

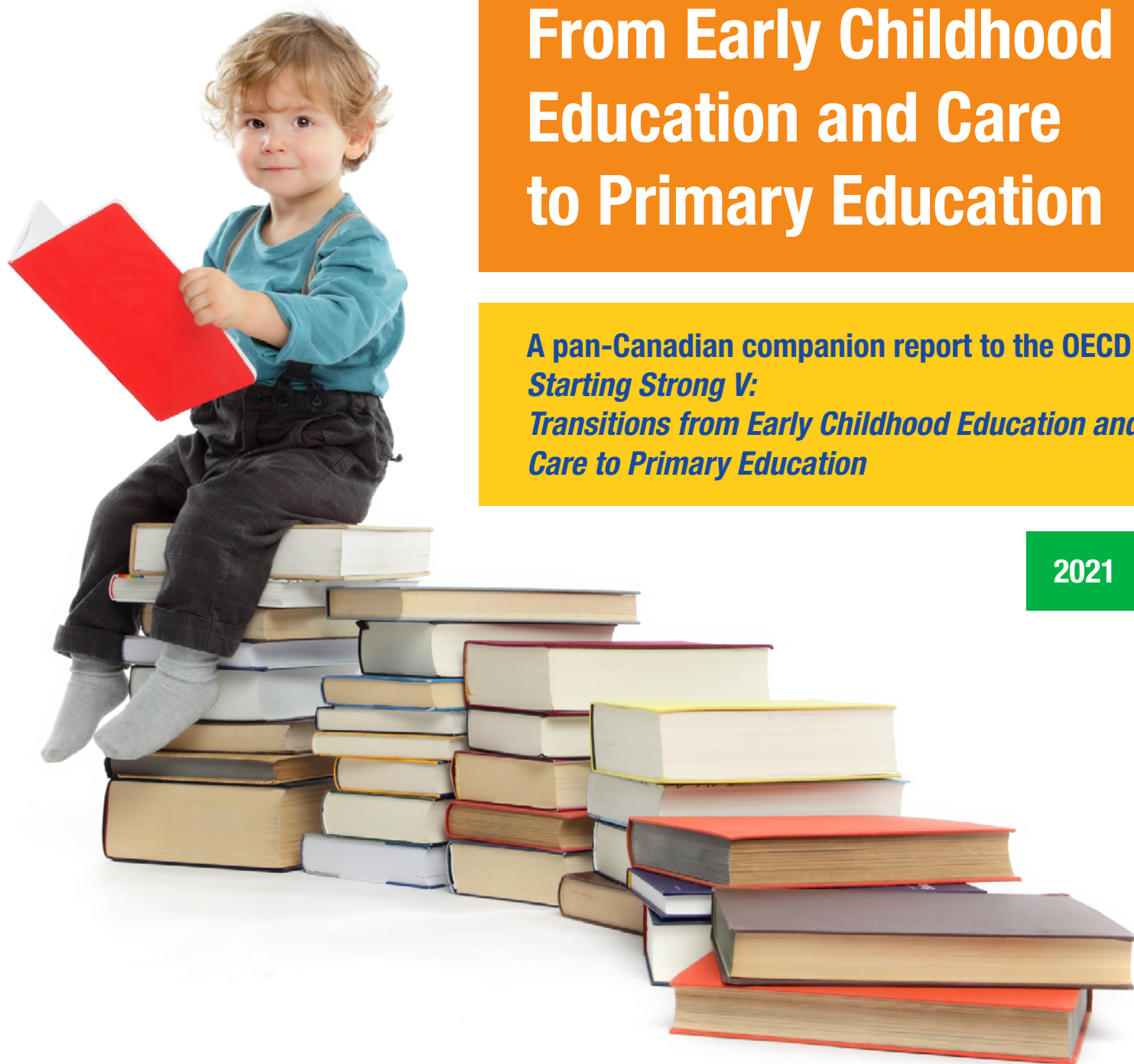


# Transitions in Canada:

## From Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education

**A pan-Canadian companion report to the OECD  
*Starting Strong V:  
Transitions from Early Childhood Education and  
Care to Primary Education***

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# INTRODUCTION

There are many stages in the learning continuum, and the transitions from one stage to the next play an important role in every individual's learning and development. In particular, the early years are a critical period of rapid physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development that helps build every individual's foundation for growth and success in the future (CMEC, 2014).

This pan-Canadian companion report to the OECD's *Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education* places certain aspects of the early learning systems of Canada's provinces and territories into an international context. This report focuses on the transitions experienced by children entering Kindergarten<sup>1</sup> and Grade 1 across Canada, drawing on key pan-Canadian comparison findings from the OECD.<sup>2</sup> This report has the following objectives:

- To act as a resource on the transitions in early childhood learning and development (ECLD) across Canada's 13 provinces and territories.
- To situate Canada's work on transitions<sup>3</sup> in the early years on the international stage.
- To inform policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders of the key conditions and practices that underscore children's successful transitions in the early years.

Transitions are key periods of change that can be multidirectional, multifaceted, and dynamic. Fostering a deeper understanding of transitions in the early years is important because, for young children, this movement will be one of their first

<sup>1</sup> In this report, the last year before Grade 1 will be referred to as Kindergarten, noting that in Nova Scotia the year before Grade 1 is known as Grade Primary.

<sup>2</sup> While this report focuses primarily on the transitions between Kindergarten and Grade 1, other transitions in early childhood, such as those occurring among other ECLD settings prior to primary education are also considered, when applicable.

<sup>3</sup> The CMEC Declaration on Lifelong Learning in the Early Years has shifted from focusing on early learning and development solely as preparation for school to focusing on equipping children in a variety of ways so that they may discover their abilities, talents, and resources in the present and the future. Learning begins at birth and continues over a lifespan.

experiences of a significant environmental and cultural change. During this period, children are exposed to new physical surroundings, new routines, and new people, while also engaging in new types of activities. For children in Canada in the early years, transitions can take place between different physical settings (e.g., early childhood learning and development programming in centres, homes, public schools) over the course of one day (horizontal transitions) or over the course of months or years (vertical transitions).

Ensuring that children feel safe, ready, and equipped with the tools they need to experience smooth and successful transitions will help them sustain and build on the gains made in the early years throughout their learning.



## Box 1. Starting Strong V

*Early Childhood Transitions in Canada: From Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education* is the pan-Canadian companion report to *Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education*, the OECD's publication series on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The Starting Strong series provides international comparisons of ECEC policies in OECD and partner countries, and each edition is organized around a central theme. *Starting Strong V* focused on the theme of transitions—from early childhood education and care settings to primary school. It draws on research and surveys completed by 30 OECD and partner countries with an aim to paint a more accurate picture of what OECD countries are doing to improve transitions, from a country's organization and governance structures to the specific measures introduced to improve professional, developmental, and pedagogical continuity.

The information in the OECD's *Starting Strong V* draws on data that were collected through a country questionnaire completed by participating countries in 2016 (referred to as "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education"<sup>4</sup>). Countries participating in *Starting Strong V* include:

- 27 OECD countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and UK (Wales).
- 3 partner countries: Colombia, Croatia, and Kazakhstan

A number of countries, including Canada, also provided information disaggregated by region (e.g., German Länder, provinces and territories), when applicable. For some indicators, information covers data of up to 63 countries and regions.

<sup>4</sup> Note: OECD Network on ECEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education", June 2016 refers to survey responses collected from OECD and partner countries. CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016 refers to survey responses collected from provinces and territories by CMEC.

While quality early childhood education and care (ECEC)<sup>5</sup> can support children's overall development, foster positive learning experiences, and boost social mobility, child-centred quality transitions in the early years are crucial to ensure gains from ECEC are sustained and enhanced through primary education and beyond. Children who attend ECEC for at least two years perform on average better than others at age 15 in mathematics, reading, and science, as per the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) from 2015 (OECD, 2018).

Safe, healthy, and engaging ECEC environments have also been shown to shape lifelong learning and positive health and well-being outcomes for children (CMEC, 2014). In addition, ECEC can also act as a vehicle to promote equity, because children from disadvantaged backgrounds have been shown to benefit

<sup>5</sup> Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is the preferred name used by the OECD to refer to pre-primary education at the international level. Pre-primary education is known as early childhood learning and development (ECLD) at the pan-Canadian level. While both terms refer to pre-primary education and may be employed interchangeably by individual provinces and territories, ECLD will be used when referring to the situation in provinces and territories at the pan-Canadian level in this report.

disproportionately from pre-primary education and from successful transitions into primary education (OECD, 2017).

Existing research suggests that the following traits are elements of successful transition practices (Lillejord et al., 2017; Ackesjö, 2013; Dobbin, 2013; Dockett et al., 2011; Hirst et al., 2011; Peters, 2010; Dockett and Perry, 2006; Pianta and Kraft-Sayre, 2003):

- Alignment between early childhood learning and development settings
- Alignment between work conditions of early childhood educators and teachers
- Collaboration, trust, and mutual respect among families, teachers, educators, communities, and schools
- Shared understanding of a child's needs, and the ability to be flexible to tailor transition practices to these individual needs.

Chapter 1 of this report will review the role of governance and organization of ECEC systems and transitions across participating OECD and partner countries, and in Canada's 13 provinces and territories.<sup>6</sup> Chapter 2 will review trends in professional continuity and the role of educators in early learning transitions in Canada and in participating OECD and partner countries. In chapter 3, the focus will shift to the continuity of learning (also known as pedagogical continuity) and the curriculum and pedagogical approaches that support it during early learning transitions across provinces and territories, and in participating OECD and partner countries. Finally, chapter 4 will explore how provinces and territories advance developmental continuity and community engagement during early learning transitions by fostering collaboration among all actors involved in transitions, including disadvantaged populations.

This foundation of knowledge can be used by families, teachers, educators, field practitioners, researchers, policy-makers, and community organizations in helping to facilitate children's transitions between key stages in the early years. Moreover, the diverse array of provincial and territorial information can be leveraged to learn from recent initiatives in ECLD, as well as to create opportunities for collaborations in the future.

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that not all participating countries, including Canadian provinces and territories, were able to answer all the questions in the OECD survey for various reasons. In these cases, they were excluded from the question-specific analyses for which they lacked reliable or complete information.



# CHAPTER 1:

## TRENDS IN GOVERNANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITIONS

Understanding how the transition between Kindergarten and primary education is organized and governed is important to help ensure that the gains made in early childhood learning and development programs, such as Kindergarten, are sustained and enhanced into primary education. This not only promotes good practices in primary school, but also helps to reinforce more equitable outcomes for children throughout the system. While transitions are complex, multifaceted and can occur at various times during the early years, this chapter will focus mainly on the governance of school transitions from Kindergarten to primary education.

This chapter draws on global trends in governance and organization identified in the OECD's *Starting Strong V* publication to better understand and contextualize current and emerging trends in Canada. It also reviews the various ways in which these transitions are structured across Canadian provinces and territories. By examining ECLD policies and organization across Canada, this chapter aims to promote a deeper understanding of transitions in the early years.

### Governance and organization of ECLD programs in Canada

ECLD programming can be designed and implemented by a variety of actors both locally, such as schools and centres, and by departments and ministries at the regional and national levels. In over a third of OECD participating countries (i.e., 10 countries) for instance, the designing, steering, or guiding of transitions policies falls solely upon national- or federal-level authorities, while in another third of countries (nine countries) federal authorities collaborate with local authorities (OECD, 2017).

In Canada, the provinces have exclusive jurisdiction over education and, by virtue of the federal Acts that created them, the three territories have comparable powers. Each province and territory is responsible for its own system of education that reflects its geographic, linguistic, and cultural reality. This responsibility includes Kindergarten and Grade Primary programs, as well as primary and secondary education. Policies, guidelines, and legislation are often then provided to local authorities to be implemented locally. While provincial and territorial ministries or departments of education have responsibility for early learning in Kindergarten in Canada, licensed/regulated early childhood programming that precedes Kindergarten (e.g., home-based, centre-based, preschools, childcare, or nursery programs) may fall under the responsibility of one or more ministries and departments, including health, family, and/or social services, in addition to education.



Kindergarten programs in public education are provided free to all Canadians who meet various age and residence requirements. Families, however, are responsible for the majority of costs associated with early childhood education and care programming for children outside of Kindergarten or Grade 1 (e.g., ECEC, before- or after-school programs). This is distinct from many OECD countries that offer between 20 and 40 hours of unconditional, free access to ECEC programming for children aged three to five. Countries with such programming include New Zealand, Finland, France, Portugal, Luxembourg, and Italy (OECD, 2017).

Similar to other countries, financial subsidies exist in Canada to support early childhood programming for families who meet certain criteria (Government of Canada, 2016b). For families who do not qualify for these supports, the costs of enrolling children in ECLD programs can pose a financial strain (Macdonald, 2015). The Government of Canada invests in early learning and childcare by providing funding to provinces and territories through a Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework, to help Canadian children get the best start in life and have a fair chance to succeed.



## Box 2. Indigenous Education in Canada

In Canada, the federal and provincial governments each have constitutional responsibilities for the education of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. While the Government of Canada has a responsibility for the education of students who attend schools on First Nations reserves, provincial and territorial public education systems provide education to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students who attend schools off reserve.

Educational services for Registered Indians in Yukon and both Registered Indians and Inuit in Northwest Territories are provided by the respective territorial governments. In Nunavut, where 85 per cent of the population is Inuit, the territorial government is responsible for elementary and secondary education for all students.

Provinces and territories, as well as the Government of Canada, have also developed agreements with Indigenous communities or organizations to provide education services for Indigenous students (CMEC, 2020).

## Trend 1.A: Responsibilities for ECEC are increasingly integrated.

Governments and education providers around the world are increasingly cognizant of the importance of children's smooth transitions from ECEC to primary education, so that the gains made in the former are sustained and enhanced in the latter. To this end, the organizational integration of ECEC responsibilities is increasingly seen as part of efforts to ensure this smooth transition.

Since the early 2000s, the issue of cross-sectoral coordination in early childhood care and education has been seen as essential for ensuring the child's holistic development. Countries across the globe have developed different approaches to support cross-sectoral coordination, ranging from structural integration of areas into a single ministry, organizing sectoral responsibilities according to age range (e.g., zero- to three-year-olds under a social/welfare ministry and four- to five-year-olds under an education ministry), to the implementation of interdepartmental coordination mechanisms.

Among OECD countries, the responsibilities for the final year before primary education (Kindergarten in Canada) are being increasingly integrated, either through integration or coordination mechanisms, in an attempt to facilitate collaboration between early childhood and primary education settings to support the child's transition from one setting to another. In some countries, such as Finland, New Zealand, and Norway, responsibilities for ECEC services are brought under one leading authority (e.g., ministry of education) at the national and/or regional level. In other countries, such as France, Japan, and Korea, ECEC services are governed under several ministries or authorities at the national or regional level, with collaborations between agencies in these structures (OECD, 2017).

It should be noted that the choice of approach depends greatly on the specific circumstances and needs in each country or region. In the case of Canada, this is exemplified by the diversity of approaches in the integration of early childhood learning and development programming across

the country's 13 provinces and territories. Since 1994, eight provinces and territories have integrated responsibility for childcare under the ministry or department responsible for education. These include Northwest Territories (1994), Nunavut (1999), Saskatchewan (2006), Prince Edward Island (2008), New Brunswick (2010), Ontario (2010), Newfoundland and Labrador (2015), and Nova Scotia (2013).

In five provinces and territories (Quebec, Manitoba, British Columbia, Yukon, and Alberta), responsibility for early childhood learning and development programming is shared between two or more ministries and departments (see Table 1.A.1). In these provinces and territories where responsibility is shared, cross-ministry/-department coordinating mechanisms have been put in place to facilitate interdepartmental cooperation in ECLD. In essence, the governance of ECLD policies, legislation, and guidelines is a shared authority among provincial and territorial ministries/departments of education, health, family, and social services, varying in structure and valuing multiple perspectives.



**Table 1.A.1****Overview of ECLD organization and governance, provinces and territories, 2016****Responsible ministries/departments for ECLD in provinces and territories in Canada**

Ontario Ministry of Education		
Québec Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur		Québec Ministère de la Famille
New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development		
Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development		
Manitoba Education		Manitoba Families
Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment		
British Columbia Ministry of Education	British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development	British Columbia Ministry of Health
Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture		
Yukon Department of Education		Yukon Department of Health and Social Services
Alberta Education		Alberta Ministry of Children's Services
Saskatchewan Ministry of Education		
Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education and Early Childhood Development		
Nunavut Department of Education		

**Source:** CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016.

**Box 3. Provincial and Territorial Directors of ECEC**

The Provincial/Territorial Directors of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Committee is a program committee, functioning as a committee reporting to Deputy Ministers of Social Services since 1986. The Provincial/Territorial Directors of ECEC Committee aims to improve policies and practices related to the development, funding, and delivery of high-quality ECEC services in Canada. This committee has developed a document entitled *Key elements of a Policy Framework for a Quality ECEC System* which focuses on the following five domains: Governance, Parent Involvement and Support, Inclusion, Human Resources, and Early Learning Framework.



## Kindergarten in Canada

Across all 13 Canadian provinces and territories, primary education begins at Grade 1 and it is compulsory. The final year of ECLD before primary education is known as Kindergarten in Canada and has a dedicated curriculum in all 13 provinces and territories.<sup>7</sup> While this final year of ECLD is only compulsory in three provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island), 97 per cent of children who are of eligible age attend Kindergarten in Canada.<sup>8</sup> In provinces and territories where Kindergarten is optional, children have the option to attend other ECLD programming aside from Kindergarten in the final year before compulsory education. In most cases, Kindergarten physically takes place in schools as part of the formal education system in Canada. However, Kindergarten programs differ significantly across provinces and territories in the following aspects:

- Full-day or half-day (alternating full days/ consecutive half-days)
- Compulsory or optional
- Available for both four-year-old children (i.e., Junior Kindergarten, pre-Kindergarten) and five-year-old children (i.e., Kindergarten, Grade Primary), or available for five-year-old children only
- Explicit connections or aligned content to an early learning framework, where applicable
- Explicit connections or aligned content to the Grade 1 curriculum and up

Program characteristics differ both among and within provinces and territories depending on local authorities, such as school divisions, districts, or boards.

In order to facilitate international comparisons of education systems, UNESCO has developed an international classification system known as ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) (see Box 4 below). Kindergarten programs in Canada are understood as belonging to ISCED 02.



<sup>7</sup> Please note that Kindergarten is known as Grade Primary in Nova Scotia and is considered to be the first year of primary education by the government. However, for ease of comparability, Grade Primary will be considered part of ISCED 02 in this report.

<sup>8</sup> Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age) in Canada, 2015–16, Statistics Canada, <https://www144.statcan.gc.ca/sdg-odd/goal-objectif04-eng.htm>.

## Box 4. The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is the reference classification for categorizing education programs and related qualifications by education levels and fields. Please see Table A.1 in APPENDIX A for a more detailed description of ISCED levels. The latest version (ISCED 2011) has nine levels of education, from level 0 to level 8, where **ISCED 0** refers to early childhood education and **ISCED 1** refers to primary education. Programs classified at ISCED level 0 may be referred to in many ways, for example: early childhood education and development, play school, reception, pre-primary, or preschool (UNESCO, 2012). Education programs at ISCED level 0 are sub-classified into two categories depending on age and the level of complexity of the educational content.

### Early childhood educational development (ISCED 01)

Education designed to support early development in preparation for participation in school and society. Programs designed for children below the age of three (UNESCO, 2012).

### Pre-primary education (ISCED 02)

This includes ECEC centres that provide services for children to support early development in preparation for participation in school and society, and that accommodate children from age three to the start of primary education (UNESCO 2012). Most Kindergarten programs in Canada fall into this category. Please note that the terms pre-primary, preschool, and ECLD are used interchangeably.

The main focus of this pan-Canadian report is on the transition from Kindergarten (ISCED 02) to Grade 1 (ISCED 1). However, other transitions in early childhood, such as those occurring among other ECLD settings prior to primary education are also considered when appropriate.

## Trend 1.B:

### A large share of children experience more than one transition before they start primary school.

Children participate in a wide range of licensed/regulated programs across provinces and territories in the early years (see Table 1.B.1). In Canada, the most common pathway for children after birth has been to stay at home with their parents for the first 8–18 months. While some children may stay at home with their families until the beginning of compulsory education, most participate in ECLD and/or childcare programs earlier or in conjunction with family supervision at home.



**Table 1.B.1**
**Programs in the early years from birth to age 12, provinces and territories, 2016**

Province/ territory	0-year- olds	1-year- olds	2-year- olds	3-year- olds	4-year- olds	5-year- olds	6-year- olds	7-year- olds	8-year- olds	9-year- olds	10-year- olds
Ontario	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs				Junior Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
Quebec	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs				Full-time Kindergarten for children with disadvantaged backgrounds and part-time Kindergarten for children with special needs and from a low socioeconomic background	Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
New Brunswick	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs					Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
Nova Scotia	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs					Grade primary	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
				Pre-primary program							
Manitoba	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs				Junior Kindergarten (in some schools)	Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
Northwest Territories	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs				Junior Kindergarten (full-day or half-day)	Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
British Columbia	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs					Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
	StrongStart BC program										
Prince Edward Island	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs					Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
Yukon	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs				Pre-Kindergarten (in the majority of communities)	Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
	Learning Together program										
Alberta	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs					Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
				Accredited Early Childhood Services operators							
Saskatchewan	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs			Pre-Kindergarten (in some communities)		Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
Newfoundland and Labrador	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs				KinderStart program	Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				
Nunavut	Various licensed/regulated early childhood education and care programs					Kindergarten	Primary/elementary school (up to 12 years of age)				

**Source:** CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016.

**Note:** Shaded areas indicate those programs that are part of compulsory education.

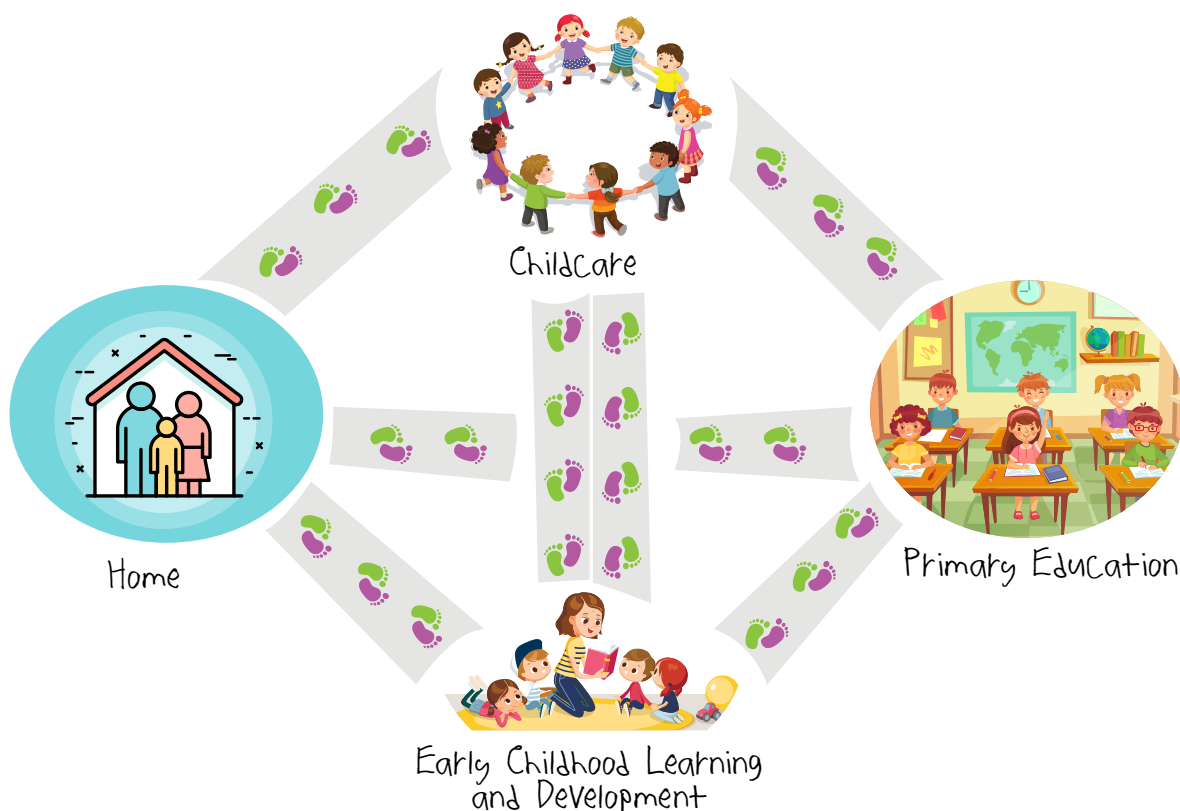


In 50 per cent of participating countries, children experience more than one transition between programs in the early years. As noted earlier, children may stay at home with their families until the beginning of compulsory education, though most participate in ECEC programs earlier, in conjunction with family supervision at home. Given that almost all children across OECD countries attend some form of ECEC, children are more likely to experience a first transition from home to ECEC, followed by a second transition from ECEC to primary school. The OECD refers to these as vertical transitions.

In Canada, as in many other OECD countries, early learning programming prior to school entry is offered by a combination of licensed and regulated schools, drop-in centres, and family daycares in homes (OECD, 2015a). Each province and territory follows different guidelines and procedures for regulating and monitoring these ECLD programs. In Canada, many children experience more than one vertical transition before starting primary school, and these can occur in multiple pathways, the most common of which are illustrated in Figure 1.B.1.

**Figure 1.B.1**

**Common vertical transition pathways in the early years, provinces and territories, 2016**



**Source:** CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016.

**Note:** Figure 1.B.1 does not include ECLD programs that are unregulated, unlicensed, or that continue to take place up to the age of 12 for children in a before- or after-school format. For more information on the different types of programs among provinces and territories, please see Table 1.B.1 and Table 3.A.1.

Turning now to the transition from Kindergarten to primary education, which almost all children will experience, primary education begins at Grade 1 in Canada, and it is compulsory.<sup>9</sup> Whether compulsory or not, the final year of ECLD before primary education is understood as being Kindergarten, and in 2015–16, 97 per cent of children who were of eligible age did attend Kindergarten. In provinces and territories where Kindergarten is not compulsory, children have the option to attend ECLD programming other than Kindergarten in the final year before compulsory education.

In addition, Kindergarten physically takes place in schools as part of the formal education systems in Canada, which eases the transition for children into Grade 1. This physical integration of ECEC and primary schools was a feature in most systems of participating countries (OECD, 2017). Sharing environments between ECEC/pre-primary and primary education programs minimizes the impact of transitions on children and is an approach used by almost half of OECD countries in their pre-primary to primary school transitions. However, drawbacks may include sharing services that may feel overburdened or the prioritization of primary/elementary school over early years settings (OECD, 2017).

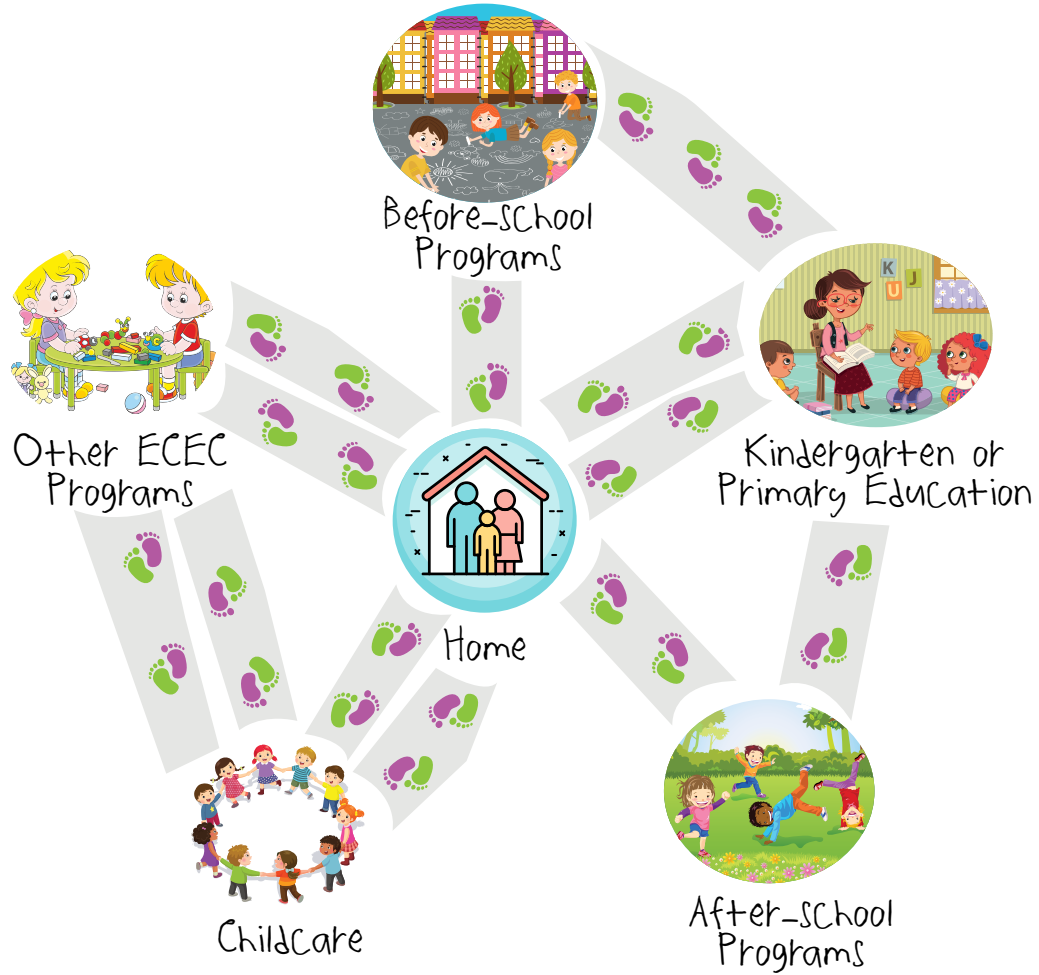
While sharing a physical setting, such as having Kindergarten and Grade 1 in the same building, eases the vertical transition, since staff and space remain familiar to the child, this factor can also help facilitate horizontal transitions. A horizontal transition refers to the physical movements a child experiences going from one setting to the next within a single day, and which begin and end at home. Children experience horizontal transitions on a daily basis in the early years. See Figure 1.B.2 for an illustration of horizontal transitions.



<sup>9</sup> In three provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island), the final year of ECLD before primary education (i.e., Kindergarten or Grade Primary) is also compulsory.

Figure 1.B.2

Common horizontal transition pathways in the early years in Canada



**Source:** CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016.

**Note:** Horizontal transitions end and begin at home.

Same-day horizontal transitions for children are commonplace across provinces and territories. For example, transitions can occur daily between regulated and unregulated childcare, family homes, preschools, and Kindergarten. Horizontal transitions can take place between before- and after-school programs, part-time/full-time childcare, or ECLD programs, in addition to pre-primary or primary education.

Horizontal and vertical transitions are common for young children in OECD countries around the world. When considering these transitions, it is critical to remember to include families, teachers, educators, and program staff in addressing the development needs of the child (OECD, 2017).

Children in Canada can experience different forms as well as combinations of vertical and horizontal transitions over the course of their early years, so it is important to consider how strategies such as a designated transition year, the inclusion of pre-primary education into the primary education system, the sharing of physical settings, or the lowering of the compulsory age for school attendance can contribute to facilitating seamless transitions. For instance, ECEC and primary school is physically integrated in most participating countries, including Canada (OECD, 2017). In addition, a separate transition year is available for children in their last year of ECEC in over half of participating OECD countries, including in all Canadian provinces and territories.





## Trend 1.C:

### Compulsory education can start as early as age three; however, among participating countries, compulsory education typically starts at six.

There has been a shift towards lowering the age of compulsory education across participating OECD and partner countries, which typically begins around age six. In doing so, children are starting compulsory education at a younger age, which in turn requires transitions policies and curricula to be developmentally adapted for younger children. This change has the potential to contribute to increased continuity between ECEC settings and primary education. Table 1.C.1 shows the age of compulsory education in provinces and territories, and in select OECD and partner countries. In New Brunswick,

Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, compulsory education starts at age five in Kindergarten, also known as Grade Primary in Nova Scotia. While the Kindergarten year is optional in the remaining 10 provinces and territories, the participation rates are very high and consistent with most OECD countries, such as France, Germany, Japan, and the Netherlands, where 90 per cent or more of five-year-old children are enrolled in Kindergarten (OECD, 2017).

**Table 1.C.1**

**Compulsory school starting age, select OECD and partner countries, provinces and territories, 2016**

Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	Age 6	Age 7
Hungary	Luxembourg	New Brunswick	Quebec	Manitoba
Mexico		Nova Scotia	Ontario	Sweden
		Prince Edward Island	Northwest Territories	
			British Columbia	
			Yukon	
			Alberta	
			Saskatchewan	
			Nunavut	
			Newfoundland and Labrador	
			New Zealand	
			Poland	
			Finland	

**Source:** Table B.1.

**Note:** In Manitoba, legislation differentiates between the right to attend, for children who are six, and the requirement to attend, for children who are seven.<sup>10</sup> Kindergarten is a voluntary program, which parents may choose to have their children attend. Grade 2 is the year that school becomes compulsory. Children turn seven by December 31 of the Grade 2 year.

<sup>10</sup> See 2.59(1) and 2.59.1(1) of Manitoba's The Public Schools Act for the relevant legislation, available at [https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/p250\\_2e.php](https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/p250_2e.php).

In over half of participating countries, a separate transition year is available for children in their last year of ECEC. A transition year between ECEC and primary school can help adapt and align the core elements of both Kindergarten and Grade 1 curricula to promote shared practices, common language, and a mutual understanding of ECEC and primary school. Twenty-three OECD and partner countries who participated in the *Starting Strong V* project indicated having a separate transition class, year, or group in ECEC in the year right before entering primary school (OECD, 2017).

Canada is included in this group, with Kindergarten programs being understood as the transition year in which to support young children as they prepare to start school. This structure bears similarities to the preschool year in Sweden, which is an optional year designed to provide a platform for children's future schooling by stimulating their development and learning at the age of six. In 11 out of these 23 participating countries, this transition year is compulsory.



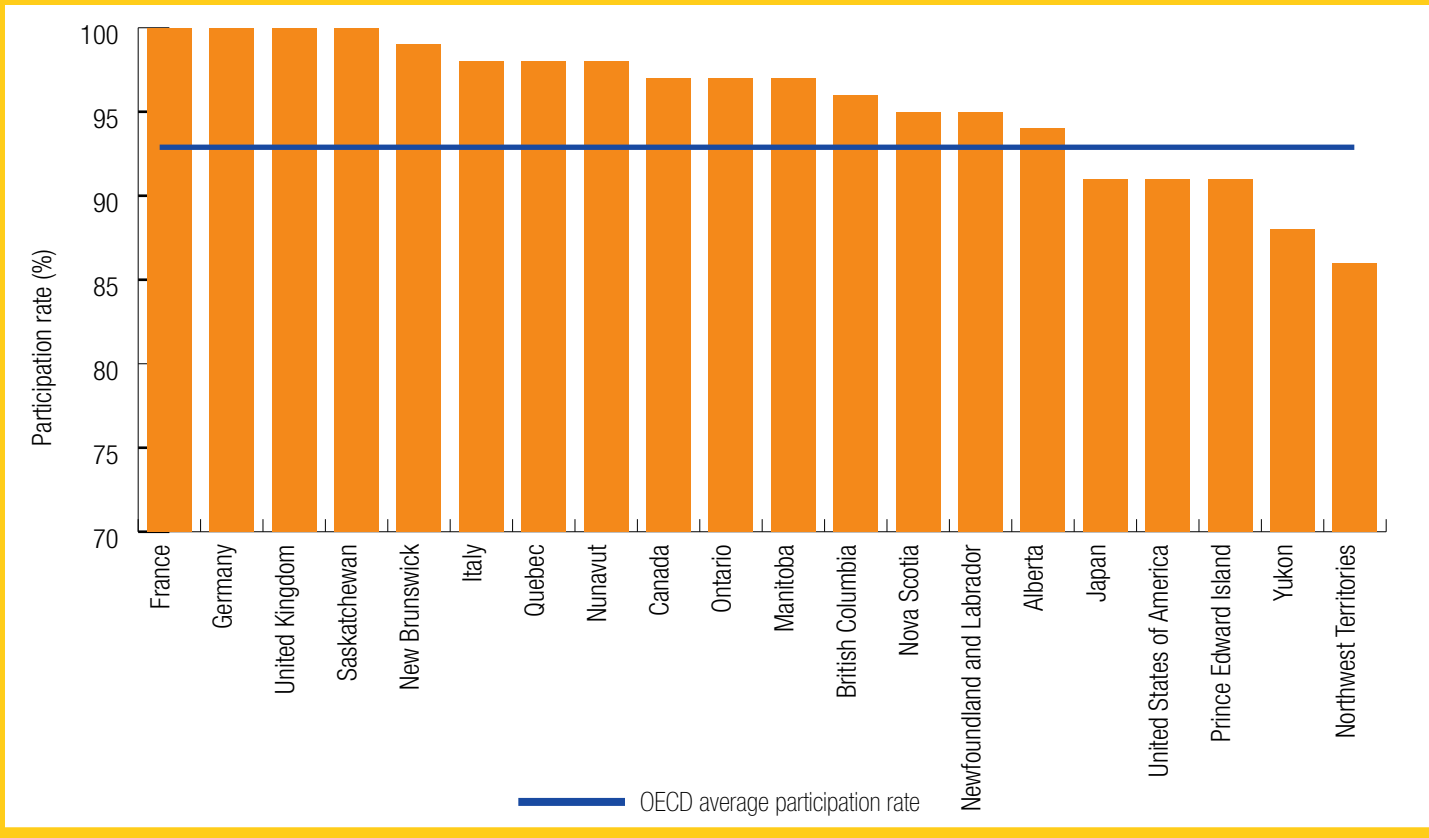
**Trend 1.D:**  
**Transitions are not commonly monitored separately and are often included in broader quality monitoring.**

Monitoring data in ECEC supports system accountability, informs policy design, can improve programming quality (OECD, 2015a), and can provide valuable insights to support quality transitions in the early years. The OECD notes that countries are monitoring transitions using several instruments, and it is uncommon to monitor transition practices only or independently (OECD, 2017).

that monitors whether children start primary school (OECD, 2017). In Canada, basic data collection, such as enrollment, provides a first level of information about children in Kindergarten and primary education (see Figure 1.D.1).

In many OECD and partner countries, monitoring transitions may refer to traditional forms of inspecting or evaluating settings and their practices, and also to the collection of child development information at a certain point in time; or school administration data

**Figure 1.D.1**  
**Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), select OECD countries, Canada, provinces and territories, 2015–16**



Source: Table B.2.

**Table 1.D.1**

**Number of students enrolled in pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Grade 1 in public education, Canada, provinces and territories, 2016–17**

Province/territory	Pre-Kindergarten (4-year-olds)	Kindergarten (5-year-olds)	Grade 1 (6-year-olds)
Canada	152,670	366,876	366,939
Ontario	128,652	132,810	137,151
Quebec	18,303	84,270	87,171
New Brunswick	-	7,068	7,296
Nova Scotia	-	9,303	8,598
Manitoba	-	13,587	13,803
Northwest Territories	114	618	633
British Columbia	-	38,913	39,264
Prince Edward Island	-	1,482	1,467
Yukon	81	447	390
Alberta	-	52,208	55,636
Saskatchewan	5,520	13,440	14,004
Newfoundland and Labrador	-	4,653	4,926
Nunavut	-	816	816

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Elementary-Secondary Education Survey (ESES)

As noted above, international comparisons reveal that transitions are most often included as part of broader monitoring of ECEC or school settings, and are usually conducted at the local level. This is also the case in those provinces and territories that monitor transitions.

Almost half (16) of participating countries (for which data is available) indicated that they monitor transitions. In nine countries, including Canada, monitoring in the early years is done at both ECEC and primary school level. In Canada, most provinces and territories monitor transitions as a part of overall monitoring in primary education (see Table 1.D.2). Furthermore, monitoring tends to take place at the local (school board) or ministry/department level in Canada.



**Table 1.D.2****Level of monitoring of transitions, OECD and partner countries, provinces and territories, 2016**

Level of monitoring of transitions	Number of OECD and partner countries	Provinces and territories
Transitions are monitored in ECEC (including Kindergarten)	11	Ontario*, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Alberta
Transitions are monitored in primary education (Grade 1)	12	Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Alberta, and Newfoundland and Labrador
Transitions are not monitored	14	Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nunavut

**Source:** Table B.3

**Note:** In Ontario, school boards support and monitor transitions in ECEC by surveying parents of Kindergarten students during school registration, in order to collect information about children's participation in childcare and early years programs prior to school entry (e.g., type of childcare arrangement, early learning programs).

As noted above, there is no one single method used to monitor transitions. In fact, instruments used to monitor transitions identified by countries include parent surveys, self-evaluations by settings, inspections, and child monitoring methods. The most common tool cited by countries is the parental surveys (see Table 1.D.3 below).

**Table 1.D.3****Instruments used to monitor transitions, OECD and partner countries, provinces and territories, 2016**

Instrument	Country/province/territory
Transitions are monitored as a part of inspections in ECEC	Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Japan, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Switzerland
Transitions are monitored as part of parental surveys in primary education	Austria, Nova Scotia, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Japan, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland
Transitions are monitored as part of child monitoring methods or child surveys	Austria, Ontario, New Brunswick, Prince Edward, Island, Yukon, Newfoundland and Labrador, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland
Transitions monitored through self-evaluations by settings	British Columbia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Japan, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland

**Source:** Table B.4



**Trend 1.E:**  
**Monitoring transitions through the collection of child-development information is common across OECD and partner countries.**

At the local level, it is common in OECD countries for transitions to be monitored via the collection of child development information at fixed points in time (before entry to school, at the beginning of the program year, etc.). Child monitoring methods were cited by 11 countries, and can be in the form of portfolios, child development reports, or development assessments.

Table 1.E.1		
Child monitoring methods, OECD and partner countries, provinces and territories, 2016		
Child monitoring method	OECD and partner countries	Provinces/territories
Portfolios/child development documentation		Nova Scotia
Child development reports, teacher report cards, individual education plans	Hungary	Yukon
Development or skills assessments/evaluations	Denmark (language), United Kingdom (Wales) [Early Years Development and Assessment Framework]	Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Newfoundland and Labrador

**Source:** OECD Network on ECEC, “Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education,” June 2016, and CMEC, “Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education,” 2016.



In Canada, provinces and territories use a variety of tools to monitor transitions in the early years. In line with the trend noted above for OECD countries, child monitoring methods were also most commonly cited by provinces and territories, specifically the Early Development Instrument (EDI), the Early Years Evaluation (EYE) and the Individual Education Plan (IEP) to collect child development information in Kindergarten or earlier (see Box 5).

## Box 5. Types of Child Development Monitoring Instruments in the Early Years in Canada

**The Early Development Instrument (EDI)** is an assessment tool composed of a 103-item questionnaire that is used in a number of provinces and territories.<sup>11</sup> It is used to measure educators' perceptions of the ability of child populations to meet age-appropriate development expectations in five general domains in the year prior to Grade 1 (Offord Centre for Child Studies 2016).

**The Early Years Evaluation (EYE)** is an assessment tool used in many parts of Canada<sup>12</sup> that provides an indicator of children's individual development in five general domains (The Learning Bar, 2016).

**Individual Education Plan (IEP)/Inclusion and Intervention Plan (IIP)** are tools in the form of a portfolio, report, or evaluation that is typically created in collaboration with the child, family, and school to increase understanding of individual students' learning needs and strengths as well as to support families with transitions and future planning. These educational plans often support inclusion and equity practices.



<sup>11</sup> Used in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta, British Columbia, and Northwest Territories.

<sup>12</sup> Used in New Brunswick (anglophone and francophone sectors), Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Yukon.



## CHAPTER 2:

# TRENDS IN PROFESSIONAL CONTINUITY IN EARLY LEARNING TRANSITIONS

Professional continuity, through coherent pedagogical and child development practices, among early childhood educators is key to children's smooth and successful transitions from Kindergarten to primary education (OECD, 2017). Educators engage with children as co-learners, provoke children's thinking, facilitate interactions among children, and create meaningful programs (CMEC, 2014). So, how do countries ensure that educators are prepared and supported to help children transition smoothly to primary education?

This chapter focuses on this question through the lens of professional continuity and its role in supporting seamless transitions between early learning and primary education settings. Professional continuity underscores the need for staff and teachers to receive quality pre-service and in-service training and that they are supported by the environment in which they operate. Professional continuity policies include staff pre-service education, professional development, teacher support, and leadership and coordination (OECD, 2017).

### Educators in the early years in Canada

Recognizing that professions in ECLD systems vary from one system to another, this chapter will look at the two most common types of staff involved in children's transitions through Kindergarten and Grade 1 in Canada: early childhood educators (ECEs) and primary/elementary teachers. Achieving professional continuity in support of these educators requires a collaborative environment, strong leadership, and a solid grasp of child development and transition

practices. As a result, this chapter will also review some international trends in professional continuity, such as qualification and professional development requirements for ECEs and primary/elementary teachers as well as the importance of educator leadership.

### Early childhood educators (ECEs)

Although ECEC professionals are known by a variety of names across OECD and partner countries, they share in common their main professional activity, which involves the transmission of knowledge, attitudes, or skills to children in an ECEC setting (OECD, 2017). In provincial and territorial systems, professionals who work in regulated/licensed early childhood learning and development programs in home- or centre-based settings are most commonly known as early childhood educators (ECEs).<sup>13</sup> In Canada, as well as in most participating OECD and partner countries, these professionals are distinct from other staff who provide non-pedagogical support in early childhood education and care settings.

ECEs are typically trained to work with children in the early years in a wide range of ECLD settings, such as programs that can take place before or after school and can include licensed/regulated programs, home-based or centre-based programs, preschools, and childcare or nursery programs. In Ontario, ECEs work with children in partnership with a primary/

<sup>13</sup> In Ontario, "early childhood educator" is a protected term, and only members in good standing with the College of Early Childhood Educators (the regulatory body in Ontario) can use that title.



elementary teacher in all Kindergarten programs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). ECEs also work in childcare and other early years settings in Ontario. Having educators trained to work in both ECEC and primary education settings is common in the majority of OECD countries (OECD, 2017).

In Canada, qualifications and certification requirements for ECEs vary across provinces and territories. While some provinces and territories do not currently have any minimum qualification/certification requirements for ECEs working in licensed/regulated ECLD programming, others require that a specific proportion of ECEs per program possess an Early Childhood Education university degree or college diploma. ECEs commonly earn either a two-year diploma or a four-year bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

In Canada, there have been some efforts to align and formalize the qualification requirements for ECEs. In 2008, Ontario became the first province to open a College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) to regulate and govern ECEs in the public interest. As a result, ECEs in Ontario now require membership to the CECE in order to use the title of ECE, or Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) and to work alongside teachers in Kindergarten programs (see Box 6). In licensed childcare settings in Ontario, centres are required to have at least a specified minimum number of RECEs in each room. A number of provinces and territories in Canada have worked



to strengthen the professional standing of the occupation, in part by standardizing qualifications and credentials and by increasing professional development options for ECEs.

### Teachers in the early years

In Canada, teachers in pre-primary<sup>14</sup> and primary/elementary education work directly with children in Kindergarten and Grade 1, though their job title may vary from one province or territory to another. These teachers are all certified, meaning that they have a minimum of four years of university education with specialized training in teaching, pedagogy, and curriculum. Qualification requirements for teachers in Canada are generally the same as those in most participating countries, with the exception of a small number of countries that require their teachers to also hold a master's degree. In Canada, the grade levels that primary/elementary teachers are qualified to teach varies across provinces and territories. Please see Table 2.1 for an overview of the grade levels that primary/elementary teachers are qualified to teach with their certifications in each province and territory.



<sup>14</sup> Pre-primary education refers to Kindergarten. The term pre-primary here does not refer to Nova Scotia's pre-primary program, which takes place prior to Grade Primary.

**Table 2.1****Grade levels that primary teachers are qualified to teach with their certifications, provinces and territories, 2016**

Province/territory	Grade levels primary/elementary teachers are qualified to teach with their certifications
Ontario	Kindergarten to Grade 6
Quebec	Kindergarten to Grade 6
New Brunswick	Kindergarten to Grade 12
Nova Scotia	Grade Primary to Grade 12
Manitoba	Kindergarten to Grade 12
Northwest Territories	Kindergarten to Grade 12
British Columbia	Kindergarten to Grade 12
Prince Edward Island	Kindergarten to Grade 12
Yukon	Kindergarten to Grade 12
Alberta	Early Childhood Services including Kindergarten to Grade 12
Saskatchewan	Kindergarten to Grade 6
Newfoundland and Labrador	Kindergarten to Grade 6
Nunavut	Kindergarten to Grade 6

**Source:** CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016.

**Note:** Several provinces and territories offer an optional pre-Kindergarten or equivalent year for four-year-olds, which is typically taught by certified primary/elementary teachers. With a few exceptions, the qualification requirements to teach this pre-Kindergarten level are similar to those required to teach the Kindergarten and Grade 1 levels. In Northwest Territories, primary teachers with a bachelor of education are qualified to teach Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12.

## Professional development for educators in the early years

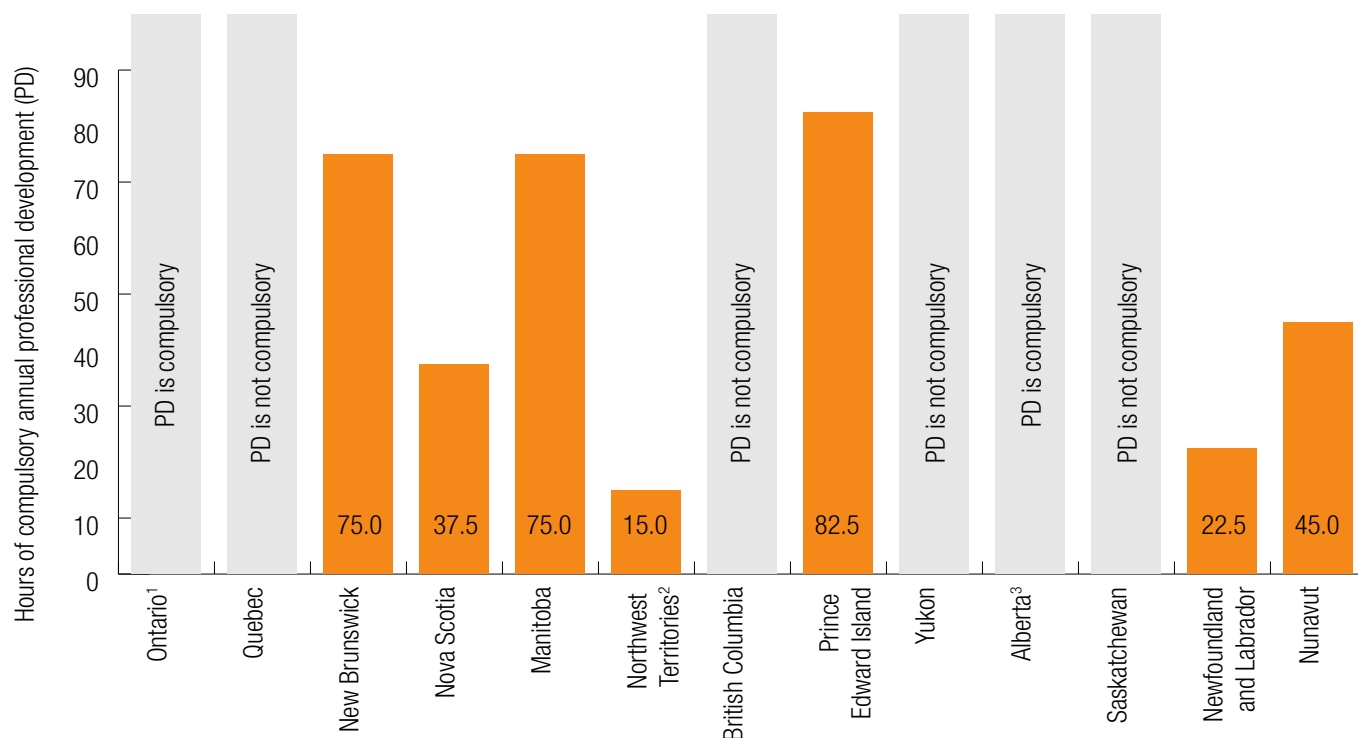
Participation in professional development in Canada is mandatory for ECEs in six provinces and territories, and the number of required hours varies. Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador each require a minimum of 30 hours of professional development every three years, while British Columbia expects a minimum of 40 hours every five years. ECEs in Prince Edward Island are required to complete 45 hours of professional development every three years. Professional development requirements for ECEs also exist in Northwest Territories, as they are linked to licensing requirements. In Ontario, professional development for RECEs is also mandatory, via the College of Early Childhood Educators' Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) requirement. While there is no minimum number of hours of professional development in Ontario for RECEs, they must complete a self-assessment, develop an individual learning plan, and maintain a record of their professional learning activities under the plan (a portfolio of their learning activities) over a two-year

cycle. The content of ECE training and professional development often depends on the regional or local authorities.

Participation in professional development training is mandatory for teachers in nine out of 13 of Canada's provinces and territories. This is also true in 18 of the 26 participating countries; however, very few countries regulate the minimum number of hours per year of professional development for their teachers (OECD, 2017). Those that do, such as Luxembourg, Slovenia, and Turkey, have requirements ranging from 8 to 120 hours per year (OECD, 2017). As shown in Figure 2.1, for those provinces and territories that require professional development, the number of hours varies. In Alberta, for example, teachers are required to complete professional development, but instead of a minimum number of hours, teachers prepare a professional growth plan based on their learning needs and educational context.

**Figure 2.1**

**Hours of compulsory professional development per year for primary schoolteachers, provinces and territories, 2016**



**Source:** Table B.5

**Notes:** The estimate of hours of compulsory professional development training for Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Manitoba is based on an average working day of 7.5 hours.

<sup>1</sup> In Ontario, there is a variety of ministry, school board, school, federation, and self-directed professional development for teachers, including the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP), annual learning plans (ALPs), the Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA), and mandatory as well as discretionary Professional Activity days.

<sup>2</sup> In Northwest Territories, teachers (JK–12) must participate in professional development for a minimum of 120 hours over five years and for at least 15 hours in each of the five years to maintain a professional certificate.

<sup>3</sup> In Alberta, professional development is compulsory for teachers but there is no prescribed minimum. In Alberta, teachers prepare a professional growth plan based on their learning needs and educational context.

The range of topics that is offered through professional development workshops or courses usually depends on the local authorities, such as the individual school or the school division, district, or board.



## Trend 2.A: Educators in the early years are commonly being taught about transitions.

ECEs and teachers across participating countries are being taught about transitions in their pre-service training and professional development. Pre-service education is key and helps ECEs and teachers to work successfully with children during the transition period. Internationally, more than half of participating countries provide transition-specific training, though this is more common in initial training than in professional development and more common for ECEC than for primary teachers (OECD, 2017).

The educator training landscape looks somewhat different in Canada, with fewer educators receiving transition-specific training in their pre-service education than in other countries (Figure 2.A.1).

In general, across provinces, territories, and other participating countries, transition-specific training of ECEs and teachers is offered through a variety of ways, including:

- Meetings with school leaders, such as head teachers, managers, or principals
- Information or workshops provided by third parties, such as psychologists and child-development agencies
- Specific guidelines on transitions
- Other written communication materials (books, flyers, Web sites)

In Canada, practices that inform teachers and ECEs about how to handle and prepare transitions are often determined at the ECEC-setting or school-district level, as they are usually not mandated at the provincial or territorial level.

Moreover, resources that support educators on how to handle transitions and support children are widely provided among participating countries. These may include transition guidelines, or other written communication materials, such as books, flyers, and Web sites. Additional guidance is also often linked to curriculum (OECD, 2017). In Canada, resources and specific guidelines targeting educators are at the discretion of schools and school boards, ECLD settings, or providers.

**Figure 2.A.1**

**Transition-specific training in pre-service education and professional development, OECD and partner countries, provinces and territories, 2016**



**Source:** Table B.6

**Note:** Information regarding pre-service education on transitions is based on 23 countries. Information regarding voluntary professional development on transitions is based on 22 countries. Included are countries, provinces and territories where transitions are available in pre-service or professional development, or within the autonomy of the training institution or district/school board. ECEs here refer to early childhood educators in Canada, and pedagogical ECE staff taking the lead in the classroom/playroom in OECD countries.

## Trend 2.B:

### Collaboration among educators is common among participating countries.

Collaboration among educators in ECEC and school settings can take several forms, as highlighted by the OECD. These can include visits and exchanges, sharing information on child development, and forming collaborative professional learning groups as platforms to exchange ideas and practices across sectors.

When these professionals work together on specific skills, a holistic approach to children's transitions and development can be put into practice, and the positive outcomes of these approaches have been shown to supersede the benefits of other qualifications such as educational attainment (Rous et al., 2010).

Sharing child development information is important for ensuring that both ECEC and primary settings

are fully informed of the status and needs of children entering primary school, and was found to be a common practice in most participating countries (OECD, 2017). Most provinces and territories also noted that this is common, though how this is done is often determined by schools and ECLD settings (see Table B.8, APPENDIX B).

While it is clear that provinces and territories value collaborations between teachers and ECEs, these activities vary in frequency and practice across the country, including across ECLD settings and school divisions, districts, or boards.

See Box 6 for a specific example of collaboration between teachers and early childhood educators.

#### Box 6. Professional Collaboration in Ontario's Full-Day Kindergarten Program

"In Kindergarten classrooms that have an educator team, with a teacher and an early childhood educator, the team members have the benefit of a collaborative and reflective partnership. Educator team members have complementary skills that enable them to create a nurturing and stimulating learning environment that supports the unique needs of each child. While an educator team will reflect the uniqueness of its members, the hallmark of all successful partnerships is an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, and open communication. Teachers and early childhood educators work together to plan and implement the program and to maintain a healthy physical, emotional, and social learning environment. They collaborate in observing, monitoring, and assessing the progress and development of the children in Kindergarten and in communicating with families."

*Ontario Ministry of Education, The Kindergarten Program 2016, p. 112*



Trend 2.C:

In most countries, leadership is pivotal in making transitions work well for children.

The role of leaders is another factor that has proven to have a significant impact on professional continuity in support of transitions for children. Leadership is pivotal for supporting staff and teachers, and for making transitions work well for children, though more research is needed to understand and measure its direct effects on transitions (OECD, 2017). ECEC centre leaders are those with the highest responsibility for administrative, managerial, and/or pedagogical leadership; such leadership activities may include supervising other staff, making contact with parents, and planning the pedagogical work in the centre (OECD, 2017). In primary schools, principals often occupy the main leadership role and are the official head administrator.

Principals (school leaders) and ECEC centre leaders are the most commonly cited resource for information and support for teachers and ECEs regarding student transitions. Such information and support is typically provided via meetings between these two groups. This was the case in 17 out of 30 countries, and seven provinces and one territory (see Table 2.C.1). It should be noted that these provinces and this territory also indicated that these meetings are often determined by the local setting (school or centre). Meetings may be informal, or they may consist of principals’ delivering formal presentations, or, at the provincial level, ministries/departments may share with school boards/districts in a variety of ways.

Table 2.C.1	
School and ECEC leaders are key sources of information for teachers and ECEs on how to handle transitions to support children, OECD and partner countries, provinces and territories, 2016	
OECD and partner countries	Provinces and territories
Austria	Ontario
Colombia	New Brunswick <sup>1</sup>
Croatia	Nova Scotia
Czech Republic	Manitoba
Germany	British Columbia
Greece	Prince Edward Island
Hungary	Newfoundland and Labrador <sup>2</sup>
Japan	Nunavut
Kazakhstan	
Luxembourg	
Poland	
Portugal	
Slovak Republic	
Slovenia	
Spain	
Turkey	
United Kingdom – Wales	

Source: Table B.7

Notes: <sup>1</sup> In New Brunswick, this is the case for children with exceptionalities between ECEC settings and Kindergarten.

<sup>2</sup> In Newfoundland and Labrador, this was only the case for children with exceptionalities.

In the transition from Kindergarten to Grade 1, school principals can support seamless transitions for children by being well-informed, encouraging an exchange of knowledge or resources between teachers and families, and recognizing the importance of transitions to a child's learning and development. This role of primary-school principal is similar to those in countries such as Austria, Japan, Kazakhstan, Norway, Slovenia, and Sweden, where principals are responsible for the cooperation and exchanges between institutions and staff (OECD, 2017).

The fact that Kindergarten and Grade 1 typically both take place in primary schools in Canada supports continuity for young children, and underscores the importance of having a school leader who can provide guidance and make important decisions that will support children's transitions. In order for this leadership to be effective, however, there should be a clear definition of the leader's roles and responsibilities with specific regard to transition practices and relationships to different types of staff (OECD, 2017).

Lastly, research in the area of leadership has also been shown to impact quality in ECEC and achievement among students in elementary-secondary education (OECD, 2017). For example, a study using longitudinal data from British Columbia, which explored the effectiveness of principals in raising math and reading scores between grades four and seven, found that principals were as important to or even slightly more important than teachers were to student-achievement outcomes (Dhuey and Smith, 2014). More research is needed to understand the impact of school leadership in early learning outcomes.





## CHAPTER 3:

# TRENDS IN CONTINUITY OF LEARNING IN TRANSITIONS

In this report, curriculum and pedagogical continuity (or the continuity of learning) is understood as the aspects of learning that facilitate children's transitions from ECEC to primary school. These include curriculum and pedagogical approaches, learning standards and development goals, and structural aspects that affect children's daily ECEC and school experiences (OECD, 2012).

Research shows that pedagogical continuity, which includes continuity in curricula and transition practices, is critical to a child's development and to their successful transitions between ECEC settings and primary education. Moreover, transitions accomplished well can positively impact children's later academic and social success (OECD, 2017). In addition to examining some international trends, this chapter will review the extensive work completed by provinces and territories on developing holistic frameworks and curricula to support children in their early learning and development.

### Early learning frameworks

The emergence of new ECLD frameworks over the past decade underscores the importance of aligning Kindergarten and Grade 1 curricula. Frameworks and guidelines for early childhood learning and development contribute to an increasing recognition of the early years as an independent and critical period of growth and learning for all children. Likewise, continuity between ECLD documents can support children's seamless transitions by defining guiding principles, content, or demonstrating strong connections between the resources being used at different levels in a child's learning and

development. Increasingly across the world, countries are developing frameworks and curricula for children, beginning from as early as birth to the start of the compulsory school age, as there is a gradual disappearance of settings focused solely on childcare without educational components (OECD, 2015a). Internationally, Japan offers a good example of a holistic and evidenced-based approach to the topic of transitions in early childhood. Not only has Japan developed a national document to promote transition-related activities between ECEC and primary education, but it also conducts surveys to gauge how municipalities are progressing every year (OECD, 2017). In line with this trend, the majority of provinces and territories in Canada have developed early learning frameworks, which support learning programs for children from birth leading up to their entry into compulsory education or Kindergarten programs (see Table 3.A.1). These documents demonstrate strong similarities to one another, each of them exploring four common themes:

- Engaging and inclusive environments
- Strong relationships between children, families, educators, and communities
- Importance of play-based learning
- Children's well-being and their social, emotional, cognitive, and physical dimensions

Throughout these themes, the topic of supporting children in their transitions from home to early learning programming to school is consistently discussed. While these frameworks are often optional for early childhood programs to use, they were developed by relevant authorities and are widely implemented in early years programming.



At the pan-Canadian level, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada published the CMEC Early Childhood Learning and Development Framework in 2014. This pan-Canadian framework, created in collaboration with all provinces and territories, explicitly supports children's transitions into school by serving as a guide to policy and curriculum development (CMEC, 2014). It also speaks to the centrality of children in policy and program development, the importance of family engagement, welcoming diversity, learning through play, fostering safe environments, and the role of educators.



### **Box 7. The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework**

*The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework* represents work of the Government of Canada and Indigenous peoples to co-develop a transformative Indigenous framework for early learning and child care (ELCC) that reflects the unique cultures, aspirations, and needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children across Canada. The framework provides a guide for communities, program administrators, service providers, policy makers, and governments to work towards achieving a shared vision where all Indigenous children have the opportunity to experience high-quality, culturally strong early learning and child care.

The framework is intended to support, coordinate, and guide the design, delivery, and governance of Indigenous ELCC that is anchored in self-determination, centred on children, and grounded in culture, through new policies, processes, partnerships, authorities, capacities, programs and investments that will strengthen Indigenous ELCC in Canada (ESDC, 2018).

## Kindergarten curricula in Canada

All of Canada's 13 provinces and territories have a dedicated curriculum for Kindergarten/Grade Primary programs. While some have developed curriculum documents focusing solely on Kindergarten, others have developed curriculum for Kindergarten in conjunction with Grade 1 and up (see tables 3.1 and 3.A.1). Furthermore, these documents may be integrated for some subject areas, but separate for others. For example, New Brunswick has a specific mathematics curriculum document for Kindergarten, but its curricula for English language arts/Français, music, and physical education are merged with Grade 1 and above. In addition, provinces and territories with small populations, such as Yukon, often implement specific curriculum resources from a neighbouring province—in this case, British Columbia. As noted in the first chapter, Kindergarten programs can vary significantly across and within provinces and territories in a variety of ways, including length (full-day vs. half-day), frequency (alternating vs. consecutive), status (compulsory vs. optional) and eligible age requirements (e.g., Junior Kindergarten for four-year-old children, Kindergarten for five-year-old children). Given that program characteristics differ among provinces and territories, it is also possible for them to vary within them depending on the school division, district, or

board. In terms of curricula, Kindergarten programs can be merged or explicitly aligned with early learning frameworks (where applicable) or with the Grade 1 curriculum and beyond.

Similar to early learning frameworks, the topic of transitions is typically addressed in Kindergarten-specific documents. Subject areas that are commonly included in Kindergarten curricula across provinces and territories are literacy and language, numeracy, arts, and health and well-being, which are similar to primary school curricula in most OECD and partner countries (OECD, 2017). However, it should be noted that ECEC curricula generally tend to be broad and holistic, while in primary education they tend to be more subject-specific and subject to specific regulations (OECD, 2017).

Transitions can be improved by making clear connections between frameworks that govern ECLD. More pedagogical continuity in these areas could also create new opportunities for collaboration between ECLD staff, teachers, families, and children. Table 3.1 provides a detailed breakdown of curricula and early childhood frameworks in place in ECLD and primary education across provinces and territories.



**Table 3.1****Curricula profiles for Kindergarten programs, provinces and territories, 2016**

Province/territory	Program format	Age of entry	Kindergarten-specific curriculum
Ontario	Full-day Junior Kindergarten	4 years old by Dec 31	The Kindergarten Program
	Full-day Kindergarten	5 years old by Dec 31	
Quebec	Full-day Kindergarten for children from disadvantaged areas	4 years old by Sept 30	Preschool education program: Full-day Kindergarten for 4-year-olds from disadvantaged areas
	Full-day Kindergarten	5 years old by Sept 30	Preschool education program
New Brunswick	Full-day Kindergarten	5 years old by Dec 31	Kindergarten Program: Mathematics
Nova Scotia	Full-day Pre-Primary Program	4 years old by Dec 31	Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework
	Full-day Grade Primary Program	5 years old by Dec 31	Integrated Grade Primary Curriculum
Manitoba	Half-day; some divisions may offer full-day, alternating days	5 years old, but cut-off date varies locally by school division	Manitoba Education Curriculum K–12 (Kindergarten)
Northwest Territories	Full-day and/or half-day Junior Kindergarten	4 years old by Dec 31	NWT Junior Kindergarten/Kindergarten Curriculum
	Full-day Kindergarten	5 years old by Dec 31	
British Columbia	Full-day	5 years old by Dec 31	BC Ministry of Education Curriculum – Kindergarten
Prince Edward Island	Full-day	5 years old by Dec 31	Kindergarten Integrated Curriculum Document Communication and Information Technology
Yukon	Half-day K4	4 years old by Dec 31	Please see British Columbia
	Full day Kindergarten	5 years old by Dec 31	
Alberta	Half-day, alternating full-day	5 years old by Mar 1 of the school year, but cut-off date varies locally by school division. Effective September 2020, children must be 5 on or before December 31 the year that they enter Kindergarten.	Kindergarten Program Statement: Environment and community Awareness, Personal and social responsibility, Physical skills and well-being, Creative expression
Saskatchewan	Pre-K, half-day, alternating full-day	3–4 years old by Dec 31, but cut-off date varies locally by school board	Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide and Essential Learning Experiences
	Half-day, alternating full-day	5 years old by Dec 31, but cut-off date varies locally by school board	Children First: A Resource for Kindergarten, Arts Education, English Language Arts
Newfoundland and Labrador	Full-day	5 years old by Dec 31	Completely Kindergarten: Kindergarten Curriculum Guide
Nunavut	Half-day	5 years old by Dec 31	N/A

**Source:** CMEC, “Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education,” 2016.

## Trend 3.A:

# There is continuity in curricula between ECEC and primary school in most participating countries, including in most provinces and territories.

OECD and partner countries were categorized as falling into three broad categories when it came to continuity in curricula: those who had fully integrated ECEC and primary curricula, those who had explicitly aligned them together, and those who had neither aligned nor integrated their ECEC and primary curricula.

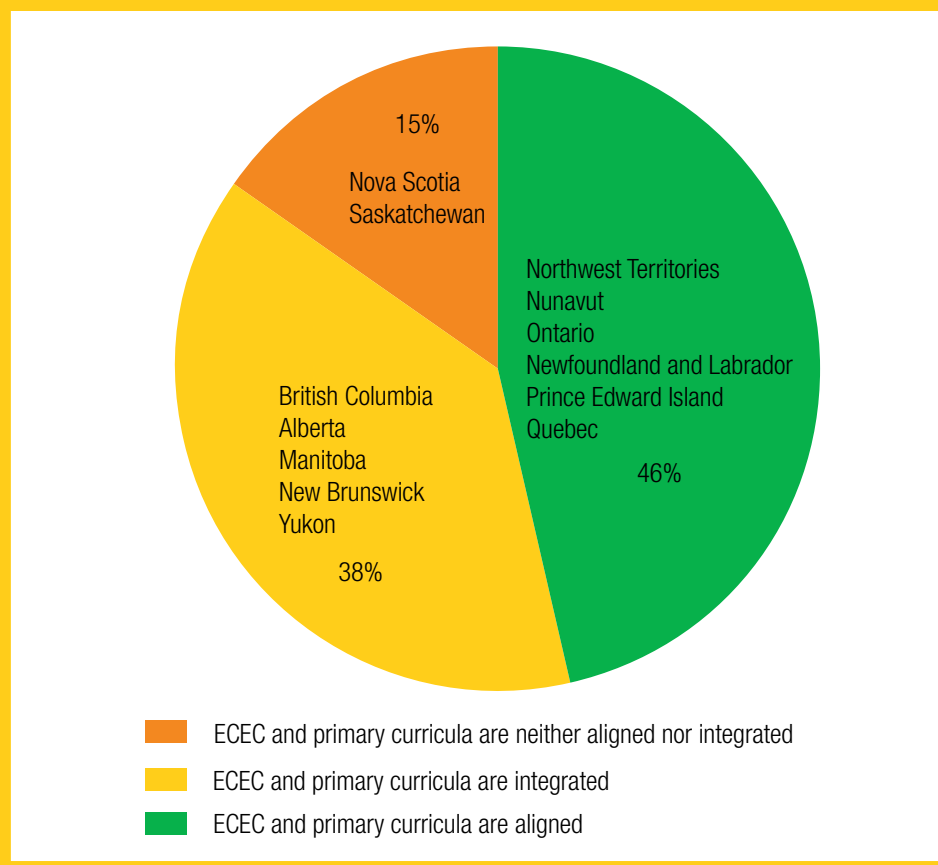
Either by aligning their curricula, or by fully integrating them together, 78 per cent of participating countries (46 out of 59 countries) have ensured some level of continuity in curricula between ECEC and primary school. This situation is also the case for most provinces and territories in Canada, as shown in Figure 3.A.1.

More specifically, authorities in 24 per cent of participating countries (14 out of 59) have fully integrated curricula (e.g., Italy and Switzerland) between ECEC and primary school (OECD, 2017). Integrated curricula typically involve a single document that covers shared themes, goals, and perspectives for a relatively broad age range, including (at least) the last year of ECEC (typically called Kindergarten) and first years of primary school, with separate contents to match each age group (OECD, 2017). Five Canadian provinces and territories fall into this group: British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Yukon.

Another 54 per cent of participating countries (32 out of 59) have explicitly aligned curricula for the two levels (e.g., Chile, German Länder, and Finland). This means that curricula are described in separate documents for each level of education, with age-specific goals and perspectives, but the documents are thematically aligned to facilitate pedagogical

**Figure 3.A.1**

**Alignment between curriculum for last year of ECEC and curriculum for primary school, provinces and territories, 2016**



**Source:** Table B.9

continuity (OECD, 2017). This is the case in six provinces and territories, including Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec.

In the remaining 22 per cent of countries (13 out of 59) the ECEC curriculum, at least for the last year of ECEC, is neither aligned nor integrated with the primary education framework (OECD, 2017). Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan fall into this category.

For an overview of early learning curriculum frameworks in Canada, see Table 3.A.1 below. More information is needed, however, on the ways educators and teachers put these early learning frameworks into practice.

Table 3.A.1

## Curricula and early learning frameworks in ECEC and primary education, provinces and territories, 2019

Province/ territory	0-year-olds	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds	8-year-olds	9-year-olds	10-year-olds	11-year-olds	12-year-olds
Ontario					The Kindergarten Program		Ontario Curriculum						
	Early Learning Framework - "How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years"												
Quebec	Accueillir la petite enfance - Programme éducatif des services de garde du Québec (Welcoming early childhood - Quebec's Educational Program for Childcare Services, optional)				Preschool Education Program Full-day Kindergarten (in disadvantaged areas)	Preschool Education Program (mandatory)	Quebec Education Program						
New Brunswick	Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care (Anglophone sector)					Curriculum (Anglophone sector)							
	Curriculum éducatif pour la petite enfance (Francophone sector)					Curriculum (Francophone sector)							
Nova Scotia	Capable, Confident and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework												
						Elementary Years: Grades Primary to 6 (Nova Scotia Curriculum)							
Manitoba	Starting Early, Starting Strong: A Guide for Play-Based Early Learning in Manitoba					Manitoba Education Curriculum							
	Early Returns: Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Infant Programs.		Early Returns: Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Pre-school Centres and Nursery Schools										
					Manitoba Education Curriculum								
				A Time for Learning, a Time for Joy: A Resource for Kindergarten Teachers									
Northwest Territories					NWT Junior Kindergarten/Kindergarten Curriculum	NWT Curriculum							
British Columbia	British Columbia Early Learning Framework (optional)												
						BC Ministry of Education Curriculum - Kindergarten	BC Ministry of Education Curriculum						
Prince Edward Island	PEI Early Learning Framework					Kindergarten Integrated Curriculum	PEI Programs of Study and Curriculum						
Yukon	British Columbia Early Learning Framework (optional)												
						BC Ministry of Education Curriculum - Kindergarten	BC Ministry of Education Curriculum						
Alberta	Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework						Alberta Program of Studies						
Saskatchewan	Play and Exploration: Early Learning program Guide for Infants and Toddlers (suggested curriculum)				Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide and Essential Learning Experiences (suggested curriculum)	Kindergarten Curriculum (mandatory) French Immersion Kindergarten; Fransaskois Kindergarten - Maternelle, Education Fransaskois	Saskatchewan Curriculum						
Newfoundland and Labrador	Early Childhood Learning Framework					Newfoundland and Labrador Curriculum							
				KinderStart Program	Newfoundland and Labrador Curriculum-Kindergarten								
Nunavut						Nunavut Kindergarten Curriculum	Nunavut Curriculum						

Source: Table B.10



## Trend 3.B:

### Many countries and regions have included new subjects in their early learning frameworks/curricula to reflect today's society.

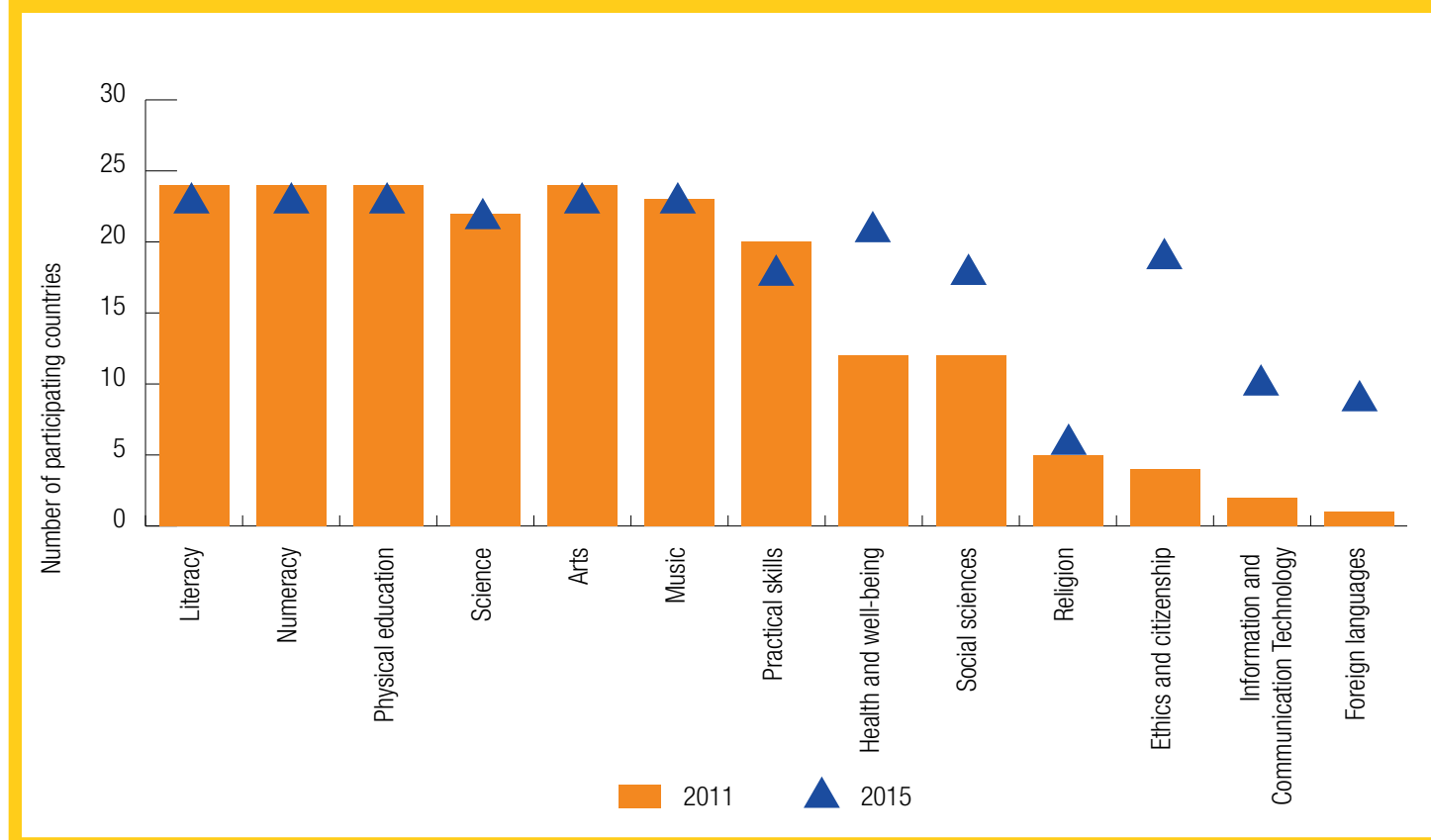
Authorities in many participating countries are expanding subject areas in their early learning frameworks to reflect today's society. The OECD has identified a number of new subjects being included in the early years: health and well-being, ethics and citizenship values, social sciences, information and communication technology (ICT) skills, and foreign languages.

domains such as ICT, foreign languages, religion, and citizenship into their early learning frameworks/curricula (see Figure 3.B.1). The increase for ethics and citizenship was particularly notable, from four countries (out of 24) in 2011 to 19 (out of 24) in 2015. In Canada, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island added ethics and citizenship to their curricula between 2011 and 2015.

For example, increasing numbers of countries are including newly emerging subject areas or

**Figure 3.B.1**

**Subject areas included in ECEC curriculum framework, OECD and partner countries, provinces and territories, 2011 and 2015**



**Source:** Table B.11

Figure 3.B.2 provides an overview of subject areas covered in Kindergarten curricula in Canada. While there is some variation in the subject areas covered in Kindergarten curricula across provinces and territories, there are a number of subject areas (such as literacy, numeracy, arts, health and well-being, science, and physical education) that are common to all. Further, almost all provinces and territories incorporate free playtime into the early learning curricula, highlighting a strong commitment to play and play-based learning (see *CMEC Statement on Play-Based Learning*).



**Figure 3.B.2**

**Subject areas in Kindergarten curricula, provinces and territories, 2016**

	Ontario	Quebec	New Brunswick	Nova Scotia	Manitoba <sup>1</sup>	Northwest Territories <sup>2</sup>	British Columbia	Prince Edward Island	Yukon <sup>3</sup>	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Newfoundland and Labrador <sup>4</sup>	Nunavut
Literacy													
Numeracy													
Physical education													
Science													
Arts													
Music													
Free playtime													
Practical skills													
Health and well-being													
Social sciences													
Religion													
Ethics and citizenship													
ICT skills													
Additional languages													

**Source:** CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016.

**Notes:** Subject areas offered in each province and territory are shown as shaded.

<sup>1</sup> In Manitoba, additional languages are not compulsory. However, beginning in Kindergarten, children may be registered in French Immersion or bilingual-track programs with English and one of Ojibway, Cree, German, Hebrew, or Ukrainian.

<sup>2</sup> Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills are now included in the new Junior Kindergarten/Kindergarten curricula for Northwest Territories.

<sup>3</sup> In Yukon and Northwest Territories, religion is offered by some public Catholic schools in Kindergarten.

<sup>4</sup> In Newfoundland and Labrador, there is a French Immersion program for students in Kindergarten to Grade 3.

Provinces and territories continue to cover similar subject areas in Grade 1 to those covered during Kindergarten, suggesting a fair degree of pedagogical and curricular continuity. This is especially true for literacy, numeracy, and the arts. The opposite is true for subject areas such as free playtime and practical skills, as shown in Figure 3.B.3.

**Figure 3.B.3**

**Subject areas in Grade 1 curricula, provinces and territories, 2016**

	Ontario	Quebec	New Brunswick	Nova Scotia	Manitoba <sup>1</sup>	Northwest Territories	British Columbia	Prince Edward Island	Yukon	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Newfoundland and Labrador <sup>2</sup>	Nunavut
Literacy													
Numeracy													
Physical education													
Science													
Arts													
Music													
Free playtime													
Practical skills													
Health and well-being													
Social sciences													
Religion													
Ethics and citizenship													
ICT skills													
Additional languages													

**Source:** CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016.

**Notes:** Subject areas offered in each province and territory are shown as shaded.

<sup>1</sup> In Manitoba, additional languages are not compulsory. However, beginning in Kindergarten, children may be registered in French Immersion or bilingual-track programs with English and one of Ojibway, Cree, German, Hebrew, or Ukrainian.

<sup>2</sup> In Newfoundland and Labrador, there is a French Immersion program for students in Kindergarten to Grade 3.

## Box 8. Ensuring That ECLD Programming Is Accessible, Meaningful, and Reflective of Indigenous Cultures, and Ways of Knowing and Being

In line with efforts to promote inclusion and equity, there are a number of initiatives underway in Canada that are designed to support off-reserve Indigenous communities, families, and children. The focus of these initiatives is motivated, in part, by a collective urgency to close the education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in Canada (Nguyen, 2011).

For example, Manitoba's [The Winnipeg Boldness Project](#) strives to improve early learning outcomes among disadvantaged children in the North End of Winnipeg. Though this program is aimed at all groups who reside in the Point Douglas area, it is significant to note that many children in the North End of Winnipeg are Indigenous and do not receive the same opportunities as children in other communities. The Boldness project plans to design a six-year early childhood development intervention strategy, creating a strength-based narrative highlighting the positive and spirited aspects of the North End community. The project includes exploring and sharing best practices in early childhood learning, drawing on vast community wisdom. The project takes a community-development approach, and one of several goals is to help ensure school readiness as children enter Kindergarten (The Winnipeg Boldness Project, 2017).

Creating more ECLD supports for Indigenous children that value and embody Indigenous cultures and languages is a priority for all provinces and territories. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC) released a report to inform all Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools, and to guide Indigenous peoples and Canadians in a process of reconciliation. In the TRCC calls to action, the TRCC calls on Canada's federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments to develop culturally appropriate ECLD programs for Indigenous families (TRC, 2015b). Manitoba's Child Care Qualifications and Training Committee, which accredits early childhood education training programs in the province so that their graduates are classified as ECE IIs or IIIs, has also recently Indigenous its competency standards in collaboration with Indigenous educators. This will in turn influence the pre-service training of ECEs and their understanding of Indigenous perspectives.

Alberta is in the process of new-curriculum development for K–12 in six subject areas in English and French. Standard 4 in The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum (Programs of Study) states: "Curriculum includes the diverse perspectives, in historical and contemporary contexts, of Francophones living in Alberta, Canada and the world" (p. 14). The Alberta Education Teaching Quality Standards has been revised to include a competency titled Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. New quality standards have also been developed for leadership and superintendents to include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education for all students. These standards take effect in September 2019.

In Northwest Territories, the curricula for Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten are reflective of Indigenous cultures and begin with what children already know, including recognizing their past experiences, cultures, and languages. For instance, children in Northwest Territories learn about the value of the land through activities led by experienced Indigenous leaders.

The purpose of these initiatives is to ensure that ECLD programming is accessible, meaningful, and reflective of Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing and being.

## Trend 3.C:

### Hours of instruction/attendance in ECEC settings and primary education varies across countries and regions.

Pedagogical continuity during transitions can be supported by having similar daily schedules and day lengths in ECEC and primary education. For example, in nine out of 23 countries, children spend more hours in the first year of primary (e.g., Grade 1) than in the final year of ECEC (e.g., Kindergarten). These countries include Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden, and Wales (United Kingdom).

In six out of 23 countries and regions, children spend more time on average in their last year of ECEC than in their first year of primary education. This is the case in countries like Italy, Hungary, Norway, and Japan.

In 13 out of 23 countries, hours of instruction are fairly similar in the last year of ECEC and the first year of primary schooling (OECD, 2017).



In Canada, the hours of instruction for Kindergarten programs are fairly similar across provinces and territories, depending on the nature of the program (see Table 3.C.1). Kindergarten exists as a half-day program (approximately 13 hours/week) or a full-day program (approximately 25 hours/week). Moreover, in some provinces and territories, the hours of participation may, in some cases, also include before and after Kindergarten care in ECEC settings.

Children spend approximately 37 weeks per year in half-day Kindergarten or full-day Kindergarten, which is the length of an average school year in Canada. Participation in Grade 1 is the same as full-time Kindergarten, in most provinces and territories, at approximately 25 hours per week and 37 weeks per year.

The average number of hours of instruction for Canadian six-year-old children in Grade 1 is 919 hours, which is higher than the OECD average of 804 hours per year. The average number of instructional days for Grade 1 in Canada is 183 days, which is very similar to the OECD average of 185 days (OECD, 2015b).





**Table 3.C.1****Hours of participation in Kindergarten and Grade 1, provinces and territories, 2016**

Province/territory	How many hours (per week or per year) does a child, on average, participate in:	
	the final year of ECEC (the year before starting compulsory primary education)?	the first year of compulsory primary education?
	Kindergarten	Grade 1
Ontario	Approximately 25 hours of instructional time per week	Approximately 25 hours of instructional time per week
Quebec	23.5 hours per week	25 hours per week
New Brunswick	up to 40 hours per week (includes care and education settings and may also include part-time programs of around 10 hours per week)	20–22.5 hours per week
Nova Scotia	Minimum 25 hours per week	Minimum 25 hours per week
Manitoba	13.75 hours per week	27.5 hours per week*
Northwest Territories	Minimum 485 hours per academic year	997 hours per academic year
British Columbia	25 hours per week	30 hours per week
Prince Edward Island	Up 45 hours (includes Early Learning and Childcare Settings) per week	30 hours per week
Yukon	In some cases, children participate in 25 to 30 hours a week. In other cases, it is approximately half of that (10 to 15 hours per week).	Between 25 and 30 hours per week
Alberta	Minimum 13 hours per week required	Minimum 26 hours per week
	(calculated as, 475 hours/36.8 school weeks per year = 12.9 h/week)	(calculated as, 950 hours/36.8 school weeks per year = 25.8 h/week)
	Kindergarten students are entitled to a minimum of 475 hours of instruction per school year. However, at the discretion of the school, more hours can be offered.	Primary education students are entitled to a minimum of 950 hours of instruction per school year.
Saskatchewan	475 instructional hours per school year	950 hours of instructional time per school year
Newfoundland and Labrador	Minimum of 25 hours per week	30 hours per week
Nunavut	15 hours per week	25 hours per week

**Source:** Table B.12**Note:** \*In Manitoba, compulsory primary education begins at age 7.

## Trend 3.D:

### In Canada, as in most participating countries, children experience a higher child-staff ratio during their first year of primary school than during their final year of ECLD.

Child-staff ratios<sup>15</sup> may vary between ECEC and primary school classrooms, and often ratios are less favourable in primary schools than in ECEC settings (Ebbeck et al., 2013).

In 27 out of 39 participating countries and regions, such as Chile and most German Länder, children experience a higher child-staff ratio during their first year of primary school than during their final year of ECEC (OECD, 2017). As shown in Figure 3.D.1, ratios in provinces and territories do not differ substantially from those of OECD countries. Like in most participating countries, children in British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, Yukon, and Ontario experienced a higher child-staff ratio during their first year of primary school (Grade 1) than during their final year of ECEC (Kindergarten).

While child-staff ratios and regulated maximum group sizes<sup>16</sup> differ among provinces and territories, in some instances, local authorities (i.e., school divisions, districts or boards, schools, etc.) determine child-staff ratios and maximum class sizes based on local needs. As illustrated in figures 3.D.1 and 3.D.2, child-staff ratios and group sizes remain fairly consistent in Kindergarten and Grade 1 across provinces and territories where these are regulated at the provincial/territorial level.

Child-staff ratios and group sizes are important to consider in terms of transitions, as these will have an impact on the child's experience of transitioning from one setting to another, if these settings differ substantially in terms of child-staff ratios or group size. Figure 3.D.2 below summarizes the regulated group sizes in Kindergarten/Grade Primary and in Grade 1 across provinces and territories.

Likewise, the majority of provinces and territories have regulated specific numbers for child-staff ratios in Kindergarten and Grade 1 (see Figure 3.D.3).

These ratios and group sizes are determined at the local level in light of diverse needs within provinces and territories. However, there is a substantial amount of consistency between structural aspects in the last year of ECLD and the first year of primary education.

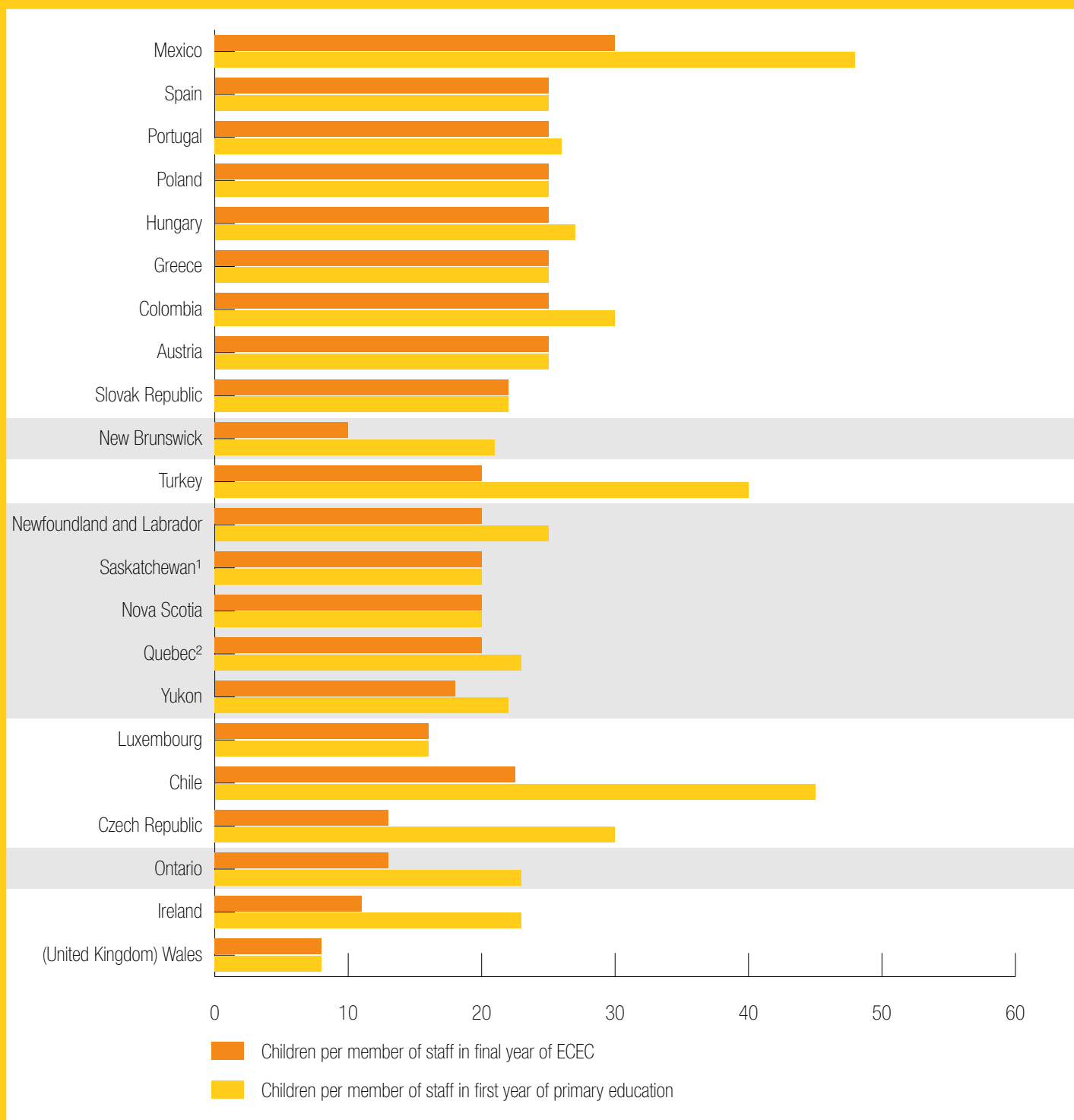


<sup>15</sup> "Child-staff ratio" means the number of children per full-time member of staff. This can be a maximum (regulated) number, which indicates the maximum number of children that one full-time member of staff is allowed to be responsible for; or it can be an average: the average number of children a full-time staff member can be responsible for. Ratios can be either for main staff only (such as teacher or caregiver), commonly reported as teacher-child or teacher-student ratios, but can also include auxiliary staff, such as assistants.

<sup>16</sup> Please note that group size or class size means the maximum number of children per member of staff working directly with the children (thus, excluding auxiliary staff, managers and other staff in ECEC and primary school settings who do not work directly with children in the playgroup or classroom).

**Figure 3.D.1**

**Regulated number of children per member of staff in the final year of ECEC (Kindergarten), and in the first year of primary education, OECD and partner countries, provinces and territories, 2016**



**Source:** Table B.13

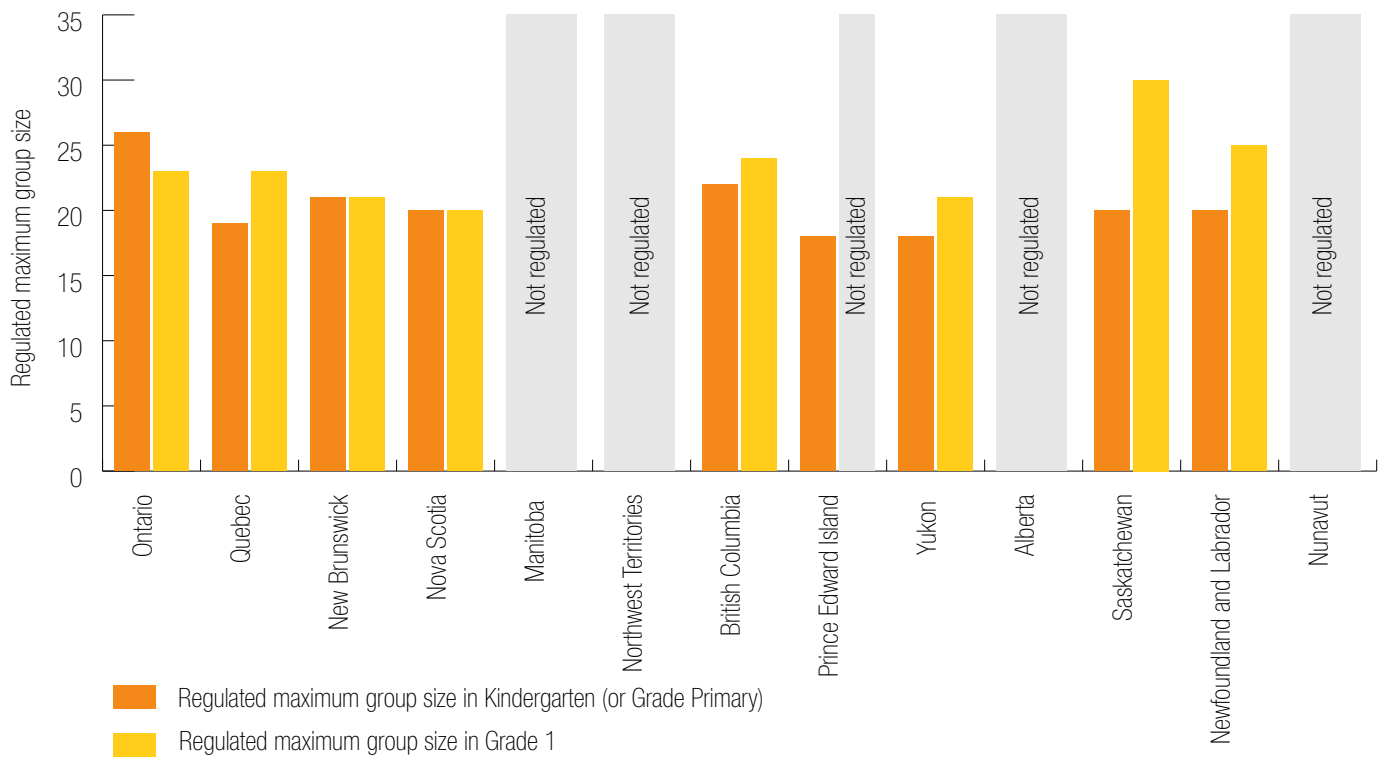
**Notes:** OECD and partner countries and regions without regulations for child-staff ratio were excluded, including Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Alberta, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut.

<sup>1</sup> Data for Saskatchewan for primary education refer to the maximum possible number of children per educator.

<sup>2</sup> Data for Quebec refer to the last year of ECEC in pre-primary education for five-year-olds (school setting) with a child-staff ratio of 20:1. Children can also attend the last year of ECEC in an educational setting. The ratios are different in each case. In the ECEC setting the ratio is 10:1 for the age group of four- to five-year-olds. These regulations are negotiated during collective agreements.

**Figure 3.D.2**

**Regulated maximum group sizes in Kindergarten and in Grade 1 in primary public schools, provinces and territories, 2016**



**Source:** Table B.14

**Note:** There is no regulated or legislated maximum class size in Manitoba, Northwest Territories, Alberta, or Nunavut for either Kindergarten or Grade 1. In Prince Edward Island, there is no regulated maximum group size in Grade 1. In these provinces and territories, class sizes are often determined by local authorities.

**Figure 3.D.3**

**Regulated child-staff ratio in Kindergarten and in Grade 1, expressed as the number of children per one member of staff in primary public schools, provinces and territories, 2016**



**Source:** Table B.15

**Note:** There is no regulated child-staff ratio in Manitoba, Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan for either Kindergarten or Grade 1. In Prince Edward Island, there is no regulated child-staff ratio in Grade 1. In these provinces and territories, child-staff ratios are often determined by local authorities.





## CHAPTER 4:

# DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Early childhood learning and development set the foundations for lifelong learning and health and well-being. Children develop on a continuum, and developmental continuity means that new skills develop, while progressively building on skills formed from previous learning experiences. It is therefore all the more important that developmental continuity be supported through the transition process.

This chapter looks at trends in developmental continuity in transitions, highlighted by the OECD among participating countries, while also exploring the diverse initiatives offered by provinces and territories in Canada to support continued children's learning and development.

Families, educators, teachers, schools, and children themselves can contribute to seamless transitions in early childhood learning and development. Studies consistently demonstrate that families' engagement in their child's learning and development directly benefits their child's outcomes. Moreover, services are more likely to be effective if they affect multiple points in children's social ecology in mutually reinforcing ways (Patel et al., 2016).

In Canada, conversations are shifting from children's readiness for school to whether schools, educators, teachers, and families are ready to support young children's overall development, or in other words, whether schools are ready to receive the children. While evidence shows that developmental continuity and connections across the early years can help support children's transitions into school (CMEC, 2014), it is critical to recognize that the early years are not a preparation period for school, but rather

a critical learning period for children to develop the foundational competencies, attitudes, skills, strategies, and knowledge that they will need to succeed throughout their lives.

Research also demonstrates that a key ingredient for seamless transitions is strong collaboration between everyone involved in a child's learning and development. Provinces and territories offer a range of programs specifically developed to support transitions for children who are more at risk, such as those with special learning or physical needs. These targeted supports are especially important, as studies have consistently shown that children from disadvantaged backgrounds stand to gain the most from strong transitions and ECLD programming (Patel et al., 2016).

Developmental continuity can be encouraged by pursuing, promoting, and sustaining positive collaborations between all individuals, groups, and agencies involved in children's transitions.

## Trend 4.A:

### In most countries and regions, children are being prepared for the transition to primary school through activities in the final year of ECEC.

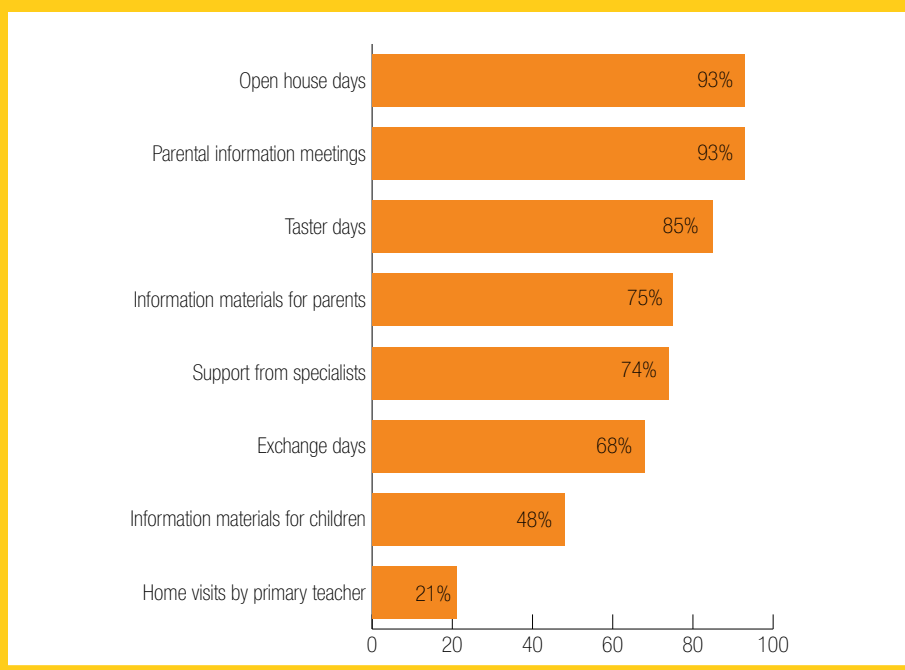
Transition practices for children entering primary school are common across participating countries, with 26 out of 28 countries indicating that they prepare children for transition to primary education through specific activities. In Canada, similar to most participating countries, children are supported in their transition to primary school through activities in their final year of ECLD and by involving parents in the process.

As shown in Figure 4.A.1, the most common transition practices noted by participating countries are open-house days (used by 26 countries), parental information meetings (used by 25 countries), and “taster” days, which are where ECEC children participate in primary school activities for one or more days (used by 23 countries).

While all of the practices noted above take place in Canada, the practices listed in Figure 4.A.1 do not necessarily each take place in each territory or province. Transition practices often vary locally, depending on the school or ECLD setting. More broadly speaking, however, there are some similar trends between transition practices used in provinces and territories and those used in participating countries.

**Figure 4.A.1**

**Transition practices to help children make their transition to a school setting, by percentage, OECD and partner countries, including Canada, 2016**



**Source:** Table B.16

**Note:** Children are being prepared for transitions through transition practices in 26 out of 28 OECD and partner countries (Canada-level data only). In Canada, the most common transition to a school setting begins with the transition to Kindergarten.

As shown in Figure 4.A.2, most provinces and territories hold open-house days and taster days, while very few coordinate home visits by primary teachers, except in specific circumstances (e.g., for rural or remote communities).

**Figure 4.A.2**

**Transition practices to help children make the transition to a school setting, provinces and territories, 2016**

	Ontario	Quebec	New Brunswick	Nova Scotia <sup>1</sup>	Manitoba	Northwest Territories	British Columbia <sup>2</sup>	Prince Edward Island	Yukon	Alberta	Saskatchewan <sup>3</sup>	Newfoundland and Labrador <sup>4</sup>	Nunavut
Open house days													
Parental information meetings													
Taster days													
Information materials for parents													
Support from specialists													
Exchange days													
Information materials for children													
Home visits by primary school teacher													

**Source:** CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016.

**Notes:** Transition practices offered in each province and territory are shown as shaded.

<sup>1</sup> Transition practices for Nova Scotia refer to those carried out between the pre-primary program for four-year-olds and the Grade Primary program for five-year-olds.

<sup>2</sup> In British Columbia and Yukon, these practices refer to those carried out prior to Kindergarten.

<sup>3</sup> In Saskatchewan, home visits by primary school teachers may occur in some instances.

<sup>4</sup> Transition practices for Newfoundland and Labrador refer to those carried out during the KinderStart program prior to Kindergarten entry.



## Trend 4.B:

### Collaboration between parents and staff is key for a successful transition.

One of the main challenges to developmental continuity identified by the OECD was the lack of parental involvement during the transition process. Most countries report that there is still insufficient awareness among parents about the powerful role they play in children's education, particularly during the transition stage from Kindergarten to Grade 1 (OECD, 2017).

Family engagement<sup>17</sup> has been demonstrated, time and again, to play a pivotal role in a child's learning and development, and it has been shown to boost literacy and numeracy (CMEC, 2013). More specifically, family engagement in both literacy and numeracy activities before school, such as reading or playing math games at home, is related to students' higher reading, mathematics, and science achievement. International assessments<sup>18</sup> reveal that the percentage of Canadian families involved in their children's education is higher than the international average; however, these figures vary significantly among provinces and territories (CMEC, 2013).

Likewise, studies have shown that a family's lack of school involvement in their child's education is a significant risk factor associated with children's developmental outcomes (Patel et al., 2016). As a result, most provinces and territories have developed programs and resources focused on supporting family engagement, as shown in Table 4.B.1. These programs do so by developing positive connections between families, ECLD programs, the school system, and local community agencies.



<sup>17</sup> In this report, the term "family engagement" is purposefully used to be inclusive of the existing diversity of family structures and guardians.

<sup>18</sup> Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

**Table 4.B.1****ECLD programs focusing on family engagement, provinces and territories, 2016**

<b>Province/ territory</b>	<b>Program name</b>	<b>Description</b>
Ontario	Parent Tool Kit	The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) offers several resources designed to support parental engagement from K–12. Topics include how to communicate with teachers, helping with homework at home, and being a mentor. Available documents include a guidebook for parents and schools, in addition to a list of resources, including ones specific to bullying, technology, and mathematics.
Quebec	Passe-Partout	Passe-Partout is a governmental family intervention program, created to foster educational success among children in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. This program is intended for families in these communities who have a child who will be 4 years of age by September 30 of the current year. Passe-Partout is designed to provide targeted parents with the tools they need to help their child adopt attitudes and practices that will enable the child to develop, grow, and succeed at school.
New Brunswick	Welcome to Kindergarten engagement sessions	New Brunswick holds Welcome to Kindergarten engagement sessions in school districts in partnership with The Learning Partnership. In some school districts, the children attend a session with the Kindergarten teacher where they participate in activities linked to the materials in the Welcome to Kindergarten bags (books, mark-making materials, play dough, scissors, etc.). This program was led by school districts prior to 2011 and is now led by the Government of New Brunswick.
Nova Scotia	Let's Play Together – A Guide for Parents of 4-Year Olds	This resource for parents of 4-year-old children explores five major areas for children's learning and development: physical health and well-being; emotional development; communication skills and general knowledge; social development; and language and thinking skills. The booklet suggests tips for healthy development and ways to help children learn through play
Manitoba	Helping your child learn to read – A Parent's Guide	This guide provides tips to families to help them encourage their children to read. There is information about the different types of readers, and how parents can also work with educators to support literacy and reading.
	Helping your child learn math – A Parent's Guide	This guide identifies important steps in developing numeracy skills and suggests activities parents and children can engage in to help build a foundation for mathematics.
British Columbia	StrongStart	A school-based drop-in program for parents, families, and caregivers and their children aged birth to five to participate in play-based early learning activities (e.g., stories, music, and art). This early learning program is of no cost to families, and it supports children's development in their language, physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills. These rich learning environments are led by qualified early childhood educators, where children can also interact with peers of similar ages. Furthermore, this program acts as a resource for families to learn more about other community programs.
	Ready, Set, Learn	Most elementary schools participate in this program, where families and three- to five-year-old children receive information and guidance about supporting learning in the early years and easing the transition into primary education.
Prince Edward Island	Welcome to Kindergarten	The Welcome to Kindergarten Program is designed for parents/caregivers and their children who will be entering Kindergarten in September. All 37 Public School Branch schools with Kindergarten organize a Welcome to Kindergarten Program for their incoming students. At the Welcome to Kindergarten Session, families will receive early literacy resources and learn strategies for using these resources with their child at home.



**Table 4.B.1 (cont'd)**

**ECLD programs focusing on family engagement, provinces and territories, 2016**

Province/ territory	Program name	Description
Yukon	Learning Together program	The Learning Together Program provides a school-based early learning service for families, caregivers, and children aged birth to five years at no cost. The program provides a quiet, high-quality learning environment where children benefit from social interactions and play. This program is provided in targeted school communities.
Alberta	Parent Link Centres	The ministries of Education, Children's Services, and Health have parent information and links posted on their Web sites, including information about child development, learning, play, Parent Link Centres, mental health, children with disabilities, and brain development.
	Family-Oriented Programming Online resources	Alberta Education supports parent involvement by funding family-oriented programming for children (ages 2.5–6) with severe developmental delays attending educational programs.
	My Child's Learning	<a href="#">My Child's Learning: A Parent Resource</a> includes information on Kindergarten.
Saskatchewan	Family Engagement in Prekindergarten – A Resource Guide for Prekindergarten Teachers and Associates	A resource guide that offer supports, practices, and tools for prekindergarten teachers and associates to enhance the focus on family engagement. This document discusses ways to build positive relationships between staff and families, provides an overview of background research, and outlines key practices, such as conducting home visits, communicating frequently, and integrating families into the classroom. There are also teacher success stories to help inspire readers.
Newfoundland and Labrador	KinderStart	Offered the year before Kindergarten, KinderStart is a school transition program to support children's adjustment to the school environment, and to provide families with resources on a range of topics, from ideas on how to encourage early childhood learning and development at home to procedural information about Kindergarten registration. Participation in this program includes a resource bag that has a variety of materials, such as crayons, books, and a booklet to guide parents and families on facilitating learning at home with their children.
	The Power of Play	The Department of Education and Early Childhood Education has a section on their government Web site dedicated to resources supporting the role of play and its positive effects on early childhood learning and development. A number of these concentrate on the parent as a child's first teacher and the various play activities that families can do with their child in a variety of environments.
Nunavut	It Starts at Home: A family engagement resource for Nunavut schools	A guide designed to increase family engagement in schools throughout Nunavut that recognizes different family structures, Inuit societal values, communities, and school staff. This document outlines research on the connections between family engagement and student success, and presents six steps for educational staff to create their own family engagement action plans.

**Source:** CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016.

## Box 9. Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan 2016–2020

To make sure that all Saskatchewan children get a good start in life, the Government of Saskatchewan has developed Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan 2016–2020. This plan outlines goals to help all children be safe and healthy and to develop to their full potential in strong families and supportive communities.

Through this plan, families have resource support in four key areas: prenatal and early childhood support; better access to high-quality early learning and childcare options; support for families in their roles as parents and caregivers; and programs to ensure that families and children receive support.

Moreover, this document acknowledges the importance of children's transition period from home-based or early learning settings into school, and outlines Saskatchewan's key investments in areas such as support for Indigenous communities, children with special learning needs, and families from vulnerable backgrounds.

*Government of Saskatchewan, 2016*

### Trend 4.C:

## Most participating countries offer additional support for children with special needs.

The OECD reports that the majority of countries, 74 per cent (20 out of 27), provide children with support from specialists (e.g., psychologists or social workers) during or after transitions. However, for most countries, including Canada, this support is especially or exclusively for children with special needs (OECD, 2017). The important role of community services in ensuring developmental continuity in transitions is recognized in the majority of countries.

In Canada, provinces and territories, in consultation with families, children, educators, and other professionals, use Individual Education Plans (IEPs), which provide detailed information about each child's specific learning and developmental requirements (e.g., actions, strategies, and

accommodations). These individual plans are intended to guide teachers, ECEs, support staff, and families in providing all children, including those with developmental delays, with opportunities for success.

Most provinces and territories have specific policies, guidelines, and resources to support children with special needs or in need of additional supports (see Table 4.C.1).



**Table 4.C.1****Resources in support of inclusive early learning, provinces and territories, 2016**

Province/ territory	Type of resource	Name of resource
Ontario	Research brief/series of videos	<a href="#">Everyone Is Welcome: Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care (2013)</a>
	Resource	<a href="#">How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years (2014).</a>
Quebec	Vision/policy	<a href="#">Services éducatifs aux élèves à risque et aux élèves handicapés ou en difficulté d'adaptation ou d'apprentissage (Educational Services for At-Risk Students and Students With Handicaps, Social Maladjustments or Learning Difficulties)</a>
New Brunswick	Guidelines	<a href="#">An Inclusion Program Support Guide</a>
	Funding support	<a href="#">Enhanced Support Worker Program</a>
Nova Scotia	Services	<a href="#">Early Childhood Development Intervention Services</a>
Manitoba	Protocol	<a href="#">Protocol for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Additional Support Needs<sup>1</sup></a>
	Guidelines	<a href="#">Guide to the Inclusion Support Program</a>
Prince Edward Island	Funding support	<a href="#">Early Years Autism Services</a>
	Funding support	<a href="#">Special Needs Grant for Licensed Early Learning and Childcare Centres</a>
Yukon	Services	<a href="#">Child Development Center provides early intervention services and support.</a>
Alberta	Information for parents	<a href="#">The Learning Team: Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs</a>
	Funding support	Program Unit Funding available for children with severe disabilities  There is also funding and supports for families through other ministries, e.g., Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD).
Saskatchewan	Funding support	<a href="#">Child Care Inclusion Program</a>
Newfoundland and Labrador	Manual	<a href="#">Child Care Services Inclusion of Children with Special Needs Policy Manual</a>

**Source:** CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016.

**Note:** <sup>1</sup> Manitoba's Protocol for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Additional Support Needs guides the movement of children with special needs from one system to another.

## Trend 4.D:

### Promoting inclusion and equity in education, starting in the early years.

Internationally, ECEC is increasingly seen as a vehicle to promote equity, as children from disadvantaged backgrounds have been shown to benefit disproportionately from pre-primary education. On average across OECD countries, a socioeconomically advantaged student who did not attend pre-primary has an 8 per cent probability of low performance in mathematics, whereas a disadvantaged student who did not attend pre-primary has a 25 per cent probability of low performance (OECD, 2017). As noted earlier, targeted supports are especially important, because studies have consistently shown that while children from disadvantaged backgrounds often struggle as they transition into primary education, they also stand to gain the most from strong transitions and ECLD programming (Patel et al., 2016).

In Canada, provinces and territories offer a range of programs specifically designed to be inclusive and to promote equity. As noted above, the IEP is a tool created in collaboration between teachers, ECEs, support staff, clinicians, and families to help guide a child's learning and development. This type of specialized plan can be particularly useful to support transitions for children with special needs. For example, in Saskatchewan, this document is called an Inclusion and Intervention Plan (IIP), which identifies students' strengths, interests, learning styles, and learning needs. Families and teachers can then use this resource to share the supports and strategies each student needs to optimize learning in an inclusive setting (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2017). Table 4.D.1 below offers a non-exhaustive list of policies focusing on inclusion and equity in ECLD across provinces and territories.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, several initiatives exist to promote inclusion of all members of the community regardless of economic status, gender, racial or religious background, sexual orientation, academic ability, or other facets of diversity. Specifically, inclusive education can mean that some students receive individualized or small-group instruction periodically in order for their needs to be met. Educators can be supported

by special education teachers (also known as instructional resource teachers) to improve the teaching and learning of all children (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2017). Moreover, to facilitate smoother transitions for children as they move from one environment to another, including from ECLD programs to the school system, policies for transitional planning were released by the Government of Manitoba in 2015 and are currently being developed by the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2016).

Some initiatives focused on inclusion and equity involve providing additional ECLD services for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, in Quebec, preschool education taking place the year before Kindergarten is available at no cost to children aged four years old who live in low-income areas or who have special learning or physical needs. Furthermore, throughout preschool, primary, and secondary school, special services such as assistance learning, French, or home instruction are available for students in specific circumstances (*Quebec Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur*, 2017).



**Table 4.D.1**
**Policies focusing on inclusion and equity in the early years, provinces and territories, 2016**

Province/territory	Policy document	Description
Ontario	Everyone Is Welcome: Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care (2013)	An informational document that outlines the key characteristics of inclusive early childhood education and care programs in terms of access, design, implementation, monitoring, and assessment. A section is also devoted to the importance of educators' language and their understanding of disabilities.
Quebec	<i>L'organisation des services éducatifs aux élèves à risque et aux élèves handicapés ou en difficulté d'adaptation ou d'apprentissage-2007</i> (Organization of Educational Services for At-Risk, Students and Students With Handicaps, Social Maladjustments or Learning Difficulties)	This document describes an individualized approach to promote the success of all students, citing the provincial <i>Education Act</i> , the <i>Programme de formation de l'école Québécoise</i> (Quebec Education Program), and their policies on special education and evaluation of learning.
Manitoba	Protocol for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Additional Support Needs (2015)	The processes and strategies outlined in this protocol integrate current research and are based on best practices in transition planning. The revised protocol provides specific timelines, outlines the responsibilities of each partner in the process, and describes key practices and principles which guide effective and collaborative transition planning.
Northwest Territories	Guidelines for Inclusive Schooling: Supporting the NWT Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling (2016)	This document provides support for education bodies on how to administer inclusive schooling supports and programming. The guidelines acknowledge the role of families in long-range educational and transition planning.
British Columbia	Special Education Services – A Manual of Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines (2016)	This resource conveys policies, procedures, and guidelines that support the delivery of special education services in British Columbia's public schools from Kindergarten to Grade 12. This document includes guidelines for the planning process involved in transitions from home to Kindergarten, as well as between different schools and programs.
Prince Edward Island	Elementary Transition Planning Resource (2006)	This resource supports the communications of key information from one school, grade, or program to another for students with special needs, with an aim toward smooth transitions.
Alberta	Standards for the Provision of Early Childhood Special Education (2006)	Guidelines to support school authorities, families, and above all, children with special needs in receiving appropriate programming and services in Kindergarten in addition to early childhood education and care. This document underscores the importance of both family-oriented decision making as well as planning for transitions.
	Inclusive Education Policy	<p>Alberta's education system is built on a values-based approach to accepting responsibility for all children and students. Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all children and students.</p> <p>To support children and students in attaining the goals as stated in the Ministerial Order on Student Learning, school authorities must ensure that all children and students (Kindergarten to Grade 12), regardless of race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, or any other factor(s), have access to meaningful and relevant learning experiences that include appropriate instructional supports.</p>

**Source:** CMEC, "Survey on Transitions between ECEC and primary education," 2016.





## CONCLUSION

Preparing and engaging children, families, educators, teachers, and environments for transitions in the early years promotes learning and development from a young age and has lasting positive impacts on the rest of children's lives. This report explored the transition period from Kindergarten to Grade 1 in Canada, examining the variety of transition programming in provinces and territories and international trends, to highlight similarities and differences. It is clear that continuity in the structures, content, programs, and people involved in early childhood learning and development and primary education is a fundamental component of making seamless transitions possible.

Across Canada and similar to countries internationally, provinces and territories are increasingly choosing purposeful integration in the governance and organization of ECLD and primary education. Horizontal and vertical transitions are a reality for young children in Canada, and in many countries around the world. As a result, the design and implementation of ECLD programming and primary education must focus on the child experience. A holistic approach to ECLD can lead to more cohesion in the way that children and families navigate such a critical stage in their lives.

Successful collaborations are essential to facilitating smooth transitions, and they could be better encouraged by providing meaningful opportunities for professional development, in-service training, and the sharing of best practices between ECEs and teachers.

Provinces and territories have accomplished a significant amount of work in prioritizing the importance of ECLD with the creation of provincial and territorial early learning frameworks. Family engagement, inclusion, and equity are priority areas in which significant work is already underway; this work also often highlights the importance of effective transitions in the early years.

Seamless transitions in the early years empower young children to continue building their foundations of learning and development, and to become lifelong learners. To achieve this vision, provinces and territories have developed a wide range of resources and initiatives in support of ECLD programming and transition to primary education, reflective of the populations they serve. Looking ahead, transition practices in Canada could continue to inform and promote early childhood learning and development approaches that support children and their transitions, while recognizing the need for continuity in their learning and development.





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## APPENDIX A: Methodology and definitions

### International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)

UNESCO developed the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) in the 1970s as an instrument to compile and report education data across countries (UNESCO, 2012). This framework provides definitions and guidelines against which education systems can be mapped as a means to

better understand data and present comparable information from a global standpoint. The most recent ISCED manual is from 2011, and it encompasses eight levels. This report references only level 0 and its subcategories and level 1 as they relate to early childhood learning and development. A brief overview of each of these two levels can be found below in Table A.1.

**Table A.1 – Summary of ISCED levels 0 and 1**

#### ISCED Level 0: Early childhood education

##### Main criteria:

- Educational content: Programs at ISCED level 0, or early childhood education, are typically designed with a holistic approach to support children's early cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development and introduce young children to organized instruction outside of the family context. ISCED level 0 refers to early childhood programs that have an intentional education component (UNESCO, 2012).
- Institutional context: ISCED level 0 programs are usually school-based or otherwise institutionalized for a group of children (e.g., centre-based, community-based, home-based). ISCED level 0 excludes purely family-based arrangements that may be purposeful but are not organized in a program. Informal learning by children from their parents, or other relatives or friends, is not included under ISCED 0 (UNESCO, 2012).
- Program intensity/duration of a minimum of two hours/day and 100 days/year

##### Subsidiary criteria:

- Staff pedagogical qualifications
- Existence of a regulatory framework
- Typically not part of compulsory education

#### ISCED Level 1: Primary education

Designed to give pupils a sound basic education in reading, writing, and mathematics, along with an elementary understanding of other subjects, such as history, geography, natural science, social sciences, art, and music. Level 1 is also compulsory.

#### ISCED Level 01:

##### Early childhood educational development

Targeted age:  
*0 to 2 years old*

#### ISCED Level 02:

##### Pre-primary education

Targeted age:  
*3 years old to the start of primary education*

Typical starting age:  
*5 to 7 years old*  
Typical duration: 6 years

**Source:** International Standard Classification of Education, 2011

This international classification system is important to include in this report's overview of early childhood learning and development in Canada, given the growing emphasis on data development in the early years on the global stage (OECD, 2015a). As work in this field progresses, the ability to discuss, report on, and compare our early childhood learning and development systems across countries and provinces and territories becomes increasingly valuable.

For the purpose of this report, Grade 1 in all provinces and territories is recognized as the first year of ISCED 1. Kindergarten programs in all provinces and territories are labelled as ISCED 02, mainly due to the fact that they are typically not part of compulsory education (with the exception of three provinces: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island). Kindergarten and Grade Primary programs all take place in schools, and are therefore under the jurisdiction of departments/ministries of education across Canada.

The one dimension that differentiates programs between ISCED 01 and ISCED 02 is target age group (please see Table A.1 above). For this reason, there exists a wide variety of programs in Canada that can be labelled as ISCED 0; however, programs providing only childcare needs (e.g., supervision, health, nutrition) and not educational instruction are not captured by ISCED, whose sole focus is on education. All provinces and territories offer childcare and ECLD programs that are licensed or regulated, as well as ones that are not, and the protocols for licensing and regulation vary across the country. It is critical to note that this report does not capture any data from unlicensed/unregulated early childhood programming.

Children can participate in childcare in addition to, or independent from, ISCED 0 education programs; however, there has been a tremendous push in the twenty-first century towards ECEC, with an aim towards eradicating the historic divide between childcare and early childhood education, and promoting the holistic and multidimensional nature of the field (OECD, 2015a). It follows suit, then, that programs which have both childcare and education components can be classified under ISCED 0, so long as the education component of the program meets the other criteria described in Table A.1, including minimum intensity and duration.





## APPENDIX B: Data Tables

Appendix Tables referred to at the bottom of graphs in this publication are available in the companion file, accessible at the following link:

[https://cmec.ca/docs/Transitions\\_in\\_Canada\\_EN\\_APP\\_B.xlsx](https://cmec.ca/docs/Transitions_in_Canada_EN_APP_B.xlsx)



## APPENDIX C: List of Contributors

The following dedicated professionals working in provincial and territorial departments and ministries of education across the country were instrumental in making this study a reality through analysis, collaboration, and provision of guidance and various other forms of support.

### Members of CMEC's Early Childhood Learning and Development Committee

David Woloshyn	Government of Alberta, Ministry of Education
Tim Winkelmanns	Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Education
Debra Mayer (Chair)	Government of Manitoba, Department of Education
Nicole Gervais	Government of New Brunswick, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Diane Lutes	Government of New Brunswick, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Sarah Melanson	Government of Nova Scotia, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Janet Lynn Huntington	Government of Nova Scotia, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Mary Goss-Prowse	Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Shelley Kapraelian	Government of Northwest Territories, Department of Education, Culture and Employment
Leslie Leafloor	Government of Nunavut, Department of Education

Jeff Butler	Government of Ontario, Ministry of Education
Carolyn Simpson	Government of Prince Edward Island, Department of Education and Lifelong Learning
Christiane Bourdages Simpson	Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur
Kim Taylor	Government of Saskatchewan, Ministry of Education
Paula Thompson	Government of Yukon, Department of Education

### CMEC Secretariat

This publication was developed by members of the Early Childhood Learning and Development Committee, in collaboration with the CMEC Secretariat team responsible for early learning. Research assistance and drafting was provided by Robin Liu Hopson, Brennen Jenkins, Federico Vargas, and Marie Macauley. The lead author of the publication is Katerina Sukovski.

The production team responsible for this report included Jelena Zikic as well as the copy-editing and translation services at the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. A special note of appreciation for Mira Mayer and her tireless efforts in support of this publication.



