



Halifax Regional

Early childhood education in the HRSB: Challenges and opportunities

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Halifax Regional School Board

- Largest school board in Atlantic Canada
- 52,000 students
- 40 % of the school age population in Nova Scotia.
- 137 schools 5,000 square kilometres

Every student. Every school.

Why consider the HRSB example?

What was it about the experiences within the Halifax Regional School Board and the province of Nova Scotia that are in any way unique?

What would inform, inspire approaches to early childhood education elsewhere?

A poor report card

Canada lags far behind other economically advanced countries in meeting suggested international benchmarks for the care and education of young children.

Of 25 economically advanced countries, Canada tied for last place with Ireland and behind most European countries, the United States, Australia, and Mexico.

(Report Card 8: The child care transition: A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries)

A poor report card

“Cost-benefit analyses of early childhood interventions have shown, in different settings, that the returns of early childhood education and care can be as high as \$8 for every \$1 invested.”

(Report Card 8: The child care transition: A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries)

A poor report card

And yet, we continue to
do too little for many of the smallest
members of our society.

Every student. Every school.

ELO

Early Learning Opportunities Program:

- A model based largely on the YMCA Playing to Learn quality care and education guide.
- Through ELO, children receive a free opportunity to learn in age appropriate ways.





The issue

85 elementary schools

5 Early Learning Opportunities sites

Every student. Every school.

The Four-Plus program

September, 1982

Former Halifax District School Board brought in Four-Plus, a program that was a response to a belief that inner city children were arriving at school less prepared than children from other areas.

The Four-Plus program

Four-Plus had three goals:

- The intellectual development of individual young children;
- The personal, social development of individual young children, with an emphasis on school participation;
- To establish early, positive relationships amongst students, parents, and school communities.

Four-Plus, the drawbacks

There is no way of determining if there has been an improvement in graduation rates among Four-Plus students as compared to similar student populations that did not receive an extra year of schooling.

Four-Plus, the drawbacks

Unlike, other public school grade levels, Four-Plus had no formal curriculum developed by the Nova Scotia Department of Education.

Four-Plus, the drawbacks

The program was delivered by teachers with support from educational program assistants.

The shift to a new model

1996, three school boards merged to create the Halifax Regional School Board.

Level of support to Four-Plus suffered, but the program survived.

Four-Plus, the drawbacks

Funding was decentralized and
in disparities between program sites.

Program goals were not revisited.

Four-Plus was limited to a handful of schools.

The shift to a new model

September, 2006

The Nova Scotia Department of Education launched the Pre-Primary pilot program in 19 schools across the province, including four in the HRSB.

The shift to a new model

Funding was provincial.

All classes were led by an Early Childhood Educator and a support Early Childhood Educator.

Classes used an activity and play-based model.

The shift to a new model

Stated goal of Pre-Primary:

“...to positively influence all areas of child development and instill a positive attitude toward learning.”

The shift to a new model

Pre-Primary objectives for children:

- Develop self-confidence and self-respect;
- Engage in an active exploration of their environment;
- Expand their skills and knowledge base and use them to develop concepts;
- Learn to work cooperatively with others;
- Expand their capacities for communication;
- Construct new knowledge based on their experiences;
- And, learn to make healthy lifestyle choices.

The shift to a new model

By 2006, we were
one board with two early childhood programs,
two very different service delivery models,
and two different sources of funding.

An end, and a beginning

June 2008, the Department of Education ended the Pre-Primary program after a change in age eligibility for entry to Primary.

Many four-year-olds who would have been candidates for Pre-Primary headed instead to a Primary class.

An end, and a beginning

Our quandary:
What was the HRSB to do
about Four-Plus?

Every student. Every school.

An end, and a beginning

We began the planning necessary to disband Four-Plus and replace it with a new program more clearly aligned with current understandings of early childhood development.

An end, and a beginning

September 2008, the HRSB launched the Early Learning Opportunities (ELO) program at five schools.

ELO employs Early Childhood Educators, is entirely funded through the school board budget, and bases its program on the YMCA Playing to Learn guide.



New program, new challenges

The HRSB faced public criticism that it was reducing service levels and cutting costs by hiring ECEs.

The Nova Scotia Teachers' Union filed a grievance over the hiring of ECEs.

New program, new challenges

As one of the lowest funded school boards in Canada, and with a mandate that does not include early childhood education, year over year funding for ELO will continue to prove a challenge.

Funding shortfalls will make it difficult to expand the program to more school sites.



The way forward

What's needed to make early childhood education a broader program, sufficiently resourced and sustainably funded?

The way forward

As a school board we cannot bear sole responsibility. Yet, our schools are the logical, and the right locations to prepare children for the school years to come.

Every student. Every school.

The way forward

What we need:
Political will;
A sense of urgency.

Every student. Every school.



Moving forward

Imagine our schools

UEY

EDI

Wrap-around schools

Every student. Every school.









Halifax Regional

Thank you.
Merci.