



Accountability Report

2023–24

Education and Early
Childhood Development


NOVA SCOTIA

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Accountability Report 2023–2024

ISBN 978-1-77448-663-4

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Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (“EECD”, “the Department”) for the year ended March 31, 2024, is prepared pursuant to the *Finance Act* and government policies and guidelines. The reporting of the EECD outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments, and opinions by the EECD management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of the EECD management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the EECD 2023-24 Business Plan.

Originally Signed by

Hon. Becky Druhan
Minister

Originally Signed by

Elwin LeRoux
Deputy Minister

Introduction

This document reports on the departmental activities as outlined in EECD's 2023-24 Business Plan.

Measuring our Performance

EECD's 2023-24 Business Plan identified several priority initiatives to advance improvements to the early years and public education systems in Nova Scotia.

Inclusive Education

Government is committed to helping all students reach their full potential by continuing to invest in the Nova Scotia public education system and prioritizing educational outcomes, related to well-being and achievement. EECD continues to work with Regional Centres for Education (RCEs), the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP), school administrators, teachers, specialists, education support workers, parents, community, government, and other key partners to put students first and ensure all students are supported to develop healthy relationships, make good choices, and achieve success in their learning.

In 2023-24, EECD supported the ongoing implementation of inclusive education through:

- Continuing to invest in Assistive Technology Supports in classrooms by providing over \$600,000 to RCEs/CSAP through the Nova Scotia Education Common Services Bureau.
- Providing ongoing professional development and training opportunities/resources for all school staff, including specific options for mental health literacy training.
- Continuing to work with the Accessibility Directorate to advance work related to the *Accessibility Act* and Education Standards.
- Continuing to share information to enhance awareness and understanding among RCE/CSAP staff of the over 1,000 inclusive education positions added to the system since 2018, to ensure maximum positive impact.
- Continuing to publicly report on the status of [inclusive education](#) in the province, including preparing to release the final developmental report from the independent developmental evaluators once received.

Student Well-Being and Achievement

In 2023-24, EECD improved school programs, services, and policies to support student well-being and academic achievement through:

- Increasing transparency and strengthening the voices of families, students and School Advisory Councils (SACs) within our education system by:
 - Launching a new fund in February 2024 that provides application-based grants of up to \$10,000 to SACs to implement innovative projects supporting student well-being and achievement;
 - Planning an annual conference that will provide all SAC chairs an opportunity to provide policy input and advise on common school challenges and opportunities. The first conference is scheduled for September 2024;
 - Increasing parent/guardian and community representation on SACs by encouraging SACs to add more parent/guardian and community members where possible;

- Directing Regional Executive Directors to lead public engagement sessions in their RCEs beginning in winter 2024 and three times each school year going forward;
 - Establishing regional student advisory committees in each RCE and CSAP that report directly to the Regional Executive Director/Superintendent on student achievement and well-being and other aspects of student experiences; and
 - Establishing regional school advisory councils in each RCE to advise Regional Executive Directors.
- Fully implementing the Physical Activity Framework in September 2023 with the support of key partners, including the Nova Scotia Teachers Union and RCEs/CSAP.
 - Announcing implementation of a new school lunch program in 2024-25.
 - Introducing the Nova Scotia Educational Leadership Standards for school administrators and other educational leaders. The standards create cohesion across the province, improve performance, and will develop and support leaders.
 - Administering the [Student Success Survey](#) in May 2023 (grades 4-12). The results were shared with RCEs/CSAP to help inform regional and school improvement plans, identify areas of need, and provide direction for improvement in student well-being and achievement.
 - Supporting the 'Network Schools' initiative, by participating in programs such as the Canada Playful Schools Network (CPSN), which leverages learning through play (Green, Screen, and Machine) in middle schools to improve engagement and well-being for students.
 - Completing an evaluation of the Tuition Support Program, which provides funding for eligible students to access specialized programming and services outside the framework of the Nova Scotia public school system.

Public School Program

In 2023-24, EECD reviewed and updated curriculum for all grade levels on financial literacy, civics, environmental stewardship, physical activity, healthy living and diversity (including education on Residential Schools), and career and skilled trades programming, including:

- Continuing to monitor and expand pilots of three new high school courses, in both English and French: Contemporary Canadian Studies 11, Life 11, and Netukulimk 12.
- Introducing the High Skills Major Program in nine schools in September 2023, which engages students in career exploration and community-based learning with a focus on sector-related knowledge and skills.
- Continuing to expand skilled trades programming to schools without skilled trades centres. In the 2023-24 school year, this programming was offered in 16 new schools.
- Launching a resource and marketing campaign for grade 7 and 8 students and their families to increase awareness of skilled trades electives and encourage students to explore skilled trades courses while in high school.
- Delivering Treaty Education professional learning for grade 5 and 6 teachers. Resources were made available in English and French.
- Providing professional development to all RCE/CSAP Treaty Education Lead Teams. Three professional development sessions were offered during the 2023-24 school year.

Early Years

In 2023-24, EECD made high-quality early learning and child care accessible, affordable, and inclusive for all families through:

- Continuing to take steps to implement the [Canada – Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement](#) (“the Agreement”) by developing a 2023-2026 Action Plan and outlining the approach to move toward a \$10 a day on average child care by 2025-2026 including:
 - Investing \$333 million annually in early learning and child care, in partnership with our federal counterparts, an increase of more than \$56 million this fiscal year.
 - Using funding to support lower child care fees for families, creation of new spaces, operational funding, ECE wage increases, and ECE recruitment and retention initiatives.
- Developing a space expansion strategy to inform the next stage of growth within the sector, including:
 - Creating 4,523 new early learning and child care spaces in licensed centres and family homes, and in the Nova Scotia Before-and-After School program since the signing of the Agreement with 2,832 of these spaces created in 2023-24;
 - Launching new grant programs to support space creation in the not-for-profit sector, including the Family Home Child Care (FHCC) Start-Up Program, the Minor Infrastructure Program, and the Major Infrastructure Program; and
 - Launching a FHCC Recruitment Campaign.
- Continuing to evaluate and expand the Quality Matters initiative by piloting two new quality assessment tools, the Assessment for Quality Improvement and Responsive Interactions for Learning, across 104 licensed early learning and child care centres. The pilots and final assessments to determine next steps will be completed in 2024-25.
- Continuing to support and expand professional development opportunities provided through EECD and support sites to FHCC providers, including:
 - Launching a work and learn program through Jane Norman College to support FHCC providers to earn their early childhood education diploma;
 - Collaborating with FHCC agencies to adapt Infant Quality Care training for FHCC providers;
 - Partnering with EECD’s Mi’kmaw Services Branch to offer Mi’kmaw Ways of Being and Knowing workshop to educators across the sector, including FHCC consultants and providers; and
 - Launching the Culturally Responsive Practice modules to educators, including those in FHCC.
- Launching the first fully-funded, online French-language Early Childhood Educator (ECE) diploma program through Université Sainte Anne (for individuals new to the sector) in fall 2023.
- Working with the sector to establish a standardized level of health and retirement benefits for ECEs, including:
 - Introducing a group benefits and defined benefit pension package for all employees working in licensed and provincially funded early learning and child care centres and FHCC agencies; and
 - Introducing a grant for licensed and provincially funded FHCC providers to self-source benefits and reimburse contributions to a Registered Retirement Savings Program (RRSP).

- Raising wages for ECEs working in provincially licensed and funded early learning and child care centres and FHCC agencies between \$3.14 to \$4.24 per hour.
- Beginning in Fall 2023, piloting a program to offer extended hours and overnight care at the HealthPark Early Learning and Child Care Centre in Sydney, Nova Scotia. Evaluation of this program in 2024-25 will help inform future flexible child care models.
- Eliminating the practice of licensed and provincially funded early learning and child care programs charging waitlist and registration fees for families, which presents unnecessary barriers to accessing care.
- Creating and implementing professional development modules to support learning about outdoor play and culturally responsive practices for ECEs.

Financial Summary and Variance Explanation

Departmental Expenses Summary			
(\$ thousands)			
	2023-2024	2023-2024	2023-2024
Programs and Services	Estimate	Actuals	Variance
Senior Management	1,156	1,144	(12)
Strategic Policy, RCE Liaison and Research	4,441	4,462	21
Early Learning	218,025	156,098	(61,927)
Child Care and Licensing	58,437	55,295	(3,142)
Centre for Equity in Achievement and Well-Being	3,807	3,982	175
Education Innovation Programs and Services	84,246	80,538	(3,708)
Student Services and Equity	2,293	2,205	(88)
African Canadian Services	6,314	6,160	(154)
Mi'kmaq Services	1,389	1,149	(240)
French Programs and Services	16,938	21,021	4,083
Corporate Services	5,144	5,266	122
Public Education Funding	1,289,106	1,359,407	70,301
Teachers' Pension	101,151	105,965	4,814
School Capital - Amortization	81,058	81,606	548
Total - Departmental Expenses	1,873,505	1,884,298	10,793
Additional Information:			
Ordinary Revenues	(236)	(8,656)	(8,420)
Fees and Other Charges	(2,323)	(1,225)	1,098
Ordinary Recoveries	(183,898)	(161,873)	22,025
Total – Revenues, Fees, and Recoveries	(186,457)	(171,754)	14,703
TCA Purchase Requirements	246,730	231,449	(15,281)
Funded Staff (# of FTEs)			
Department Funded Staff	211.8	198.6	(13.2)
Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation:			
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development expenses were \$10.8 million or 0.6 per cent higher than estimate primarily due to \$66 million for wage settlements and various operational pressures at			

RCEs and the CSAP; \$10.5 million for NSTU medical and dental premiums primarily due to a rate increase; \$4.8 million in Teachers' Pension Plan contributions; \$4.1 million in partially recoverable French Programs and Services funding; \$1.2 million for outdoor learning spaces, partially recoverable; and \$0.6 million to Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority. These increases were partially offset by \$38.0 million related to delays in implementing portions of the Early Childhood Educators compensation framework; \$25.0 million under the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, carried forward to next year; \$8.8 million in salary savings associated with the HRCE strike; \$3.1 million in the subsidy program due to lower than anticipated utilization; and \$2.4 million in the pre-primary program due to lower than anticipated expenses.

Revenue, Fees and Recoveries Variance Explanation:

Education and Early Childhood Development revenue, fees and recoveries were \$14.7 million or 7.9 per cent lower than estimate primarily due to cash flow changes in federal funding received from the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, funding to be carried forward into 2024/2025. This decrease is partially offset by increased funding received through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP), relating to projects that were carried into this fiscal from the prior year, and increased funding received under the Official Languages in Education Protocol (OLEP).

TCA Purchase Requirements Variance Explanation:

Education and Early Childhood Development TCA purchases were \$15.3 million or 6.2 per cent lower than estimate primarily related to modulars being implemented slower than anticipated due to sourcing and construction challenges. This decrease is partially offset by an increase in ICIP projects being completed that carried forward from previous years.

Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation:

FTE variance due to staff turnover and delays in refilling vacancies throughout the year.

Appendix: Disclosures of Wrongdoing received by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for the fiscal year 2023-24

The following is a summary of disclosures received by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development under section 18 of the *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act*:

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2023-24
The number of disclosures received	0
The number of findings of wrongdoing	0
Details of each wrongdoing	n/a
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing.	n/a