



## A comprehensive Early Childhood Education System for Prince Edward Island



**“Early childhood is where children learn to know, to  
do, to live together, and to be”**

(Canadian Council on Learning)

October 2008

*Professional. Certified. Licensed.*



## **The Future**

The Early Childhood Development Association of PEI sees a well funded Provincial Early Childhood Education System that is built on the latest early learning research and best practice models, has limitless access, actively involves family and community and is led by well recognized early childhood development professionals.

### **Imagine....**

....an Early Childhood Education System, led by Early Childhood Educators partnering with other early years professionals supporting the entire family unit and built on educational play experiences ... imagine physical environments that are filled with natural light, clean air, and free of allergens (e.g. carpets)....indoor and outdoor environments that provide a variety of materials for children to explore like trees, string, rocks, wood, plant life, animal life, sand, laughter and fun... a place where opportunities are limitless.

### **Imagine....**

....an Early Childhood Education System that provides family and children's programs and services under one roof.....a system with no boundaries where all children 0 to 5 years of age can have access, and where neither cost nor facility poses any barrier.

### **Imagine....**

.....a fully funded education that begins in early childhood....one that builds the foundation for later school and social success through play and learning experiences like cooking, dramatic play and blocks. A system where early childhood educators are play partners encouraging children to explore the wonders of their world, to stretch their limits and expand their knowledge and understanding of the world around them....imagine children in this environment documenting their learning, problem solving, experiencing, challenging their own limits, discussing, and estimating all while sharing their knowledge with other children.

### **Imagine....**

....a system that welcomes and involves parents and family members as participants... offering parenting programs throughout the Early Childhood Education facility, with Early Childhood Educators providing modeling opportunities and supportive practice that help families learn how to balance life and parenting responsibilities....imagine programs that provide family oriented services such as family hair cuts, exercise class or Saturday morning playtime with Dad. Imagine a system that supports the whole family in one facility.

### **Imagine...**

.... a system rich with child and family support specialists working directly out of the Early Childhood Development Centre... imagine families and educators meeting with speech and language pathologists at the facility, 'Needle Nights' with public health, or sessions to learn more about allergies or health concerns.....imagine a system that provides for the direct involvement of community family resources programs and services.

### **Imagine....**

.....this system being directed and delivered by professional certified early childhood educators that are receiving appropriate remuneration based on their education and experience, with full benefit packages and pension plans.

**The Early Childhood Development Association believes all PEI children and families deserve nothing less than this system. The ECDA invites you to join us in making our vision a reality for all Island children and their families.**



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**Appendix:** Profile of the Early Childhood Education Sector on PEI



## 1. The PEI Early Childhood Development Association

The Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of PEI is a provincial non-profit organization committed to promoting and supporting the quality of early learning and childcare programs and services for Island children and families. The Association was established in 1974, and has consistently worked to:

- Provide Island families with information about local early childhood education services, family supports, and the latest research trends and best practice.
- Encourage research and development initiatives and projects that support early childhood education and care within the province.
- Provide educational opportunity and support to its members and all Early Childhood Educators to ensure an educated workforce that is dedicated to life-long learning.

- Establish and foster the creation of partnerships and networks that support the healthy development of young Island children.

Over the years, the ECDA has been actively working on many levels, and with many partners, to educate and inform parents, communities, governments, and other relevant stakeholders of the value and importance of early childhood education. However, despite these efforts, there has never been a clear commitment to a provincial vision, supported by government with the necessary funding and delivery structures, to ensure that all Island children have access to available, affordable, quality early childhood education programs and supports.

**Note:** See appendix – Profile of Early Childhood Education Sector in PEI



## 2. The Current Situation

### 2.1 Changing Policy Environment

PEI's early childhood education sector is at a 'crossroads'. Within the past year, the provincial government has decided that kindergarten will become a provincial government service delivered through the school system. Prior to this, the provincial kindergarten program had been delivered through many of the community-based Early Childhood Development Centres across the province.

The decision to move the provincial Kindergarten Program into the school system will have significant impacts on many of the Early Childhood Development Centres; over the past few years, many Centres had worked hard to integrate the kindergarten program into their centre's programming and operating structures. Some of the potential impacts of this decision on Early Childhood Development Centres include reduced opportunity for growth, reduced enrollment numbers (i.e. sustainability issues), and a decrease in the value and vibrancy of the Early Childhood Education profession.

The ECDA believes that the time has come for the province, working in collaboration with all stakeholders, to develop and implement a comprehensive, universal Early Childhood Education System for PEI. This comprehensive system must be 'in tune' with the current research and understanding of how young children develop and learn, and the changing needs of Island families.

Most important, especially for a small province facing an aging population, and declining workforce numbers, this comprehensive Early Childhood Education System will be needed more than ever as incentive for young families to return to PEI. The healthy development of every single child born on PEI is critical in terms of the future health of our families, our communities, and our provincial economy. This is a fact that is now being readily acknowledged by many in the business world as indicated by the following quote:

*"If Canada is to succeed in forging a creative economy, we cannot afford to waste the talents of a single Canadian. In this context, Canada needs to reduce the financial burden of raising children and preparing them for productive lives as global citizens."  
(Thomas d'Aquino, President, Canadian Council of Chief Executives)*

In this environment, it is no longer feasible to accept a future where more than one-half of Island children between infancy and five years of age simply do not have access to licensed Early Childhood Education programs to support their early learning needs. The ECDA strongly believes that this is a situation that no one, including governments, community and business leaders, parents and early childhood educators, should tolerate any longer.



## **2.2 Needs, Expectations and Perceptions of Parents**

In the summer of 2008, the ECDA conducted a survey of 247 parents through their member Centres to determine the current use, needs, and expectations of parents.

Survey respondents indicated that the primary reasons for using childcare included:

- Being unable to care for their children while at work (95%),
- Wanting them to be socially prepared for school (64%),
- Believing that they (the child) enjoyed the experience (60%)
- Wanting them to be academically prepared for school (58%)

Provincial licensing was seen as important by 189 of the respondents (93%). The qualitative data revealed that respondents who use licensed care did so because of a sense of improved quality, reliability, structure, and safety.

Eighty-two percent (82%) of respondents

indicated that all families should have access to free childcare that provides for a quality educational experience during their early years.

When asked what factors would increase their satisfaction with their current childcare arrangements, respondents indicated the following:

- Accessibility (including cost, hours, age at which children are accepted, and storm days)
- Quality and diversity of educational activities
- Improved children to Educator ratio
- Improved communication between staff and parents
- Improved physical environment
- More trained and adequately compensated Early Childhood Educators

Survey respondents who use unlicensed care indicated that they did so for things such as convenience, an appreciation for a more 'home like' environment, and a comfort level with the person who was caring for their child.



### 3. Literature - Research Findings

The field of early childhood development and learning has received a lot of attention over the past decade or more. Public sector agencies and non-profit research centres have invested in extensive research initiatives that have provided a lot of new information and evidence regarding the critical importance of strong early childhood education programs, and incorporates many of the 'best practice' principles found in the following section.

#### 3.1 The Qualitative Evidence

The research literature is clear; the most effective interventions are those that view the child and his/her development in a broad, holistic way; that curriculum and programs should be integrated with other child care supports and services, flexible, and play-based; and that quality relationships with adults are important.



#### 3.2 Best Practice Principles

Research findings from both North America and Europe have identified a series of key elements that are critical to a quality early learning and child care system. The Canadian Child Care Federation, in their recently released (2007) statement on Quality Early Learning and Child Care noted these key elements, and these are outlined briefly:

- **Early Childhood Educators** who have post-secondary training and the necessary knowledge and skills sets, who are invested in ongoing professional development, and who operate within a code of ethics.
- **Collaborative partnerships with families** that honour the parent's role as the primary caregiver, respects the parent's child-rearing beliefs and values, and provide meaningful opportunities for parents to determine their child's early childhood experience.
- **Physical (indoor and outdoor) learning environments** that promote the health and safety of children, professional and families, and provides for a positive and enriching learning environment.
- **A purposeful learning environment** that promotes positive outcomes, beneficial interactions among children, involves them in a variety of creative learning experiences, supports positive self-esteem, and fosters their capacity to learn literacy and numeracy skills.



- **An environment that supports the rights of children** as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).
- **A supported workforce** that has remuneration levels consistent with the knowledge and skills required of an Early Childhood Educator and the level of job responsibility, work benefits (health plan, pensions plan, provision for ongoing professional development), opportunity for career advancement, and is respected by other professionals working with children and families.
- **Program leadership** that strives for excellence in designing and delivering early learning and care programs and supports, and works to involve parents and the community to determine how best to meet the needs of children and families.
- **Consistent and sustained administrative practices** that promote program viability and stability over the long term, and reinforces the relationships with children, parents and communities.
- **An effective infrastructure that includes:** a vision; legislated policy and practice outcomes that are grounded in evidence-based research; system-wide planning and resource allocation; substantial public investment to support program and operating costs, capital development, and the development of a skilled workforce; the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of desired outcomes and the dissemination of these findings.

### 3.3 The Quantitative Evidence

Research findings indicate that structured early childhood education and learning programs are instrumental in playing a pivotal 'foundation role' in launching children toward adult lives and careers that contribute greatly to the social and economic fabric of communities, provinces and the country overall.

The findings indicate that greater public investments in early childhood programs can pay huge dividends at many levels, including; increasing school readiness and achievement, easing the financial burden on parents, and reducing the extent of the costs on our social and health care systems.

*“Public spending in early childhood provides far greater returns on investment than interventions at any other age....the data computes the return on investment in early childhood at 8:1, compared to 3:1 for primary and secondary education, and 1:1 for adult training. (Economist James Heckman – 2002)*

*“Early interventions are more effective and less costly than waiting until later in the child’s development – gaps in school performance generally stay constant or increase after 8 years of age.” (Blueprint For Early Childhood Development and School Reform: Department of Education, Australia, 2002)*





## 4. The Vision for PEI

### 4.1 Vision:

All Island children between infancy and five (5) years of age will have access to a sustainable Provincial Early Childhood Education system that is available, affordable, and of high quality.

### 4.2 Goals:

The overarching goals include:

- To achieve positive early learning and development outcomes for children.
- To provide support to parents in balancing work and family responsibilities.
- To establish a sustainable Early Childhood Education 'career path'.
- To ensure that the ECE system is integrated with other child and family support services.
- To contribute to the social and economic development of Island communities and the province.

**Objective:** The objective is to develop and implement the above vision, together with government and other key partners, over the next five year period (Sept 2008 - Sept.2013).



**Outcomes:** A comprehensive provincial early childhood education program will result in the following outcomes:

- A universal, accessible, high quality early childhood and learning system.
- Improved educational, and health and well-being outcomes for all children.
- Reduced barriers to children's learning and development.
- An adequate wage/benefits structure, opportunities for career advancement, and opportunities for ongoing learning for Early Childhood Educators.
- Demonstrated positive impacts on the social and economic fabric of communities and the province.
- Public confidence in, and support for, a well funded provincial early childhood development system for all.



## 5. The Design Framework

The following design elements will guide the development and implementation of the above vision, and achievement of the goals and outcomes:

### 5.1 Key Partnerships

- **Provincial and Federal Governments:** there is a strong policy and funding commitment from both levels of government.
- **Municipal Governments:** municipal governments acknowledge the importance of early learning programs, and their municipal by-laws are supportive to developing early learning opportunities and 'family friendly' environments
- **Corporations and Business Groups:** businesses see the value of a strong early learning and child care program, and are prepared to support early learning and family support practices on a number of levels; (family 'friendly' human resource policies, sponsoring professional development events, etc).
- **Other Professionals and Community Groups:** there is strong community involvement and support from a wide range of other educators, child care professionals, NGO's, and community organizations and groups.

### 5.2 Building Public Support – Parents and Communities

- **Parents:** parents are more informed and knowledgeable with regard to early learning and positive learning outcomes, the work of the Early Childhood Development Centres, and what a quality ECE program would look like.
- **Public Awareness and Buy-In:** there is a high level of public understanding and acceptance of the value of and importance of early childhood development and learning.

*“The goal of high-quality learning environments for children three-to-five should be to address the needs of the whole child, in the home, in early learning and child care programs, in kindergarten and through support programs directed at both child and parents or guardians”. (The Quality of Public Education in Canada – School Readiness: A Marker that Matters - The Learning Partnership - 2007)*



### 5.3 Program Design Principles

- **Accessibility and Affordability:** all families will have access to programs and supports, and the fees will be affordable.
- **Program Quality and Standards:** there will be a core curriculum that describes a continuum of learning activities and methods, with specific program quality and delivery standards (e.g. ECE education and certification, ongoing training, investments in staff development; licensing and accreditation of Centres, accountability in terms of program monitoring and outcomes, etc).
- **Program Flexibility:** there will be a range of quality, affordable child care spaces available to all children, and all needs – e.g. infants, children with special needs, school aged child care, etc. In addition, there will be more flexible childcare options targeted to certain rural-based industry sectors (e.g. agriculture, fisheries).
- **Physical environments:** there will be guidelines to ensure that both indoor and outdoor spaces provide for the health and safety of children, professionals and families and support a positive and enriching learning environment.
- **Program Diversity:** there will be an allowance for variety as to how a program is delivered (e.g., pedagogy) while maintaining core curriculum goals.
- **Professional Work Force:** there will be a professionally trained, licensed, and adequately paid early childhood education workforce; wages and benefits are reflective

of the level of training, the nature of the work tasks, and the scope of responsibility.

- **Legislative Foundation:** relevant legislation and regulations are developed and/or amended to:
  - Reflect the spirit and intent of the above vision
  - Support and reinforce best practice principles and methods, and
  - Ensure long-term stability and sustainability of the system.

### 5.4 Program Accountability

- **Learning Outcomes:** specific learning and child development outcomes will be established, and these will be regularly monitored, measured, and reported on.
- **Broader Social and Economic Outcomes:** specific social and economic outcome indicators will be established, and regularly measured and reported on.





## 6. Summary

If early childhood education is to survive and further develop on PEI, a system that will transform and strengthen the existing network of Early Childhood Development Centres across the province must be implemented. The government of PEI and all early childhood education stakeholders and advocates need to come together and work collaboratively to design and put in place the system described in the foregoing. This will be a major undertaking, and will require a three-to-five year strategy designed to implement all the key elements of the new system.



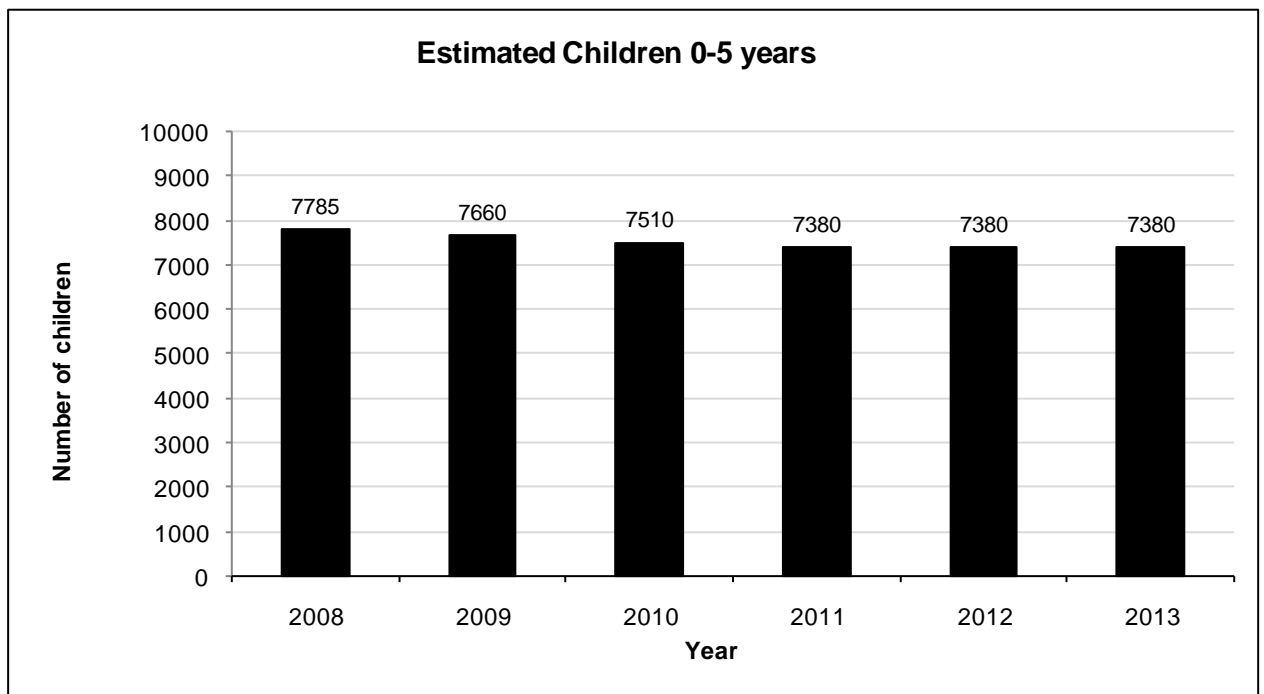
## Appendix

### Profile of Early Childhood Education in Prince Edward Island - 2008

The following data and information provides a current profile of the Early Childhood Sector on PEI.

#### 1. The 0-5 Age Cohort – A Five Year Estimate

There are approximately 7800 children aged 0-5 on PEI (based on 2008 population estimates). The number of children in this age cohort is estimated to decrease slightly to approximately 7400 children over the next five years.

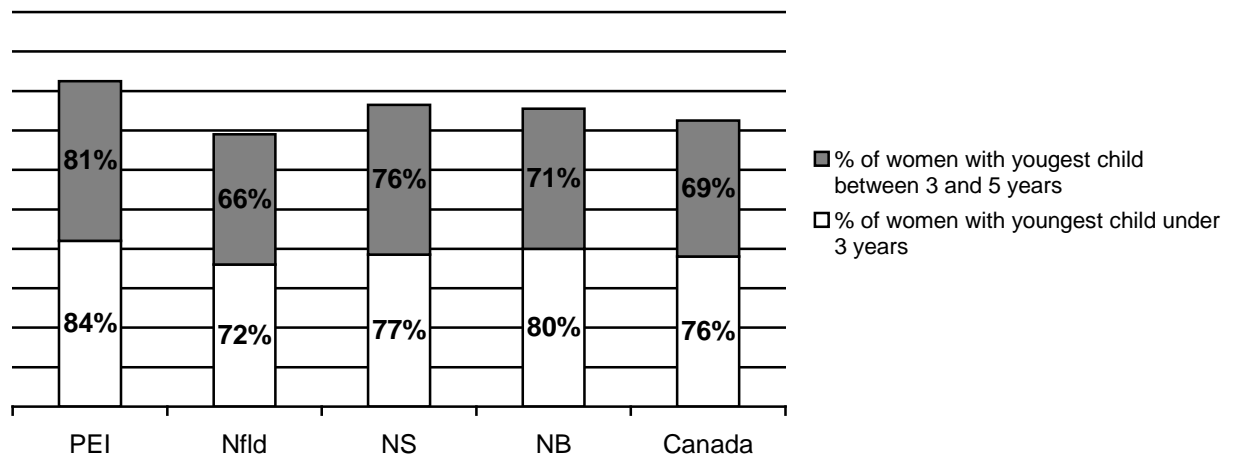




## 2. The Workforce Participation of Women on PEI

PEI has the highest percentage of women with young children who are in the workforce of all provinces and territories in Canada. In PEI, 80.6% of women with children younger than 3 years old, and 84% of women with a youngest child between 3 and 5 years old are in the workforce. Although PEI has the highest percentage of children who have access to regulated spaces, the current level of access provides for only about half of the children whose mothers are in the workforce.

Percentage of Women with Young Children in the Workforce (Canadian Census 2006)



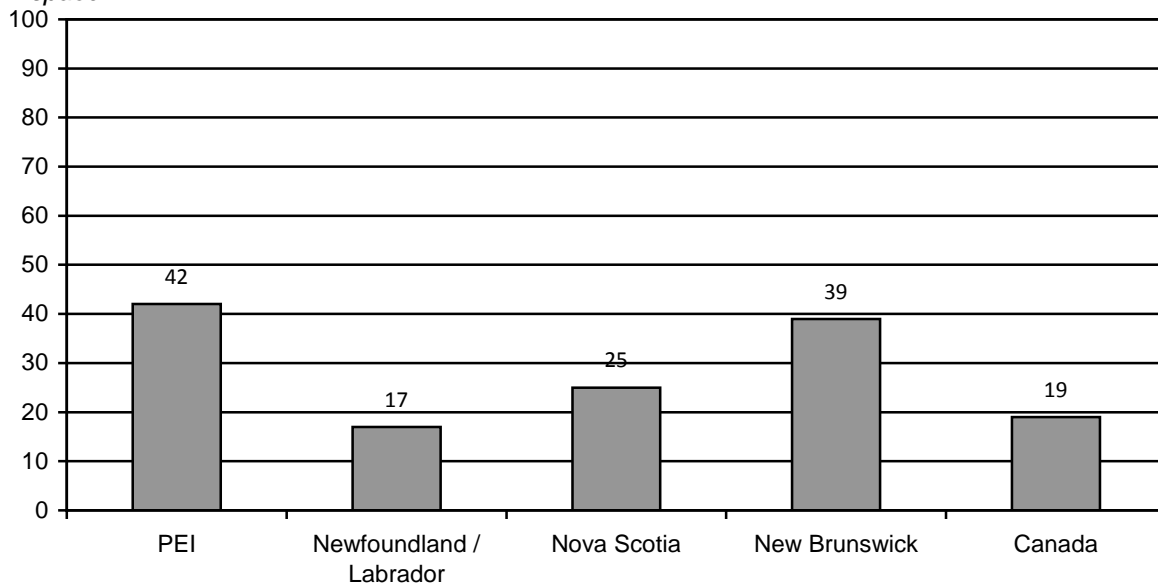


### 3. ECE Services Available to Parents in 2008

#### 3.1 Access to Regulated Spaces

PEI has the highest availability of regulated early childhood education and care (ECEC) spaces for preschool children (birth to five years of age). Across Canada – on average – 19.3% of children in this age group have access to a regulated ECEC space. In PEI, 42.4% of preschool children have access to a space. This number does not include the additional spaces available in half-day kindergarten programs.

*Percentage of preschool children (0-5 yrs) with access to a regulated ECE space*



Friendly, M., Beach, J. and Turiano, M. ECEC in Canada 2006. University of Toronto, 2007.

Between 2004 and 2008 the number of licensed centres on PEI has increased by 9%, and the number of licensed spaces on PEI has increased by 26%. As of September 2008, 57% of the 527 staff who work in licensed early childhood centres are certified.



### 3.2 *Special Needs and Infant Spaces:*

There are 209 infant spaces in licensed daycares on PEI (Charlottetown has 90 spaces; Summerside has 42).

There are 219 children with special needs attending 64 licensed child care centres who receive Special Needs

Funding to increase the child to staff ratio and enhance their inclusive supports.

- In 2007, 235 children with special needs participated in regulated ECEC programs in PEI
- In 2007, 1547 children were subsidized in order to assist their parents with the cost of participating in regulated ECEC programs

Between 2006 and 2007, there was almost a 20% increase in the number of regulated ECEC spaces in PEI. However, this expansion occurred without any assessment of need, analysis of current supply, or planning as to how to better meet the needs of children, families and communities.

Friendly, M., Beach, J. and Turiano, M. ECEC in Canada 2006. University of Toronto, 2007.

### 3.3 *Cost of Licensed Care*

Parent fees for full-day licensed child care range.

- \$22 - \$41 per day for infants.
- \$16 - \$32 per day for two to five year olds.

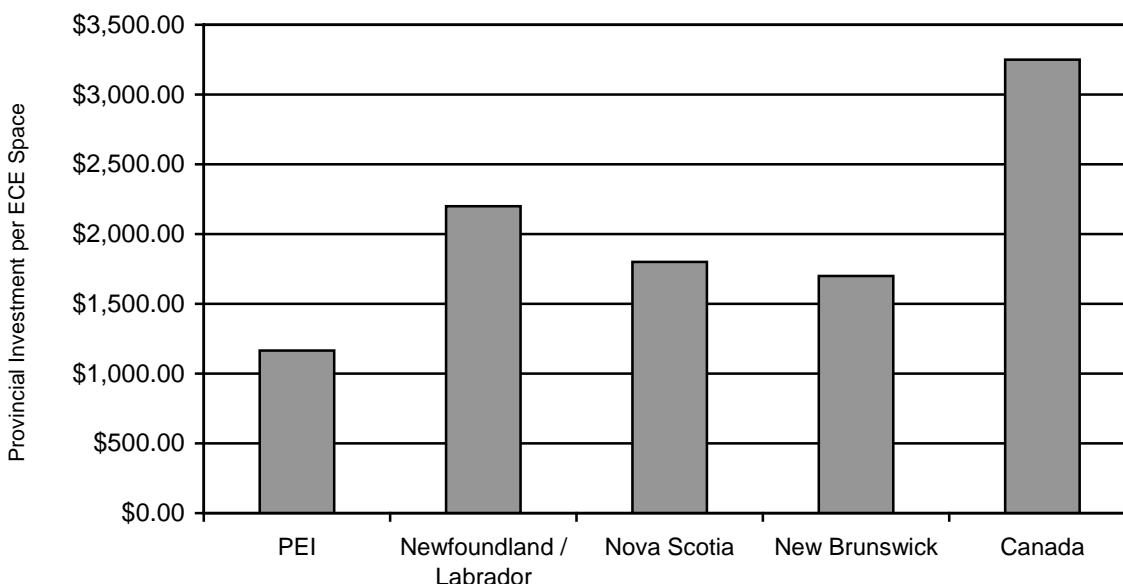




#### 4. Government Financial Contribution for Early Childhood Education

Despite being leaders in the region for numbers of spaces available, PEI's Provincial contribution to support regulated ECE spaces is the lowest in the Atlantic region, and the second lowest in Canada. While the average provincial / territorial investment per ECEC space is \$3259, PEI invests \$1166 per regulated ECEC space:

*Provincial Contributions to Support ECE Spaces*



Friendly, M., Beach, J. and Turiano, M. ECEC in Canada 2006. University of Toronto, 2007.

In an average month 1,764 children (38% of the spaces) are supported by the Child Care Subsidy program.

Daily rates paid for child care subsidy are:

- \$30 for infants
- \$23 for two year olds
- \$22 for three to five year olds