

A young child with dark hair, wearing a green and grey striped long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is sitting on a grey carpeted floor. The child is holding a bright pink ring-shaped toy in their mouth. In front of the child is a wooden abacus with colorful beads (red, yellow, green, blue) and a wooden toy with letters 'H', 'O', and 'O' on it. The background is a blurred room with a bookshelf and a window with a grid pattern.

Evaluating Quality: Impacts of Low Cost Childcare in Alberta and British Columbia

R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd.
Tuesday May 28, 2019

The logo for malatest, featuring the word "malatest" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. To the left of the text is a stylized graphic of a globe or sphere composed of several white, curved lines.

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“We see this as another step toward a quality, affordable and universal system,” said Gregson, who argues the benefits extend beyond families to the wider economy, which gets a boost when more people are working and have more disposable income.

Opinion: Quality, affordable childcare is in the public's interest



B.C. moves toward universal child care with \$10-a-day project at 53 sites

The parents of about 2,500 children in B.C. will be able to get daycare for as little as \$200 a month.



“These centres are actually having a big impact not only on the affordability of childcare for Albertans but also on the quality and accessibility of care, which are key things for parents,” said Joel French, executive director of Public Interest Alberta.

Funded child care centres increase quality, reduce gaps in affordability: Public Interest Alberta

The provincial government's Early Learning and Child Care Centres (ELCCs) are helping to bridge financial gaps for parents in the province, according to a Public Interest Alberta survey.



BACKGROUND

- Two provinces (Alberta, BC) introduced pilot projects to assess the impacts of providing low cost childcare service's to a broad spectrum of parents (not just low income households).
- Both pilots are three year projects, with the expectation that the Pilots will demonstrate impacts in terms of affordability, access and quality.

WHAT IS THE PILOT?

- Reduction in fees paid by parents in Alberta and BC. No means testing to include/exclude parents (Quebec model).
- Maximum fees capped at:
 - \$25/day (max \$550/month) per child in Alberta
 - \$10/day (max \$200/month) per child in BC
- In each model, there is an expectation that funding will also contribute to “improved quality”.
- SROI conducted for both.

CORE OBJECTIVES OF LOW COST CHILDCARE

Increase
Affordability

Easy to measure

Increase
Accessibility

Less easy to measure

Increase
“Quality”

Very difficult to measure

ALBERTA APPROACH

- Service providers (childcare operators) were asked to submit proposals that included the following:
 - How they would create new spaces
 - How they would offer spaces at \$25/day per child

ALBERTA APPROACH

- Implementation of the Play, Participation and Possibilities Curriculum Framework (Flight) and the Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (GRIT) Access Support and Participation Continuum Model (ASaP)
- How they would implement up to 7 pre defined program improvements
- How they would support PD of educators
- Year 2 offer Wage Floor Asset

ALBERTA APPROACH

- Service providers provided with an annual grant to fund low cost childcare for all parents in their facility.
- Pilot started with 22 sites, since expanded to 122 sites under bi-lateral funding.
- Evaluation includes 51 ELCC Centres and approximately 20 comparison sites.

BC APPROACH

- Service providers asked to submit a proposal outlining their interest in participation in the pilot.
- Ministry selected proponents and covered expenses save for the expected parental contribution (max of \$200 per child per month).
- Pilot included 55 sites (mix of public, not for profit, and private operators and 2 AHS).
- Three inclusion models:
 - 1) SCD/ASCD
 - 2) Inclusion Support
 - 3) Inclusion Coordinator

QUALITY DILEMMA

- How do we measure “quality improvements” in the pilot projects?

No agreement among ‘experts’ on how to measure quality.

| | Measurable | |
|---|-------------|--------------------|
| | AB | BC |
| Relationship between educators & children | Limited | Limited |
| Child – educator ratios | No change | No change |
| Child assessments | No measures | No measures |
| Changes in quality of the childcare | Limited | Standardized tools |

HOW ARE WE MEASURING QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS? - ALBERTA

| Measures | Pre-Post Cross Sectional Comparisons | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|
| | Pilot | Control |
| Parent satisfaction | ✓ | ✓ |
| Professionalism of workforce | ✓ | ✓ |
| Improved child well-being | ✓ | ✓ |
| Centre accreditation | ✓ | ✓ |
| Diversity | ✓ | ✓ |
| Implementation of a curriculum | ✓ | ✓ |
| Implementation of inclusion practices | ✓ | ✓ |
| Implementation of improvements | ✓ | |

HOW ARE WE MEASURING QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS? - BC

| Measures | Pre-Post Cross Sectional Comparisons | |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| | Pilot | Pilot Inclusion Models |
| Parent satisfaction and feedback | ✓ | ✓ |
| Educator satisfaction and feedback | ✓ | ✓ |
| Partner satisfaction and feedback (one time interview asking about changes) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Professionalism of the workforce | ✓ | ✓ |
| Implementation of inclusion practices | ✓ | ✓ |
| Diversity | ✓ | ✓ |
| Implementation of other improvements (e.g., facility, learning, communication) | ✓ | ✓ |

BC MODEL

- Utilize a baseline and T + 1 year approach.
- High reliance on surveys, focus group data, interviews (parents, educators, operators/managers, partners).
- Use of standardized assessment tools – AQI and The LOVIT Way (baseline/post) which include onsite observations.

HOW WELL CAN WE MEASURE QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS?

| | |
|---------|--|
| Alberta | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reasonably well, pilot structure supports site adoption of quality improvements.• Use of control groups allows for better identification of net or incremental impacts. |
| BC | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-post design assessing quality improvements as pilot allocated funding for quality improvements.• High reliance on self report data and site assessments. |

LESSONS LEARNED

- As governments implement major social programs, attention needs to be given to appropriate program design and evaluation structure.
- “Quality” in early child care is difficult to measure – no agreed upon measures of quality and majority of childcare sites do not use any standardized quality assessment tools.
- Childcares do not consistently utilize standardized child assessment tools often used in the K-12 system.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Very high reliance on self report of what parents/educators consider to be “quality childcare”.
- Evaluation period should include a longer term time horizon to allow for the measurement of child development.
- Lack of qualified educators in childcare to meet demand.

Questions?

Robert Malatest
President
r.malatest@malatest.com

Joanne Barry
Vice President of Research
j.barry@malatest.com

Eleanor Hamaluk
Executive Vice President
e.hamaluk@malatest.com



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