



EARLY CHILDHOOD :
THE QUALITY
OF EDUCATIONAL
SERVICES
IN QUEBEC

Highlights

A photograph of two young children sitting on the floor and playing with colorful alphabet blocks. The child on the left is a young Black girl with curly hair, wearing a light blue polo shirt and a green skirt. She is holding a green block with the letter 'B' on it. The child on the right is a young white girl with blonde hair, wearing a pink lace-trimmed shirt and blue jeans. She is holding a yellow block with the letter 'M' on it. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting.

WHY DO WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES?



Childcare is the daily experience that has the most influence on children's development and well-being. The first few years of a child's life are particularly critical for their development.

Children's brains develop rapidly when they are very young, making them much more receptive to stimulation. For example, the area of the brain responsible for language reaches maximum sensitivity between 1 and 2 years of age, while the area responsible for numeracy is particularly sensitive before the age of 4.

Since educational daycare centres and preschool programs take advantage of this window of opportunity, they can have a positive impact on children's overall health and development, provided they are of good quality. The time spent by children in educational services complements the stimulation they receive at home from their families.

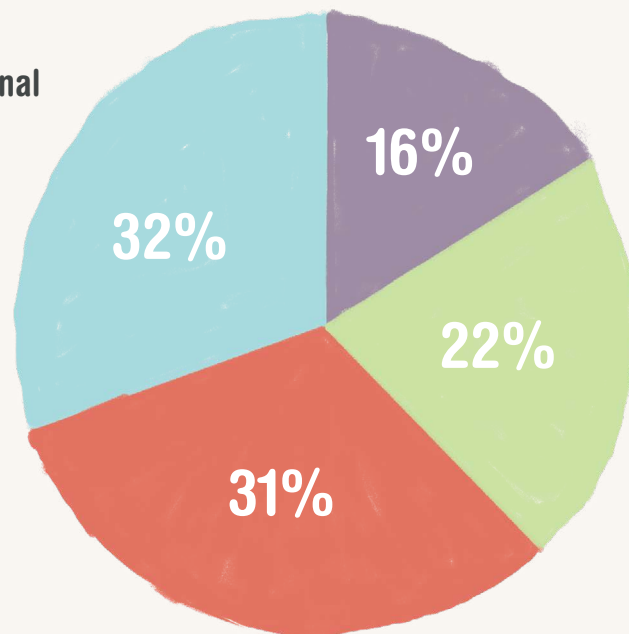
Educational daycare centres and preschool programs in Quebec

To foster the overall development and educational success of young children, Quebec offers educational childcare services recognized by the *Ministère de la Famille*. In 2014, 56.9% of all children under 5 years of age were enrolled in this type of service.

Distribution of spaces in educational daycare centres recognized by the *Ministère de la Famille**

As at December 31, 2017

- Early childcare centres (CPEs)
- Subsidized daycare
- Non-subsidized daycare
- Home childcare



* Since these figures have been rounded off, their total may be greater or less than 100%.

Since 2013, full-day kindergarten classes for 4-year-olds have been set up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to improve children's school-readiness, prevent dropping out later on, and to fight poverty. These classes were added to half-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes that had existed since the 1970s.

Reduced contribution spaces (CPEs, home childcare, subsidized daycares) <i>December 31, 2017</i>	Spaces in non-subsidized daycares <i>December 31, 2017</i>	Children in full-day 4-year-old kindergarten <i>2016-2017</i>	Children in half-day 4-year-old kindergarten <i>2016-2017</i>
233,291	65,782	2,256^p	4,279^p

p: Provisional data for 2016-2017

Enrolment in educational childcare services

Educational childcare services are less frequented in certain regions of Quebec: Lanaudière, Centre-du-Québec, Côte-Nord, Bas-Saint-Laurent and Abitibi-Témiscamingue. The distribution of spaces in the different types of educational childcare also varies from region to region.

Studies have shown, however, that fewer children from disadvantaged areas attend CPEs. Reasons provided by parents include lack of spaces, cost of service, location and lack of flexibility in services offered.

In 2011, on the Island of Montreal, the number of spaces in CPEs for children between 1 and 5 was generally lower in more disadvantaged sectors.

Educational childcare services

A few definitions

Recognized daycare centres

These are daycare services recognized under the Educational Childcare Act. In order to provide care for more than six children, they must hold a permit from the *Ministère de la Famille* or be recognized by an accredited home childcare coordinating office. All regulated services are required to offer an educational program.

Regulated daycare services include:

- early childcare centres
- subsidized daycare centres
- non-subsidized daycare centres
- educational home childcare providers recognized by a Home Childcare Coordinating Office

Preschool education programs

These programs are under the jurisdiction of the Quebec *Ministère de l'éducation et de l'enseignement supérieur*.

They include:

- half-day 4-year-old kindergarten
- full-day 4-year-old kindergarten in disadvantaged neighbourhoods
- full-day 5-year-old kindergarten
- the Passe-Partout program

Only 4-year-old kindergartens are covered in this document.

Other types of daycare services

Unregulated daycare services

Certain types of establishments described in the Educational Childcare Act, such as before- and after-school care and services offered by community organizations (under certain conditions), are not under the jurisdiction of the Act.

Unrecognized daycare services

Childcare provided to six children or less in a private home by a person who respects a series of conditions stipulated in the Educational Childcare Act. These services are not required to offer an educational program.

Although unregulated and unrecognized daycares may offer educational services, they are not required to offer an actual educational program. These types of services are not covered in this document.

In this document, educational childcare services include educational daycare and 4-year-old kindergarten.

How does the quality of educational childcare services affect children's development?

Educational services can influence several aspects of children's development.

Social and moral development

- Frequent contact with other children under the supervision of an educator/teacher teaches children how to initiate relationships with others, put themselves in another's place and resolve conflicts.
- Living in a group helps children learn to distinguish right from wrong.

Physical and motor development

- Children's movements during games develops their motor skills: agility, endurance and balance. They learn how to sit, crawl, walk and run.
- Drawing, colouring and crafts help develop their fine motor skills.

Language development

- Living in a group teaches children how to communicate their needs and ask questions.
- Talking and listening to their educator/teacher improves children's pronunciation and vocabulary.





Cognitive development

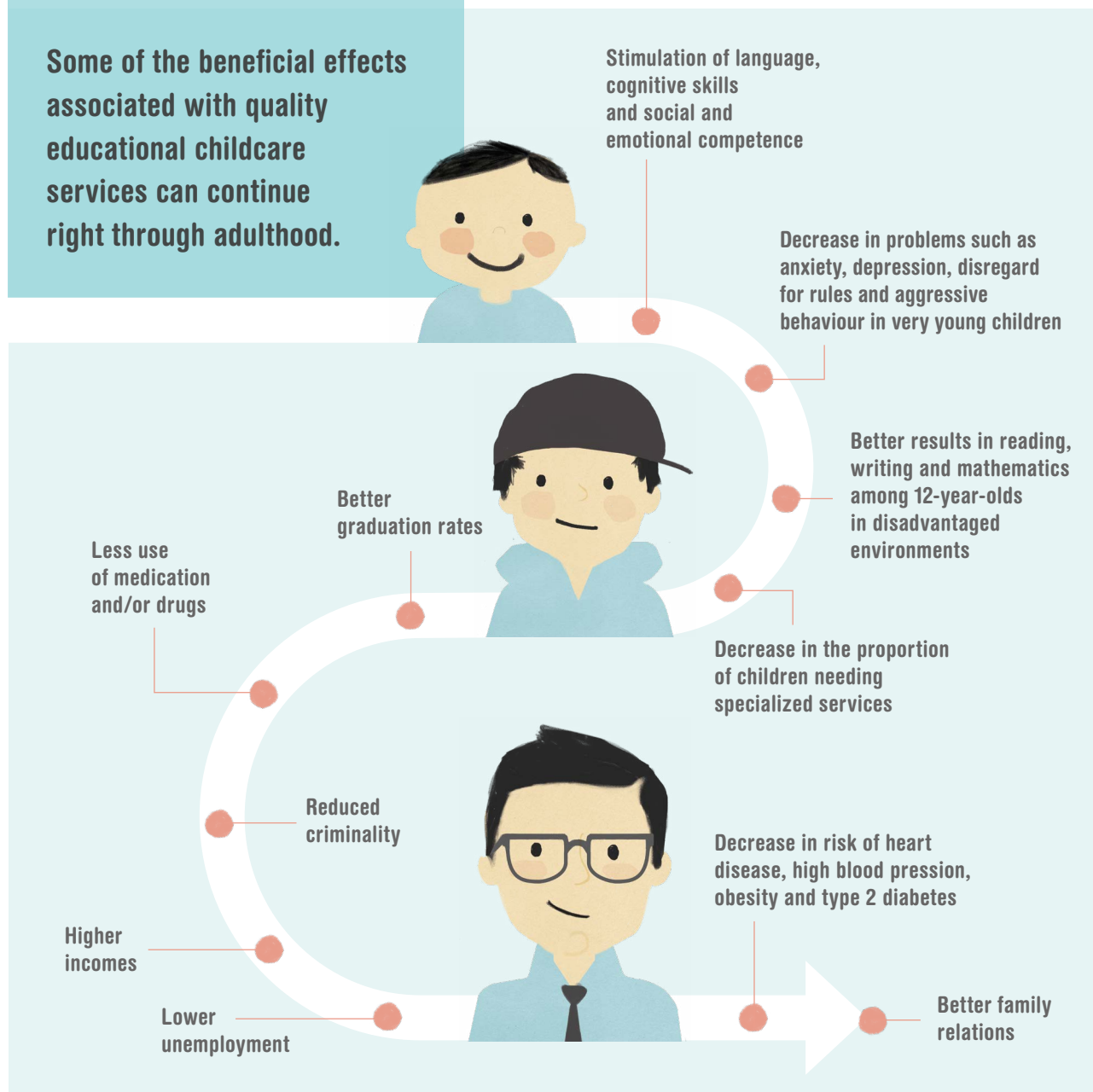
- The material and activities offered promote the acquisition of knowledge while helping children to understand the world around them.
- The educator/teacher encourages children to reflect and develop their creativity.

Affective development

- When their educator/teacher responds quickly to children's needs, it helps them develop a sense of security.
- When the educator/teacher puts children's emotions into words, they learn how to express their emotions and develop self-confidence.

In order to have a positive impact on children's development, the educational childcare services offered to the very young must be of superior quality.

Some of the beneficial effects associated with quality educational childcare services can continue right through adulthood.



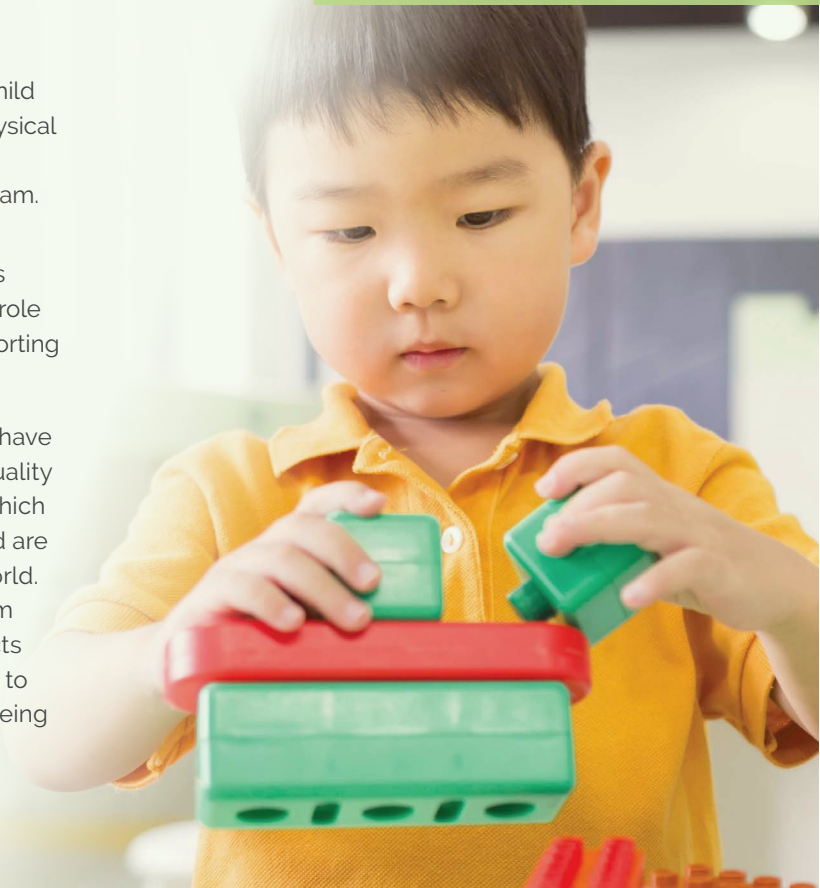
HOW CAN QUALITY BE MEASURED?

Quality must be approached from what is in the child's best interest. In order for an experience in educational childcare to be qualified as "high quality," it has to foster children's overall development.

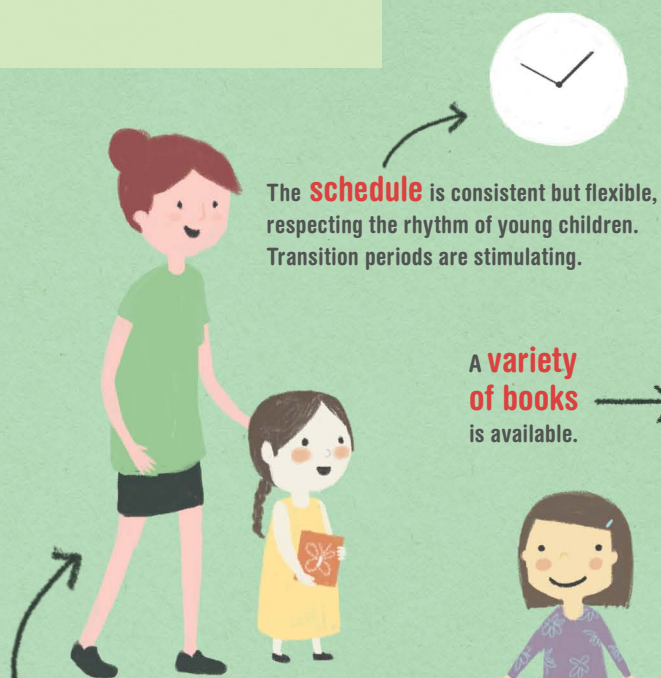
The quality of educational childcare service can be evaluated based on two types of criteria:

- **Quality of structure:** educator-child ratio, group size, staff training, physical surroundings, available material, presence of an educational program.
- **Quality of processes:** diversity of activities, quality of interactions between the educator and child, role of educational personnel in supporting play, relationship with parents.

Several different evaluation scales have been developed to measure the quality of educational services, some of which have been validated by studies and are used elsewhere throughout the world. Although the criteria used vary from one scale to another, certain aspects considered to be especially critical to children's development and well-being are common to all of them.



Key requirements for quality educational childcare



The **schedule** is consistent but flexible, respecting the rhythm of young children. Transition periods are stimulating.

A **variety of books** is available.



The **outdoor play area** is well organized. Equipment is accessible, safe and allows for free play. The value of outdoor games is recognized.

The **educator/teacher:**

- is familiar with and adapts to each child's level of development
- respects and supports children's games
- encourages independence
- provides clear instructions
- is attentive to children's needs and responds kindly
- encourages children to reflect
- deals appropriately with disruptive behaviour
- uses a rich vocabulary when talking to children.

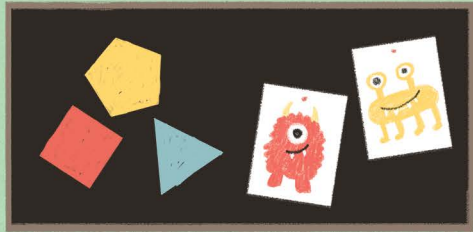


Children learn how to play together and resolve their conflicts.

Material provided encourages development (language, logic, motricity, creativity, etc.) and represents the cultural diversity of children's families.



The **premises** are safe, well lit and well maintained.



Food is healthy and varied, and the atmosphere at mealtimes is relaxed.

Furniture is child-sized.

Free play is encouraged, with children allowed to make choices. A variety of activities is offered (art, music, science, role-play, etc.).



The educator/teacher collaborates with **parents** to ensure children's well-being.



All **staff members** respect good hygiene practices and encourage young children to develop good habits.



The quality of educational childcare services in Quebec: An overview

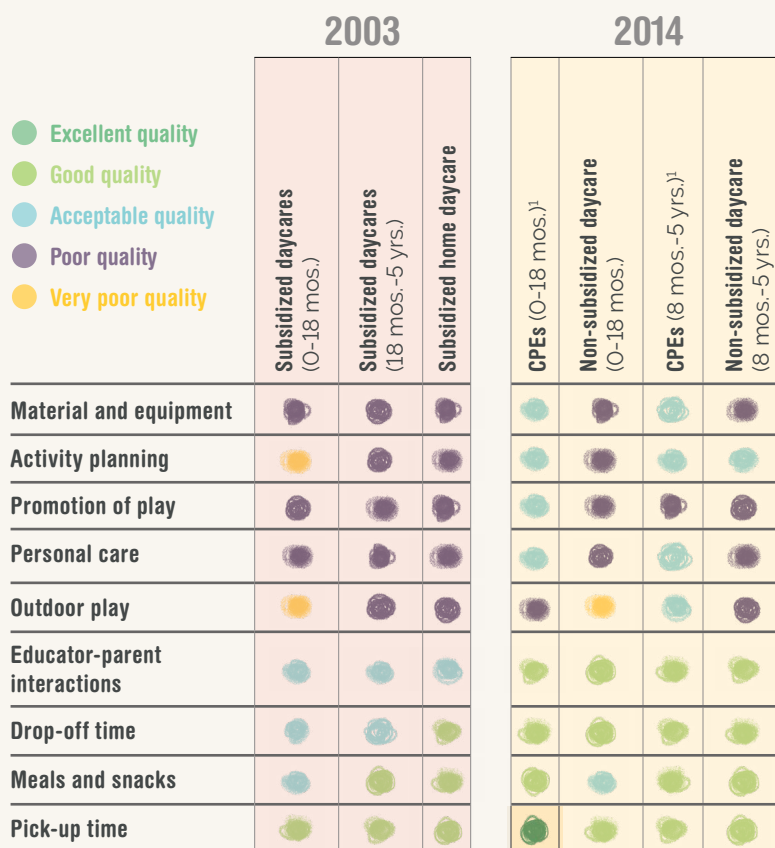
Even though most educational daycares obtained an average acceptable rating, a significant number of Quebec children are attending educational childcare facilities of poor or very poor quality. This proportion is relatively low in the case of CPEs, however.

Between 2003 and 2014, however, there was no significant improvement in the overall quality of CPEs. Since CPEs were the only type of service evaluated by both editions of the survey, it was not possible to determine how quality had evolved in other environments.

1. Only the most recent results (from the 2014 survey) are presented for CPEs.

Educational daycare centres

Quebec surveys on the quality of educational daycare called *Grandir en qualité* conducted in 2003 and 2014 by the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* showed that, on the whole, daycare centres were of **acceptable quality**, with the exception of CPE nurseries (*pouponnières*), which were rated "good." Certain individual aspects scored very poorly, however, while others were good or excellent, as shown below.






Full-day 4-year-old kindergarten in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

An evaluation of the interactions between teachers and students was conducted by a team from the Université du Québec en Outaouais between 2012 and 2016 in five full-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes².



Aspects evaluated



High quality	
	Emotional support





Moderate quality	
	Instructional support
	Classroom organization

The quality of 4-year-old kindergarten classes was also evaluated by a team from the Université du Québec à Montréal in 2015 in 15 full-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes³.



Aspects evaluated

Minimal quality	
	Language and reasoning stimulation
	Interactions

Inadequate quality	
	Space and furnishings
	Quality of outdoor games
	Activities offered
	Program structure

The research team concluded that the quality of the educational environment in the full-time 4-year-old kindergarten classes they evaluated was **generally very low**.

2. Since this was an implementation evaluation and the number of classes assessed was small, these results may not be representative of all full-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes that existed at the time.

3. Since the research team observed only 15 groups very shortly after the implementation of the first full-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes, these results cannot be considered representative of all kindergarten classes at the time.



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES?

The scientific literature has shown that certain conditions can be implemented to enable daycares and preschools to offer better quality services. The needs of young children are the same in any environment.

Staff training

Studies have shown the importance of having well-trained personnel. Educators with a high level of initial training offer children better personal care, are more sensitive to their needs and interact more with them. Educators with specialized training in early childhood offer children a stimulating environment that meets their needs. This kind of training teaches educators how to plan activities and set up an environment that better supports children's social, language and cognitive development.

In its 2017 report, the *Commission sur l'éducation à la petite enfance* (Early Childhood Education Commission) recommended that educational personnel working in educational childcare services hold a *diplôme d'études collégiales* (diploma of college studies, or DEC) in Early Childhood Education as an initial basic training. The Commission also recommended that all new providers of home childcare services also hold a DEC.

Under Quebec law, once CPEs and daycares (subsidized or not) have been in operation for five years after obtaining their licence, they must ensure that two-thirds of their educational personnel is qualified (one-third during the first five years). In other words, they must have a DEC (diploma of college studies from a CEGEP) in child education techniques or the equivalent.

Service providers in home childcare facilities must have received at least 45 hours of training within the three years preceding their application. They are also required to obtain six hours of professional development training every year.

Working conditions of educational personnel

Certain surveys conducted in educational childcare services noted that educators' working conditions had an influence on the quality of the establishment. The overall score was higher when educators perceived their work as stimulating and challenging, had time to plan their teaching activities and were satisfied with their relationships with management personnel.

Structure of educational service

The scientific literature has shown that the following factors could also have an impact on the quality of services received by children in daycare:

- Adult-child ratio
- Group size
- Physical layout
- Material and equipment
- Presence of an educational program

Quebec CPEs and daycares may not accept more than 80 children per establishment. The required educator-child ratios are as follows:

- 1:5 for children under 18 months
- 1:8 for children between 18 months and 4 years
- 1:10 for 4-year-olds

In 4-year-old kindergarten, one teacher may have up to 18 children in the class.

Conditions for setting up educational services

Studies conducted have shown that the following conditions for setting up educational services promoted the quality of services offered:

- Government funding or not-for-profit operation
- Integration of educational services with other services offered in the community (like health services and social services)
- Parents' involvement in the running of the educational service (sitting on the board of directors of the educational service, for example)

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) calculates that an investment equivalent to 1% of GDP is necessary to ensure quality early childhood education. In Quebec, that would represent an investment of \$3.76 billion.

According to James Heckman, winner of the Nobel prize in economics, money invested in early childhood offers the best rate of return on investment.





POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS TO PROMOTE QUALITY

The importance of quality in educational services has been recognized by several Quebec policies and frameworks. Here are just a few:

Stratégie relative aux services éducatifs offerts aux enfants de 0 à 8 ans – Tout pour nos enfants (2018)

(Strategy for educational services offered to children between 0 and 8 years of age)

This strategy, developed in connection with the Policy on Educational Success, is aimed at acting as early as possible in children's educational lives, consolidating the various educational interventions involved, and facilitating the many transitions that children go through during this period. It also sets up conditions to ensure that young children are supported by accessible, quality educational environments that foster their well-being and meet their needs.

An Act to improve the educational quality and foster the harmonious development of educational childcare services (2017)

This Act makes participation in an evaluation and quality improvement process mandatory. Under this Act, the government may now determine, by regulation, any element or service to be included in the educational program, establish a single educational program and determine which childcare providers are required to apply it, and provide for program equivalencies. Finally, the Act recognizes the importance of the role of educational childcare services in children's educational success.

Quebec government preventive health policy (2016)

The objective of the *Politique gouvernementale de prévention en santé* is to increase to 80% the percentage of children who start 5-year-old kindergarten without developmental vulnerability. To support and improve children's overall development, this policy also promotes access to educational childcare services for families in disadvantaged areas and supports improvements to the quality of educational childcare services.

Gazelle et Potiron framework (2014)

Developed by the Quebec *Ministère de la Famille*, this framework aims to improve the overall development of children under five years of age through healthy diet, active play and motor development. It consists of 12 orientations that encourage the development of good eating habits and taking advantage of all opportunities to be physically active.

CONCLUSION

Offering our children quality educational services

Educational childcare services offer many advantages for early child development, particularly in the case of children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. They must be of good quality, however, if they are going to make a positive contribution to children's development.

Studies conducted over the past few years have revealed certain quality issues in all types of educational childcare services and 4-year-old kindergarten in Quebec.

The scientific literature has demonstrated the existence of factors that could improve the quality of education childcare services. Some of these factors are associated with a higher quality of educational childcare services, such as educator/teacher training and working conditions. Group size, the adult-child ratio and communication with parents can also have a positive impact on the quality of certain educational services for the very young.

Offering young children quality educational environments helps to ensure that the citizens of tomorrow have the opportunity to develop their full potential.

**Every child deserves the chance
to develop their full potential**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Early Childhood Observatory has produced a series of documents on the quality of educational childcare services in Quebec:



An information **video** to raise public awareness



A comprehensive 59-page **report**



An information **brochure** for decision-makers



Visuals for your presentations or use on social media

Consult our complete report on the quality of educational childcare services at

tout-petits.org/qualite

OBSERVATOIRE des tout-petits

The mission of the Early Childhood Observatory is to help ensure that the development and well-being of Quebec's very youngest children has a place on the province's list of social priorities. In order to do so, the Observatory compiles the most rigorous data on early childhood (from pregnancy to 5 years of age) which it then disseminates to incite dialogue on collective actions in this area.



Fondation Lucie
et André Chagnon