

### 3. Does Canada truly rank last in the OECD in early childhood education?

**No.**

The OECD regularly reports two measures of performance in early childhood education: enrollment, and spending. Until recently, Canada was shown to rank last in each measure.<sup>12</sup> These findings have been quoted repeatedly by commentators and organizations seeking to sound the alarm about Canada's apparently dismal performance in the vital area of early childhood education.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, the OECD's comparisons were not valid, and as a result Canada's data has been withdrawn from more recent publications. The problem lies not with the OECD – which publishes in good faith the data that its members submit to them – but with the way data in this sector is collected and collated in Canada. The responsibility for programs for pre-school age children rests with the provinces and territories and varies across the country: in some provinces the programs are run by education departments, in others they are run by social or family services departments, and in some provinces the responsibility is shared between different departments.

There is nothing wrong with this approach. National-level data, however, is collected on a sector-by-sector basis - thus there is one count for spending through education departments, one count for spending through social services departments, but as yet no integrated count for spending on similar programs that are managed by different departments in different provinces. For this reason, existing national-level data in early childhood education programs are inevitably

incomplete - education statistics exclude information about social services programs, and social service statistics exclude education ones.

Given the number of different players involved in early childhood education in Canada - different departments across 13 jurisdictions, with a federal department of social development and a national statistics agency added into the mix, it is taking some time for governments in Canada to come to terms with the challenge of reporting data in this area. Collaborative efforts are now underway to collect more comprehensive data and to resume reporting to the OECD.

In the meantime, the previously published OECD charts will continue to be circulated, and some commentators will insist that Canada should be embarrassed to find itself in last place. These assertions, however, are simply inaccurate.

Of course, the absence of data cuts both ways: while we cannot say that Canada is really among the worst performers in this area, there is also no basis upon which to claim that we compare favourably with other developed countries. It is the case, however, that this is a growing area of investment in Canada. Across the provinces, new initiatives are being launched in early childhood education, and an increasing number of education departments are being given more explicit mandates to focus not only primary and secondary schools but on early childhood learning and development as well.

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<sup>12</sup> See for instance Chart C.2.1 in the 2012 edition of the OECD's Education at a Glance: [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oced/education/education-at-a-glance-2012/indicator-c2-how-do-early-childhood-education-systems-differ-around-the-world\\_eag-2012-24-en#page3](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oced/education/education-at-a-glance-2012/indicator-c2-how-do-early-childhood-education-systems-differ-around-the-world_eag-2012-24-en#page3).

<sup>13</sup> Examples include: [https://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/di1112\\_EarlyChildhoodEducation\\_pr.pdf](https://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/di1112_EarlyChildhoodEducation_pr.pdf); <http://timeforpreschool.ca/en/weblog/2014/11/09/early-childhood-education-report-2014-released/>.