



**EARLY CHILDHOOD:
THE QUALITY
OF EDUCATIONAL
CHILDCARE
SERVICES
IN QUEBEC**

OBSERVATOIRE
des tout-petits

 Fondation Lucie
et André Chagnon

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HIGHLIGHTS

Why is it important to talk about the quality of educational childcare services¹?

The first few years of a child's life are particularly critical for their development. Children's brains develop very rapidly when they are very young, making them much more receptive to stimulation.

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, acting in complementarity with the role of their parents.

What do we know about the quality of our educational daycare centres and preschool programs?

Surveys conducted in Quebec since the early 2000s reveal issues related to the quality of all types of educational childcare in the province. A fairly significant proportion of young children are attending facilities of poor or very poor quality. This proportion is relatively low, however, in CPEs (provincially subsidized educational childcare centres). Studies carried out in kindergartens for 4-year-olds have also revealed certain problems related to quality.

The overall quality of CPEs has not significantly improved since the early 2000s. Moreover, certain aspects identified as needing improvement remained unchanged. 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.

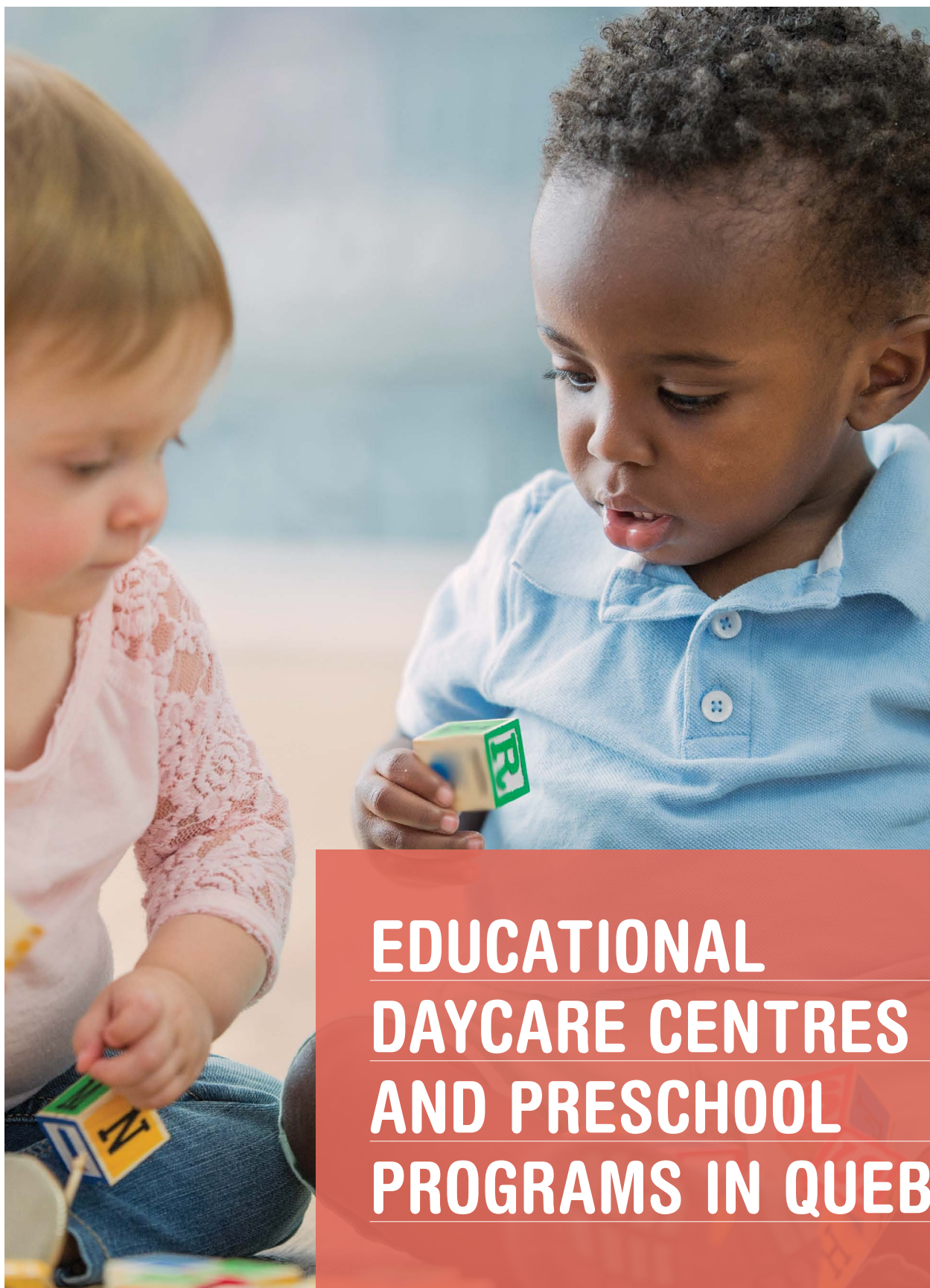
What can we do to improve the quality of educational daycare centres and preschool programs?

The scientific literature has shown that facilities (both educational daycare centres and preschools) can implement conditions that will allow them to offer better quality services. Children's needs are the same in any environment.

Certain factors are associated with a better quality of early childhood educational services, such as the initial and ongoing training of educators and improved working conditions. Other factors, including group size, adult-child ratio and communication with parents can also have a positive effect on the quality of certain educational services offered to young children.

We have the tools at our disposal to improve the quality of early childhood educational services. While putting theory into practice, however, it is important to continually assess the quality of educational childcare services and support those services in their efforts to make lasting improvements.

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

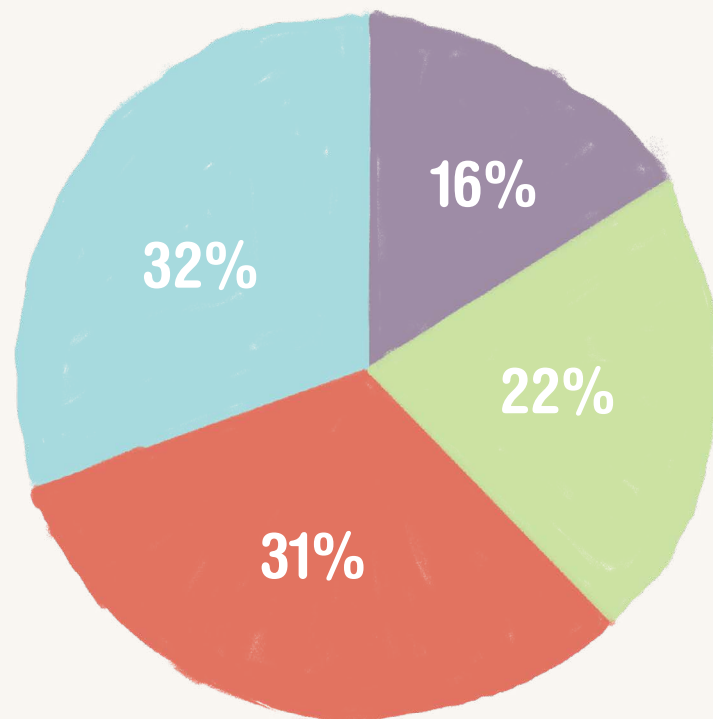


EDUCATIONAL DAYCARE CENTRES AND PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS IN QUEBEC

Reduced-contribution daycare centres were set up in Quebec following the introduction of the Family Policy in 1997, with the goal of supporting young children's overall development and educational success in Quebec. In 2014, 56.9% of all children under 5 were enrolled in a daycare service recognized by the *Ministère de la Famille*.

Distribution of spaces in educational daycare centres recognized by the *Ministère de la Famille*²

As at December 31, 2017



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

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

It is difficult to know how many children were attending an unregulated or unrecognized childcare service. In 2009, a survey by the *Institut de la statistique* estimated that unregulated home childcare providers accounted for 16% of all children in regular childcare, or 39,000 children.

It is important to note, however, that educational childcare services are less frequented in certain regions of Quebec. In 2014, for example, the proportion of children not attending daycare or attending an unregulated facility was higher in the following regions: Lanaudière (50%), Centre-du-Québec (49%), Côte-Nord (49%), Bas-Saint-Laurent (47%) and Abitibi-Témiscamingue (48%).

The distribution of spaces in the different types of educational childcare also varies from region to region. On December 31, 2017, for example, of all the spaces in educational childcare services, 20% were in CPEs in the region of Laval, while the corresponding figure was 89% in the Nord-du-Québec.

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. The table below shows how many spaces were available in educational childcare for Quebec families, according to the most recent data.



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

Full-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes have been added to existing educational childcare services, not replacing them, to ensure the continuity of existing services. The objective of full-day 4-year-old kindergarten is to reach children who are not already enrolled in other services.

Educational early 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*.

These 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.

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

Other types of childcare 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.

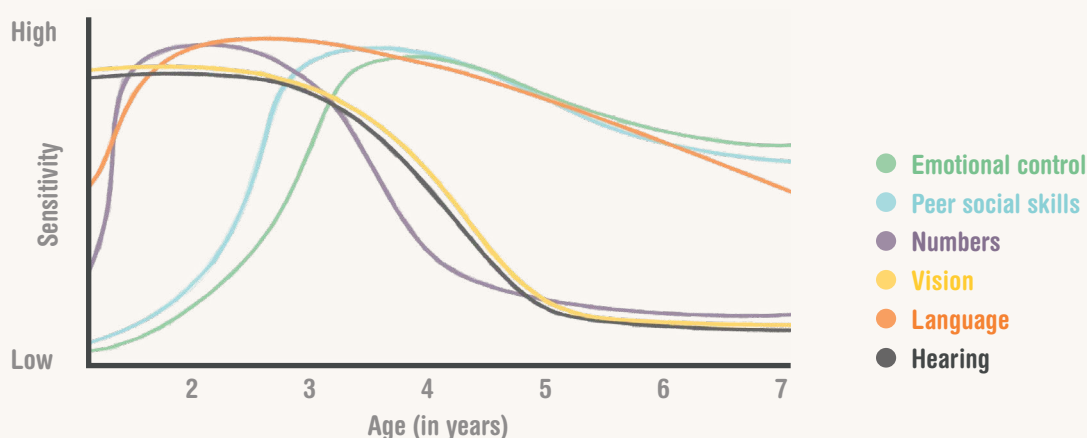
Although unregulated and unrecognized daycares may offer educational services, they are not required to offer an actual educational program. These types of services are not covered in this document.

A photograph of two young children sitting at a dark table. On the left, a young girl with dark hair in two small pigtails, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt, is looking down at the table. On the right, a young boy with dark curly hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with blue and green horizontal stripes, is also looking down and has his hands near some colorful blocks (blue and green) on the table. The background is slightly blurred, showing a white wall and a radiator.

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

The first few years of a child's life are particularly critical for their development. Children's brains develop very rapidly when they are very young, making them much more receptive to stimulation. Certain cognitive functions are especially sensitive in very young children.

For example, as shown by the following graph, 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.



Source: Adapted from the *Rapport de la Commission sur l'éducation à la petite enfance*, which was itself adapted from the *Council for Early Child Development*, 2010. "The Science of Early Child Development," CECD, Vancouver, Canada.

Everything that happens during the first few years of a child's life therefore has a significant impact on their development.

Since they take advantage of this window of opportunity, educational daycare centres and preschool programs are beneficial to children's overall health and development. According to 2009 data, children who regularly attend daycare because their parents are working or studying spend an average of eight hours a day at the facility.³ Educational services thus complement the stimulation children receive at home from their family.

3. In the case of children with more than one form of childcare—about 10% of children who are cared for on a regular basis while their parents are working or studying—this result underestimates the average number of hours spent in childcare.

How educational services affect young 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

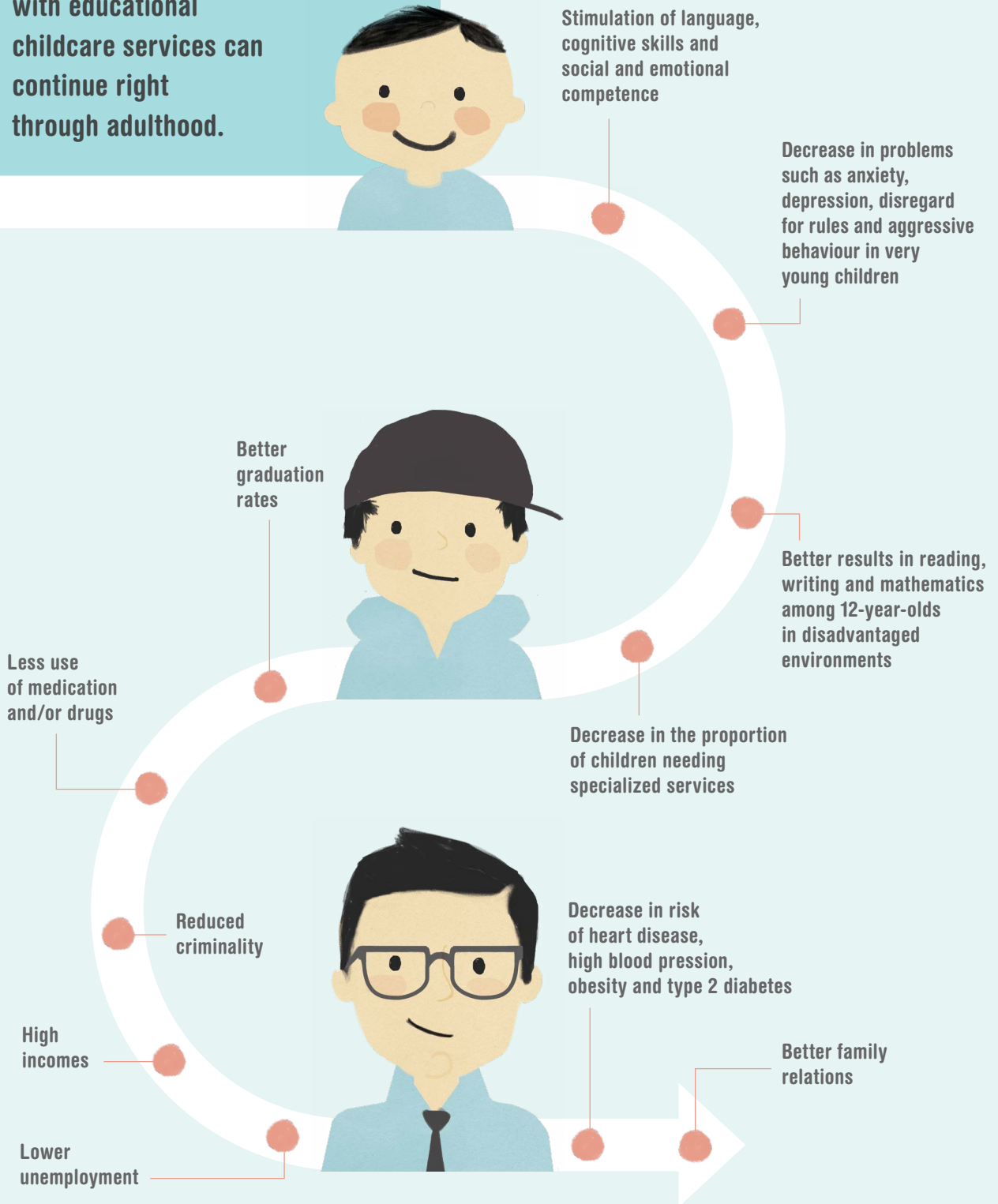
- The material and activities offered promote the acquisition of knowledge while helping children to understand the world around them.
- The educator/teacher encourages children to reflect and develop their creativity.

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 educational childcare services can continue right through adulthood.



Educational services for young children and children in disadvantaged environments

According to the Quebec Survey of Child Development in Kindergarten (QSCDK), one child out of three in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is vulnerable in at least one area of development. The corresponding figure in more privileged environments is one child out of five.

Attending educational daycare in early childhood is therefore particularly beneficial for children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The QSCDK has also shown that children in disadvantaged areas who attended educational daycare (such as a CPE) are less likely to be developmentally vulnerable when they enter kindergarten than those who did not.

Other studies have shown that children whose development is most at risk are also more receptive to intervention and stimulating environments.

In short, attending a quality educational childcare facility during early childhood helps create a more level playing field and may even reduce the gap in academic results between children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and their middle-class counterparts.

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.

One of the targets of Goal 4 (quality education) of the United Nations Development Program is to “ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.”

HOW CAN QUALITY BE MEASURED?



It is the day-to-day support and stimuli offered to children that have the greatest influence on their development and well-being. The experiences they have in educational childcare reinforce the stimulation they receive at home from their families.

Quality must thus 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.

- **Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R):** Evaluates personal care routines, space and furnishings, educational material, daily schedule, language and reasoning development, fine and gross motor activities, creative activities, interactions among children and staff-child interactions, social development and adult needs (a total of 39 aspects evaluated).
- **Échelle d'observation de la qualité éducative – EOQE (observation scale on the educational quality of childcare):** Evaluates space and furnishings, structure and variety of activities, educator's interactions with children and parents (122 aspects evaluated).
- **Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS):** Evaluates the quality of interactions offered in the educational environment, including emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support (42 aspects evaluated).

Evaluation scales

Each of the three scales assigns a rating to the group observed that is then used to determine the quality level.

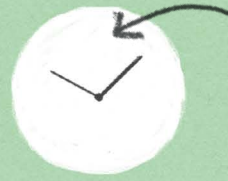
ECERS-R scale	EOQE scale	CLASS scale
 5.0 to 7.0 Good to excellent quality	 3.50 to 4.00 Excellent quality	 6.0 to 7.0 High quality
 3.0 to 4.9 Minimal quality	 3.00 to 3.49 Good quality	 3.0 to 5.9 Medium quality
 1.0 to 2.9 Inadequate quality	 2.50 to 2.99 Acceptable quality ⁴	 1.0 to 2.9 Low quality
	 2.00 to 2.49 Poor quality	
	 1.50 to 1.99 Very poor quality	
	 1.00 to 1.49 Extremely poor quality	

All the surveys discussed in this document used one of these three scales. 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 three, as shown in the following section.

4. The EOQE scale was used in both 2003 and 2014 for the *Grandir en qualité* surveys conducted by the *Institut de la statistique du Québec*. Between the two editions of the study, the qualifiers for quality levels changed: a score of between 2.50 and 2.99 was qualified as "fair" in 2003 and "acceptable" in 2014. In the interests of uniformity, we have chosen to use the term "acceptable" throughout this document.



Key requirements for quality educational childcare



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



A **variety of books** is available.



Children learn how to play together and resolve their conflicts.



Teacher/educator:

- 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.

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

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

The **physical environment**
is safe, well lit and well maintained.



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.



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



Staff respects good hygiene
practices and encourages
young children to develop
good habits.



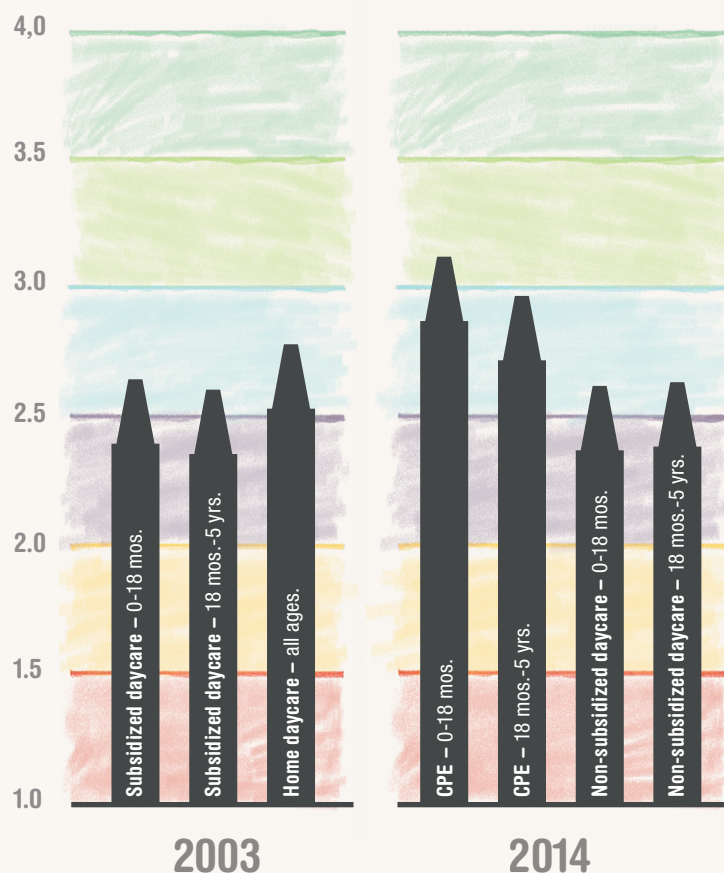
WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES IN QUEBEC?

In 2003 and 2014, Quebec surveys on the quality of educational daycare called “*Grandir en qualité*” assessed the quality of educational childcare services in Quebec based on the Échelle d’observation de la qualité éducative (EOQE). The 2003 study evaluated the quality of early childhood centres (CPEs), subsidized daycares⁵ and subsidized home daycares, while the 2014 edition evaluated the quality of CPEs and non-subsidized daycares. The following section presents the most recent results available to us for each type of educational childcare service.

Quality of daycare services

Surveyed conducted in 2003 and 2014 showed that, on the whole, educational services were of acceptable quality, with the exception of CPE nurseries (*pouponnières*), which were rated “good.”

In the case of subsidized daycare centres and subsidized home childcare, which were evaluated in 2003 only, these data do not take into account the structural changes that occurred during the intervening 10 years. It is important to take this into consideration when interpreting these results.

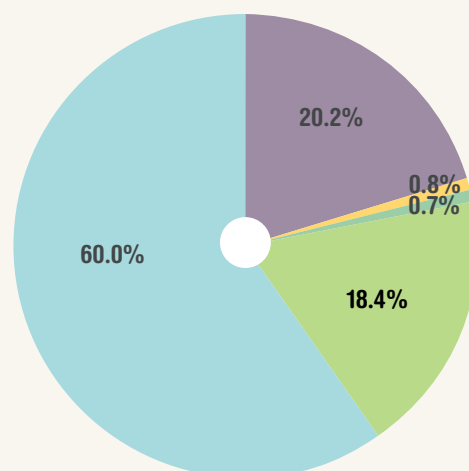


5. This category includes a very small number of non-subsidized daycare centres. During the 2003 survey, since there were so few non-subsidized daycares (accounting for less than 1% of licensed available spaces), their data were not collected separately from those for subsidized facilities.

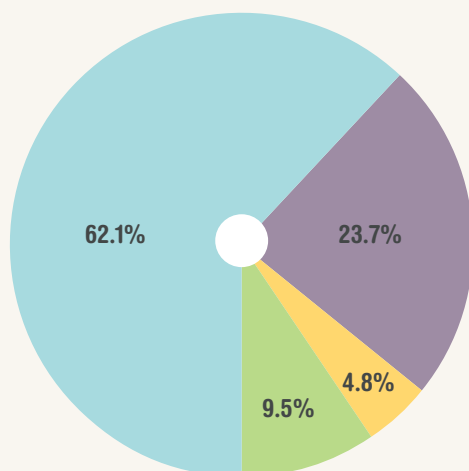
Distribution of children in 2003 and 2014 based on quality of childcare service

In spite of an average acceptable rating, a significant number of Quebec children are attending educational childcare facilities of poor or very poor quality⁶. This proportion is relatively low in CPEs, however.

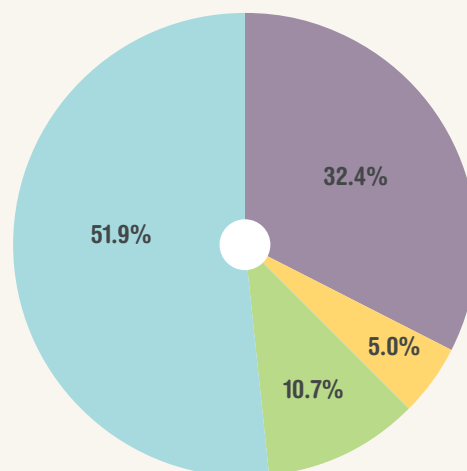
Home daycare
All ages



Subsidized daycare
0-18 mos.

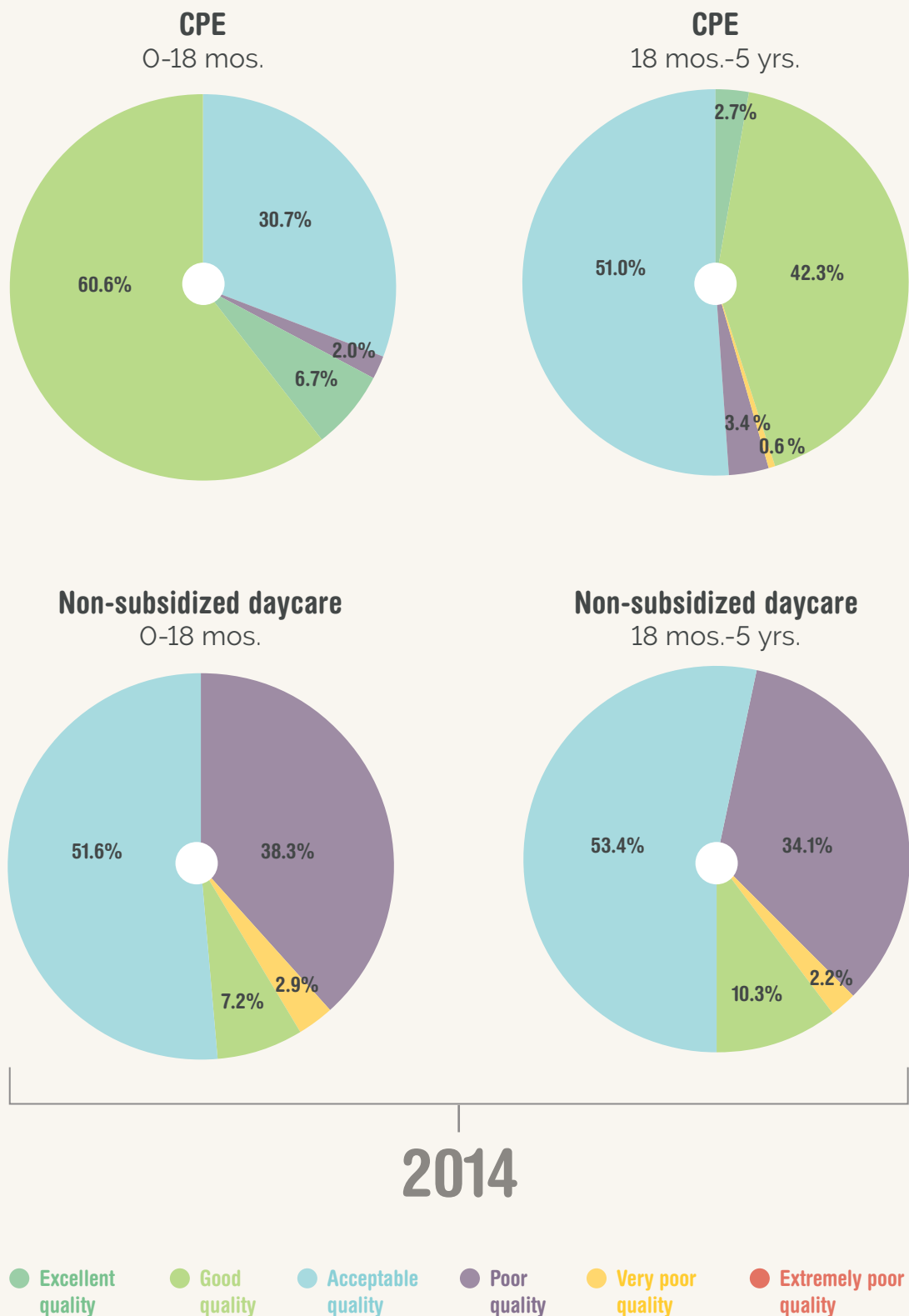


Subsidized daycare
18 mos.-5 yrs.



2003

6. The smaller proportions are less precise and must be interpreted with caution.



Quality of different aspects

The *Grandir en qualité* surveys also enabled researchers to measure the aspects of lesser quality in each educational childcare service.











































	2003			2014			
	Subsidized daycares (0-18 mos.)	Subsidized daycare (18 mos.-5 yrs.)	Subsidized home daycare	CPEs (0-18 mos.)	Non-subsidized daycare (0-18 mos.)	CPEs (18 mos.-5 yrs.)	Non-subsidized daycare (18 mos.-5 yrs.)
Structuring of the premises							
• Layout of the premises							
• Available equipment and materials							
Activities							
• Planning							
• Observation of children							
• Daily schedule							
• Play activities							
Interaction between educators and children							
• Promotion of play							
• Democratic intervention							
• Communication and relations							
Interaction between educators and parents							

What the results tell us:

- The quality of the structuring of the premises varied from acceptable to poor, with the exception of CPEs – 18 months to 5 years, whose quality was good. Quality of equipment and material gave the most cause for concern, ranging from acceptable to poor.
- Although the quality of activities was generally acceptable, the quality of activity *planning* was highly variable.
- The quality of interactions between educators and children was generally acceptable. Promotion of play, however, scored poorly across the board, except for CPE nurseries, where it was acceptable.
- Interactions between educators and parents varied from good to acceptable.

Quality of basic activities

The quality of various basic activities involved in providing educational services has also been evaluated.

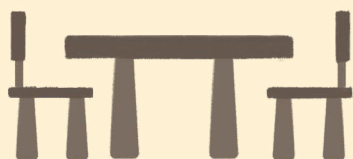
	2003			2014			
	Subsidized daycares (0-18 mos.)	Subsidized daycares (18 mos.-5 yrs.)	Subsidized home daycare	CPEs (0-18 mos.)	Non-subsidized daycare (0-18 mos.)	CPEs (18 mos.-5 yrs.)	Non-subsidized daycare (18 mos.-5 yrs.)
Drop-off time							
Meals and snacks							
Personal care							
Outdoor play							
Transition periods							
Pick-up time							

According to the survey:

- The drop-off time, meals and snacks and pick-up time were generally of good quality.
- Personal care and transition periods scored lower in terms of quality.
- The quality of outdoor play is particularly worrying, except in the case of CPEs (18 months to 5 years), which scored "acceptable" for quality in this category.

-  Excellent quality
-  Good quality
-  Acceptable quality
-  Poor quality
-  Very poor quality
-  Extremely poor quality

Quality criteria used to evaluate educational childcare services (EOQE)



STRUCTURING OF THE PREMISES

Layout of the premises

The facilities are welcoming and salubrious. The layout and equipment are versatile, safe and accessible, meeting the needs of both children and educators.

Available equipment and materials

Material and equipment are adapted to children's needs. There is a sufficient quantity of safe equipment in good repair to promote children's overall development and stimulate their senses. Equipment and material also reflect the diversity of the children's families and cultures.



ACTIVITIES

Activity planning

Planned activities for the week are posted, but planning is flexible. Sources of inspiration for activities are topical and varied (reflecting seasonal events, children's preferences, their strengths and skills, etc.).

Observation of children

The educators observe the children, note their observations and follow up.

Daily schedule

The daily schedule is flexible, taking children's needs into account and allowing them to develop attachment and trust in the educators. Activities are varied, and their sequence helps children establish points of reference throughout the day.

Play activities

The value of free play is recognized. Activities are appropriate to children's development and their areas of interest. They foster creativity, imagination and learning in a safe environment.



EDUCATOR-CHILD INTERACTION

Promotion of play

Educators respect children's games and support their personal initiatives. They help children to become aware of their achievements and encourage them to reflect on past activities.

Democratic intervention

Decision-making is shared with children. Educators gradually give children more responsibilities and encourage cooperation. They help children learn how to find solutions to their problems. Discipline and safety rules are adapted for children and clearly understood. Educators deal appropriately with disruptive behaviour.

Communication and interpersonal relations

Educators listen to the children. They support their language development and encourage them to express their needs and their feelings. The daycare atmosphere promotes harmonious relationships.



EDUCATOR-PARENT INTERACTION

Exchanges between educators and parents reinforce intervention continuity and support the quality of services received by the children. Educators and parents work together to help children who are having problems. The educational program supports newcomers in their integration process.

Quality criteria used to evaluate educational childcare services (EOQE) – Basic activities



DROP-OFF TIME

The organization of the **cloakroom space** makes it easy to greet families and create a smooth transition between home and daycare.

The welcome helps to create **a constructive relationship with parents**.

Children **can make choices** about their activities.



MEALS AND SNACKS

Healthy food is prepared in sanitary conditions.

Children may **choose their portions and the order in which they eat their food**.

Meals and snacks are enjoyed in a **relaxed atmosphere**.

Meals and snacks **are prepared in accordance with health and safety regulations**.



PERSONAL CARE

Educators are **attentive to children's needs**.

Educators practice **good hygiene** (when changing diapers, teaching cleanliness, washing hands, etc.).

The physical layout of the premises **encourages children to be independent** in their personal care.

Children learn about cleanliness in a **calm, caring environment**.



OUTDOOR PLAY

The yard is **well organized and maintained**.

Equipment is accessible to children, promoting their development in a safe environment.

Educators participate actively with children in outdoor games.

Outdoor activities are encouraged, as are opportunities to discover the environment.

Preparation for going outside and coming back inside **is organized and stress-free**.

Outings to the park are conducted **safely**.



TRANSITION PERIODS

Putting-away time is **organized and stimulating** for children.

Transitions from one activity to another **are relaxed and calm, respecting the children's rhythm**.



PICK-UP TIME

The **atmosphere is cheerful and relaxed**.

Children **can make choices** for their activities.

Educators **pay equal attention** to all children.

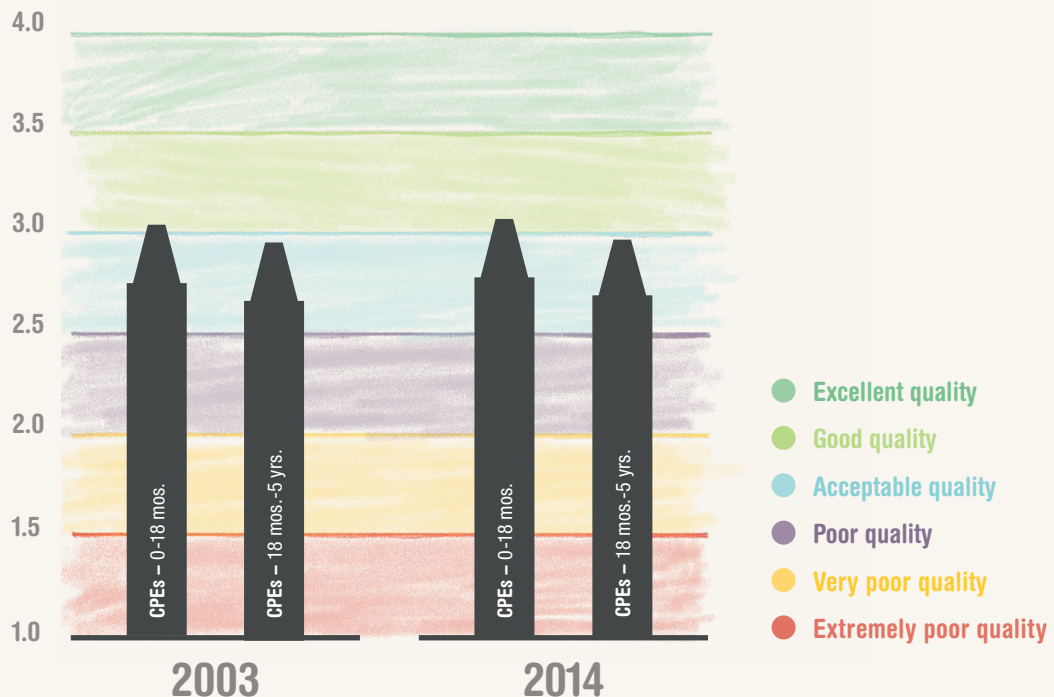
Educators establish a **constructive relationship with parents** and communicate with them.

Evolution of CPE quality between 2003 and 2014

Since the quality of CPEs was evaluated during both editions of the *Grandir en qualité* study, we have some knowledge of how the quality of services evolved over that 10-year period.

Overall quality

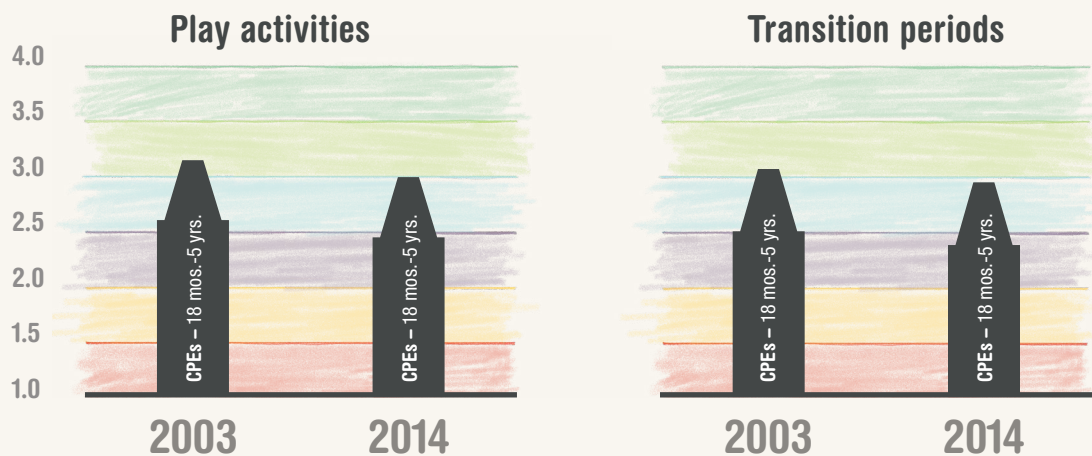
The overall quality of CPE nurseries remained stable between 2003 and 2014; quality was ranked as "good" by both editions of the survey. Services received by children between 18 months and 5 years was "acceptable" in 2003, albeit very close to "good." No improvement was observed in 2014.



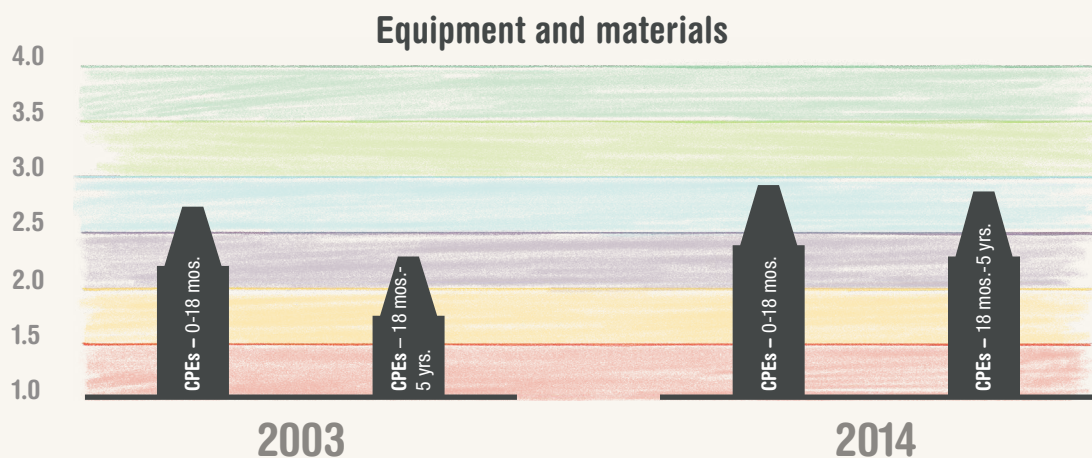
In groups of children between 18 months and 5 years of age, no change was observed in the promotion of play, which remained poor, or in the quality of outdoor play, interactions between educators and children, and personal care routines, which were all ranked as acceptable in both surveys.

In groups under 18 months, an improvement was noted in the promotion of play, but there was no change in the quality of outdoor play, which remained poor. Interactions between educators and children were given a "good" rating, and the quality of personal care was ranked "acceptable" in both surveys.

The quality of certain elements declined significantly, however, in services offered to children between 18 months and 5 years: play activities and transition periods, as shown below:



On the other hand, quality of equipment and material improved between 2003 and 2014 for both age groups.



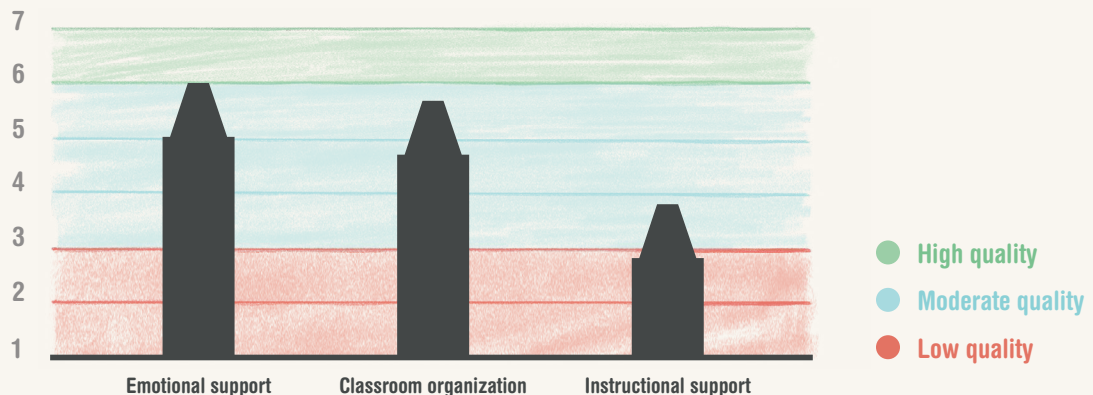
New studies will be needed in the future to continue measuring quality and documenting the evolution of the situation.

Quality of 4-year-old kindergarten

Between 2012 and 2016, a research team at the Université du Québec en Outaouais was mandated by the *Ministère de l'éducation et de l'enseignement supérieur*⁷ to evaluate the implementation of full-day 4-year-old kindergarten in disadvantaged areas. One of the tools the team used was the CLASS Pre-K scoring system to assess the level of quality of five 4-year-old kindergarten classes in five Quebec schools: two in the Montreal region and three in the Outaouais⁸. A total of 415 students participated in the evaluation process.

The results allowed researchers to determine the quality of interactions between teachers and students in those five classes.

The main observations were as follows:



- The quality of emotional support and classroom organization was high.
- The quality of instructional support is the lowest of the three areas.

In their report, however, when the authors compared these results with the average scores of the general American population, all areas scored higher for Quebec teachers.

7. Called the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* at the time.

8. 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.

Quality criteria used to evaluate interactions in 4-year-old kindergarten

(based on the CLASS Pre-K scoring system)



EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Positive climate

Teachers and students develop healthy, positive relationships. Teachers maintain a close physical presence with their students, participating in activities with them. The classroom climate is characterized by shared smiles and laughter, mutual respect and courtesy.

Teacher sensitivity

Teachers are vigilant and sensitive to children's verbal and non-verbal cues that may indicate they are experiencing emotional or learning difficulties. Teachers notice children's lack of comprehension and respond effectively to each child on an individual basis. Children participate actively in activities and seek comfort from teachers when needed.

Negative climate

Neither teachers nor students resort to sarcastic or disrespectful remarks, threats or shouting. Children are not aggressive with one another.

Regard for student perspectives

Teachers continually make a point of recognizing the importance of children's preferences, motivation and points of view. They give children responsibilities and encourage them to express their ideas. Children can make their own decisions, make choices, etc.

Quality criteria used to evaluate interactions in 4-year-old kindergarten

(based on the CLASS Pre-K scoring system)



CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION

Behaviour management

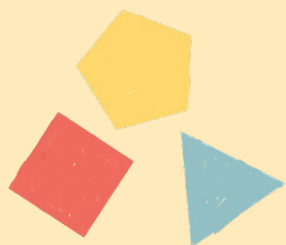
Teachers use strategies that enable children to understand the specific expectations for their behaviour and comply with them. Instructions and expectations are clear and consistently applied. Teachers intervene proactively, redirect inappropriate behaviours and make sure children respect rules.

Instructional Learning Formats

Children's engagement in various types of activities promotes learning. The teachers' strategies allow children to manipulate material rather than simply observe. Children are exposed to a wide range of learning opportunities: visual, auditory and motor. Children show interest in the situations presented to them: activities arouse their enthusiasm and concentration.

Productivity

Little or no instructional time is lost on organizational tasks or waiting while children are passive. Teachers are prepared, material is available and transitions between activities are brief.



INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

Concept development

The methods used by teachers enable children to better understand various concepts. Teachers use strategies designed to help children develop their ability to think for themselves. Children have opportunities to analyze, compare, make connections between different concepts, solve problems on their own or to be creative and come up with their own ideas.

Quality of feedback

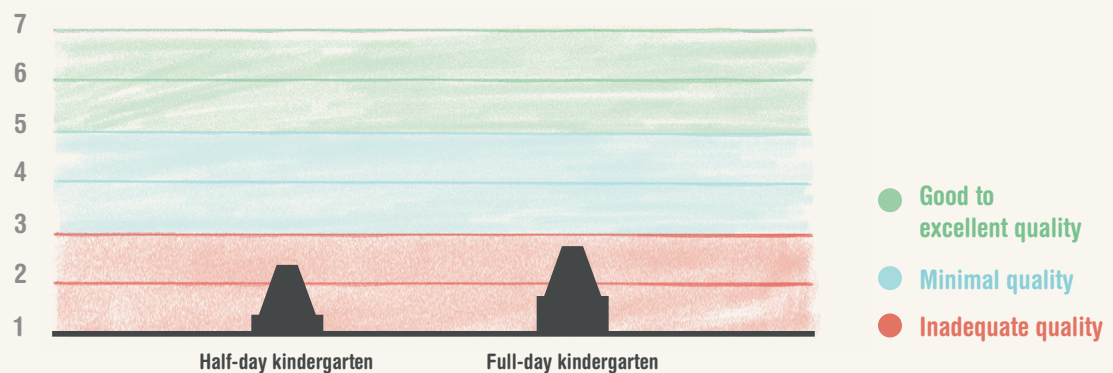
Teachers consistently provide children with feedback to help them better understand various concepts. Teachers talk to children, add specific information on what they are doing or expressing, recognizing children's efforts.

Language modeling

Teachers use strategies that continually expose children to varied forms and uses of language. Teachers have meaningful conversations with children, reformulating children's words using more complex constructions. They ask open-ended questions to encourage more detailed answers and use words to describe their actions in order to provide a model.

In 2015, the quality of 4-year-old kindergarten classes was also evaluated by a team from the Université du Québec à Montréal using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R). The research team observed 13 half-day kindergarten classes and 15 full-day classes⁹, accounting for about 30% of children attending full-day 4-year-old kindergarten in disadvantaged areas.

Their results revealed a very low quality of educational environment.



The situation is particularly worrying in the areas of space and furnishings, personal care routines, language-reasoning, activities, interactions and program structure.

Any interpretation of these results must take into account that this evaluation was carried very shortly after the implementation of the first full-day 4-year-old kindergarten classes.

	Half-day kindergarten	Full-day kindergarten
Space and furnishings	Inadequate quality	Inadequate quality
Personal care routines	Inadequate quality	Inadequate quality
Language and reasoning	Inadequate quality	Minimal quality
Activities	Inadequate quality	Inadequate quality
Interactions	Inadequate quality	Minimal quality
Program structure	Inadequate quality	Inadequate quality

9. The sample used in this study consisted exclusively of 4-year-old kindergarten classes in an urban or semi-urban area. Results must therefore not be applied to all children attending 4-year-old kindergarten, especially children in rural areas.

Quality criteria used to evaluate 4-year-old kindergarten classes

(using ECERS-R)

SPACE AND FURNISHINGS

Indoor space

The indoor space is safe, well lit, aired and well maintained. The environment is welcoming and inviting.

Furniture

Furniture is child-sized and meets children's needs, providing a comfortable environment for learning and playing. Teachers have easy access to all necessary material.

Room arrangement

The arrangement promotes a positive self-image for the children and encourages a variety of activities. Material is organized in clearly defined centres of interest.

Other

There are spaces where children can be alone if they wish to and most of the display is children's work. There is sufficient space and safe equipment for motor development.



PERSONAL CARE ROUTINES



Greeting and departing

The atmosphere is warm and welcoming when children are arriving and leaving.

Meals and snacks

Food served meets official nutrition recommendations and promotes the development of good long-term eating habits. Food is prepared under hygienic conditions.

Naps and toileting

Daily schedule includes sufficient time for rest. Children may use the toilet when needed and are supervised when doing so. Material is available to promote good hygiene practices (footstool beside sink, soap, etc.).

Health practices

Children learn basic hygiene practices (handwashing, nose-blowing) to minimize the risk of spreading germs.

Safety

Children are properly supervised and safety rules are enforced to minimize the risk of injury. Children are taught safe behaviour.

Quality criteria used to evaluate 4-year-old kindergarten classes

(using ECERS-R)



LANGUAGE AND REASONING STIMULATION

Book and pictures

A variety of books and pictures is accessible in sufficient numbers for individual or group use.

Communication

Activities and material encourage language development.

Stimulation of reasoning

Teachers present relationships and logical concepts in an appropriate way.

Use of language

Teachers have regular conversations with children and encourage them to have conversations with each other. Language used by the teacher enriches that of the children.



ACTIVITIES

Educational activities that promote development

Especially in the following areas:

- fine motor
- art
- music and movement
- nature and science
- mathematics

The following activities are available:

- blocks
- sand and water
- dramatic play

Screen time

Use of computers, tablets, etc. is limited, not only in terms of time but also regarding appropriate subjects for young children. Participation in computer activities is not compulsory.

Promoting acceptance of diversity

Books, pictures, games and materials expose children to diversity in a positive way that encourages respect for others.



INTERACTIONS

Supervision of children

Teachers supervise the children without controlling them, in a way that is adapted to their skills and needs.

Discipline

The layout of the environment, teachers' expectations, available material, schedule and style of discipline (non-punitive, democratic and consistent) encourage children's positive behaviour.

Interactions between staff and children

Teachers respond warmly to children's needs, fostering the development of mutual respect between children and adults.

Interactions between children

Teachers provide an environment that is conducive to taking initiatives and developing skills. They encourage children to work and play together, and to resolve their conflicts productively.



PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Schedule

Teachers set up a consistent routine that is well balanced between child-initiated activities and teacher-initiated activities that promote physical, social and emotional growth. Children have a lot of time to play, and transitions between activities are calm and pleasant.

Free play

Children are free to play with the material and playmates of their choice. They may make decisions, and the teachers' interventions meet their needs.

Group time

Teachers are attentive to the needs of individual children and provide guidance. Group time is limited to a minimum, reflecting children's needs and interests.

Children with disabilities

The needs of children with disabilities are met.



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.

- **High level of initial training**

Educators with a high level of initial training offer children better personal care, are more sensitive to their needs and interact more with them.

- **Specialized diploma in early childhood education**

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.

- **Continuing education activities**

Participation in professional development activities based on best practices results in a higher-quality offer of educational services.

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.

In its 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.

In educational daycare centres

The 2014 *Grandir en qualité* survey enabled researchers to more clearly identify the types of education and training that were associated with higher quality services in Quebec educational daycare facilities.

- Educators have completed post-secondary studies.
- They have a *diplôme d'études collégiales* or DEC (diploma of college studies from a CEGEP).
- Educators' qualifications meet regulatory requirements.
- Educators participate in professional development activities and receive support in putting new knowledge and skills into practice.
- Educators take part in team meetings or meetings of professional associations.
- They are familiar with the *Accueillir la petite enfance* program and recognize its value.

When educators have more years of experience in daycare services, the result is a higher quality of services.

In preschools

According to the UQAM research team that assessed the quality of 4-year-old kindergartens, the current teacher training includes very few courses focused specifically on preschool education. The report recommends that courses be added in the following areas:

- The needs of vulnerable students
- The various aspects involved in creating a quality preschool environment, including the quality of interactions
- Proven educational practices based on reliable data.

Such courses could help teachers better meet the needs of 4-year-olds living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Ongoing professional training in confronting the challenges presented by this clientele is also suggested. Finally, teachers would gain much by receiving the support of trained personnel.

According to the UQO research team, training should also provide information on educational approaches and forms of collaboration that promote the inclusion of family diversity.

THE SCANDINAVIAN APPROACH

Several Scandinavian countries guarantee every child a space in an educational daycare. The professionals on staff are required to have a university degree in education, with a specialization in early childhood. Ongoing professional development is encouraged. The Scandinavian models encourage the active participation of parents and other professionals important to children's development. These countries are recognized for the quality of their childcare services and educational services in general.

Working conditions of educational personnel

The *Grandir en qualité* surveys conducted in 2003 and 2014 noted that educators' working conditions had an influence on the quality of the establishment. The overall score was higher when educators:

- earned a better hourly wage
- perceived their work as stimulating and challenging
- had time to plan their teaching activities
- had a positive perception of their work
- were satisfied with their relationships with management personnel
- had the daily opportunity to talk about teaching together.

Structure of educational service

3

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.

In educational daycare centres

The 2003 and 2014 *Grandir en qualité* surveys also showed that the following factors were associated with higher quality:

- Smaller group size
- Educator-child ratio smaller than required limit
- Setting up communication channels with parents

In preschools

During their evaluation of 4-year-old kindergartens, UQAM researchers concluded that smaller teacher-child ratios would result in more effective interventions with children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Going a step farther, the UQO team recommended an approach that recognized the unique quality of each child as well as the importance of the cultural contribution of his or her family. This approach would also encourage parents and other personnel to work together more closely to promote inclusion.

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
- Parents' involvement in the running of the educational service

In their research report, the UQAM team that evaluated 4-year-old kindergartens also recommended that the financing of 4-year-old kindergarten in disadvantaged areas be sufficient to guarantee the quality of the educational environment.

The UQO researchers noted that management personnel had a key role to play in setting up 4-year-old kindergarten classes in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. They suggested that training should be developed specifically for management personnel in order to prepare them for shouldering more responsibility in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the process.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), governments have a role to play in improving the quality of educational childcare services. They can, for example, establish quality standards and propose measures upholding them in consultation with actors on the ground. They can also conduct quality assessments and ensure that standards are respected. Finally, they can propose incentive measures to encourage educational services to improve their quality and offer adequate financing to ensure quality standards are respected.

The 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.

Winner of the Nobel prize in economics James Heckman has stated that it is the money invested in early childhood that offers the best rate of return on investment.



A CUSTOMIZED TRAINING PROGRAM ON THE QUALITY OF SERVICES OFFERED BY CPEs

As part of a pilot project, CPEs in the Cantons-de-l'Est region received customized training. Management personnel were first given training on the concept of quality as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R). The quality of the CPE'S educational environment was observed before and after three customized training sessions based on needs identified during the initial observation. The results of the pilot project show that this type of training had a positive impact on the quality of participating CPEs, and that favourable effects were still visible a year later.

Following the pilot project, the program was adopted by CPEs associations in the Cantons-de-l'Est, Quebec City, Chaudière-Appalaches and Abitibi-Témiscamingue regions. Due to a lack of funding, however, these programs were not renewed.

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. Below are a few of the measures proposed to achieve these goals:

- Set up a system for evaluating educational quality in educational childcare services and develop forms of support to promote continuous improvement.
- Support the organization of training programs for educational personnel in educational childcare services.
- Increase allocations to Coordinating Offices to enable them to carry out projects aimed at improving the educational quality of educational home childcare.
- Provide funding for the acquisition of educational material for children in full-day 4-year-old kindergarten in disadvantaged neighbourhoods—both in classrooms and after-school care.
- Support educational personnel in implementing the new preschool level of education.
- Create a financial assistance program for associations of educational childcare services with the goal of improving quality and educational success.



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.





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

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.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Early Childhood Laboratory
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 entire special 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
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