

- **The report has added** an additional two benchmarks for a total of 21; however, the total score remains at 15;
- **Benchmarks 11 & 12:** In addition to asking if a curriculum framework is in place it also establishes if its use is mandatory in licensed child care;
- **Benchmarks 17 & 18:** professional recognition and professional development have been separated and are now two separate benchmarks.
- **Benchmark 6:** Salaries of ECE *publicly 'managed'* replacing *'mandated'*.
- **Benchmark 9:** Following consultations with officials, the ECER 2020 will not include any early years programming that does not fall under P/T oversight.
- **Benchmark 5 & 7:** Funding for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) will be included under total ECEC funding if it is included within the ECEC budget.
- **Benchmark 14:** Two-thirds of staff must have a minimum of one year post-secondary level training in early childhood development in licensed child care programs.
- **Benchmark 19:** Previous iterations required public reporting every three years. This iteration requires yearly reporting as per the bilateral 2017 agreements.

# THE METHODOLOGY 2020

The reach of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is broad, encompassing the education, care, and well-being of young children. Early education is also central to family policy and is associated with economic development and productivity. It is linked to a range of equity issues, including women's employment and civic engagement, work and family balance, anti-poverty strategies, the promotion of social cohesion, and the settlement of new Canadians.

Reviews of early childhood education in Canada have traditionally focused on counting child care spaces and funding levels. Research has either evaluated child outcomes or the quality of programs offered. Until the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) 2004 review of ECEC in Canada, there had not been an extensive evaluation of the policy frameworks that shape the environments that providers and educators operate in and in which small children learn and are nurtured. The Early Childhood Education Report (ECER) was designed to fill this gap.

Reflecting on the main recommendation of [Early Years Study 3](#)—that all children should have access to high quality early childhood education—the ECER focuses on indicators promoting this goal. The ECER 2020 is the fourth status update on the policy provisions in early childhood education in Canada that support quality and access in early childhood education services.

The report defines early childhood education as programs for young children based on an explicit curriculum delivered by qualified staff and designed to support children's development and learning. Settings may include parent/child centres, childcare centres, nursery schools, preschools, or school-operated programs such as pre- or junior kindergarten, pre-primary, école maternelle, and kindergarten. Attendance is regular and children may participate on their own or with a parent or caregiver. When organized to support parents' labour force participation, early childhood education can also be a very cost-effective policy lever; returning socio-economic benefits greater than the service costs.

## DEVELOPING THE REPORT

The benchmarks for the ECER were established following an extensive review of monitoring tools developed in Canada and internationally, and in consultation with experts involved in the development of these measures. Nineteen benchmarks were identified and populated using an analysis of government publications and reports, Statistics Canada data (including population estimates), and customs runs from the Labour Force Survey. A profile of each province and territory (P/T) was developed using the above data, supplemented by key informant interviews with provincial and territorial officials (P/T) following round table discussions with ministerial officials, two new benchmarks were added for a new total of 21 benchmarks. Quebec's 2020 profile has again been developed under the direction of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development at the University of Montreal and Laval University. Draft profiles for each jurisdiction were developed and provided to officials for comment and modifications were incorporated. Assessments against the 21 benchmarks are determined in consultation with P/T officials. Current and past profiles of ECE policies and programming for P/T may be found under Provincial/Territorial Profiles on the ECEReport.ca website.

In earlier editions, insufficient data prevented the inclusion of the territories as well as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. However, following a cross-Canadian roundtable in June 2016, and with a commitment from all P/Ts, the 2017 and 2020 editions include all the territories. Insufficient data continues to prevent the inclusion of ECEC programs in First Nations communities. Hopefully the federal government's commitment to accountability through data collection and reporting will help address this longstanding deficiency.

Report authors meet with P/T ministry officials between report iterations in order to review the data collection process and update the benchmarks as new information and research comes to light. The research team met with PT officials on August 24th, 2018 at the Université de Moncton, New Brunswick to discuss changes that are reflected in the ECER 2020. Results reflected in the ECER and the P/T profiles were reviewed with each jurisdiction prior to the release.

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE OECD AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL MEASURES

The Starting Strong (OECD, 2006) analysis identified key elements of successful policy that were common to 20 member countries who took part in the OECD's review of their early education and care systems. The ECER is rooted in the recommendations of the OECD review.

While being guided by the OECD directions, the selection of benchmarks was limited by the availability of consistently collected data across Canadian jurisdictions and the likelihood that similar information would be available in the future to allow for ongoing monitoring. In some important areas, consistent data are not available across Canada. Benchmark thresholds were influenced by those established by UNICEF in 2008 to promote the potential for continued international comparisons, and those included in the UNESCO 2010 cross-national study on the integration of early childhood education and care (Kaga, Bennett & Moss, 2010).

Adapting the ECER to Canadian reality, all benchmark thresholds in the report have been achieved in at least one jurisdiction. The authors recognize that there is always sensitivity to monitoring and reluctance to make comparisons. Canada is a very large and highly diverse

country. However, in the development of other levels of education from elementary through to postsecondary, there has emerged a remarkable similarity based on shared values and research. Arm's length assessments are part of democratic oversight and allow the sharing of best practices, identification of gaps, and a push for better systems to improve outcomes for children. A parallel rationale exists for early childhood education. Indeed, all P/Ts already agree on a number of comparable inputs to promote program quality, including the need for staff qualifications, child/staff ratios, group size, and facility safety.

## THE ECER CATEGORIES

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The 21 benchmarks selected for the ECER are organized into five categories:

### **GOVERNANCE**

Four benchmarks explore policy and operational oversight—is governance split between multiple departments, or does it have coherent direction, a common policy framework with goals, timelines, and consistent support for service providers?

### **FUNDING**

Three benchmarks examine the adequacy of funding and its influence on supporting program quality, and equitable access.

### **ACCESS**

Three benchmarks assess the numbers of children attending ECE programs and if barriers to participation are addressed.

### **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Eight benchmarks examine whether curriculum and its use, program standards, and trained and adequately resourced staff support the quality of programming.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Three benchmarks assess whether jurisdictions are meeting their reporting commitments, have standards for program quality, and are monitoring and reporting child outcomes.

Each of the 5 categories is assigned 3 points for a total of 15. Points are assigned to provide equal weight to each category.

## ECER 2020

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All data for the present report is current up to and including March 31, 2020.

## **ATTAINING THE BENCHMARKS**

Benchmarks are not aspirational goals; instead, they express the basic requirements that jurisdictions should meet to establish and maintain acceptable quality and access in their early childhood systems. For this reason, partial marks are not assigned. For example, if a benchmark is weighted 0.5, the threshold is either attained (0.5) or not attained (0). A benchmark was reached if policies were in place by March 31st, 2020 or if the P/T has embarked on a particular initiative with a commitment to take it system-wide. Many jurisdictions have ambitious plans for their ECE systems, however if these policies were still in development, the benchmark was not attained. Although the report is current to March 31, 2020, new developments are highlighted in the introduction to each profile, with the exception of annual reports that were extended to March 31, 2021 due to COVID-19-related delays.

### **I. Benchmarks focused on governance for integrated early childhood education**

The OECD recommended that Canadian jurisdictions take steps to “build bridges between child care and kindergarten education, with the aim of integrating ECEC both at ground level and

at policy and management levels”.<sup>1</sup> Evaluations demonstrate the importance of assigning responsibility for young children to one ministry that combines policymaking, funding and regulatory powers. A single ministry/department facilitates the development of a common vision of early education, with agreed-upon objectives. Split administration tends to entrench child care as a welfare service with all its inherent weaknesses—poor public perception, poor funding and underpaid and undertrained staff. Canadian research reveals the cost returns from combining education and care at the service delivery level to support both child development and parents’ workforce participation. Common oversight also avoids the duplication of administrations and costs. From a pedagogical perspective, integrating education and care allows administrators and educators to better address the continuum of learning that begins at birth and continues throughout life.

#### **FOUR BENCHMARKS ARE ALLOCATED TO THE GOVERNANCE OF ECE SYSTEMS:**

##### ***Benchmark 1: ECEC under common department/ ministry (0.5 point)***

The minimum for the benchmark is a single ministry/department with oversight for child care as well as Kindergarten and other education-funded preschool programming.

##### ***Benchmark 2: Common ECEC supervisory unit (0.5 point)***

This benchmark examines if integration has gone beyond co-locating child care and Kindergarten under the same ministry roof while still operating as distinct entities. It assesses whether all ECEC services are under a common supervisory unit,

where specialized staff members have shared responsibilities for both public (school-offered) and private (child care/preschool) ECEC programs.

##### ***Benchmark 3: Common ECEC policy framework (1 point)***

Administrators, systems managers, and educators require a clearly communicated policy direction, with vision, objectives, timelines, and benchmarks to guide their work. The minimum for this benchmark determines if policy directions encompass both education and child care/preschool, aligning them to support the learning continuum.

##### ***Benchmark 4: Common authority for ECEC management and administration (1 point)***

The integration of policy frameworks at the P/T level should be reflected in service management and delivery on the ground, thereby removing the necessity for parents and children to navigate between service silos. All ECEC services, both public and private, should link to a common authority responsible for supporting standards reflected in P/T policies. Authorities would be responsible for organizing ECEC service delivery to facilitate smooth transitions from preschool into Kindergarten and the primary grades. It is acknowledged that there are many collaborative tables including education and children’s service providers. These bodies are not mandated to direct systems delivery or enforce quality standards. The benchmark requires governance with this level of authority.

#### **II. Benchmarks focused on funding to promote quality, access and equity**

The OECD noted Canada’s market-determined fee structure for child care results in high parent fees and an inefficient subsidy system with widely varying and complex eligibility criteria. It encouraged

<sup>1</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Directorate for Education. (2004). Early childhood care and education policy: Canada country note. Paris, FR: OECD Secretariat (page 6).

Canadian jurisdictions to “devise an efficient means of funding a universal early childhood service”.<sup>2</sup> There is a general consensus across the OECD countries that substantial government investment is necessary to support a sustainable system of high quality, affordable services (OECD, 2006). Without strong government investment and involvement, it is difficult to achieve broad system aims, such as child health and well-being, equitable access, social inclusion, and quality learning goals. Funding levels are important, but how services are funded also makes a difference. A universal approach appears to be more effective at including children from low-income families. Mixed enrollment in ECEC is also associated with better-quality outcomes than programs targeted to children from low-income families. Direct funding to programs appears to have a positive impact on staff wages and program stability, whereas funding through fee subsidies or tax transfers has fewer positive effects. Since fee subsidies to parents seldom reflect the actual cost of child care, they tend to hold down staff wages, leave a gap between the subsidy parents receive, and the fees programs must charge. This can exclude low-income families from using ECEC centres. Three benchmarks look at funding levels and how funds are directed:

### **THREE BENCHMARKS ARE ALLOCATED TO THE FUNDING OF ECE SYSTEMS:**

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#### ***Benchmark 5: At least two-thirds of child care funding goes to program operations (1 point)***

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Percentage allocations to program operations, special needs integration, and parent fee subsidies are determined through public reporting. Funding for children with special needs is included as part of operations, since most jurisdictions deliver this funding to child care programs rather than through direct subsidies to parents. Funding for Autism

Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is included as part of the overall budget if ASD funding is allocated through the ECEC budget. The two-thirds benchmark for program funding was chosen because it is associated with greater system stability when centres receive direct operational funding.

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#### ***Benchmark 6: Managed salary and fee scale (1 point)***

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Many jurisdictions subsidize staff wages. This benchmark reflects provincial policies establishing a parent maximum fee scale and a minimum wage scale for educators. Such policies contain the market nature of child care funding and delivery.

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#### ***Benchmark 7: At least 3 per cent of P/T budget is devoted to early childhood education (1 point)***

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Percentages were calculated using total 2019/2020 spending estimates to March 31, 2020 as stated in government budget documents. ECEC spending includes total 2019/2020 estimates for the operation of licensed child care for infants to school aged, Kindergarten, pre-Kindergarten, and other early education services, including school-based parent/caregiver/child programs. Following roundtable discussion with P/T officials, major capital funding is included. Funding for ASD is included if funding is allocated through the ECEC budget.

In Ontario, 47 service managers (Consolidated Municipal Service Managers [CMSMs] and District Social Services Administration Boards [DSSABs]) are designated under the *Child Care and Early Years Act* to manage and contribute financially to child care services. The CMSMs/DSSABs portion of Ontario early years funding was calculated by reviewing their budgets and is included as part of the province’s total public expenditures on ECEC.

2 Ibid., p. 72.

The 2020 estimates for Kindergarten and education-offered programs were obtained from government documents or informant interviews. Where Kindergarten funding was not specified, estimates were made based on Kindergarten and pre-Kindergarten enrolment multiplied by per pupil spending in elementary schools and, if applicable, pro-rated for half-time programs. Spending on ECEC programs at 3 per cent of P/T budget was chosen as a benchmark because it approaches the 1 percent of GDP that is considered a minimum investment for the care and education of young children (UNICEF, 2008). It represents a modest and fair share for children in their early years.

### III. Benchmarks focused on equitable access

The OECD recommended Canada to “continue efforts to expand access while promoting greater equity”.<sup>3</sup> Equitable access is associated more with entitlement programs such as Kindergarten. However, Kindergarten does not address parents’ need for care beyond the school day/year. Equity is but one more of the benefits of organizing ECEC to meet the educational needs of children, at the same time as facilitating parents’ workforce participation. Barriers to ECEC participation are many: economic, geographical, cultural, language, hours of service, and the special needs of children. One area where all jurisdictions have made an effort is by targeting resources to enable programs to include children with special needs.

#### **THREE BENCHMARKS ARE ALLOCATED TO ACCESS TO ECE PROGRAMS:**

#### ***Benchmark 8: Full-day kindergarten offered (1 point)***

Kindergarten is the sole early education program that is universally available across Canada. Full-day Kindergarten for 5-year-olds has become the norm across Canada; it is now offered by 9 out of 13

jurisdictions. Full-day Kindergarten also reflects the duration threshold, which research indicates is more likely to improve academic and social outcomes for children (Reynolds, 2011).

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#### ***Benchmark 9: Fifty percent of 2 to 4-year olds regularly attend an ECEC program (1 point)***

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This benchmark focuses on 2- to 4-year olds, the group for which there is high unmet demand for ECEC. Five-year olds are excluded since the majority attend Kindergarten. Infants are a less likely group to participate in ECEC programs because of parental leave. Determining the accurate enrolment of children in ECEC programs is challenging. Schools report enrolment numbers. Child care maintains a record of spaces, which may be vacant or used by more than one child, while other programs report capacity.

The number of 2- to 4-year olds attending ECEC programs is estimated using government reports of school offered pre-Kindergarten programs including StrongStart programs in British Columbia, child care, nursery school, and Aboriginal Head Start availability. Early years programs that fall outside public oversight are not included, for example, unlicensed preschools in Saskatchewan.

The ECER collects access data using three age groups: birth to <24 months, 24 months to <5 years, and 5 years. Jurisdictions often collect access data using different age groupings than used in the ECER. Therefore, the report corrects for overlapping age groups.

The report also adjusts to avoid double counting children attending both school-based programs and licensed child care. Consider a jurisdiction where 50% of four-year-olds attend Junior Kindergarten. The 2-to-4-year-old group used in the report contains three age cohorts (2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 8.



Four-year olds therefore occupy approximately one-third of all child care spaces in this age group. If 50% of 4-year-old children attend JK, that percentage will be used to subtract from the number of child care spaces for the associated age group. For example, if there are 1,500 spaces for all 2-to-4-year olds, approximately 500 (one-third) will be used by 4-year-olds. Based on the above formula, 50% of the 4-year old spaces, or, 250 spaces, will be subtracted from the 1,500 total to ensure that the same child is not counted in child care and again in the school-based program.

If number of spaces for Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) is not available in a jurisdiction, the number of spaces is estimated by multiplying the number of AHS centres by 25. The federal government funds a maximum of 25 spaces per centre.

UNICEF's benchmark is set at 80 percent of 4-year-olds regularly attending an ECEC program and 25 percent of children under 3-years old. Fifty percent of 2 to 4-year olds represents a reasonable and achievable interim benchmark for Canada.

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***Benchmark 10: Funding is conditional on including children with special needs (1 point)***

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The threshold for this benchmark is P/T policy that requires programs to give equal consideration to the enrollment of children with special needs as a condition of funding. Funding as an incentive without policy directions does not provide parents with recourse if their child is excluded from participation.

#### IV. Benchmarks focusing on quality in the early learning environment

Well-established research confirms that quality in early education programs depends on responsive staff, trained in child development, and resourced and valued for the work they do. This part of the

ECER looks at progress in this area. Is there an evidence-based curriculum to guide the work of educators? Is the use of the curriculum mandatory? Is it aligned with the school curriculum to support children's transition into school? Are educators in all ECEC settings trained in early childhood development? Are salaries and recognition reflective of the important work educators do? Is professional certification and development required?

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***EIGHT BENCHMARKS ARE ALLOCATED TO THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT OF ECE PROGRAMS:***

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***Benchmark 11: An early childhood curriculum/framework (0.25 point)***

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ECEC curriculum frameworks are organic documents resulting from the best available research and broad consultation. They are holistic and child-centred, with clear goals across a range of developmental areas to which educators and children can aspire. The primary role of parents is recognized and parents are welcomed as partners in their children's learning. The report determines if P/Ts have developed a curriculum framework for early education settings. The threshold does not require the use of the curriculum in all ECEC settings.

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***Benchmark 12: ECEC curriculum framework use is mandatory (0.25 point)***

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The benefits of a curriculum framework occur only if their guidance is utilized. This benchmark is reached if the curriculum framework is required for use in licensed child care.

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***Benchmark 13: Alignment of early childhood framework with kindergarten (0.5 point)***

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Children move from preschool into Kindergarten at different ages and stages of development. The

Kindergarten and child care curriculum frameworks should align to reflect this. This benchmark is reached if the curricula for both Kindergarten and child care acknowledge the need to support the transition and/or if there are standalone guides to support the transition.

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***Benchmark 14: Programs for 2 to 4-year olds require at least two-thirds of staff to have ECE qualifications (0.5 point)***

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Child/staff ratios across jurisdictions are quite similar, but the number of qualified staff required by policy or regulation varies widely. For this benchmark, qualified represents the period of post-secondary training P/T regulation considers necessary to be recognized as a qualified staff member in an ECEC setting. It is acknowledged that ECE qualifications are not standard across jurisdictions. UNICEF recommends at least 50 percent of staff have three or more years of post-secondary training and 80 percent of staff working directly with children have post-secondary training in child development. No Canadian jurisdiction meets this UNICEF standard. This benchmark requires two-thirds of staff to have a minimum of one year of post-secondary level training in early childhood development.

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***Benchmark 15: Kindergarten educators require ECE qualifications (0.5 point)***

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Public Kindergarten is the dominant form of ECEC provision. For many children it will be their only preschool experience. Quality in ECEC settings depends on educators trained to understand the developmental needs of young children. A review of P/T policies determined if ECE training is required for educators in Kindergarten classrooms. For example, Prince Edward Island requires its Kindergarten educators to obtain a teaching certificate with an early childhood education specialty. Ontario was recognized because its legislated staffing model

for full-day junior and senior Kindergarten requires at least one staff member to be a registered early childhood education. A two-year early childhood education diploma is an acceptable qualification to teach junior kindergarten in the Northwest Territories.

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***Benchmark 16: Salaries of early childhood educators (ECEs) are at least two-thirds of teacher salaries (0.5 point)***

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Low compensation levels for ECEs are recognized in the literature as contributing to recruitment and retention challenges, which in turn impact the quality of ECEC programming. The compensation gap between elementary school teachers and ECEs reflects the challenge. These issues become more evident as ECEs move into school settings to work alongside teachers. This benchmark looks at the salary gap between teachers and ECEs by jurisdiction as an indicator of the relative value placed on the professions. In previous editions of the ECER the teacher salary was selected from the top of negotiated salary grids. However, this is not representative of most teachers. The rates for teacher salaries for the 2017 and 2020 ECER were therefore obtained from available current P/T collective agreements. For the ECER 2020, if collective agreements were not available, teacher salaries were obtained from the British Columbia Teacher's Federation summary of P/T salaries at category Level 5.<sup>4</sup> ECE salaries were obtained from government sources. Where information was not available, a custom run of the Labour Force Survey provided 2019 hourly wages for self-identified ECEs with post-secondary qualifications employed in the sector. The hourly rate was used to estimate full-time annual salaries (40 hours x 52 weeks). The two-thirds benchmark reflects a salary gap between the two professions based on differences in educational requirements.

4 British Columbia's Teacher's Federation. Teacher Salaries Across Canada. How Does BC Compare? Retrieved from: <https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/Research/Reports/Cross-Canada%20teacher%20salaries.pdf>



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**Benchmark 17: ECE professional certification is required (0.25 point)**

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Registration, certification and classification are all processes that provide official recognition as an ECE and enable the registrant to work in an early childhood education program. These processes are proxies for the value placed on the profession. This benchmark reflects P/T policies requiring professional registration of ECEs as a condition of practice.

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**Benchmark 18: ECE professional development is required (0.25 point)**

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Ongoing professional development is critical to maintaining a workforce that is knowledgeable about current child development and educational practices and is closely associated with high-quality early childhood settings. This benchmark reflects regular professional development as a condition of maintaining good standing in the ECE profession.

**V. Benchmarks focused on accountability**

Monitoring is an integral part of democratic accountability to children, families and the public. It is essential for informed decision-making, ensuring that societal resources are deployed productively, resources distributed equitably, and social goals reached. The challenge is to develop monitoring systems that capture how programs are operating, how children are developing and if system goals are being met. Monitoring on its own does not deliver results, although it is a crucial part of a larger system designed to achieve them.

 **THREE BENCHMARKS ARE ALLOCATED TO ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ECE SYSTEMS/PROGRAMS:**

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**Benchmark 19: Annual progress reports are current and posted (yearly) (1 point)**

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Federal/provincial/territorial (FTP) early childhood agreements include annual reporting by each jurisdiction on progress made in meeting the terms of the agreements. All P/Ts signed the Multilateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care with the federal government in March of 2017 agreeing to report on indicators of quality, such as training requirements, child/ caregiver ratios and group size, where available, number of programs designed to serve children from diverse populations, including but not limited to minority communities, Indigenous people off-reserve, new Canadians, and refugees, and the number/proportion of children from low-income and middle-class families participating in early learning, and child care programs.

Bilateral agreements were then developed between P/Ts and the federal government (with the exception of Quebec<sup>5</sup>) committing to providing annual reports posted by October 1st of each fiscal year (see Section 5.2 of bilateral agreements). Through the bilateral agreements P/Ts have agreed to report to the federal government the results and expenditures of early learning, child care programs, and services attributable to the federal funding provided, and to continue to provide data on numbers of children benefiting from subsidies, number of licensed early learning and child care spaces (by age of child, and type of setting); impact of families in need, including those with limited access, and remote areas.

The minimum benchmark proposed is that the responsible ministry/department/agency has published a comprehensive report on ECEC services as per the agreements. In light of COVID-19 and the pressures of the pandemic on data collection, the date for this benchmark was extended to March 31, 2021.

5 While the Government of Québec supports the general principles of the Early Learning and Child Care Framework, it does not adhere to the Framework as it intends to preserve its sole responsibility in this area on its territory. The Government of Québec expects to receive its share of the federal funding and will continue to invest significantly toward programs and services for families and children.

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### ***Benchmark 20: Facilities Standards for ECEC programs (including kindergarten) (1 point)***

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Learning outcomes cannot be considered apart from children’s experience in ECEC settings. Standards governing health and safety, and facilities, are important minimums for all early childhood education programs. Also important are standards outlining class size, pedagogical practices, implementation of curriculum goals and the set-up of the learning environment that are reflected in other benchmarks of quality therein. The benchmark proposes that jurisdictions recognize facilities standards for all early childhood education settings including kindergarten.

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### ***Benchmark 21: Population measures for preschool children collected and reported (1 point)***

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Public reporting informs communities about how their children are doing and what can be done to improve children’s early learning environments. The minimum benchmark is that a P/T has used the Early Development Instrument or an equivalent tool, and reported on the findings at least once in the past three years. In light of COVID-19, many jurisdictions may have cancelled data collection for this year due to pandemic pressures, school, and centre closures.

## **NEXT STEPS FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION REPORT**

The five equally weighted categories in the report and their benchmarks reflect current research, and international reports. System-level indices comparing jurisdictions must balance the desire for appropriate, comparable data, and the reality of what is available. The content validity of the ECER appears to be good. It is a tool for conversations about success and challenges, and is a support for advocacy efforts.

The ECER is housed at the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The Centre regularly brings together academic expertise to further review the Report and improve aspects of its validity. It hosts a number of conferences, roundtables, and reviews to delve more deeply into the individual benchmarks. To date the Centre has reviewed integrated governance, population monitoring, early learning curriculum frameworks, quality monitoring, access, and the status of the early childhood workforce. Reports and presentations are available on the Atkinson Centre website.

Awareness of the importance of development in early childhood has caught the attention of policy makers and they have responded. This is an important start. However, we cannot overlook the limited number of benchmarks the report is able to populate and the constraints that exclude First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. The modesty of the thresholds reflects the persistence of low standards and investments in ECEC across the country. Yet there are reasons for optimism. Much progress has been made since the OECD’s international review exposed Canada as an ECEC laggard, not all of which can be captured in a single report.

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