



**Early Years Study 4 Newsletter #18**  
**January 4, 2022**

In 1999, Fraser Mustard and myself released [Early Years Study: Reversing The Real Brain Drain](#). It envisioned “a first ‘tier’ program for early child development as important as the elementary and secondary school systems and post-secondary education” (p.23).

Two decades later, [Early Years Study 4](#) called on governments to design an early education system for all preschool children that would simultaneously support parents’ work needs. We documented the steady drip of incremental increases in funding from federal and provincial/territorial governments and the growing coverage for preschool aged children provided by public education. Yet, Canada still lagged behind its OECD counterparts, and was failing to prepare its next generation for the existential challenges it faced. We recommended a substantial investment of \$8 Billion in new federal funding to bring Ottawa’s contributions on par with then provincial/territorial spending.

The global pandemic hit Canada early 2020 and within weeks the essential role of early learning and child care came into sharp focus. The [September 2020 Speech from the Throne](#) stated “the Government will make a significant, long-term, sustained investment to create a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system”. [Budget 2021](#) noted our efforts: “Studies by Canadians Dr. Fraser Mustard and the Honourable Margaret McCain have shown that early learning is at least as important to lifelong development as elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education—it improves graduation rates, promotes lifelong well-being, boosts lifetime earnings, and increases social equity.” The government backed up its words with \$30 Billion in new funding over 5 years.

Now the hard work of execution is underway. Early Learning and Child Care Agreements are now in place for all provinces and territories with the exception of Ontario and Nunavut. In the months ahead, the federal government will introduce legislation that will ensure their ongoing financial commitment. Yet legislation needs to do more than guarantee money. It must ensure a sturdy public infrastructure capable of ensuring equitable access to quality programming for all children. Reduced fees for parents must be accompanied by professional work environments for educators and access for the majority of children.

Here public education has demonstrated its ability to provide early learning and child care as a public good, universally available to all children instead of a market service for a few. Legislation should not discourage provinces and territories from using their school systems to expand access.

Equally important is transparency. Legislation must be accompanied by arms-length monitoring able to track progress and analyze its impact. This has been the role of the [Early Childhood Education Report](#),





which grew out of [Early Years Study 3](#). Maintained by researchers at the Universities of Toronto and Montréal, it provides an accurate baseline of early childhood program provision for children prior to elementary school. By featuring best practices, it can help guide the rollout of Canada's newest, yet long overdue, social program.

Hon. Margaret Norrie McCain