



EVERY CHILD A BETTER FUTURE

PUBLIC KINDERGARTEN COMMISSIONER REPORT



EVERY CHILD A BETTER FUTURE

**Report
of the
Public Kindergarten Commissioner**

June 2009



Executive Council
Office

Bureau du
Conseil exécutif



Public Kindergarten Commissioner

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June 22, 2009

Honourable Robert Ghiz
Premier of Prince Edward Island
P.O. Box 2000
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Dear Premier Ghiz:

I am pleased to submit my report, presenting my findings and recommendations on the orderly transition of Prince Edward Island's kindergartens into the public school system. The report is based on research evidence and on extensive consultations with the public, with educators, and with other education stakeholders. I thank them for their participation, their advice, and their ideas. The input I received contributed significantly to my recommendations.

I want to acknowledge the expert assistance provided to me by Wendy MacDonald, Research Director, and Maria Driscoll, Policy Analyst, Executive Council Office.

I thank you as well, for the opportunity to have contributed to this important work. This initiative to strengthen our early childhood learning system will make a lifelong difference to Island children and to the society that they will create. I strongly believe that the measures recommended in this report are essential if we are to retain the best features of the community-based kindergarten system that has been built over the past decade, while gaining all the benefits that come from being part of the public school system. I would be pleased to meet with you to review my findings and to discuss the rationale behind my recommendations as well as a plan for their successful implementation.

Sincerely,

Patricia J. Mella
Public Kindergarten Commissioner

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2008, the Government of Prince Edward Island announced, in the Speech from the Throne, its commitment to bring kindergarten into the public school system during its current term of office, following a thorough, careful, and sensitive consultation process. To fulfill this commitment, the Public Kindergarten Commission was established in May 2008 and Patricia J. Mella was appointed as Commissioner and mandated to submit her report in June 2009.

PEI's kindergarten system is unique in its community-based model, and its firm grounding in early childhood philosophy and approaches. To maintain these strengths while gaining access to the benefits offered by the public school system, the Commission has relied strongly on extensive consultations with educators, other stakeholders, and the public. This work has been supported by research and evidence from other jurisdictions where applicable.

Based on this work, the following vision is suggested for kindergarten in PEI when it becomes part of the public school system:

**Every Island child will be given the opportunity
to develop to the fullest of his or her potential.**

The Commissioner's Terms of Reference call for her to address the full range of issues involved in a fair and orderly transition of kindergarten into the school system. Recommendations are as follows:

Delivery Model

1. Kindergarten be provided as a full-day, full-time program when it transitions into the public school system.
2. The kindergarten year be mandatory when kindergarten moves into the school system.
3. Parents be able to defer their child's entry to kindergarten to the year following the usual age of entry if they feel this would be in the best interests of the child.
4. Current legislative and regulatory provisions on private schools be amended to include private kindergartens.
5. French immersion kindergarten be offered in schools currently providing Grade One French immersion.

6. The level and range of early intervention and support for children with special needs be maintained when kindergarten moves into the school system. This includes, but is not limited to, maintaining or enhancing current supports in the areas of speech language therapy, autism therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and day-to-day classroom support.
7. To ensure consistency in the provision of special needs supports for kindergarten aged children, speech language supports for that age level be transferred from the Department of Health to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Curriculum

8. The present kindergarten curriculum, with its integrated, developmentally appropriate, play-based approach, be maintained when kindergarten moves into the school system.
9. The maximum kindergarten class size be set at no more than 15 children per teacher.
10. If classes are combined for purposes of team teaching, the maximum number of kindergarten children in a group be no more than 24, with two qualified teachers required.
11. The assessment process for kindergarten children be refined to include:
 - A consistent entry assessment for all kindergarten students
 - An expanded progress report at yearend which specifies more of the individual outcomes set out in the kindergarten curriculum.
12. Kindergarten children participate fully in the offerings and opportunities of the public school system. To ensure that this occurs in a way which maintains and supports the current kindergarten curriculum, it is recommended that:
 - The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development review current curricula pertaining to specialty subjects for the primary grades, and modify or add to those curricula as appropriate to ensure that they respond to the needs of kindergarten students and reflect the kindergarten curriculum approach.
 - In-servicing sessions be designed and provided to all specialty teachers who will be teaching kindergarten-aged children. These sessions should include content on early child development and methods.

Staffing

13. Based on the requirements of the public school system and in light of the link between education and the quality of learning, kindergarten teachers be required to obtain a Bachelor of Education degree.

14. The University of Prince Edward Island be requested to complete development of a flexible bridging program providing a '2 plus 2' Early Childhood B. Ed. to existing kindergarten teachers.
15. In recognition of the many commitments these new positions will require from teachers, students in the bridging program be allowed to complete the program over a period not to exceed six years.
16. The '2 plus 2' Early Childhood B.Ed. degree program be open to anyone who has taught kindergarten since it became publicly funded in 2000, as well as graduates of the Holland College and Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É. Early Childhood Program in 2009 and 2010.
17. Kindergarten teachers be licensed on an interim basis for the six-year transition period recommended above, and the Certification and Standards Board policy be revised as necessary to accommodate this measure.
18. Following assessment, teachers be placed as follows on the academic scale:
 - Teachers with an early childhood diploma or equivalent two-year diploma credential be placed at the Certificate II level.
 - Teachers with an undergraduate degree be placed at the Certificate III level.
 - Teachers with a B.Ed. be placed at a Certificate IV or higher as applicable.
19. Kindergarten teachers' years of experience in the publicly funded kindergarten system since 2000 be recognized on a two for one basis, that is, one step for every two years of teaching experience from 2000 to 2010.
20. Kindergarten teachers whose age and years of experience add up to 80 or more, and who plan to spend a period teaching in the public school system not exceeding the six-year transition period, be exempted from the requirement to obtain a B.Ed.
21. Existing kindergarten teachers have exclusive entitlement to kindergarten teaching jobs during the six-year transition period.
22. An orderly and transparent hiring process be designed and implemented, which includes the features outlined above and which minimizes stress and dislocation for the individuals involved.
23. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development design and deliver measures to foster a welcoming climate and a professional learning community within the school system, including:
 - In-servicing of school and school board personnel on the kindergarten curriculum and early childhood approach
 - Pre- and post-entry orientation and welcome programs at the school level such as 'buddy' systems and welcome committees.

24. The following priority structure be established for the move:
- Top priority be placed with teachers who were teaching during the 2007-08 school year during which the move of kindergarten to the school system was announced, and who were teaching subsequently in either or both of the school years 2008-09 and 2009-10.
 - Should vacancies remain after all members of the above group who wish to move have been placed, then eligibility to move be extended to individuals who were not teaching in the 2007-08 school year, but who taught kindergarten in the school years prior to AND after the 2007-08 school year.
 - Should vacancies still remain, then eligibility be extended to people who taught kindergarten in the school years prior to 2007-08 OR who began teaching kindergarten in 2008-09 or 2009-10.
25. During the transition period, any kindergarten teaching vacancies which occur be filled from the designated groups in the order of priority provided, before being opened to broader competition.
26. All teachers currently teaching in the Grade 1-12 system who wish to move into a kindergarten teaching position after the transition period ends, and who do not have an early childhood B.Ed., be required to take two courses in early childhood development and methods.
27. Special Needs Assistants who have extensive experience working with kindergarten children be given first consideration when staffing any additional Educational Assistant positions arising from the move of kindergarten to the public school system.
28. Special Needs Assistants who transition to the school system be required to meet the training requirements established for Educational Assistants, within the six-year transition period.

Space

29. Space for kindergarten be identified or created in all elementary schools in PEI to enable kindergarten to move into the public school system in September 2010.
30. The standard of 3.5 square meters of classroom space be retained when kindergarten moves into the school system. This should be treated as a minimum: each kindergarten classroom should be provided with sufficient space to accommodate at least five activity centres in an efficient and appropriate layout.
31. Each kindergarten classroom be provided with sufficient equipment and materials to establish at least five activity centres within the classroom, and to rotate these over the school year.
32. School administrators be flexible and open to the use of non-commercial materials in the kindergarten classroom, to the extent that safety and fire standards permit.

Transportation

- 33. School boards deploy their buses with safety seats to maximize access for kindergarten children and other children meeting the weight requirement.
- 34. School boards develop plans to reduce the duration of bus runs to meet a target of no more than one hour one-way for bus routes transporting kindergarten aged children.
- 35. School boards review their bus safety programs and activities and modify them as required to ensure that they are appropriate for kindergarten aged children.

Linkages

- 36. An early childhood transition protocol for children with special needs be designed, building on the model of the present kindergarten transition protocol.
- 37. Processes be designed to promote and support communication between kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators regarding the transition of children from early childhood centres into the school system.

Early Childhood Sector

- 38. A comprehensive review of early learning in Prince Edward Island be carried out, leading to a plan for a sustainable, high quality, accessible early childhood system serving all Island children and their families.

Taken together, these recommendations are designed to provide the focus and framework for an orderly transition of kindergarten into the public school system in September 2010 – retaining the many strengths and positive aspects of Prince Edward Island's community-based kindergarten system, and securing the many benefits and opportunities offered by the public school system, to ensure,

Every child a better future.

RÉSUMÉ

En avril 2008, le gouvernement de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard a annoncé, dans le discours du Trône, son engagement à intégrer la maternelle au système scolaire au cours du mandat actuel, après un processus de consultation respectueux, soigné et approfondi. Pour mener à bien cet engagement, la Commission des maternelles publiques a été créée en mai 2008. Patricia J. Mella a été nommée commissaire et on lui a demandé de remettre son rapport en juin 2009.

Le système de maternelle de l'Î.-P.-É. est unique de par son modèle communautaire ainsi que sa philosophie et son approche en matière de développement de la petite enfance. Afin de préserver ses atouts tout en donnant accès aux avantages procurés par le système scolaire, la Commission a beaucoup misé sur des consultations auprès des éducateurs, des autres intervenants ainsi que de la population. Ces travaux sont appuyés sur la recherche et sur des constatations faites dans d'autres provinces, le cas échéant.

Compte tenu de ces travaux, la vision suivante est proposée pour la maternelle à l'Î.-P.-É. lorsque celle-ci sera intégrée au système scolaire :

**Chaque enfant de l'Île aura la chance de se développer
au maximum de ses capacités.**

En vertu de son mandat, la commissaire devait étudier l'ensemble des questions relatives à une transition juste et ordonnée de la maternelle au système scolaire. Voici les recommandations :

Modèle de prestation

1. Que le programme de maternelle soit offert sous forme de journée complète et à temps plein lorsqu'il sera intégré au système scolaire.
2. Que l'année d'enseignement à la maternelle soit obligatoire lorsque le programme sera intégré au système scolaire.
3. Que les parents soient en mesure de reporter l'entrée de leur enfant à la maternelle à l'année suivante par rapport à l'année d'entrée habituelle, s'ils croient qu'il serait préférable d'agir ainsi pour protéger les intérêts de l'enfant.
4. Que les dispositions législatives et réglementaires actuelles au sujet des écoles privées soient modifiées afin d'inclure des programmes de maternelle privés.
5. Que des programmes d'immersion en français à la maternelle soient offerts dans les écoles qui offrent présentement des programmes de première année d'immersion en français.

6. Que le niveau et la variété des outils d'intervention précoce et de soutien pour les enfants ayant des besoins spéciaux soient maintenus lorsque les programmes de maternelle seront intégrés au système scolaire. Cela comprend, sans s'y limiter, le maintien ou l'amélioration du soutien actuel dans les domaines de l'orthophonie, du traitement de l'autisme, de la physiothérapie, de l'ergothérapie et du soutien quotidien en classe.
7. Que l'uniformité soit assurée dans l'offre de soutien pour les enfants d'âge préscolaire ayant des besoins spéciaux, et que le soutien en matière d'orthophonie pour les enfants d'âge préscolaire soit transféré du ministère de la Santé vers le ministère de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance.

Programme d'enseignement

8. Que le programme de maternelle actuel, avec son approche intégrée, favorable au développement et axée sur le jeu, soit maintenu lorsqu'il sera transféré dans le système scolaire.
9. Que la taille maximale des classes de maternelle soit établie tout au plus à 15 enfants par éducatrice ou éducateur.
10. Que les classes combinées pour effectuer du coenseignement, où la présence de deux éducatrices ou éducateurs qualifiés sera requise, comptent un nombre maximal de 24 enfants.
11. Que le processus d'évaluation des élèves de maternelle soit affiné pour inclure les éléments suivants :
 - Une évaluation d'entrée uniforme pour tous les élèves de maternelle;
 - Un rapport de progrès élargi remis à la fin de l'année qui indiquera plus de résultats individuels parmi ceux présentés dans le programme de maternelle.
12. Que les élèves de maternelle profitent pleinement des possibilités qui s'offrent à eux dans le système scolaire. Pour veiller à ce que cette situation se produise de manière à maintenir et à soutenir le programme de maternelle actuel, il est recommandé :
 - Que le ministère de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance examine les programmes d'enseignement actuels relatifs à des matières spécialisées du niveau primaire, et qu'il apporte des modifications ou des ajouts à ces programmes de façon appropriée pour s'assurer qu'ils répondent aux besoins des élèves de maternelle et qu'ils reflètent l'approche du programme de maternelle;
 - Que des séances de formation en milieu de travail soient offertes aux éducatrices et aux éducateurs spécialistes qui enseigneront aux enfants d'âge préscolaire. Ces séances devront inclure du contenu à propos du développement de la petite enfance et des méthodes d'enseignements appropriées.

Personnel

13. Qu'il soit exigé des éducatrices et des éducateurs de maternelle d'obtenir un baccalauréat en éducation, en raison des exigences du système scolaire et du lien qui existe entre l'éducation et la qualité de l'apprentissage.
14. Que l'on demande à l'Université de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard de terminer la préparation d'un programme de mise à niveau flexible menant à l'obtention d'un baccalauréat en éducation de la petite enfance de type « 2 plus 2 » pour les éducatrices et les éducateurs de maternelle actuels.
15. Qu'il soit permis aux étudiantes et aux étudiants de terminer le programme de mise à niveau dans un délai n'excédant pas six ans, en raison des nombreuses responsabilités que les nouveaux postes exigeront de la part des éducatrices et des éducateurs.
16. Que le programme de baccalauréat en éducation de la petite enfance de type « 2 plus 2 » soit ouvert à toute personne enseignant le programme de maternelle depuis qu'il a commencé à être financé par le secteur public en 2000, ainsi qu'aux diplômés du programme d'éducation de la petite enfance du Holland College et du Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É. de 2009 et 2010.
17. Que les éducatrices et les éducateurs de maternelle aient un permis provisoire pendant la période de transition recommandée ci-dessus, et que la politique du *Certification and Standards Board* soit révisée au besoin pour permettre cette mesure.
18. Qu'après évaluation, les éducatrices et les éducateurs soient placés dans les niveaux d'études suivants :
 - Les éducatrices et les éducateurs possédant un diplôme d'éducation de la petite enfance ou un diplôme de deux ans de compétences équivalentes seront placés au niveau « Certificat II »;
 - Les éducatrices et les éducateurs possédant un diplôme universitaire de premier cycle seront placés au niveau « Certificat III »;
 - Les éducatrices et les éducateurs possédant un baccalauréat en éducation seront placés au niveau « Certificat IV » ou à un niveau supérieur, le cas échéant.
19. Que les années d'expérience des éducatrices et des éducateurs de maternelle acquises depuis la mise en place du programme de maternelle financé par le secteur public soient reconnues selon une règle de « 2 pour 1 », à savoir, un échelon pour chaque période de deux ans d'enseignement effectuée de 2000 à 2010.
20. Que les éducatrices et les éducateurs dont l'âge et les années d'expérience totalisent un nombre d'années égal ou supérieur à 80, et qui prévoient enseigner pendant un certain temps dans le système scolaire pour une période n'excédant pas les six années de transition, soient exemptés de l'exigence d'obtenir un baccalauréat en éducation.

21. Que les éducatrices et les éducateurs actuels aient un droit exclusif sur les emplois d'enseignement du programme de maternelle durant la période de transition de six ans.
22. Qu'un processus d'embauche méthodique et transparent soit conçu et mis en place, comprenant les aspects exposés ci-dessus et minimisant le stress et les bouleversements pour les personnes qui y participent.
23. Que le ministère de l'Éducation et du Développement de la petite enfance crée et offre des mesures pour favoriser l'établissement d'un climat accueillant et d'une communauté d'apprentissage professionnel au sein du système scolaire, ce qui inclurait les éléments suivants :
 - De la formation en milieu de travail pour le personnel des écoles et des commissions scolaires au sujet du programme de maternelle et de l'approche à adopter concernant l'éducation de la petite enfance;
 - Des programmes d'accueil et d'orientation avant et après l'entrée au niveau des écoles, comme des systèmes de jumelage et des comités d'accueil.
24. Que l'ordre de priorité suivant soit établi pour le transfert :
 - La priorité numéro un doit être accordée aux éducatrices et aux éducateurs qui enseignaient pendant l'année scolaire 2007-2008, durant laquelle le transfert du programme de maternelle vers le système scolaire a été annoncé, et qui auront enseigné par la suite pendant l'une ou l'autre des années scolaires suivantes, soit 2008-2009 ou 2009-2010, ou les deux.
 - S'il reste des postes vacants après que tous les membres du groupe ci-dessus désirant être transférés ont été placés, les occasions d'emploi doivent alors être offertes aux personnes qui n'enseignaient pas pendant l'année scolaire 2007-2008, mais qui ont enseigné le programme de maternelle dans les années précédant ET suivant l'année scolaire 2007-2008.
 - S'il reste toujours des postes vacants, les occasions d'emploi doivent être offertes aux personnes qui ont enseigné le programme de maternelle avant l'année scolaire 2007-2008 OU qui auront commencé à l'enseigner en 2008-2009 ou 2009-2010.
25. Que pendant la période de transition, tous les postes vacants liés à l'enseignement du programme de maternelle soient pourvus par des membres des différents groupes désignés, et ce, dans l'ordre de priorité indiqué ci-dessus, avant qu'ils ne soient ouverts à d'autres candidats.
26. Que l'on exige de toutes les enseignantes et de tous les enseignants de la première à la douzième année qui désirent devenir éducatrices ou éducateurs de maternelle après la fin de la période de transition et qui ne détiennent pas de baccalauréat en éducation de la petite enfance de suivre deux cours sur le développement de la petite enfance et les méthodes d'enseignement appropriées à ce niveau.

27. Que les assistants pour les enfants ayant des besoins spéciaux qui possèdent de l'expérience approfondie auprès des élèves de maternelle soient pris en considération en premier pour pourvoir tout poste supplémentaire d'aide-enseignante ou d'aide-enseignant résultant du transfert du programme de maternelle vers le système scolaire.
28. Que l'on exige des assistants pour les enfants ayant des besoins spéciaux qui prendront part au transfert du programme de maternelle vers le système scolaire de satisfaire aux exigences en matière de formation établies pour les aide-enseignantes et aide-enseignants, et ce, à l'intérieur de la période de transition de six ans.

Espace

29. Que l'espace pour les maternelles soit déterminé ou créé dans toutes les écoles primaires de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard afin de permettre l'intégration du programme de maternelle au système scolaire en septembre 2010.
30. Que la norme de 3,5 mètres carrés d'espace pour les classes soit conservée lorsque le programme de maternelle sera transféré dans le système scolaire. Cette norme doit être considérée comme minimale : chaque classe de maternelle doit offrir assez d'espace pour accueillir au moins cinq centres d'activités dans un aménagement efficace et adéquat.
31. Que l'on fournisse aux classes de maternelle de l'équipement et du matériel suffisants afin d'aménager au moins cinq centres d'activités dans la salle et de changer ces activités tout au long de l'année scolaire.
32. Que les cadres scolaires fassent preuve de flexibilité et d'ouverture quant à l'utilisation de matériel non commercial dans les classes de maternelle, dans la mesure où les normes en matière de sécurité et d'incendie le permettent.

Transport

33. Que les commissions scolaires utilisent leurs autobus munis de sièges de sécurité afin de maximiser l'accès pour les élèves de maternelle et les autres enfants satisfaisant les exigences en matière de poids.
34. Que les commissions scolaires mettent au point un plan pour réduire la durée du trajet afin de satisfaire une cible équivalant tout au plus à une heure de déplacement pour un trajet simple dont l'autobus transporte des enfants d'âge préscolaire.
35. Que les commissions scolaires examinent leurs programmes et leurs activités en matière de sécurité dans les autobus et qu'elles les modifient, au besoin, afin de s'assurer qu'ils sont adéquats pour des enfants d'âge préscolaire.

Articulation du processus

36. Qu'un protocole de transition pour l'éducation de la petite enfance destiné aux enfants ayant des besoins spéciaux soit créé, ce qui viendrait s'ajouter au modèle de transition du programme de maternelle actuel.
37. Que le processus soit conçu afin de promouvoir et de soutenir la communication entre les éducatrices et les éducateurs de maternelle et ceux et celles de l'éducation de la petite enfance, en ce qui a trait au transfert des enfants des centres de la petite enfance vers le système scolaire.

Secteur de la petite enfance

38. Qu'un examen approfondi des services d'apprentissage offerts à la petite enfance à l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard soit effectué, afin d'élaborer un plan pour créer un système de services à la petite enfance durable, de qualité supérieure et accessible qui servira tous les enfants de l'Île et leur famille.

Ces recommandations visent à fournir une orientation et un cadre qui permettront une transition ordonnée de la maternelle au système scolaire en septembre 2010 – en conservant les nombreux atouts et aspects positifs du système communautaire de maternelle de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, et en exploitant la multitude d'avantages et de possibilités qu'offre le système scolaire, de façon à garantir :

Un meilleur avenir pour tous les enfants



INTRODUCTION

“Our Island has a rich and distinguished history of pioneering and revolutionary developments in education ... the next logical step in this evolution of public education is to bring kindergarten into the school system. My Government is committed to achieving this during the current mandate, following a thorough, careful, and sensitive consultation process.”

Prince Edward Island Speech from the Throne, April 4, 2008

In fulfillment of this commitment, in May 2008, Premier Robert Ghiz established the Public Kindergarten Commission with a mandate to develop a detailed action plan for an orderly transition of kindergarten into the school system by September 2010, and appointed Patricia J. Mella as Commissioner.

Under her Terms of Reference, contained in Appendix One, the Commissioner was asked to carry out research and extensive consultations to ensure a sound base of evidence and public understanding and consensus for the plan. Based on this work, she was asked to propose a vision and goals for the kindergarten system to guide the Province in its implementation. The Terms of Reference call for the Commissioner to address the full range of issues involved in the move, including but not limited to the following:

- **Delivery Model:** Define the delivery model, including whether kindergarten should be half-day or full-day, and whether it should be mandatory or voluntary. Additional issues explored by the Commission under this heading included French immersion kindergarten, and provision for children with special needs.
- **Curriculum:** Ensure appropriate kindergarten curriculum is in place using play-based strategies to achieve defined learning outcomes.
- **Impacts:** Examine impacts and implications of the move for existing early childhood education providers and how those can be mitigated.
- **Staffing:** Define appropriate qualifications and licensing requirements for the new kindergarten system; training and bridging systems for existing kindergarten teachers; early childhood training opportunities for teachers in the 1-12 system; and consequential training needs for staff in the early learning and child care sector.

- **Logistics:** Integrate kindergarten spaces into schools in the larger context of a rationalization and renewal of educational facilities to address declining enrolment, and consider transportation questions.
- **Linkages:** Integrate the public school kindergarten system with the pre-kindergarten early childhood system, and recommend measures to strengthen those systems as warranted.
- **Legislation:** Identify necessary legislative changes.

The Commissioner was asked to submit her report in June 2009.

This report sets out the Commissioner's findings and recommendations on the Terms of Reference outlined above. It opens with a description of the consultations and research on which the report is based. Next, the report briefly reviews the history of kindergarten in PEI, and describes the current system. The vision, mission, and objectives for PEI's future school-based kindergarten system are then proposed. The report then sets out the Commission's findings and recommendations on each of the issues set out above. In closing, the report emphasizes the importance of ensuring that, in September 2010, some 1,400 Island children are able to attend kindergarten in welcoming and appropriate school environments that will fulfill the vision of this report:

**Every Island child will be given the opportunity
to develop to the fullest of his or her potential.**



METHODOLOGY

PEI's kindergarten system is unique in its community-based model, and its firm grounding in the early childhood philosophy and approach. The move of kindergarten into the school system must aim to retain the strengths of this model as fully as possible, while also gaining all the advantages that come with being part of the school system. To promote this outcome, the Commission's methodology has sought to ensure that PEI's future kindergarten system, while informed by evidence from elsewhere, will be first and foremost a made-in-PEI, made-by-PEI, made-for-PEI system.

As such, the work of the Commission has relied strongly on meetings and discussions with the various groups affected by the move of kindergarten into the school system. An ongoing dialogue has been carried out to identify issues, explore solutions, propose and discuss future directions, and foster understanding and consensus. This dialogue has been of enormous value to the Commission in reaching its conclusions and recommendations. Thanks are expressed to all who took part, for their contributions and for their commitment to a better future for Island children.

Throughout the process, these consultations were supported by research on issues, trends, and approaches and best practices within PEI, across Canada, and internationally. Research and organizational support was provided to the Commissioner by staff of Executive Council Office. The Commission's major consultations and meetings are listed in Appendix Two, while a list of selected literature references is set out in Appendix Three.

The work began in June 2008, with visits to almost twenty kindergartens prior to their end of year closing date. These visits proved to be a very helpful source of information and insight to the Commission, and an excellent start to the work.

During the summer of 2008, a work plan was developed and research into the literature and approaches in other jurisdictions began. The research continued throughout the work of the Commission, to provide background information and evidence on the various issues being explored through meetings and consultations.

During the fall of 2008, meetings were held with a wide range of stakeholder groups within the early childhood and education systems. Highlights of these included the keynote address to the Early Childhood Development Association's annual fall conference in late October, and a presentation to and discussion with the Education Senior Management Forum in early November. As well, the Commissioner met with groups of principals, the PEI Teachers Federation, the PEI Home and School Federation, PEI's post-secondary institutions, and numerous other groups. Further visits continued to additional kindergartens and to Grade One classrooms.

In December, the first two public meetings were held, in St. Peters and Bloomfield. Six further public meetings took place in January, in Summerside, Montague, Wellington, Souris, and two meetings in Charlottetown. A final public meeting in French was held in May in Charlottetown. In all, these meetings were attended by over 320 members of the public. At each meeting, the Commissioner gave a presentation on her mandate and on her findings and impressions to date, then took questions and held discussions with the public in attendance.

A website was established for the Commission, which included a comment form through which members of the public could provide their input. A number of members of the public and individual stakeholders used this communications channel to convey their ideas, questions, and views.

Further meetings took place with various stakeholders throughout the remaining winter months and the spring to further explore specific issues, refine directions, and develop detailed solutions. Late in the work, a visit to New Brunswick took place, to seek practical insights from their experience of moving kindergarten into the school system in the 1990s.

The key insights and recommendations arising from this work are set out in this report. The report is supported by background papers on several of the issues in the Terms of Reference, which provide additional detail on research findings and consultation input.



3.1 History of Kindergarten in PEI

In Prince Edward Island, the first early childhood program, Head Start, was established in the 1950s in Charlottetown, serving disadvantaged children, and several additional centres opened during the 1960s. In the 1970s, PEI's early childhood system expanded rapidly, spurred by the national funding available through the new Canada Assistance Plan and by the major movement of mothers into the labour force. The number of centres expanded, the *Child Care Facilities Act* was passed, and the Early Childhood Development Association was founded. During the late 1970s and the 1980s, the public funding system of fee subsidies and centre grants evolved, and the number of early childhood and kindergarten programs increased further throughout PEI.

In 1993, the Task Force on Education included in its report a recommendation that a standard play-based kindergarten curriculum be designed, linked to a common Atlantic curriculum for Grades 1-12. While this recommendation was accepted, a decision was taken to await completion of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation work to develop an Atlantic Curriculum for K-12.

In 1998, work began in PEI to design a publicly funded kindergarten system. In 2000, the provincial government implemented a province-wide, publicly funded kindergarten program with a community-based model of delivery.

This unique model funds community-based kindergartens and early childhood centres, both non-profit and private, to provide a half-day kindergarten program or its equivalent to children in their year before school entry. Kindergarten operators are required to deliver a curriculum developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development with input from early childhood educators and the community. The program is taught by educators holding a minimum credential of a two-year early childhood diploma or its equivalent.

In 2005, the Province established the Task Force on Student Achievement. The Task Force's *Report*, released in January 2006, contained wide-ranging recommendations. With regard to kindergarten, the Task Force called on government to:

- Put in place more rigorous requirements regarding program content, the number of hours, and the length of the school year to ensure consistency and quality in the kindergarten system.
- Integrate francophone kindergartens into the public school system and investigate whether this would be advantageous for all kindergartens.
- Lead the way in identifying children with learning disabilities as well as those who may be academically and socially at risk.
- Develop an intervention program for children identified as being at risk.

The Province has taken a number of actions which are relevant to those recommendations:

- The kindergarten year was extended to a minimum of nine months.
- During 2007 and 2008, the then Department of Education led a participative process to develop a comprehensive, integrated kindergarten curriculum. The curriculum was implemented in all kindergartens in September 2008.
- In April 2008, the Province announced the move of kindergarten into the school system, and in May appointed the Public Kindergarten Commissioner to plan for the transition.
- Also in April 2008, the Speech from the Throne announced that responsibility for Early Childhood would move from the Department of Social Services and Seniors to the then Department of Education, renamed the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
- In July 2008, following a consultation process, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development announced a change in the age of entry to December 31, bringing it into line with most other provinces.

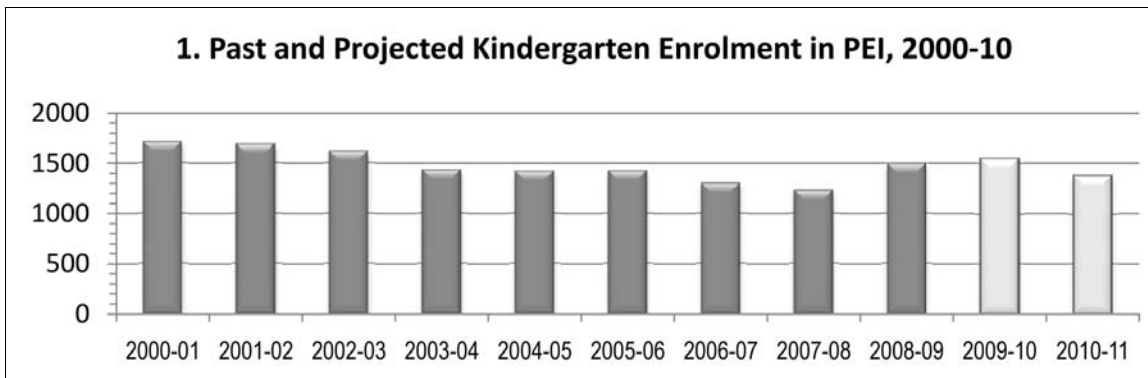
3.2 The Kindergarten System Today

The history outlined above has led to a kindergarten system unique in Canada.

3.2.1 Enrolment

Kindergarten enrolment in 2008-09 is 1,480 children, up significantly from the 1,215 children served in 2007-08. This increase in enrolment is partly due to fluctuations in annual births, and also reflects the impact of a change in the age of entry announced in March 2008. This change affected approximately 250 children born in September and October of 2002. Some of these children took a readiness program in the spring of 2008 and then proceeded to Grade One in September 2008, while others took the full 2008-09 kindergarten year.

With the further change in the age of entry announced in July 2008, this effect will happen again in the 2009-10 kindergarten year. Next year, a 14-month cohort of children born from November 2003 to December 2004 will be enrolled, resulting in a further increase in forecast enrolment to 1,540. Enrolment trends and projections are summarized in Chart 1.



3.2.2 Programs

Publicly funded kindergarten in Prince Edward Island today is delivered through 83 programs in 80 locations. The system is very diverse in terms of size, location, setting, ownership, and operating model. These features are briefly described below.

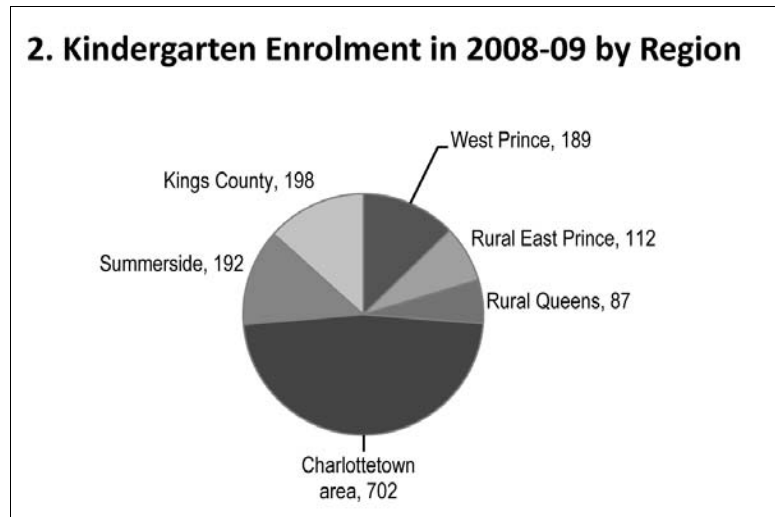
Program Size

The programs vary in size from two to 52 children, spread fairly evenly across the range of sizes:

- Nineteen centres serve between two and nine children, with total enrolment of 124.
- Thirty centres serve ten to 19 children, with total enrolment of 418.
- Twenty-two centres serve 20 to 29 children, with total enrolment of 500.
- Twelve programs serve 30 or more children, with total enrolment of 438.

Program Location

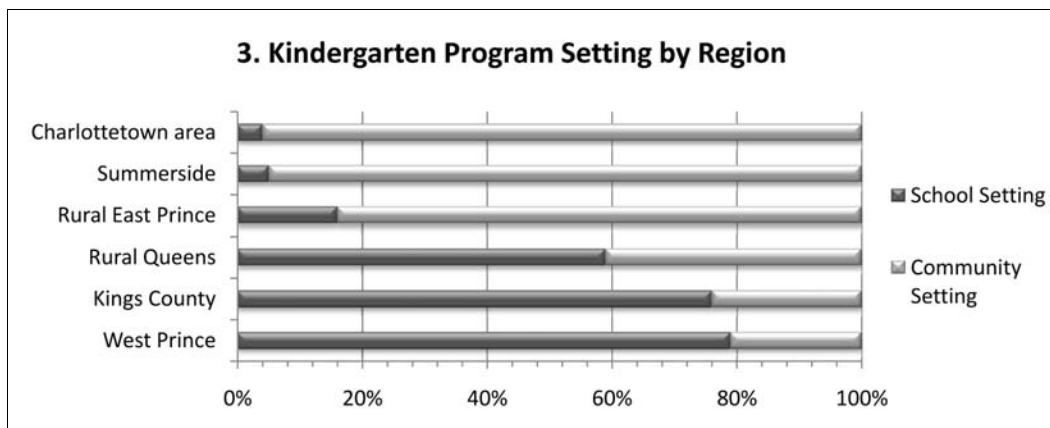
A relatively high share of kindergarten capacity is located in and around the two cities. Summerside and the Charlottetown-Cornwall-Stratford area account for 43% of PEI's population, but their kindergarten programs serve 60% of the provincial total. The distribution of kindergarten enrolment across PEI is shown in Chart 2.



Program Setting

In many parts of rural Prince Edward Island, kindergartens are already situated in or co-located with elementary schools. In all, eighteen English schools in rural PEI are already home to kindergarten programs, serving a total of 335 children or almost one-quarter of total enrolment. As well, combined kindergarten and child care centres are housed in the community centre portion of all six school complexes under the Commission scolaire de langue française (CSLF). These serve a further 79 children.

Within Summerside and the Charlottetown-Stratford-Cornwall area, there are no kindergartens in the English schools. Outside the urban areas, the proportion of school-based kindergarten children varies widely by region. As shown in Chart 3, over three-quarters of all children in West Prince and Kings County are served in kindergartens located in or with schools.



Program Ownership

Kindergarten in PEI is delivered by both non-profit and private centres. In the current year, enrolment is almost evenly split between the two categories. The mix differs significantly by region, however. The rural areas of PEI are primarily served by non-profit kindergartens. All kindergartens located in schools are required to be non-profit, and as well, the majority of community-based rural programs are non-profit. In the urban areas, on the other hand, privately operated programs account for three-quarters of programs and of enrolment.

Centre Model

Currently, some kindergarten programs are delivered in a stand-alone model, while others are delivered by centres which also offer other programs, including preschool, child-care, and after-school programs. The majority of non-profit programs, including most of the programs in English schools, are stand-alone, while the majority of private programs are combined. Urban programs are more likely to be combined, while rural programs are more likely to be stand-alone.

Summary

Taking the above factors together, kindergarten in Prince Edward Island differs significantly by region and language, falling into three clusters:

- In PEI's cities, the majority of programs are privately operated, located in the community, and offered in a centre also providing preschool or after-school care.
- In PEI's rural areas, the majority of programs are non-profit, located in schools, and stand-alone or combined with pre-kindergarten programs.
- In PEI's French first language system, all six programs are non-profit, co-located with the schools, and offer 'wraparound' care and early learning to children from toddlers to school age.

These differences mean that the move of kindergarten into the school system will have different impacts and implications across the province and across language groups. The analysis and recommendations later in this report have sought to recognize and respond to those differences.



MISSION, VISION AND OBJECTIVES

It is recommended that the kindergarten program in Prince Edward Island strive to fulfill the following vision:

Vision:

Every Island child will be given the opportunity to develop to the fullest of his or her potential.

The vision of Prince Edward Island's present kindergarten program, as articulated in the curriculum document, sets out a number of critically important themes which are proposed as the core of the mission statement for the new system. It states, "The Kindergarten Program of Prince Edward Island fosters children's growth and learning: socially, emotionally, intellectually, physically, and creatively, to become lifelong learners in an environment that is nurturing, play-based, and developmentally appropriate."

Building on this core, the following is proposed as the mission for PEI's kindergarten system once it becomes part of the school system:

Mission:

Prince Edward Island's public school system will deliver an integrated, play-based, kindergarten program to all Island children in a nurturing, and developmentally appropriate environment, drawing on the full resources of the school to promote their optimal development in all domains – social, emotional, intellectual, creative, and physical.

Objectives

In achieving its mission, Prince Edward Island's school-based kindergarten system will be guided by the following objectives:

- Provide every Island child with equal access to kindergarten as a universal entitlement.
- Deliver an integrated curriculum using a developmentally appropriate play-based methodology to achieve defined developmental outcomes.
- Ensure that all kindergarten educators have a strong background in early childhood development as well as degree-level training in primary education.
- Provide a safe, welcoming, comfortable and appropriately equipped learning setting for all children.
- Develop and maintain strong linkages with families, with the early childhood system, and with other providers of early childhood services and supports.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS





5.1 Full-Day or Half-Day Kindergarten

The Terms of Reference call on the Commissioner to “assess various models of full-day and half-day kindergarten to identify the model that provides an optimal combination of learning outcomes, access, and family strengthening.”

PEI’s publicly funded community-based system provides a half-day program consisting of a minimum of three hours, of which 2.5 hours must be instruction. In 2000, when kindergarten became publicly funded, this model was similar to the majority of provinces. Only Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia provided full-day kindergarten.

Over the past decade, the national and international trend has been to move to full-day kindergarten:

- Among provinces with half-day kindergarten, a growing number of full-day kindergarten programs are being provided to special populations of children considered to be at risk or in need of more intensive learning, social, and cultural supports.
- In Alberta, the Commission on Learning recommended in 2003 that the province move toward full-day kindergarten in all districts. A number of school districts have moved forward with implementation. Full-day kindergarten is offered in most schools in Edmonton and Calgary, in northern Alberta, and some smaller centres.
- In November 2007, Ontario announced its intent to phase in full-day kindergarten starting in 2010. Commissioner Charles Pascal was appointed to develop a plan for the transition. He is expected to submit his report in June, 2009.
- In February 2008, British Columbia’s Speech from the Throne announced the establishment of the Early Childhood Learning Agency, with a mandate to consult on the feasibility of moving to full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds by September 2009. A year later, the 2009 Speech from the Throne expressed continued commitment to the measure, but indicated that its introduction would be delayed.
- Internationally, full-day programs for children aged five have been the norm for many years. In fact, most European countries provide universal, fully-funded full-day educational programs for all children aged three to five years. In the United States, full-day kindergarten has become the dominant model in recent decades.

As suggested by the trend to full-day kindergarten described above, the research is strongly supportive of full-day kindergarten. Further detail is provided in a companion background paper.

In Canada, a recent study¹ compared learning outcomes over time for children in full-day and half-day kindergarten programs in Edmonton schools. The study indicated that the children in the full-day programs, who were mostly from educationally disadvantaged and low-income households, closed the learning gap with and even outperformed their middle-class counterparts in half-day programs. These benefits persisted to Grade Three and beyond.

In the United States, research² suggests that there is a broad range of positive relationships between participation in full-day kindergarten and later academic success. The study found that full-day kindergarten children exhibited more independent learning, classroom involvement, productivity in work with peers, social development and positive behaviour than did pupils in half-day or alternate-day programs.

Stakeholder input was generally although not unanimously supportive of full-day kindergarten.

With regard to parent input, at the public meetings, the majority of participants were supportive of full-day kindergarten. The PEI Home and School Federation has been on record for many years as supporting the inclusion of kindergarten in the school system. In April 2008, the PEIHSF renewed its support, passing a resolution calling on government to “take the necessary steps to develop and implement a publicly funded school-based full-day kindergarten program within PEI’s education system by the year 2010.”

Further insights on parent views were gained from a parent engagement survey conducted by the PEI Home and School Federation in the fall of 2008. The survey found that among parents with preschool children, 53% were in favour of full-day kindergarten, while 40% favoured half-day and 7% were unsure. Survey comments noted a range of factors in support of full-day kindergarten, citing the developmental benefits of full-day, including the increased opportunity for learning and social time, the greater flexibility allowed by a full-day program, and the scope for more individualized and small group learning. Comments also highlighted the benefits to families, especially working parents. As well, a number of comments noted that full-day was common outside PEI and was needed here to provide our children with the same learning advantages available elsewhere.

With regard to educator input, in February 2008, the PEI Teachers Federation established a policy to strongly advocate for the implementation of full-day kindergarten in the public school system, reaffirming a longstanding position on this issue.

Among early childhood educators, input during the kindergarten tour in June indicated that the majority were supportive of full-day kindergarten. They emphasized that in order for all children to gain the maximum benefit from full-day, it was essential to retain a developmentally appropriate, play-based curriculum and to build in opportunities for both quiet time and active play throughout the day.

¹ Dr. Jose da Costa, “Full-Day Kindergarten: Longitudinal Effects on Reading and Writing at the End of Grades One, Two, and Three,” *International Journal of Learning*, 2005

² Amanda Miller, “What are the effects of full-day kindergarten programs?” Clearinghouse on Early Education and Parenting (CEEP), 2005 <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/poptopics/fullday.html>

The recommendation on full-day kindergarten is a key one for this report, as many other recommendations flow from it.

It is recognized that full-day kindergarten will significantly increase the funding and resources required to deliver the program. Nonetheless, the weight of evidence of better outcomes for children is very strong. All Island children will benefit from a well-designed, high quality, developmentally appropriate full-day kindergarten program, and those who will benefit most are the children facing disadvantages and challenges. Island children who have special needs, who are socio-economically disadvantaged, who do not speak either official language, who have previously attended an early learning program – these children will gain the greatest benefit from a full-day kindergarten program. As those children live in all parts of Prince Edward Island and come from all walks of life, a universal approach is essential to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to benefit from kindergarten.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that kindergarten be provided as a full-day, full-time program when it transitions into the public school system.

5.2 Mandatory or Voluntary Kindergarten

The Terms of Reference call on the Commissioner to consider “whether kindergarten should be mandatory or voluntary.”

In Prince Edward Island currently, and in most Canadian provinces, kindergarten is a voluntary program. Kindergarten is mandatory only in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Prior to the introduction of publicly funded kindergarten in 2000, it was estimated that about 85% of Island children took some sort of kindergarten or readiness program prior to entering Grade One. Enrolment jumped sharply after kindergarten became publicly funded, and has stood at well over 90% throughout the decade. Currently, it is estimated that 97% of eligible children are enrolled in community-based kindergarten.

During consultations, very few public concerns were expressed about making kindergarten mandatory in PEI. School principals urged that kindergarten be mandatory, noting that children who do not attend kindergarten enter Grade One at a disadvantage. The lack of the kindergarten year affects not only the child, but also his or her classmates and the teacher as well.

While 97% participation is excellent and higher than many other provinces, it still means that almost 50 Island children are not benefiting from kindergarten in the current year. When kindergarten moves, it will join the public school system in which attendance is mandatory. The developmental importance of kindergarten cannot be stated too strongly. Mandatory attendance will reinforce its key role in the education of the child, and will place that first year on an equal footing with subsequent years of schooling.

It is noted that currently in PEI, the *School Act* provides for free schooling for all persons aged six to twenty, but sets the compulsory age of school attendance at seven. This allows parents to defer

their child's entry to school by a year if they feel that this would be in their child's best interests. This age option should be open to parents of kindergarten children as well. The need to amend the *School Act* accordingly is noted in Section 11 on legislation later in this report.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- ***The kindergarten year be mandatory when kindergarten moves into the school system.***
- ***Parents be able to defer their child's entry to kindergarten to the year following the usual age of entry if they feel this would be in the best interests of the child.***
- ***Current legislative and regulatory provisions on private schools be amended to include private kindergartens.***

5.3 French Immersion Kindergarten

Since French immersion programs are offered to Grade One children at ten elementary schools across PEI, the issue of French immersion kindergarten needs to be addressed.

Presently, three kindergarten programs in Prince Edward Island offer French immersion to a total of 45 children. One program is located in Summerside, one in St. Louis, and one in Tignish.

Ten Island schools offer a dual track program with both English and early French immersion options for students. Five of these schools are in the Western School Board (Elm Street, Greenfield, Bloomfield, St. Louis, and Tignish), and five are in the Eastern School District (Westwood, Spring Park, Sherwood, Glen Stewart, and Montague.) Across PEI, French immersion accounts for about 23% of enrolment in Grades One and Two, with higher enrolment in the Western board (30%) than in the Eastern District (20%).

If French immersion kindergarten enrolment follows the same level and patterns as Grade One EFI enrolment, it is forecast that up to 300 children may seek French Immersion kindergarten. Potential English and French immersion enrolment in those schools is shown in Charts 4 and 5 in Section 8.1 of this report.

A 2002 review of early French immersion in Canada³ identifies the ideal conditions for second language learning as including:

- starting as early as possible so as to allow the children to acquire the language in a natural way
- intensive, sustained, contextualized exposure to the second language

³ Marjorie Wesche, "Early French Immersion: How Has the Original Canadian Model Stood the Test of Time?" Burmeister, P., et al, eds. *An Integrated View of Language Development*. Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2005

- motivating activities which engage the learner in understanding and using the language.

The study notes as a factor contributing to successful outcomes, the importance of having learners start from the same point with regard to their beginning proficiency in the second language, so that the teacher uses consistent linguistic and pedagogical approaches.

Overall, the study indicates that early immersion students gain both a high level of proficiency in their second language, and mastery of content equivalent to or greater than their counterparts in a first language stream. The study concludes that an early starting age is generally advantageous for children whose first language is well established and continues to develop.

Children with a wider range of academic abilities are more successful in early immersion than is the case in later starting programs. Furthermore, long-term oral fluency development and self-confidence in using the language tend to be stronger among EFI children.

At the public meetings, several participants inquired whether French immersion kindergarten would be available. Both Canadian Parents for French, PEI division, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's French Programs branch were strongly supportive of making French immersion kindergarten available in all ten schools currently offering early French immersion.

It is recognized that a decision to offer French immersion kindergarten in all dual-track early French immersion schools would pose some implementation challenges. The research strongly shows that French immersion is beneficial not only for children's acquisition of a second language, but also for their overall learning and development. Moreover, the research indicates that those linguistic and cognitive benefits are best attained when immersion begins as early as possible.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that French immersion kindergarten be offered in schools currently providing Grade One French immersion.

5.4 Supports for Children with Special Needs

Both the kindergarten system and the school system offer a range of supports to children with special needs. Both systems are committed to a philosophy of full inclusion. The nature, level, and delivery model of supports for special needs children vary between the two systems.

In the early childhood system, a child with special needs is defined as "a person who, in order to attain the usual developmental goals, requires additional and/or specific types of stimulation/care." This may include children with issues related to mobility, cognition, development delay, vision or hearing loss, speech, behavioural issues and children who have multiple disabilities.

In the school system, education for children with special needs is defined as "programming and/or services designed to accommodate students within the public school system whose educational needs require interventions different from, or in addition to, those which are needed by most students."

In PEI's kindergarten system, approximately 4.5% of children are identified each year as having special needs. Most of these children receive the support of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) under the Special Needs Program. The SNAs work as part of the overall team, based on an approach of full inclusion. This group of staff is discussed further in Section 6.6.

The supports provided by SNAs in the kindergarten system are complemented by a range of specialized supports including speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and autism specialists. With the exception of the autism consultants, these personnel are currently employed by the Department of Health.

Presently, a Department of Education and Early Childhood Development transition protocol is in place to facilitate the movement of children from kindergarten into the school system. The protocol sets out requirements for a planning team and a year-long planning process for children with special needs, defines the circumstances under which a child may remain in kindergarten for an additional year, and describes approaches specific to children with autism.

In the school system, students with special needs receive support from both resource teachers and Educational Assistants. These staff are deployed throughout the school as needed and may move among classrooms during the day. Specialist supports in the school system include autism consultants from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and speech language pathologists from both the Department of Health (Grades 1-2) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Grades 3-6).

Early childhood educators and program directors have expressed a high level of satisfaction with the level of support provided by the Special Needs Program. The availability of specialist supports varied across the province, with gaps or interruptions in some services in some regions due to staffing vacancies or other factors.

During the public meetings, parents expressed the view that maintaining the range and level of supports is essential when children with special needs move from kindergarten to Grade One.

Children with special needs are the most vulnerable members of our society, and require and deserve all the support that we can provide to them. Early intervention is crucial if we as a society are to improve lifelong outcomes for these children.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the level and range of early intervention and support for children with special needs be maintained when kindergarten moves into the school system. This includes, but is not limited to, maintaining or enhancing current supports in the areas of speech language therapy, autism therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and day-to-day classroom support.

Currently, responsibility for speech language services is split, with the Department of Health providing services to children until the end of Grade 2 and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development providing services to children in Grades 3-6. Stakeholder input suggested that this creates some issues with regard to consistency in the level of supports, and communications between the two systems at the transition point.

Recommendation:

To ensure consistency in the provision of special needs supports for kindergarten aged children, it is recommended that speech language supports for that age level be transferred from the Department of Health to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.



6.1 Play-Based Approach

The Terms of Reference call for measures to “ensure that appropriate kindergarten curriculum is in place using play-based strategies to achieve defined learning outcomes.”

The introduction of publicly funded kindergarten in 2000 resulted in Prince Edward Island’s first evidence-based province-wide kindergarten curriculum. This curriculum was developed by the Department of Education in the year prior to implementation. It was grounded in an early childhood philosophy of developmentally appropriate play-based learning, and met Atlantic region requirements in the areas of early literacy and numeracy.

Since then, the Department has expanded on this curriculum, working with early childhood educators and pilot sites across the province to develop a comprehensive, integrated, developmentally appropriate, play-based kindergarten curriculum which incorporates all outcomes established by the Atlantic Ministers responsible for education.

The full curriculum was implemented in all centres across Prince Edward Island in September 2008.

Concerns exist in other jurisdictions that kindergarten approaches are becoming more structured and less play-based. These trends are driven by external pressures related to testing and funding, and by an increased emphasis on ‘measurables’ from the established curriculum.

The research strongly supports the kindergarten curriculum currently being delivered in Prince Edward Island.

The curriculum is **comprehensive**: it includes the full range of learning domains needed to build a strong foundation for lifelong learning. It addresses early literacy and numeracy, social studies, science, creativity, and health and physical development.

The curriculum is **integrated**: it uses natural situations and play activities to achieve a number of outcomes simultaneously. The rationale for this is well expressed in the curriculum document itself, and is supported by a wide range of research: “For the kindergarten child, the experiences of living and learning are inseparable. Learning is part of the total experience of living. Separating learning experiences into subjects taught in isolation is contrary to what is known about how children learn. Integration is the drawing together of the natural connections among various curriculum areas to assist children in making sense of their world.”⁴

⁴ PEI Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Kindergarten Integrated Curriculum Document*, 2008, p. 38

The curriculum is **developmentally appropriate**: it is designed to respond to how children learn best at age four and five. It provides for all components of children's development in an individualized and child-centred way – socio-emotional, intellectual, creative, physical, literacy, and numeracy.

To achieve these three crucial features, the curriculum is **play-based** – an approach overwhelmingly supported by the literature as the best way for young children to learn.

Public and stakeholder views were unanimous in their support of the present kindergarten curriculum.

The most urgent concern expressed by early childhood educators and kindergarten program operators was that the curriculum would be threatened by the move to the public school system. Across the province, early childhood educators expressed their strong support for the current curriculum as high quality and the best possible approach for children.

Stakeholders from the school system expressed commitment to continuing the current play-based curriculum. Stakeholders vary however, in the depth of their familiarity with the kindergarten curriculum and the early childhood philosophy on which it is founded. As such, there are concerns that over time, unless action is taken to prevent it, the existing structures, routines, and expectations of the school system will unintentionally lead to the erosion of the kindergarten curriculum and its play-based approach.

The research and consultations very strongly support the current kindergarten curriculum as high quality and appropriate. Evidence from some other jurisdictions indicates that play-based approaches are under pressure in their public school systems. It is important that administrators and teachers become familiar with the play-based curriculum and its early childhood philosophy.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the present kindergarten curriculum, with its integrated, developmentally appropriate, play-based approach, be maintained when kindergarten moves into the school system.

6.2 Student-Teacher Ratio

The consultations highlighted an important issue related to curriculum: student-teacher ratio. The number of children per teacher has a vital impact on the capacity to retain the current kindergarten curriculum.

The current kindergarten ratio is governed by the provisions of *the Child Care Facilities Act* and Regulations. The present ratio for five-year-olds is twelve children per early childhood educator. This maximum is strictly enforced.

In recent years, the provincial government has invested in reducing class sizes in the public school system. The staffing formula has shifted to an approach whereby schools are allocated a certain number of classroom and specialty teachers based on enrolment. These classroom teaching resources are then deployed by school administration to best fit the enrolment levels and composition of the various grades and classes. As a result, although class sizes have declined in the present decade, individual class sizes continue to vary within schools.

During public meetings, it was clear that the public places strong importance on maintaining a low ratio. A number of concerns were expressed about the perceived threat of a higher ratio once kindergarten moves to the school system. Strong support was expressed for a hard cap on kindergarten class sizes, ideally at the current level of 12 but in no case higher than 15.

Consultations with early childhood indicators indicated a strong belief that a class size over 15 would undermine the current curriculum by forcing a shift from individualized and small-group, child-initiated activities to large-group, more standardized, teacher-directed activities.

A maximum class size of 15, when applied to projected kindergarten enrolment, is forecast to result in a requirement of approximately 110 teachers.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the maximum kindergarten class size be set at no more than 15 children per teacher.

It is recognized that there may be significant advantages to a team teaching approach with larger groups of children. These potential advantages include a larger and more diverse learning setting, pedagogical advantages, and better use of space.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that, if classes are combined for purposes of team teaching, the maximum number of kindergarten children in a group be no more than 24, with two qualified teachers required.

6.3 Kindergarten Assessment

Consultations indicated a desire to see more specifically defined outcomes as part of the yearend kindergarten assessment process.

At the end of the year, kindergartens are required to prepare a progress report on each child, using a form developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The form is provided to parents, and, with parental consent, is forwarded to the child's school for the information of the Grade One teacher. Many kindergartens augment the progress report to parents with a portfolio showing the child's development over the kindergarten year.

The research indicates that the approach to assessment currently being used by PEI's kindergarten program is appropriate. For example, the US National Education Association, a 2.7-million member organization, states, "Assessment of the child's progress should address all areas of a child's development: physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. Multiple sources of information should be used, and children should be given opportunities to demonstrate their skills in different ways, allowing for variability in learning pace and for different cultural backgrounds. As with pre-kindergarten, large-scale standardized testing is inappropriate. The purpose of assessment should be to improve the quality of education by providing information to teachers, identifying children with special needs, and developing baseline data."⁵

Consultation input indicated that the progress report is a helpful piece of information for Grade One teachers to gain a better understanding of their incoming students. However, a face-to-face meeting between the kindergarten and Grade One teacher would be an important component of a more complete assessment of the child. Some kindergartens continue to augment the progress report with their own longstanding and more in-depth reporting systems.

Scope exists to expand the progress report to more fully include the various outcomes set out in the kindergarten curriculum.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the assessment process for kindergarten children be refined to include:

- ***A consistent entry assessment for all kindergarten students***
- ***An expanded progress report which specifies more of the individual outcomes set out in the kindergarten curriculum.***

⁵ The National Education Association, *The NEA on Kindergarten and Prekindergarten*, 2004, p. 13

6.4 Integration into the School

When kindergarten children move into the public school system, they will have access to a variety of subjects, including physical education, music, art, information technology, and library.

The present kindergarten curriculum contains components related to health and physical development, and to creative development. Teachers are to build in daily opportunities for gross motor play, with a view to developing a range of skills including physical skills. The creative element calls for daily artistic expression activities, as well as activities involving dramatic play, music, and movement.

Consultation input indicated that access to specialty subjects is one of the major benefits of moving kindergarten into the school system. As well, on a practical level, it was noted that participation by children in these activities frees up preparation time for the kindergarten teacher similar to other classroom teachers.

Early childhood educators expressed some concern about interrupting the less structured flow of the kindergarten day by having the children break off their activities and go to scheduled periods. Concern was also expressed that the developmental approach to learning might not be used as a teaching methodology in the specialty subjects, given that the curricula in those areas have been developed for school-aged children and may not use a developmental approach. This could potentially result in an overly structured approach being applied to kindergarten students.

Access to specialty teachers and learning environments holds major potential benefits for kindergarten children. Full-day kindergarten would provide enough time in the school day for these components to be included. This would also be of benefit to kindergarten classroom teachers and would provide them with the same working conditions as their colleagues.

It is important, however, that these benefits be gained in a way which supports the current kindergarten curriculum and philosophy.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that kindergarten children participate fully in the offerings and opportunities of the public school system. To ensure that this occurs in a way which maintains and supports the current kindergarten curriculum, it is recommended that:

- The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development review current curricula pertaining to specialty subjects for the primary grades, and modify or add to those curricula as appropriate to ensure that they respond to the needs of kindergarten students and reflect the kindergarten curriculum approach.***
- In-servicing sessions be designed and provided to specialty teachers who will be teaching kindergarten-aged children. These sessions should include content on early child development and methods.***



The Terms of Reference call on the Commissioner to define “staffing requirements and transition measures, including:

- The qualifications and licensing required in the new system
- Training and bridging systems for existing kindergarten teachers
- Early childhood training opportunities for existing teachers in the Grade 1-12 system.

7.1 Teacher Qualifications

Presently, PEI's kindergarten teachers are required to hold a minimum credential of a two-year early childhood diploma or its equivalent. Teachers who enter the system with a credential other than an early childhood diploma or degree are required to take additional early childhood courses. In addition, all early childhood educators are required to take at least thirty hours of training every three years to retain their certification.

Within the public school system in Prince Edward Island, teachers are required to obtain a minimum of a Bachelor of Education degree. In other provinces in Canada, all teachers in the school system, including kindergarten teachers, are required to hold a Bachelor of Education before being granted a teaching certificate.

Internationally, kindergarten teachers are required to have a degree credential in most developed countries. In the United States, kindergarten is part of the school system and teachers are required to hold education degrees. In a number of European countries, kindergarten is part of the early childhood education system rather than the school system. In many of those countries, early childhood teachers are required to have qualifications at least equal to and sometimes exceeding those required of school teachers.

The issue of teacher qualifications was of great concern to the present kindergarten teachers. The majority of early childhood educators felt that the two year diploma in Early Childhood Development had prepared them well to teach kindergarten. However, most kindergarten teachers recognized the requirements of the public school system, and, with some qualifications, expressed an interest and willingness to gain further training.

In February, 2008, the PEI Teachers Federation established a policy on public kindergarten as follows:

“That the P.E.I.T.F. aggressively pursue the implementation of a full-day kindergarten program as part of the public school program:

(a) That such a program be delivered by individuals who hold a Bachelor of Education Degree and hold a valid P.E.I. Teaching Certificate;

(b) That those people presently teaching in the kindergarten system be given an appropriate time frame in which to upgrade their educational qualifications.”

Without question, the Early Childhood program at Holland College is of exceptional quality and is widely recognized as providing an excellent grounding in the early childhood field. The Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É. also provides a high quality early childhood program in French through its partnerships with other French language post-secondary institutions outside PEI.

When kindergarten becomes part of the public school system, kindergarten teachers will be expected to take further education to place themselves on an equal footing with other teachers. Further education will also provide them with more career opportunities and with mobility options, both within the Prince Edward Island school system and elsewhere in the country.

Research clearly shows a strong link between the level of teacher education and the quality of learning programs. In some countries, early childhood educators have the highest level of education of any teachers in the school system. Further education for PEI’s kindergarten teachers can be confidently expected to result in an even higher quality of kindergarten program in future.

Recommendation:

Based on the requirements of the public school system and in light of the link between education and the quality of learning, it is recommended that kindergarten teachers be required to obtain a Bachelor of Education degree.

7.2 Training for Kindergarten Teachers

7.2.1 Design of the Training Program

The requirement in the recommendation of a B.Ed. credential, though important, presents some special challenges for the existing cohort of kindergarten teachers in the province. Many are mid-career, and will be working full-time and often bearing family responsibilities while they pursue their education. In recognition of their special circumstances, emphasis has been placed on developing a bridging training program designed specifically for existing kindergarten teachers.

Following discussions with Holland College, the University of Prince Edward Island, and the Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É., a bridging program was designed that would meet the needs of most kindergarten teachers, with the following characteristics:

- Delivered by UPEI
- All existing kindergarten teachers eligible to enter the program
- Full recognition of prior Early Childhood diploma credentials on a year-for-year basis, with agreements to this effect with Holland College and Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É. already in progress
- A customized program which combines new material with strands from various existing B.Ed. courses to provide a content focus on the primary grades which complement the kindergarten teachers’ existing knowledge and skills in the early childhood domain

- Basic program to be delivered over a four-year period with opportunities for individuals to gain specific courses that may have been missed
- A final credential consisting of an Early Childhood '2 plus 2' B.Ed. degree
- Provision in both English and French
- Measures to maximize accessibility for this group of learners
- Funding on a course fee rather than up-front program fee basis
- Provision of resources to UPEI to support the detailed program design work.

The University of Prince Edward Island has been very accommodating to the Commission's request for a 'bridging program' specifically designed for existing kindergarten teachers. Building on an increasing tradition of partnering with Holland College, UPEI has developed a 'concept design' for a degree program.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the University of Prince Edward Island be requested to complete development of a flexible bridging program providing a '2 plus 2' Early Childhood B. Ed. to existing kindergarten teachers.

Recommendation:

In recognition of the many commitments these new positions will require from teachers, it is recommended that students in the bridging program be allowed to complete the program over a period not to exceed six years.

In the long term, this program concept also holds considerable promise to serve as the basis for a permanent Early Childhood B.Ed. program offering, consisting of a two-year Early Childhood diploma, two years of undergraduate study at UPEI, and the Early Childhood B.Ed. program described above, refined as appropriate. This would be a very positive development which would help sustain the current kindergarten curriculum, strengthen linkages between the early childhood and school systems, and expand career opportunities for early childhood educators.

It is noted that UPEI is not the only potential provider of a B.Ed. program to existing kindergarten teachers. Other universities across Canada offer B.Ed.s, some of which have an early childhood component. As well, educators in French first language or French immersion kindergartens may wish to pursue a credential from a French language university outside the province. A UPEI-based program can offer significant advantages in terms of recognition of prior credentials, customization to the PEI situation, and accessibility. However, kindergarten teachers should not be restricted from taking other programs that meet PEI teacher certification requirements.

7.2.2 Eligibility for the Training Program

Since the proposed bridging program is designed to accommodate the existing kindergarten teachers, it is important to define this category. Four potential groups can be identified:

- All kindergarten teachers who were teaching at the time of the Throne Speech announcement and who have continued to teach since then. This group also includes teachers who may have been on a formal leave from their work in April 2008 due to reasons of illness, maternity, educational leave, secondment, or other formal leave.
- Kindergarten teachers who join or rejoin the system subsequent to the April 2008 announcement.
- People who taught kindergarten in the publicly funded kindergarten school system prior to the April 2008 announcement, but were in other jobs in the early childhood system or not in the sector at the time of the announcement or since.
- Students enrolled in the Early Childhood programs at Holland College and the Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É. and graduating in 2009 or 2010.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the '2 plus 2' Early Childhood B.Ed. degree program be open to anyone who has taught kindergarten since it became publicly funded in 2000, as well as graduates of the Holland College and Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É. Early Childhood Program in 2009 and 2010.

7.3 Licensing of Kindergarten Teachers

The teacher licensing system in Prince Edward Island is the responsibility of the PEI Certification and Standards Board, pursuant to the School Act and the Certification and Standards Board Regulations.

This licensing system is reflected in the levels established in the Collective Agreement between the Province and the PEI Teachers Federation. The agreement provides for a range of levels in the academic scale ranging from a Certificate II to a Certificate VI, with the level broadly corresponding to the number of years of post-secondary education. Teachers at the Certificate IV level have a single degree consisting of a four-year B.Ed. or the equivalent, and teachers at the Certificate V level hold an undergraduate degree plus a B.Ed. Presently, virtually all academic teachers in the Grade 1-12 system are at a Certificate IV or above. However, the Certificate II and III levels still exist within the Collective Agreement.

7.3.1 General Approach to Licensing

The Certification and Standards Board Regulation provides for two categories of academic licenses: permanent and interim. A permanent license requires a university degree. With regard to interim licenses, the Regulation:

- Permits the Registrar to issue an Interim Academic Teacher's License to an applicant who qualifies under Board policy
- Provides that these teachers will be employed with the same rights and responsibilities as academic teachers
- States that the interim license is valid for the period set out in Board policy.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that kindergarten teachers be licensed on an interim basis for the six-year transition period recommended above, and that the Certification and Standards Board policy be revised as necessary to accommodate this measure.

For licensing purposes, each individual teacher will need to be assessed to identify his or her level of prior training.

Recommendation:

Following that assessment, it is recommended that teachers be placed as follows on the academic scale:

- ***Teachers with an early childhood diploma or equivalent two-year diploma credential be placed at the Certificate II level.***
- ***Teachers with an undergraduate degree be placed at the Certificate III level.***
- ***Teachers with a B.Ed. be placed at a Certificate IV or higher as applicable.***

Current licensing systems include provision for teachers to be given credit for their years of relevant experience prior to joining the system. Public kindergarten was recognized and became government funded in 2000. It was and remains a half-day program.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that kindergarten teachers' years of experience in the publicly funded kindergarten system since 2000 be recognized on a two for one basis, that is, one step for every two years of teaching experience from 2000 to 2010.

In addition to the above, experience would be credited on a one-for-one basis once teachers are employed in the public school system.

Since the P.E.I.T.F. Collective Agreement does not include 'experience steps' for the Certificate II or III levels, credits for experience would be allocated once a grid is negotiated for inclusion in the Collective Agreement.

7.3.2 'Grandfathering'

It is evident from the Commission's visits to kindergartens across the province that PEI has a well-qualified and very committed group of teachers. Some have dedicated their whole careers to teaching kindergarten, and some have sacrificed better-paying jobs to do so. These teachers (mostly women) love what they do – and a generation of well-adapted young children is their reward.

A small number of existing kindergarten teachers has been teaching for over twenty-five years, and some are approaching the end of their teaching career. These individuals have contributed a great deal to their profession over their years of teaching, and bring great depth of experience to their work. It would not be reasonable to require these individuals to engage in post-secondary studies throughout their remaining years of full-time work.

With government's announcement to move kindergarten to the public school system, these long-serving teachers deserve the opportunity to move with the kindergarten children should they wish to do so.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that kindergarten teachers whose age and years of experience add up to 80 or more, and who plan to spend a period teaching in the public school system not exceeding the six-year transition period, be exempted from the requirement to obtain a B.Ed.

7.4 Teacher Transition into the Public School System

7.4.1 Hiring and Transition Processes

It is anticipated that there will be over 100 kindergarten teaching positions once kindergarten moves into the school system. A transparent and fair hiring process must be followed. Prior to discussing the hiring process, a basic premise must be established.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that existing kindergarten teachers have exclusive entitlement to kindergarten teaching jobs during the six-year transition period.

The movement of kindergarten teachers into the school system will occur in different contexts across the province. In the rural areas, especially where kindergarten programs are located within the schools, turnover is lower and longstanding relationships often exist among kindergarten teachers and school personnel. In the urban areas, the kindergarten and school systems are essentially separate, turnover in the kindergarten system is higher, and there is little or no contact

among kindergarten educators and school personnel. Each of these situations has its own implications for the hiring process.

Hiring systems vary among the boards, but generally involve a central intake and screening of applications by the boards, and an interview and selection process which is primarily school-based, with varying degrees of participation by school board personnel.

The orderly movement of over one hundred new personnel into every elementary school in the system calls for a more integrated approach, which should include the following elements:

- Design of an application form for all eligible 'existing kindergarten teachers,' in which they:
 - indicate their training, experience, special skills and achievements, career goals, and top three preferences re schools
 - affirm their commitment to obtain their B.Ed.
- A single integrated intake and review system operated by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, through which applications are screened, organized, and forwarded to the boards and the applicable schools.
- An interview protocol which ranks the teachers based on criteria including prior training, years of experience in the publicly funded kindergarten system, and evidence of relevant additional skills, strengths, and professional achievements.
- An interview process which involves a hiring committee with representation from the school, the applicable school board, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Early Childhood Branch.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that an orderly and transparent hiring process be designed and implemented, which includes the features outlined above and which minimizes stress and dislocation for the individuals involved.

Kindergarten teachers and school teachers are two largely separate groups with different training, different philosophies, and often limited interaction. Consultations indicated some need to foster mutual understanding and awareness. While this will emerge naturally over time, proactive measures should be taken to promote the development of a single professional community as quickly as possible and to enhance the climate of welcome and acceptance within schools for incoming kindergarten teachers. These measures will have the additional benefit of building understanding and acceptance of the kindergarten curriculum among personnel in the Grade 1-12 system.

The Commission is advised that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is already planning in-servicing sessions for a range of school personnel, and that the 2009-10 budget includes resources to support this work. This initiative is commendable.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development design and deliver measures to foster a welcoming climate and a professional learning community within the school system, including:

- In-servicing of school and school board personnel on the kindergarten curriculum and early childhood approach***
- Pre- and post-entry orientation and welcome programs at the school level such as 'buddy' systems and welcome committees.***

7.4.2 Eligibility for Teaching Jobs

In addition to a fair and transparent hiring approach, an orderly transition also requires a clear definition of the cohort of people who would be eligible to apply for jobs. In defining who should have access to kindergarten jobs in September 2010, the Commission must balance its mandate to 'maximize opportunity' with its duty to 'ensure fairness for all involved.'

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the following priority structure be established for the move:

- Top priority be placed with teachers who were teaching during the 2007-08 school year during which the move of kindergarten to the school system was announced, and who were teaching subsequently in either or both of the school years 2008-09 and 2009-10.***
- Should vacancies remain after all members of the above group who wish to move have been placed, then eligibility to move be extended to individuals who were not teaching in the 2007-08 school year, but who taught kindergarten in the school years prior to AND after the 2007-08 school year.***
- Should vacancies still remain, then eligibility be extended to people who taught kindergarten in the school years prior to 2007-08 OR who began teaching kindergarten in 2008-09 or 2009-10.***

Recommendation:

It is recommended that during the transition period, any kindergarten teaching vacancies which occur be filled from the designated groups in the order of priority provided, before being opened to broader competition.

7.5 Training for Existing Schoolteachers

As outlined in earlier sections of this report, the kindergarten curriculum is based on a different philosophy and methodology than the school curriculum. In PEI, currently, the Child Care Facilities Board requires aspiring kindergarten teachers without an early childhood background to take two to four courses in early childhood development and methods, depending on their level of prior credentials.

Most B.Ed. training programs place little emphasis on the early childhood area, although a few institutions offer B.Ed. degrees or certificates specializing in Early Childhood.

In order to protect and enhance the play-based curriculum which is so fundamental to the success of the program, it is important for teachers to be familiar not just with its content, but with its philosophy and methodology. There is some evidence that having teachers without this familiarity will lead to the erosion of the kindergarten curriculum and to more structured methodologies.

Consultations with early childhood educators and parents indicated major fears that the early childhood approach would be eroded once kindergarten moves into the school system. This fear was based partly on an awareness of this trend in other jurisdictions, and partly on the fact that most teachers in the Grade 1-12 system have limited early childhood content in their training. The lack of an early childhood background is expected to lead to a narrower focus on academic competencies and outcomes.

If the integrity of the kindergarten curriculum is to be sustained, it is essential for teachers to know and understand its philosophy and methodologies.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that all teachers currently teaching in the Grade 1-12 system who wish to move into a kindergarten teaching position after the transition period ends, and who do not have an early childhood B.Ed., be required to take two courses in early childhood development and methods.

7.6 Special Needs Staffing

In addition to teachers, children in the present kindergarten system are also served by Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) funded through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Special Needs Program. Training requirements consist of thirty hours of entry-level training, and a further thirty hours of professional development every three years. This standard is comparable to and in some cases exceeds that required in most other provinces for special needs assistants in the early childhood system.

This group is less well defined than the group of kindergarten teachers. Their employment is often temporary in nature, as it depends on the presence of special needs children in a centre. Hence there is more turnover, less job stability, and less continuity among these staff. As well, most special needs children are served in combined centres rather than stand-alone kindergartens. Due

to the inclusion model, many SNAs work as part of the overall centre team and not exclusively with the kindergarten age group or a specific child.

Within this context, information provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development indicates that there are almost twenty special needs assistants province-wide working exclusively or largely with kindergarten children who have diploma level training and/or over 4,000 hours of experience.

The Grade 1-12 school system employs Educational Assistants (EAs) to provide support to children with special learning needs. All newly hired Educational Assistants are required to have either two years of formal training in the education of persons with special learning needs from a recognized institution, or 4,000 hours of relevant experience.

EAs are employed for ten months of the year, and the majority work a six-hour day. School boards are provided with resources for a fixed number of EAs based on the special educational needs reported by the schools. The boards then deploy the EAs to meet these needs, with assignments of individual EAs based on seniority.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that Special Needs Assistants who have extensive experience working with kindergarten children be given first consideration when staffing any additional Educational Assistant positions arising from the move of kindergarten to the public school system.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that Special Needs Assistants who transition to the school system be required to meet the training requirements established for Educational Assistants, within the six-year transition period.



SPACE AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The Terms of Reference call for the Commissioner to examine “the integration of kindergarten spaces into schools in the larger context of a rationalization and renewal of educational facilities to address declining enrolment.”

With the announced closures, kindergarten will move into 43 elementary schools across the province in September 2010. These schools vary in age, design, size, and utilization levels. To ensure a high quality kindergarten program and a welcoming, positive learning environment, it is necessary to assess, assign, and prepare adequate and appropriate space. As such, the issue of kindergarten space involves:

- The integration of kindergarten into individual schools, and the renovation and construction measures required to accommodate all kindergarten children in the school to which they are zoned.
- The quality of the learning environment within that kindergarten space.

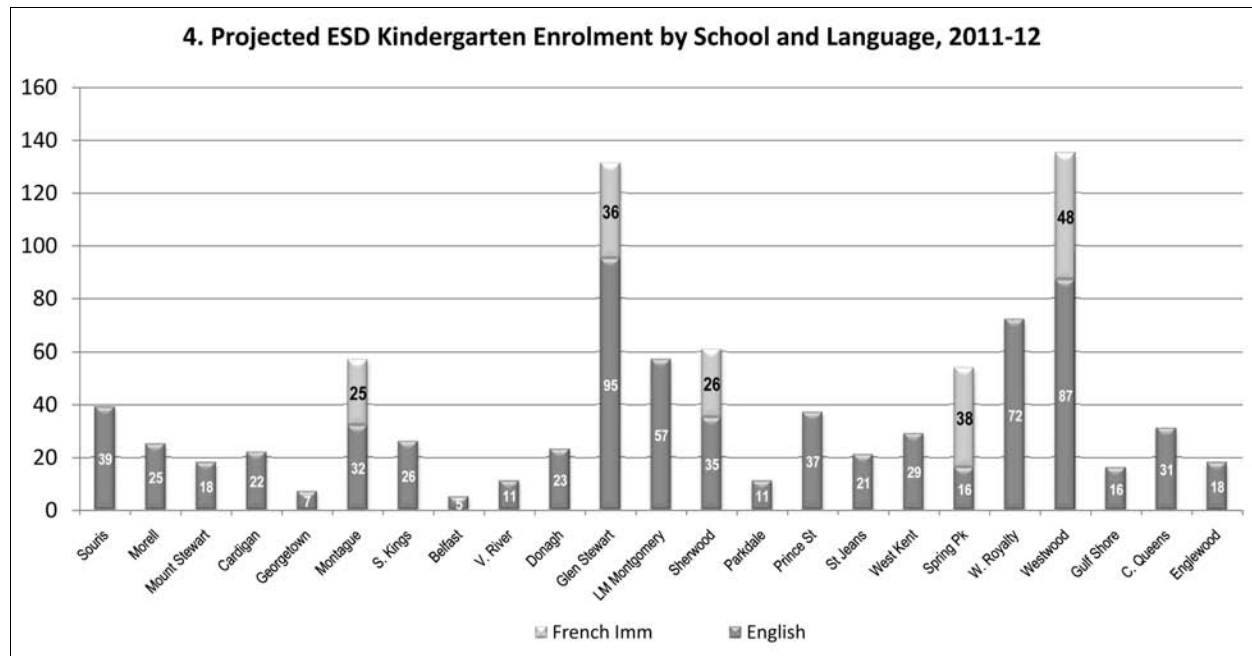
8.1 Kindergarten Space Within Schools

To identify kindergarten space needs:

- A five-year projection of the expected numbers of kindergarten children in each school was developed using school board data.
- Information on schools, including size and utilization levels and trends, was analyzed.
- Meetings were held with school board officials, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Transportation and Public Works.

Kindergarten enrolment is forecast to be 1,423 in September 2010, and to rise to 1,481 the following year. Detailed projections by school are set out in chart form below. Based on this forecast, several schools are facing significant space issues which will require measures to accommodate kindergarten in September 2010.

Projected Eastern School District kindergarten enrolment by school and language of instruction in 2011-12 is shown in Chart 4. This year rather than the entry year of 2010-11 is used as it more accurately reflects projected enrolment from 2011 onwards. Forecast enrolment in the ESD in 2010-11 is 882, rising to 960 in 2011-12, and remaining in the range of 940 to 960 thereafter. As such, the 2011-12 projection is shown as a more appropriate basis for determining long-term space requirements.



These projections have been updated to take account of the decisions on school closures announced in early June 2009. The projections reflect the following changes:

- Enrolment at Souris Consolidated has been increased from 26 to 39 to include 13 children from Fortune Consolidated.
- Enrolment at Morell Consolidated has been increased from 19 to 25 to include six children from St. Peters Consolidated.
- Enrolment at Mount Stewart Consolidated has been increased from five to 18 to include seven children from St. Teresa's Consolidated and six children from Tracadie Cross Consolidated.
- Enrolment at Cardigan Consolidated has been increased from 13 to 22 to include nine children from Dundas Consolidated.
- Enrolment at Lucy Maud Montgomery Elementary has been increased from 52 to 57 to include five children from Grand Tracadie Elementary.

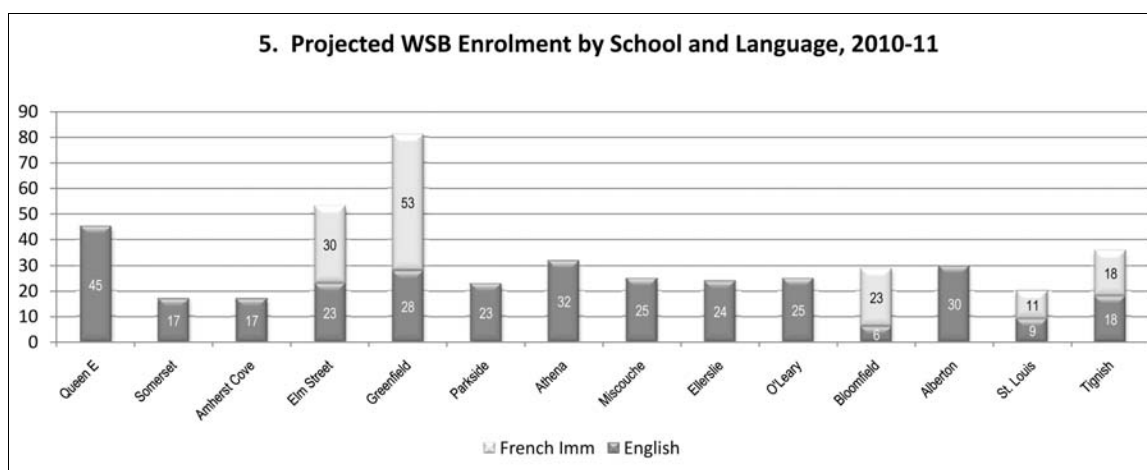
In the Eastern School District, several schools are already facing space issues or are forecast to experience space issues in future as a result of enrolment growth.

- Two schools, Glen Stewart and Westwood, are currently fully occupied and unable to accommodate kindergarten. Glen Stewart will need to accommodate nine kindergarten classrooms while Westwood must accommodate ten.
- Two further schools, West Royalty and Lucy Maud Montgomery, are presently reversing a trend of declining enrolment. West Royalty is forecast to have six kindergarten classes and Lucy Maud Montgomery is predicted to have four kindergarten classes. If this trend continues, those schools may experience space issues within a few years.

In consultations, questions were raised as to the availability of space at several other schools in the Eastern School District, including Spring Park, Sherwood, Montague, and Englewood. Forecasts indicate that those schools will see a brief increase in numbers when kindergarten is added. However, enrolment in those schools is forecast to continue its decline for several more years. As a result, within a few years enrolment at those schools will stabilize at a level similar to or slightly below their pre-kindergarten enrolment.

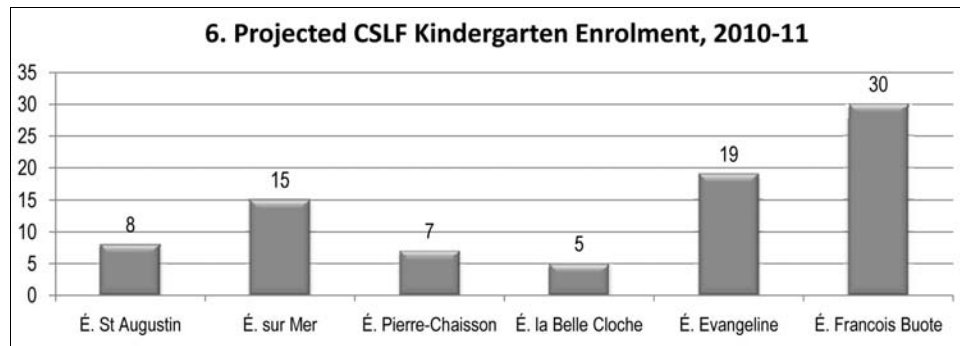
As well, in the Souris family of schools, the coming year will see the integration of children from Eastern Kings, Rollo Bay, and Fortune into Souris Consolidated. Total enrolment at Souris Consolidated is forecast to grow by 36 when kindergarten is added, increase slightly in 2011 and 2012, and then stabilize at about 43.

Enrolment projections for the Western School Board are shown in Chart 5. Three schools, Miscouche, Elm Street, and Greenfield, are expected to have space issues that will require new construction or rezoning. Space issues were initially anticipated at other schools including Tignish and Somerset, but may be addressed by combining kindergarten classes and using a team teaching approach. Enrolment projections suggest that all Western School Board elementary schools will have lower enrolment in 2017-18 than in 2012-13.⁶



⁶ Ascent Strategy Group. *Schools for Tomorrow: Building and Sustaining High Quality Educational Programs. Final Report on Enrolment Analysis and Forecasts*. PEI Department of Education, August 2008.

In la Commission scolaire de langue française, as shown in Chart 6, enrolment of 84 kindergarten children is expected in 2010-11 across the six schools, requiring up to eight classrooms in total. Enrolment forecasts for the CSLF are more complex as they must take into account not only demographics but also trends and variations in the exercise of stakeholder rights by parents.



École Francois Buote in Charlottetown is already experiencing some space issues and further increases in enrolment are expected. To address these, two new classrooms have been added and four further classrooms will be added in the summer of 2009. It is anticipated that this will allow kindergarten to be accommodated in 2010. As well, the forecast for École sur Mer in Summerside may need to be revised upward if recent increases in French first language early childhood enrolment carry through into the school system.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the schools must be ready to accommodate kindergarten children in September 2010. Under the present kindergarten system, many parents select their kindergarten and register their child far in advance of enrolment. At consultations, a number of parents asked for confirmation that the September 2010 date would be adhered to. Given that the move of kindergarten to the school system will affect some 1,400 young families across the province, it is important that the move take place as scheduled.

There are several options to address space issues to ensure that the system is ready to accommodate kindergarten in 2010. Space options to accommodate kindergarten students include reconfiguration of existing classroom space, rezoning students to create space, temporary construction through the use of relocatable classrooms, and new permanent construction of classroom space. The Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development and Transportation and Public Works and the school boards have the necessary expertise to determine the optimum mix of approaches for specific schools.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that space for kindergarten be identified or created in all elementary schools in PEI to enable kindergarten to move into the public school system in September 2010.

8.2 The Kindergarten Learning Environment

Currently, PEI's kindergarten space standards are governed by the *Child Care Facilities Act* and Regulations and are set at a level of 3.5 square meters per child. This is slightly higher than the national average of 3.2 square meters. Other jurisdictions range from 2.75 to 4 square meters per child.

Provisions regarding space and safety requirements for early learning facilities are set out in the Child Care Facilities Regulations. As well, during the past decade strong priority has been placed on improving the quality of those learning environments. In 2003, the Measuring and Improving Kids' Environments (MIKE) project was introduced as a partnership between government, the Early Childhood Development Association, and early learning centres. This evolved into the BRIDGES program, established in 2006, which combined MIKE with the kindergarten mentors to create an early childhood resource team dedicated to improving the quality of learning environments, programs, and methods.

In addition to these expert resources, substantial investments have been made in equipping early learning centres. Each centre receives an annual grant based on enrolment, of which 90% is required to be spent on non-consumable items. Over the years, this has enabled most centres to acquire a range of equipment, furnishings, and durables. These have been augmented by equipment and resources acquired by centres from their own revenues or through parent and community fundraising and in-kind support.

The research indicates that in an early learning environment, both the quality and the quantity of space are critically important. As the learning environment becomes richer and more diverse, children's learning opportunities expand. Sufficient space allows materials and activity centres to be laid out in a way which promotes positive interactions and engages the children in a variety of play and learning activities.

Throughout North America, efforts to improve the quality of early learning environments have been guided by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS). This instrument was first introduced in 1980 and was revised earlier this decade to update its content and to further improve its validity and reliability as a quality measurement and improvement tool. ECERS sets out detailed criteria for seven domains of the early learning environment, using a seven-point scale, with 1 being inadequate, 3 minimal, 5 good, and 7 excellent. The summary which follows is excerpted from several of the subsections.⁷

To earn a rating of at least 'good', kindergarten space must have the following features:

- Adequate space to move around freely
- Large enough to accommodate a minimum of three and preferably five or more activity centres
- Good ventilation, ideally controllable by teacher
- Natural lighting, controllable by teacher

⁷ Thelma Harris et al., *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition*, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina, 2005

- Accessible to children with disabilities
- Some indoor space and adequate outdoor space for gross motor play
- Child-height sink in classroom with warm running water
- Toileting area at least adjacent to room, ideally with child-size toilets
- Ideally, situated close to facility entrance doors

Requirements with regard to layout and furniture include the following:

- Child-sized furniture for routine learning and play (tables, chairs)
- Soft furnishings – mats, cozy area of room
- Room layout:
 - At least three and preferably five or more interest centres
 - Quiet and active areas separated
 - Areas organized for independent use by children
 - Easily supervised space for privacy (play by one or two children)
- Provision for display at child's eye level of children's work: 3-D (clay, play dough, etc.) as well as flat work
- Provision for storage of materials and equipment to allow rotation of interest centres

Gross motor equipment includes both indoor and outdoor and should:

- Be age-appropriate and in good repair
- For stationary equipment, include swings, slides, climbing equipment with ramp and ladder access
- For portable equipment, includes balls, sports equipment, wheel toys, tumbling mats, jump ropes, bean bags, ring toss
- Stimulate skills at different levels
- Be accessible, or special equipment should be provided, for children with disabilities

Curricular materials and supplies include the following categories:

- Language: wide variety of books, pictures, other language materials
- Fine motor: small building toys, manipulatives, puzzles
- Art: drawing materials, paints, three-dimensional materials, collage tools
- Music: tape player, instruments
- Blocks: wooden or plastic unit blocks, large hollow blocks, homemade blocks
- Sand/water: sand and water tables with containers, utensils, etc. for play; adjacent sink
- Dramatic play: dress-up clothes, props from varied themes – domestic life, work, leisure
- Nature/science: collections of natural objects, living animals and plants, books, games, toys, basic science tools
- Math/number: materials to support counting, measuring, comparing, shapes, and familiarity with written numbers.

Input from early childhood educators in PEI and from researchers at the University of New Brunswick highlighted the critical linkage between staffing levels and the quality and richness of the learning environment. It was noted that a well-equipped, well-laid out learning environment engages the children and promotes positive social interactions, enabling the teacher to actively support learning and social development. Conversely, a minimally equipped setting shifts the onus for learning onto the teacher, and a poorly laid-out environment reduces the quality of social interaction among the children, requiring more teacher intervention and support.

Input from early childhood educators on space and learning environment issues was received mostly during the kindergarten visits. Those visits included a number of very appealing and welcoming spaces which offered a tremendous diversity. Most early childhood educators and operators indicated that they felt their centres were well equipped, and acknowledged the support of the equipment grant. Indeed, some centres reported that they had sufficient equipment and non-consumables and suggested that a portion of the grant be shifted to consumables, which are also heavily used in the early learning system.

The quality of kindergarten space is critically important to the integrity of the kindergarten curriculum and to the range and depth of children's outcomes. It is essential that kindergarten classes be provided with a range of materials and equipment to support play-based learning, and that adequate space be provided in the schools to lay out these environments in a way which optimizes learning and social development.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the standard of 3.5 square meters of classroom space be retained when kindergarten moves into the school system. This should be treated as a minimum: each kindergarten classroom should be provided with sufficient space to accommodate at least five activity centres in an efficient and appropriate layout.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that each kindergarten classroom be provided with sufficient equipment and materials to establish at least five activity centres within the classroom, and to rotate these over the school year.

Consultations also highlighted the important role of natural, found, and home-made materials and supplies in the early learning setting. Teachers described the depth and breadth of learning to be gained from creating houses, theatres and other buildings out of water bottles or large cardboard boxes and playing in them; having a month-long hockey season in an imaginary rink with hockey nets, gear, and schedules; growing sunflowers; and enjoying quiet time in a jungle treehouse in a corner of the centre.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that school administrators be flexible and open to the use of non-commercial materials in the kindergarten classroom, to the extent that safety and fire standards permit.



TRANSPORTATION

The Terms of Reference call for the Commissioner to “consider transportation questions.”

The vast majority of kindergarten children will travel to and from school on the buses. Bussing is a significant benefit to the children and their families, but given the very young age of this group of children, requires consideration of their safety and well-being.

It is noted that over one-quarter of all kindergarten students already travel to school by bus. Board policies presently permit kindergarten children to travel on school buses where space permits, to access their program if it is located in a school. In rural areas of the province, and especially in West Prince and in Kings County, this approach is widespread, and in some cases has been in place for over twenty years.

This extensive history is very helpful in identifying issues and solutions that might be encountered as school bussing goes system-wide for kindergarten children in 2010. Parents place the utmost priority on the safety and well-being of their children during their bussing, and can be expected to place even more emphasis on the kindergarten children in light of their young age.

Experience indicates that the bussing of kindergarten children has gone very well over the years and that no significant issues have arisen. However, bussing will become more complex as it goes system-wide. Children will be bussed both morning and afternoon, rather than one-way only for a half-day program. A small number of children, including some French immersion students, may need to transfer from one bus to another.

9.1 Children’s Safety

Safety of the children is essential. Fortunately, the size, design, and skilled operation of school buses ensure that they are by far the safest way to transport children to and from school. In PEI and across Canada, school buses have an outstanding safety record with an extremely low number of fatalities and injuries.

However, the small size and young age of kindergarten children pose some specific safety concerns that must be addressed.

Historically, school buses have not had seat belts for any of their occupants. Rather, the bus design is used to protect children in the case of an incident. The system, called passive compartmentalization, uses the height, padding, and spacing of the seats to keep children safe without requiring any specific action on their part. Research indicates that lap belts are demonstrably less safe than compartmentalization, and that three-point belts do not have a net safety benefit for school-aged children.

In 2007, this approach shifted, in recognition of the growing number of very young children travelling on school buses. Based on research,⁸ Transport Canada concluded that the characteristics of this age group – lower height and weight, and higher ratio of head size to body size – require a child restraint system for maximum safety. Consequently, as of April 1, 2007, all new buses were required to be equipped with tethers for child restraints, to be used for children weighing less than 18 kilograms (40 pounds). Essentially, any child still requiring a toddler seat rather than a booster seat in the family vehicle is now required to be in a child safety seat on a school bus if it is available. As existing buses are not required to be retrofitted with safety seats, this measure will be phased in as bus fleets are renewed.

In Prince Edward Island, almost 100 new buses have been added to the fleet in 2008 and 2009. Each of these buses is equipped with eight built-in safety seats that may be folded into the seat back if not required, creating an inventory of 800 such seats. Further buses may be purchased in May 2010, adding to this inventory.

By law, if a safety seat is available and a child of eligible weight is a passenger, the child must use the seat. Anecdotal data from the school boards indicates that there has been very little demand for the seats to date, even on buses transporting kindergarten students. There have not yet been any instances of demand for the seats exceeding the number available on a bus. However, if this were to occur, the boards indicated that they would address it by assigning the safety seats to the children with the longest duration of bus run.

Experience with these safety seats to date is based mostly on children aged five or older. The reduction in the age of entry is likely to increase demand as children entering school in September may be as young as four years and eight months old. To explore this issue, research was conducted to identify the potential number of children requiring such seats in September 2010. There are no PEI data on average weights for this age group, but the weight for age charts developed by the Centres for Disease Control in Atlanta suggest that at age four years and nine months, almost half the children weigh less than forty pounds.⁹ The charts indicate as well that, on average, a smaller proportion of older children also weigh less than forty pounds. In the course of the school year, many of these children initially requiring a safety seat will outgrow their need for it. These averages are supported by research into overweight in Newfoundland preschool children, which indicated that the average weight of boys aged 55-60 months was 19.7 kg, and of girls 19.4 kg.¹⁰

With the recent fleet expansion, there should be a sufficient number of safety seats to meet potential demand, and future fleet renewal will further improve availability. However, actual access to the seats by children who need them will depend on how the buses are deployed.

⁸ Transport Canada, *Child Seats on School Buses, Road Safety Fact Sheet*, Revised March 2007
<http://www.tc.gc.ca/roadsafety/tp2436/rs200407/menu.htm>

⁹ National Center for Health Statistics, *Clinical Growth Charts*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes/growthcharts/clinical_charts.htm

¹⁰ Patricia M. Canning. "Prevalence of Overweight and Obesity in a Provincial Population of Canadian Preschool Children," *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, August 3, 2004, 171 (3), pp. 240-242

Recommendation:

It is recommended that school boards deploy their buses with safety seats to maximize access for kindergarten children and other children meeting the weight requirement.

9.2 Children's Comfort and Well-Being

While safety is the paramount consideration, the comfort and well-being of the children is also a priority. This is affected by many factors, including duration of bus rides, number and age mix of children on the bus, distribution of pick-up points, and behaviour management approaches on the bus.

Bus runs presently vary widely in length and duration. Information in the *School Organization Plan Supplemental Report* indicated that a number of routes in the twelve schools examined exceeded an hour in duration one-way, and a few exceeded an hour both ways. These longer bus runs existed throughout the district, not only in rural areas. The report indicated scope for several measures to reduce these times, including redesign of routes and elimination of high school transfers for buses serving elementary children.

In the Eastern School District, bus runs will be rationalized as part of the school organization measures presently underway. School closures announced earlier in June will result in some children travelling further to their school. Further impacts may arise from the rezoning measures to be designed and proposed next fall for implementation in September 2010. While this poses some challenges, it also provides an opportunity to increase the efficiency of bussing across the system and to move towards more consistency in the duration of bus runs and the number of children per bus, through redesign of routes and reallocations of buses.

With the change in the age of school entry, kindergarten children will be as young as four years, eight months when they enter the public school system in September 2010. A bus run in excess of an hour is tiring for these very young children. In general the school system should seek to work toward reducing bus times to no more than an hour for routes involving kindergarten aged children.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the school boards develop plans to reduce the duration of bus runs to meet a target of no more than one hour one-way for bus routes transporting kindergarten aged children.

Extensive measures are already in place to promote the safety and well-being of children on school buses, including driver training and in-servicing, and education sessions for the children. These may require some modification to ensure that they are appropriate to the age and developmental level of kindergarten aged children.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that school boards review their bus safety programs and activities and modify them as required to ensure that they are appropriate for kindergarten aged children.



The Terms of Reference call on the Commissioner to “integrate the public school kindergarten system with the pre-kindergarten early childhood system, and recommend measures to strengthen those systems as warranted.”

As present, kindergarten is part of the early childhood system and hence a high level of integration exists within the early childhood sector. However, consultations and kindergarten visits indicated that the present linkages between kindergarten and the school system are more limited and vary widely across the province.

- The only consistent linkage involves children with special needs, whose transition from kindergarten to the school system is governed by the formal protocol described earlier in this report.
- As well, an end-of-year kindergarten progress report was introduced several years ago. This report provides a consistent way for kindergartens to report to parents on the outcomes achieved by their child. With parental consent, the kindergarten teacher may also provide this report to the school. The extent to which this occurs, and the extent to which the report is used by the school, vary widely.
- In addition, individual kindergartens or individual kindergarten teachers have established a range of less formal linkages with the Grade One teachers and school administrators in their community. As children in urban kindergartens may go to a dozen different schools after kindergarten, these relationships mostly occur in rural communities. Kindergarten teachers reported that these informal processes often end when teacher turnover occurs.

When kindergarten moves into the school system, these issues should be overcome, as kindergarten teachers will develop close working relationships with primary teachers. As well, the movement of existing kindergarten teachers into the school system should initially help sustain linkages between kindergarten and the early childhood system, given that kindergarten teachers will share a common training, philosophy, and network with early childhood educators. Over time, however, unless systems and measures are put in place to support continued integration, these linkages between kindergarten and early childhood may erode. Such measures are particularly important in the case of special needs children.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that an early childhood transition protocol for children with special needs be designed, building on the model of the present kindergarten transition protocol.

When kindergarten moves, it will be important for kindergarten teachers to gain an understanding of the strengths, learning styles, and needs of their incoming students. A progress report such as presently exists for kindergarten would be a helpful tool, although the present diversity of early childhood programs across the province poses some challenges to designing such a tool.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that processes be designed to promote and support communication between kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators regarding the transition of children from early childhood centres into the school system.

At a system level, the linkages between kindergarten and the early childhood system are influenced by the management and policy structure. Until 2008, early childhood was the responsibility of the Department of Social Services and Seniors, while the kindergarten curriculum and funding was the responsibility of the Department of Education. The move of responsibility for early childhood to the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in 2008 brought these sectors into a single department. In the fall of 2008, kindergarten and early childhood staff were combined into a single organizational unit. This structure appears appropriate and supports the retention of the current kindergarten curriculum.

Looking beyond transition linkages to the broader relationship between the early childhood system and the school system, a strong national and international trend toward closer integration is underway. For example, in Australia, the states of Victoria and New South Wales have both moved to an integrated approach for children aged 0-8. The Toronto First Duty centre is an acclaimed example of a school-based 'wraparound' model of early childhood and family strengthening services, while in Prince Edward Island, the early childhood centres in the French school complexes are examples of this approach.

Factors in this shift include the growing body of research on the developmental importance of the early years, and the benefits to children and families of a more seamless system and day. The Council on Early Child Development has provided leadership on this issue through the research and public speaking contributions of Dr. Fraser Mustard and the Hon. Margaret McCain, who visited PEI in the fall of 2008. The topic was further explored in depth at two major Canadian conferences on connecting early childhood and the school system, held in Montreal in January and in Sackville in May 2009.

While these approaches appear to have much merit, it would be premature to address them in detail in this report. The public school system is already undergoing major changes with school closures, rezoning, and the introduction of kindergarten between the present time and September 2010. Introduction of such features as wraparound school-based day care would add further complexity to the change process. As well, as discussed in Section 12 below, the move of kindergarten to the school system will have significant impacts on the early childhood sector which call out for a more comprehensive strategy that would address the future of the early childhood sector on Prince Edward Island.



LEGISLATION

The Terms of Reference call on the Commissioner to “identify necessary legislative changes arising from the move of kindergarten into the public school system, including regulatory changes.”

Two Acts and their Regulations are identified as potentially requiring amendments due to the move of kindergarten into the public school system: the *Child Care Facilities Act* and the *School Act*. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is responsible for both statutes.

A review of the *Child Care Facilities Act* indicated that there are no clauses making reference to kindergarten or to the credentials of kindergarten teachers specifically, and hence no changes are required to this Act. With regard to the Child Care Facilities Regulations, Clause 32 (3), “Exception, Staff for Kindergarten,” should be repealed.

A review of the *School Act* indicated that several amendments will be required to take account of the move of kindergarten into the public school system:

- Clause 68, “Right to Free School Privileges,” will need to be amended to change the age of eligibility from the present ‘six to twenty years’ to the applicable age, taking into account recent changes in the age of entry.
- Clause 69, “Compulsory School Age,” will need to be amended to reduce the age of compulsory attendance from seven to six.
- Clause 133, “Private School Licenses,” will need to be amended to include kindergarten as a type of private school program.

Changes to the School Regulations arising from this report’s recommendations are as follows:

- The Student and Parent Regulations will need amendments to the following sections:
 - Clause 1, clauses (1), (2), and (2.1), “Age Six for Enrolment Purposes,” will need to be amended to change the applicable age from six to five in the text and the title.
 - Clause 2 “Child, Age of Seven,” will need to be amended to change the applicable age from seven to six in the text and the title.
 - Clause 4 (2) (a) and (b), “Resident Students,” will need to be amended to change the age of residents from six to five.
- The Private Schools and Home Education Regulations will need to be amended to include kindergarten in Clause 1, “Private School Defined.”
- The Certification and Standards Board Regulations will require an amendment to Clause 2 (2), Board Members, to add, “one representative from the Early Childhood Development Association.”



IMPACTS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROVIDERS

The Terms of Reference call for the Commissioner to “examine implications for existing early childhood education providers and how those can be mitigated,” and to consider “training needs for staff in the early learning and child care sector resulting from the change.”

The move of kindergarten into the public school system will have substantial direct impacts on the licensed early childhood sector in Prince Edward Island, through the loss of children, revenues, and certified staff:

- **Children:** On March 2008, 60% of kindergarten children in PEI were enrolled in a full-day program at a combined child care centre, receiving child care following or prior to their kindergarten program. Kindergarten children accounted for 20% of full-day spaces in the early childhood system, and 36% of part-day spaces. When kindergarten moves, stand-alone centres will close and combined centres may experience difficulty filling vacated seats.
- **Revenues:** The publicly funded kindergarten program provides funding of \$180 or \$240/month per child to centres depending on location (school or other free space, or rented/private owned space.) In 2008-09, the Department budget for these program fees was \$2.9 million. For children receiving a full-day program, information from the Early Childhood Development Association indicates that parent fees for child care amount to a further \$2.4 million in revenue for the sector. As such, kindergarten provides over \$5 million in revenues to the early childhood sector, a substantial portion of its total revenues. Consultations suggested that one impact of the loss of kindergarten revenues might be increases in parent fees for care, especially after-school care.
- **Certified staff:** The Child Care Facilities Regulations establish requirements for certified staff at licensed centres. Chronic and intensifying shortages of qualified early childhood personnel in recent years have already made it increasingly difficult for many centres to meet these requirements. The sudden move of 100 or more certified teachers to the school system – well over one-third of the certified staff in the early childhood system – will affect most centres, and is likely to place some in a position of non-compliance with regulatory requirements. On a broader level, it will mean the loss to the sector of many of its most experienced and senior personnel, given that 80% of kindergarten teachers are employed as supervisors.

These are major issues. Although they present threats to the early childhood sector, they may have a more positive aspect: they make it essential to take action to maintain and enhance the sustainability of the early childhood sector and the quality of its services to Island children.

As demonstrated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's research earlier this decade, Canada as a whole ranks low among developed countries in its investment in and coherence of early childhood services. Early childhood systems in provinces across the country are described as 'chaotic' and 'a patchwork.' Examination of early childhood systems in other jurisdictions revealed a complex range and massive number of government funding programs, subsidies, incentives, and special purpose grants and measures.

In recent years, jurisdictions worldwide are moving toward a more integrated, holistic model which links the early childhood system to the school system to provide a seamless day for children and their families.

It is time for Prince Edward Island to undertake a comprehensive review of its early childhood system, leading to a strategy for a sustainable, high-quality, accessible, affordable early childhood system throughout the province.

At present, government is investing in early childhood, including grants to child care centres, parent fee subsidies, special needs supports, and quality assurance services:

- **Centre Grants:** This component provides funding to full-day centres at a rate of \$1.10 per space per day, and flat grants to part-day centres varying by program size and ranging from \$750 to \$2,002 per year.
- **The Fee Subsidy Program:** This program subsidizes child care fees for families with low or moderate incomes, on a sliding scale. The program makes payments directly to early childhood centres for eligible children. In February 2008, 2,117 children were receiving support under the program, representing 43% of all licensed spaces in the system. The program is administered by the Department of Social Services and Seniors and has a budget of \$3.4 million for 2009-10.
- **The Special Needs Program:** This program provides funding to centres to increase their staffing to better serve children with special needs. The budget in 2007-08 was \$1.3 million, and 219 children were being assisted through the program.
- **Quality assurance and quality enhancement** are provided through the *Child Care Facilities Act* and Regulations, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's inspection and mentoring supports and services.

Notwithstanding the government support that is currently provided, there is potential within the early childhood sector to strengthen the program across the province. Accessibility to licensed child care is very limited in some parts of rural Prince Edward Island. On the other hand, overcapacity exists in other areas. Although PEI has a dedicated and committed workforce in its early childhood centres, there exists a need to increase the level of training required for staff at these centres.

Fortunately, the Early Childhood Development Association has a well-qualified staff with exceptional organizational capacity. As well, the early childhood training programs offered at Holland College and Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É. are very high quality and a valuable resource to the province.

When the move of kindergarten takes place, measures may be needed to avoid the loss of too many early childhood centres in the province. It should be noted that the potential approaches outlined below are short-term, and that a more comprehensive review is needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of a quality early childhood system in PEI.

- Early childhood centres facing difficulty after kindergarten moves to the school system could be granted access to a loan program, based on submission by the centres of business plans identifying their needs in order to continue operations.
- Centre grants could be enhanced, in conjunction with a required commitment to enhance staff training and quality of services.
- Finding and retaining staff may be an immediate challenge for some early childhood centres. Government could work with the operators of those centres to introduce a system of wage incentives that would encourage staff to access training programs offered within the province.
- To promote enrolment in early childhood centres, child care must be affordable for parents. Government could raise the income cut-offs to increased the number of moderate-income families eligible under the program.
- It is expected that most stand-alone kindergartens will cease operations when kindergarten moves to the school system. The majority of these centres are non-profit, and the teachers and supervisors will have the opportunity to move to the school system. Nonetheless, there may be direct costs to the operators arising from the closures, which could be addressed through a one-time payment. As well, providers of rented space to kindergarten will experience a loss of revenue when kindergarten moves. A one-time grant could also be provided to offset this loss and assist in preparing the space for another use.

The above-noted measures are short-term, and do not address all the issues that PEI faces in improving early childhood services across the province. In order to achieve a more integrated model for early childhood education and care, PEI now has the opportunity to take the next step and devise its own integrated model that would be second to none.

There is an increasing range of early childhood models throughout the country. These models range from family home child care, to community child care centres, to school-based 'wraparound' centres, to privately owned and operated centres. All of these models should be considered and a funding model designed that would ensure the ongoing presence of each in the province.

A comprehensive review would also include an early childhood curriculum for preschool children and an appropriate training program for staff of the centres.

An expansion of programs that provide parenting supports to young families would be part of a comprehensive plan as well.

The move of kindergarten to the school system creates both the need and the opportunity for a comprehensive review of early learning in PEI that would result in a renewed and strengthened sector providing more access and higher quality early learning to Island children. The scope of this work, and the fact that the Commission received limited input from the early learning industry during the past year, call out for a separate initiative.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that a comprehensive review of early learning in Prince Edward Island be carried out, leading to a plan for a sustainable, high quality, accessible early childhood system serving all Island children and their families.



CONCLUSION

Prince Edward Island's kindergarten system has provided major benefits to Island children since it became publicly funded in 2000 and for many years before that. Over the years, an excellent curriculum has been developed and refined. The program has been delivered by a professional and extremely dedicated teaching force trained in early childhood philosophy and approaches. Access has improved significantly, with 97% of Island children participating in at least nine months of kindergarten this year.

The move of kindergarten into the public school system in September 2010 is an opportunity to build on this progress – keeping what is best about our present system while gaining access to the full resources and opportunities of the school system. PEI's kindergarten system of the future – a full-day integrated play-based kindergarten curriculum delivered in PEI's schools and accessible to all children – is essential to fulfilling the vision set out earlier in this report:

**Every Island child will be given the opportunity
to develop to the fullest of his or her potential.**

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended as follows:

Delivery Model

1. Kindergarten be provided as a full-day, full-time program when it transitions into the public school system.
2. The kindergarten year be mandatory when kindergarten moves into the school system.
3. Parents be able to defer their child's entry to kindergarten to the year following the usual age of entry if they feel this would be in the best interests of the child.
4. Current legislative and regulatory provisions on private schools be amended to include private kindergartens.
5. French immersion kindergarten be offered in schools currently providing Grade One French immersion.
6. The level and range of early intervention and support for children with special needs be maintained when kindergarten moves into the school system. This includes, but is not limited to, maintaining or enhancing current supports in the areas of speech language therapy, autism therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and day-to-day classroom support.
7. To ensure consistency in the provision of special needs supports for kindergarten aged children, speech language supports for that age level be transferred from the Department of Health to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Curriculum

8. The present kindergarten curriculum, with its integrated, developmentally appropriate, play-based approach, be maintained when kindergarten moves into the school system.
9. The maximum kindergarten class size be set at no more than 15 children per teacher.
10. If classes are combined for purposes of team teaching, the maximum number of kindergarten children in a group be no more than 24, with two qualified teachers required.

11. The assessment process for kindergarten children be refined to include:
 - A consistent entry assessment for all kindergarten students
 - An expanded progress report at yearend which specifies more of the individual outcomes set out in the kindergarten curriculum.
12. Kindergarten children participate fully in the offerings and opportunities of the public school system. To ensure that this occurs in a way which maintains and supports the current kindergarten curriculum, it is recommended that:
 - The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development review current curricula pertaining to specialty subjects for the primary grades, and modify or add to those curricula as appropriate to ensure that they respond to the needs of kindergarten students and reflect the kindergarten curriculum approach.
 - In-servicing sessions be designed and provided to all specialty teachers who will be teaching kindergarten-aged children. These sessions should include content on early child development and methods.

Staffing

13. Based on the requirements of the public school system and in light of the link between education and the quality of learning, kindergarten teachers be required to obtain a Bachelor of Education degree.
14. The University of Prince Edward Island be requested to complete development of a flexible bridging program providing a '2 plus 2' Early Childhood B. Ed. to existing kindergarten teachers.
15. In recognition of the many commitments these new positions will require from teachers, students in the bridging program be allowed to complete the program over a period not to exceed six years.
16. The '2 plus 2' Early Childhood B.Ed. degree program be open to anyone who has taught kindergarten since it became publicly funded in 2000, as well as graduates of the Holland College and Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É. Early Childhood Program in 2009 and 2010.
17. Kindergarten teachers be licensed on an interim basis for the six-year transition period recommended above, and the Certification and Standards Board policy be revised as necessary to accommodate this measure.

18. Following assessment, teachers be placed as follows on the academic scale:
 - Teachers with an early childhood diploma or equivalent two-year diploma credential be placed at the Certificate II level.
 - Teachers with an undergraduate degree be placed at the Certificate III level.
 - Teachers with a B.Ed. be placed at a Certificate IV or higher as applicable.
19. Kindergarten teachers' years of experience in the publicly funded kindergarten system since 2000 be recognized on a two for one basis, that is, one step for every two years of teaching experience from 2000 to 2010.
20. Kindergarten teachers whose age and years of experience add up to 80 or more, and who plan to spend a period teaching in the public school system not exceeding the six-year transition period, be exempted from the requirement to obtain a B.Ed.
21. Existing kindergarten teachers have exclusive entitlement to kindergarten teaching jobs during the six-year transition period.
22. An orderly and transparent hiring process be designed and implemented, which includes the features outlined above and which minimizes stress and dislocation for the individuals involved.
23. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development design and deliver measures to foster a welcoming climate and a professional learning community within the school system, including:
 - In-servicing of school and school board personnel on the kindergarten curriculum and early childhood approach
 - Pre- and post-entry orientation and welcome programs at the school level such as 'buddy' systems and welcome committees.
24. The following priority structure be established for the move:
 - Top priority be placed with teachers who were teaching during the 2007-08 school year during which the move of kindergarten to the school system was announced, and who were teaching subsequently in either or both of the school years 2008-09 and 2009-10.
 - Should vacancies remain after all members of the above group who wish to move have been placed, then eligibility to move be extended to individuals who were not teaching in the 2007-08 school year, but who taught kindergarten in the school years prior to AND after the 2007-08 school year.
 - Should vacancies still remain, then eligibility be extended to people who taught kindergarten in the school years prior to 2007-08 OR who began teaching kindergarten in 2008-09 or 2009-10.

25. During the transition period, any kindergarten teaching vacancies which occur be filled from the designated groups in the order of priority provided, before being opened to broader competition.
26. All teachers currently teaching in the Grade 1-12 system who wish to move into a kindergarten teaching position after the transition period ends, and who do not have an early childhood B.Ed., be required to take two courses in early childhood development and methods.
27. Special Needs Assistants who have extensive experience working with kindergarten children be given first consideration when staffing any additional Educational Assistant positions arising from the move of kindergarten to the public school system.
28. Special Needs Assistants who transition to the school system be required to meet the training requirements established for Educational Assistants, within the six-year transition period.

Space

29. Space for kindergarten be identified or created in all elementary schools in PEI to enable kindergarten to move into the public school system in September 2010.
30. The standard of 3.5 square meters of classroom space be retained when kindergarten moves into the school system. This should be treated as a minimum: each kindergarten classroom should be provided with sufficient space to accommodate at least five activity centres in an efficient and appropriate layout.
31. Each kindergarten classroom be provided with sufficient equipment and materials to establish at least five activity centres within the classroom, and to rotate these over the school year.
32. School administrators be flexible and open to the use of non-commercial materials in the kindergarten classroom, to the extent that safety and fire standards permit.

Transportation

33. School boards deploy their buses with safety seats to maximize access for kindergarten children and other children meeting the weight requirement.
34. School boards develop plans to reduce the duration of bus runs to meet a target of no more than one hour one-way for bus routes transporting kindergarten aged children.
35. School boards review their bus safety programs and activities and modify them as required to ensure that they are appropriate for kindergarten aged children.

Linkages

36. An early childhood transition protocol for children with special needs be designed, building on the model of the present kindergarten transition protocol.
37. Processes be designed to promote and support communication between kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators regarding the transition of children from early childhood centres into the school system.

Early Childhood Sector

38. A comprehensive review of early learning in Prince Edward Island be carried out, leading to a plan for a sustainable, high quality, accessible early childhood system serving all Island children and their families.

APPENDIX ONE: TERMS OF REFERENCE

On April 4, 2008, in the Speech from the Throne, the Province announced its intention to bring Prince Edward Island's kindergarten system into the public school system. It pledged to achieve this goal within its current term of office, following a thorough, careful, and sensitive consultation process. As well, the Speech from the Throne announced the move of responsibility for early childhood development from the Department of Social Services and Seniors to a new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

These initiatives offer an opportunity to create the best kindergarten system possible for Islanders – guided by the wealth of recent research knowledge about the early childhood years, and building on the strengths of our existing community-based system and our public school system to capture the best of both worlds. Rigorous study and extensive public engagement is vital to ensure that the full potential of this opportunity is realized, and that the future of every Island child is changed for the better. This work should yield a plan for an orderly transition to the new integrated model that maximizes opportunity and ensures fairness for all involved.

Accordingly, the Government has appointed a Commissioner to oversee this important task. The Commissioner will carry out her work over the coming year, submitting her Report in June 2009. This Report shall set out a vision and goals for the kindergarten program to guide the Province in addressing the full range of issues, including but not limited to those outlined below, and shall recommend a detailed action plan to move kindergarten into the school system by September 2010.

Issues to be addressed include:

- **Delivery model:** Assess various models of full-day and half-day kindergarten to identify the model that provides an optimal combination of learning outcomes, access, and family strengthening. This assessment will include a consideration as to whether such a program should be mandatory.
- **Curriculum:** Ensure appropriate kindergarten curriculum is in place using play-based strategies to achieve defined learning outcomes.
- **Impacts:** Examine implications for existing early childhood education providers and how those can be mitigated.
- **Personnel:** Define appropriate credentials and licensing requirements for the new kindergarten system; training and bridging systems for existing kindergarten teachers; early childhood training opportunities for existing teachers in the 1-12 system; consequential training needs for staff in the early learning and child care sector.

- **Logistics:** Integrate kindergarten spaces into schools in the larger context of a rationalization and renewal of educational facilities to address declining enrolment; consider transportation questions.
- **Linkages:** Integrate the public school kindergarten system with the pre-kindergarten early childhood system, and recommend measures to strengthen those systems as warranted.
- **Legislation:** Identify necessary legislative changes.

The Commissioner shall develop her own detailed work plan and time frames, as her first task. It is expected that this work will include, although not be limited to, the following elements:

- Review the available literature on early childhood development and learning.
- Carry out an initial stakeholder engagement process, including:
 - interviews with key informants throughout the early childhood and public school systems and among community and other stakeholders to initially identify and define the key issues;
 - stakeholder focus groups to refine and explore those issues;
 - advisory groups to solicit expert input.
- Conduct additional research to investigate the issues identified, and to identify options and best practices, including as deemed necessary:
 - further literature review;
 - contracting of specific issues to selected experts;
 - site visits to other jurisdictions.
- Produce a discussion document outlining the issues, findings, and potential approaches.
- Carry out extensive further public engagement through various processes to be determined, to refine the recommended approach and to build awareness and support.
- Prepare a final report recommending a vision, goals, strategic directions, and action plan.

The Commissioner shall be provided with research support by Executive Council Office, to include a Research Director, and other resources as required by the work plan.

APPENDIX TWO: CONSULTATIONS AND PUBLIC MEETINGS

Kindergarten and School Visits

Prince County:

- Ada Louise Learning Centre, Summerside
- Alberton Kindergarten, Alberton
- Bloomfield Kindergarten, Bloomfield
- Fun Times, Kensington
- Kids Place, Summerside
- Magic Moments Child Care Centre, Tignish
- O'Leary Kindergarten, O'Leary
- Tignish Kindergarten, Tignish
- YMCA Kindergarten, Summerside

Queens County:

- Brighton School of Early Learning, Charlottetown
- Campus Kids Child Care Centre, UPEI
- Child Development Centre, Holland College
- Cornwall Child Care Centre, Cornwall
- Central Queens Elementary School and Hunter River Kindergarten
- Island Montessori Academy Ltd., Stratford
- L'Île Enchantée Kindergarten, Carrefour St. Jean
- Richmond Street Early Learning Centre, Charlottetown
- Sherwood-Parkdale Head Start, Charlottetown
- Stratford Kindergarten and School Age Program, Stratford
- Westwood Primary School, Cornwall

Kings County:

- Early Childhood Development Centre, Morell
- Georgetown Kindergarten, Georgetown
- Little People's Centre, Cardigan
- Montessori Children's Centre, Montague
- Souris Kindergarten, Souris

Public Meetings

- Bloomfield, Westisle Senior High School
- St. Peters, St. Peters Consolidated School
- Summerside, Athena Consolidated School
- Montague, Montague Intermediate High School
- Wellington, Evangeline Senior High School
- Souris, Bluefin Restaurant
- Charlottetown: Murchison Centre, Carrefour St. Jean

Consultation Meetings

Early Childhood Organizations

- Early Childhood Development Association:
 - ECDA Fall Conference, keynote address, October 2008
 - ECDA Annual General Meeting, keynote address, April 2009
- Early Learning Operators of PEI
- Kindergarten Advisory Committee

Post-Secondary Education Providers

- PEI Certification and Standards Board
- Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É.
- Holland College
- University of Prince Edward Island

Unions

- Canadian Union of Public Employees, Locals 1145, 1770, 1775, 3260
- Prince Edward Island Teachers Federation

Parent Organizations

- Canadian Parents for French, PEI Division
- Prince Edward Island Home and School Federation

Boards and Department

- Commission scolaire de langue française
- Eastern School District
- Western School Board
- Education Senior Management Forum
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

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