

CHANCES MEDIA CONFERENCE, MARGARET MCCAIN REMARKS

CHANCES, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND, MARCH 26, 2019

Thank you all for coming, and thank you Verna for your kind words. I am pleased to share the highlights of our joint efforts with CHANCES in piloting some very important initiatives that hold lessons for policy makers and the public.

Our work in PEI builds on a wide body of research but two recent reports have particular relevance. A Conference Board of Canada study called the scientific evidence for early childhood education and care “absolutely compelling”. It documents how every public dollar spent, returns \$6 in improved child outcomes, reduced gender and income inequality and economic stimulus.



On the heels of the Conference Board report economists from the University of Toronto analyzed how free, universal early education is a viable public policy option, delivering social, economic and health benefits that far exceed its costs.

Both reports stress that benefits arise only if child care is educational, while the costs accumulate when care is custodial.

The Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation supports evaluations across Atlantic Canada that bridge the gap between education and care.

This is why our foundation partnered with the PEI government and CHANCES Family Centres to test the benefits of expanding educational care. The project offered families, who did not qualify for a government subsidy, the opportunity to have their child attend a CHANCES Early Years Centre at no cost. Every family offered the program, took advantage of it for their child.

The project also focused on quality; instituting a robust professional development and monitoring agenda. The improvements in program quality were measurable.

Researchers evaluated the project’s impact over six years. They have delivered made-in-PEI findings that can be scaled up to improve outcomes for islander children, families and communities.

Based on the evidence we recommend:

- Preschool for all 4 year olds. Specifically calling on the government to appoint a special advisor, reporting directly to the premier with an implementation plan.
- Continue efforts to revamp the child care subsidy process to make it less intimidating and stigmatizing for families.

- Include Early Years Centres in economic planning. Every job in early education creates two spin-off jobs, in addition to supporting parents to work. We are able to showcase these results in O'Leary where the new Early Years Centre has brought needed jobs and economic growth to a rural community.
- Continue to invest in the ECE workforce. This is such important work. Educators need the recognition, compensation and supports necessary to do it well.
- Finally pay attention to quality.

The researchers will fill you in on the details of the study.

But I would like to add some urgency. In cross Canada assessments PEI comes out on top, buoyed by its strong public management of early childhood services.

However PEI scores low on access. Fewer than 1 in 2 island preschoolers participate in an early learning program.

No one is suggesting that early education is a replacement for a loving and stimulating home, but it is an important complement. There are the academic paybacks, but many experts believe the enduring benefits are derived from what children learn from one another -- how to be patient, to share, to consider the feelings of others, to listen and contribute. Skills they will need for school and for life.

But for too many Island children that door is closed. This is wasted talent for the province and wasted opportunities for the child. 21st century economies cannot afford to leave half their future behind. We have the evidence. Now we need action.

Thank you. I will now ask Kerry McCuaig with the Atkinson Centre at the University of Toronto and Dr. Bill Montelpare from UPEI to provide more of the research details.