

Early Learning & Junior Kindergarten Canada and Atlantic Canada

Why investing in early childhood education matters to business.

Atlantic Chambers of Commerce, September 18, 2024

Why is this so topical now?

COVID unearthed the fractures in this system when we tried to restart the economy.

CWELL agreements – demand is high & supply is low (with sector being long ignored, wages and working conditions deterrents = critical shortage in ECE's.)

It's no longer a "mom's problem" but an economies problem, a business problem, a community problem that we must collectively solve.

Why are Chambers important stakeholders?

Supporting business development

- Heathy workforce with parents who aren't stressed about childcare, or having to leave work to deal with their children
- Getting parents back to work, especially moms, but not just moms
- Building communities
- Retaining immigrant families, who have the least access to childcare



Supporting ECE's in staying in the sector, having productive careers with fair compensation



Building a future workforce that is literate, competent and healthy (Craig Alexander's Ready for Life)



Keeping schools viable in communities, especially rural communities, expanding education down to include the 4 year olds



The Importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE)



Critical Brain Development: Early years are foundational for cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Long-Term Benefits: ECE promotes future academic success, social skills, and higher graduation rates.

Economic Argument: Research shows a high return on investment for society—better job prospects, lower crime rates, and reduced welfare dependency.

Evidence & research shows high return on investment (ROI)

- Studies from around the world, including the United States, Europe, and Asia, consistently show a high return on investment in early childhood education.
- Heckman Curve: Economist James Heckman's research found that for every \$1 invested in early learning, society can see a return of up to \$13 due to reduced costs in welfare, healthcare, and criminal justice, along with increased future earnings.
- Increased Workforce Participation
- Access to affordable pre-primary education allows more parents, especially women, to participate in the workforce, boosting household income and economic growth.
- Countries like Sweden and Norway have seen an increase in GDP linked to universal childcare programs that also lead to more equitable labor markets.
- Improved Future Earnings
- Children who attend quality early learning programs tend to have higher educational attainment, leading to higher future wages.
- A longitudinal study in the UK found that individuals who attended early education programs earned 10-15% more in their adult lives.

Long-Term Economic Impact and Societal Gains

Reduced Social Costs

- Early intervention through junior kindergarten reduces need for special education & remedial teaching later in life.
- In the U.S “the Perry Preschool Project” children who attended high-quality pre-primary programs had lower rates of incarceration and reliance on social services, saving governments money long-term.
- Poverty Alleviation Research from developing countries like Chile and Mexico shows that early education programs significantly help in breaking the cycle of poverty by providing disadvantaged children with critical cognitive and social skills.
- In South Korea, studies have shown that early learning contributes to greater economic equality by reducing achievement gaps between socio-economic groups.

Global Policy Recommendations

Organizations like UNESCO and the World Bank advocate for increased global investment in **early childhood education**, noting that it is key to achieving sustainable economic development.

Countries that invest in **early learning** see broader societal benefits, including healthier populations and more innovative, productive workforces.

Junior Kindergarten/Junior Primary in Canada (early play based learning)

What is Junior Kindergarten/Junior Primary: Structured early learning program typically for 4-year-olds. Programs focus on play based learning curriculum.

Differences Across Provinces: Varies between provinces (e.g., Ontario's full-day JK vs. programs in other areas).

Federal Investment: The federal government's funding towards affordable, accessible early learning and child care (e.g., 2021-2022 Child Care Agreement).

Positive Impacts on Children and Families: Access to affordable childcare and its effect on workforce participation, especially for women.

Atlantic Canada: Early Learning and JK Initiatives

Atlantic Provinces' Approach: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and PEI have all introduced initiatives to expand access to early childhood education.

Example – Nova Scotia: Introduction of Public Pre-Primary programs for 4-year-olds, making ECE more accessible.

Impact on Enrollment: Increased participation in early learning programs in the region.

Government Support: Provincial and federal investments in facilities, educator training, and curriculum development.

Challenges and Opportunities in Atlantic Canada

Evidence still suggests:

**Further building down Junior
Kindergarten or PrePrimary**





What does pre-primary look like

Free for all families

Staffed by qualified early child educators

Uses a play-based curriculum that aligns with the kindergarten curriculum

Fully integrated into the culture of the school

Under the leadership of the school principal

Allows children to access the school bus

Has before & after school programs known as “warp around” services

Benefits of Early Learning

Cognitive and Social Development: Reports show improvements in readiness for Grade 1 and better social skills.

Reduced Gaps: Early intervention helps reduce developmental gaps among children from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Parental Workforce Participation: More parents, particularly women, can enter or re-enter the workforce.

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Nova Scotians are saying

Boosts literacy

Strengthens language skills

Improves social skills

Fosters behavioral regulation

Reduces referrals to special education programs

Lowers family stress

Allows for a smooth transition to school

Allows mothers to return to work

Improves family finances

Long-Term Outcomes and Community Impact



Educational Success: Early learning contributes to long-term academic achievement and higher graduation rates.



Economic Benefits: Higher future income for students, reduced social service costs.



Community Well-Being: Investing in ECE leads to stronger, more resilient communities.



Comparing ROI on Early Learning in Canada and Globally

- United States – Perry Preschool Project:
 - Longitudinal studies show an ROI of up to **\$7 to \$13 for every \$1 invested**. This high return stems from reduced crime rates, lower social service usage, and increased lifetime earnings for participants.
- Sweden:
 - Sweden reports a return of **\$2 to \$3 for every \$1 spent**, primarily from increased workforce participation, higher tax revenues, and reduced gender inequality in the labor market.
- Developing Nations (e.g., Chile, Mexico):
 - Research in countries with emerging economies shows ROI in the range of **\$3 to \$5 for every \$1 invested**. These benefits are largely tied to poverty reduction, improved educational outcomes, and increased female employment.
- Quebec
 - ROI: For every **\$1 spent on Quebec’s early childhood education program, the provincial government receives \$1.75** back in the form of increased tax revenues and reduced spending on social services.

Expected ROI: Nova Scotia anticipates similar economic benefits in the long term, though full-scale ROI data is still developing.

Knowing the research

Impact on child development

Impact on community development

Economic development