

**Proceedings Report**  
**May 9, 2012 Discussion Forum**  
**Topic: *Early Years Study 3:***  
***Implications and Opportunities for our Province***

Sponsor: Jimmy PRATT FOUNDATION  
Location: Geo Centre, Signal Hill Road, St. John's, NL

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**Objective:**

1. The objective for the discussion forum was to assemble a group of informed stakeholders within Newfoundland and Labrador's early childhood education (ECE) sector to discuss the findings of the *Early Years: Study 3* and their implications for the province's ECE system. A secondary issue was how the study's Early Childhood Education Index 2011 could be used as an indicator (and facilitator) of ongoing developments in ECE in the province.
2. The study: <http://earlyyearsstudy.ca/download-early-years-study-3/> was authored by the Hon. M. N. McCain, J. Fraser Mustard and K. McCuaig and supported by several foundations including the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation and the Jimmy PRATT FOUNDATION.

**Presentations:**

3. Kathy Pratt Legrow, Chair, opened the forum with introductions, gave the background to holding the forum, and set the stage for the subsequent presentations and discussions.
4. Hon. Clyde Jackman, Minister of Education, addressed the forum. He commented that he has a keen interest in learning and literacy stemming from his earlier career as a teacher and school principal. The Minister outlined some of the initiatives that his department is undertaking in early childhood education. The Minister announced a partnership between the provincial government and both the McCain and Pratt Foundations to conduct a feasibility study on developing an integrated early years program in the province. That study will be conducted by researchers in the Faculty of Education at MUN.
5. Hon. Charlene Johnson, Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, addressed the forum and commented on the recent provincial 10-year child care strategy based on provincial consultations. She suggested that the department's focus was on improving the quality of the services that her department would be funding.

6. Hon. Margaret McCain, co-author of the *Early Years: Study 3*, spoke about health human development and the role ECE plays in this field. She commented about the need for parental support and called for progressive and publicly-funded ECE for all children ages 2+ including an extended learning day for children. Ms. McCain sees education as the basis for learning and that early education should be integrated into the formal school system. She concluded by talking about the Early Childhood Education Index as a tool to guide development of public policy in this field.
7. Kerry McCuaig, co-author of the study, presented the study's key findings. She concluded by stating that if done right, ECE pays for itself.

### **Small group discussions:**

8. In the morning session, the forum's participants addressed the following questions in small group discussions: (a) how does this morning's knowledge resonate with you? (b) what's new, what's missing? and (c) is an ECE opportunity for every child a reasonable goal?
9. Through a facilitated discussion with all participants, the following points emerged:
  - the report's key findings and the other presentations resonated with participants; they were seen as credible and significant
  - need for a strategy to disseminate report findings and ensure take-up, and to make link between ECE and economic/social development
  - ECE needs to be seen as a community initiative; not a top-down effort; accompanied by a huge investment in community-based approach that has to be sustainable and supported by a community needs assessment process
  - continuity across ECE-related programs, services, departments and agencies is important
  - need more integration at policy development stage, and between policy and program delivery
  - access to ECE opportunities should be universal; not only for children and families at risk; urban and rural needs should be seen as equal; society, families and households are changing and needs are growing
  - families need to be supported; governments/others need to have family friendly policies in place
  - there is growing recognition of a poor capacity of youth to learn when there are few if any ECE resources in place
  - having schools as the 'hub' that also integrate with family resources centres and other services in a community is a model to be explored (recognizing that schools are not the only location to act as a hub); location is not so much the issue as is governance of any model/hub
  - there is a need for more training, development of ECE educators

- quality in training, service delivery, etc. is critical to impact outcomes; need for more opportunities for continuing ECE education and degree programming
- funding for right service provider is linked to quality, retention and pay; and outcomes
- legislation, if enacted, should be seen as the ‘floor’ in terms of meeting educational and training requirements
- information needs to be accessible to inform public policy and advocacy
- room for more research on ECE needs of special/specific needs of children and families, and different learning approaches
- need for more collaboration between primary/elementary teachers and ECE educators
- full-day kindergarten is an option that could be explored
- ECE opportunities for all children should be seen as a goal; it is reasonable to achieve this; a solid vision with timeframes have to established; requires a public campaign and political will with a political champion (such as the Premier)
- the need to focus on ECE has to be seen as a Canadian/NL societal value (can take advantage of UN convention on rights of the child to promote it)

### **Additional presentation:**

10. In the afternoon, Jane Bertrand presented on the Early Childhood Education Index 2011, as presented in Chapter 6 of the study, the elements that constitute the index, the interprovincial comparisons and the opportunities to be drawn from applying the index.

### **Group discussion:**

11. Following J. Bertrand’s presentation, the forum’s participants engaged in a question and answer session that resulted in some additional key points:
    - the index was seen as a new instrument and a means to focus attention on the state of ECE in the province
    - in NL, the index can be improved in all areas but particularly in respect to governance, access and funding
    - given the NL government’s recent announcements respecting ECE and child care, it is expected that the index will improve in NL
    - retention and recruitment also impact the index; they in turn are affected by quality of pay and training opportunities – some key issues facing the ECE sector in NL
- NL still has cost of daycare, affordability and availability of spaces as

- major concerns
- given that there is a lot of parallel work going on across all provinces and territories the question was raised: shouldn't we be able to we learn from each other?

### **Wrap-up/Conclusion:**

12. K. Pratt Legrow brought the forum to a close by thanking the presenters and event organizers. She indicated that there would be a proceedings report circulated to the forum's participants.
  13. K. Pratt Legrow also commented that ECE should be seen as a right of children and a link to the province's future economic development, particularly when we know of potential labour shortages over the next decade. She noted that we need leadership and champions to advocate and inform the public as well as government policy, and the political will to see it happen. Finally, she observed that independent foundations should be seen as important players in recognizing and addressing community needs through evidence-based research that then can be used to influence public policy. She cited the current ECE study and follow-up being such an example of this approach.
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