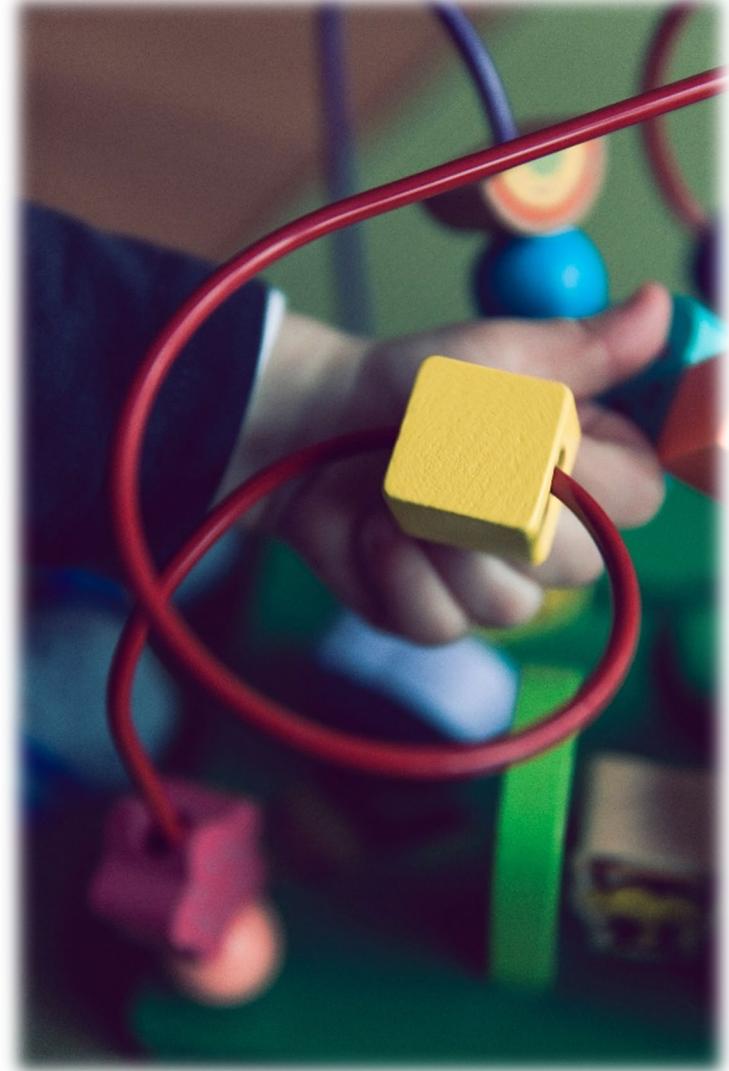
- Four case studies

- School visits, focus groups and interviews
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) 3



Survey methods

- Data from PowerSchool informed participation and attendance
- Online survey link, posters and leaflets distributed to PPP leads who sent to all 46 school communities with a program (spring 2018)
- Response frequencies and cross-tabulations were generated and explored with the collected data.



Pre-primary Program Participation

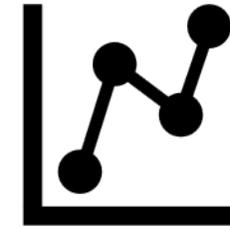
- 896 children enrolled in 2017-2018
- About 60% of eligible children attended the program



Sample characteristics

- 295 families responded to the survey (33% response rate)
 - 84% respondents were mothers
 - 57% indicated that their child would have received care from themselves or a family member if they did not attend the program
 - 6% indicated their child has a diagnosed special need; 8% indicated having concerns about their child's development and learning
 - 11% indicated having someone in their family who identified as a member of the LGBTQ2+ community
 - 9% identified as being of Mi'kmaq or other Indigenous heritage; 7% identified as being of African descent

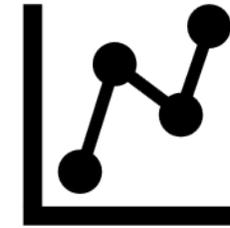
Key results



- Overall the Pre-primary Program was well-received.
- High levels of Pre-primary Program attendance and overall satisfaction with the quality, inclusion practices, and staff.
 - 84% - their child enjoys attending the program
 - 80% - they would recommend the program to others
 - 81% - the educators help their child grow and develop
 - Most families who had a child with special needs indicated their child's needs were met

“My daughter looks forward to going everyday. She has made many friends and has gained insurmountable confidence in who she is.”

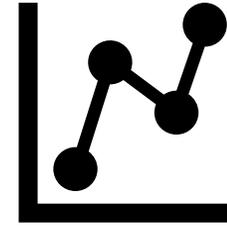
Key results



- Most families indicated that the Pre-primary Program was supportive of their family, culture, parenting, and child's development.
 - 87% indicated the program provided them with extra support in raising their family
 - 94% indicated their culture and identity was respected by staff
 - 79% indicated they feel their child will move easily into Grade Primary because of their participation in the program

“As a stay at home mom with very low income the Pre Primary Program gave us an option that otherwise we would not be able to afford.”

Key results



- Identified areas of improvement:
 - Additional communication about the program
 - Before-and-afterschool care, transportation and outdoor play

“I personally would like more information from the pre-primary educators on how my child is developing and interacting with the other children.”

Next steps (spring 2019)

- Final year of evaluation
- Family and educator survey
- Focus groups with early elementary teachers and interviews with principals



Concluding thoughts



- Universal program is supporting families and creating successful transitions for children in school
- Pre-primary Program helps to bring attention to the importance of play-based learning
- Continued attention is needed to ensure program accessibility



Thank you!



Thank you to my dedicated
ECCRC team.

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