



September 22, 2021

### **Pre-Kindergarten Now on Offer to Half of Canada's Four-Year-Old Children**

About 50% of Canadian four year-olds marked the first day of school this September. Ontario, Nova Scotia and the Northwest Territories now offer school-based universal pre-kindergarten. Quebec has pre-kindergarten in about 30% of its schools with a goal of including all children by the fall of 2025.

Provinces and territories are finding that schools offer an efficient platform to expand early learning opportunities. Planning is underway to include four-year-olds in schools in the Yukon, and Newfoundland and Labrador, while Nova Scotia's new early learning and child care agreement with the federal government introduces full day preschool for three-year-olds.

Public schools exist in every community and children participate because they are children – there is no stigma attached. While attendance in pre-kindergarten is voluntary, where available the majority of families enrol their children. Opening schools to younger children is also cost-effective, lowering the rising costs of special education by identifying and addressing concerns earlier when children are most responsive to interventions.

Unlike child care, where children's attendance is often tied to their parents' work status and ability to pay, schools are open to all. Changes in family circumstances do not mean changes for children's early learning. Schools are also an essential support for working families. Extended hours offered to cover parents' work schedules, typically charge families far less than the fees in regulated child care.

Pre-kindergarten is guided by curriculum and pedagogy that recognizes the benefits of play-based learning. Educators recognize young children are active, curious learners. Children's thinking and language skills and their social-emotional well-being benefit, and the benefits carry forward into kindergarten, the elementary grades and beyond.

School's open door policies result in representation from children across all backgrounds, an approach that research shows raises across-the-board skills development. Since children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most, learning gaps are reduced.

As economist Craig Alexander notes: "[Canada's universal, public education system is foundational to skills development of our youth and the quality of the education system is a key reason why Canada does not have the inequality experienced in the United States.](#)"

Regards,

Hon. Margaret Norrie McCain