

NOVA SCOTIA PYRAMID MODEL

Executive Summary Report 2022-23



Authored by: Jessie-Lee McIsaac, PhD; Robyn Ashley, MA CYS; Hannah Cosman, BSc BIOL/PSYC; Randi Cummings, BA CYS/PSYC; Elizabeth Jean Larson, PhD

The Nova Scotia Pyramid Model is funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. This report was prepared as part of the Pyramid Model initiative by the Early Childhood Collaborative Research Centre at Mount Saint Vincent University and has been approved by the Provincial Leadership Team; the findings do not necessarily represent the views of organizations represented.



For further information regarding the evaluation of the Nova Scotia Pyramid Model please contact:
ECCRC: Pyramid.eccrc@msvu.ca
NSECDIS: NSpyramidmodel@nsecdis.ca



Promoting Social & Emotional Competence in Nova Scotia's Young Children
Favorisant la compétence socio-émotionnelle des jeunes enfants de la Nouvelle-Écosse



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Land Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge that the evaluation of the Pyramid Model was conducted in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded ancestral territory which remains the homeland of the Mi'kmaq Nation. This territory is covered by the Covenant Chain of Treaties of Peace and Friendship signed between 1725 and 1779. These treaties are affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada and recognize Aboriginal Title (which is embedded in both the 1763 Royal Proclamation and in section 35(1) of the 1982 Constitution Act). The treaties are living agreements that establish the rules for an ongoing Treaty relationship between nations.

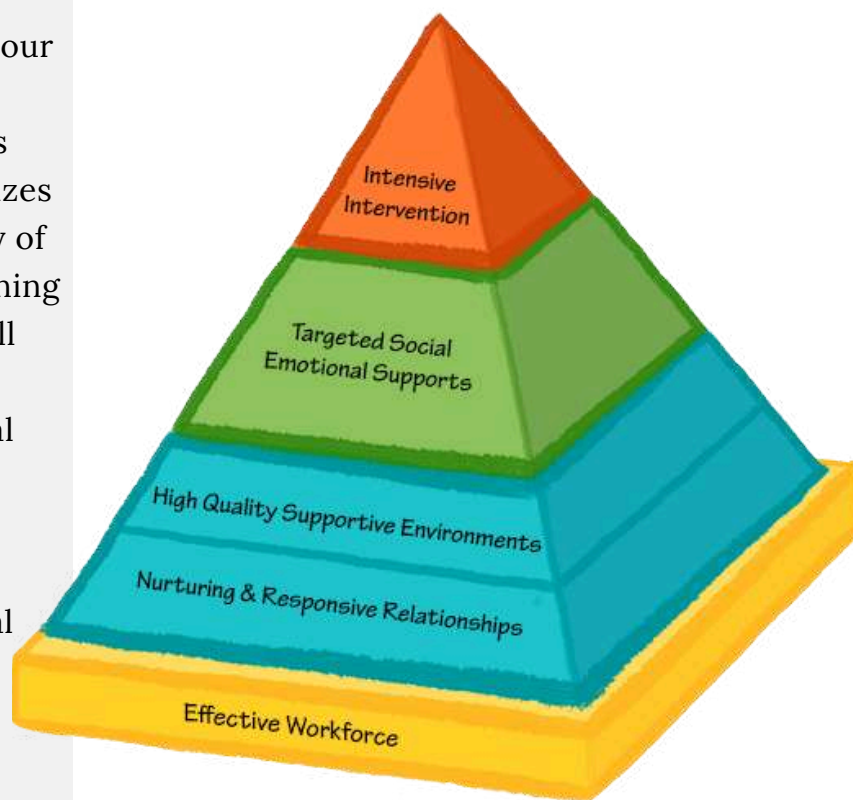
We pay respect to the knowledge embedded in the Mi'kmaw custodians of the lands and waters and to the Elders, past, present, and future.

This is a photo of the Shubenacadie River. The Mi'kmaq have traversed the Shubenacadie River and the lakes to its south as a major transport route since time immemorial.

INTRODUCTION

The Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children is an evidence-based, positive behaviour support framework for educators to promote social and emotional development and address challenging behaviours.¹ The framework organizes evidence-based practices to build the capacity of educators to support all children using a coaching approach to professional development and skill development. The goal of the Pyramid Model initiative is to support the social and emotional health of all children across the province. This development helps children:

- identify and understand feelings
- accurately read and comprehend emotional states in others
- manage strong emotions
- regulate behaviours
- develop empathy for others establish
- sustain relationships²



Nova Scotia (NS) began implementing the Pyramid Model in 2018 at 23 Regulated Child Care (RCC) centres across the province, and later throughout 2019-2021, the province expanded the implementation of the Pyramid Model into 64 Pre-primary Programs (PPP) across the province (see [here](#) for previous evaluation report). In April 2021, the Pyramid Model program transitioned from a pilot to a program, and is now housed with Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services (NSECDIS).

From January 2022 to December 2023, an additional 5 RCC programs and 63 PPP programs began coaching in Pyramid Model.

The purpose of the following executive summary is to illustrate the findings from the evaluation of the Pyramid Model implementation across Nova Scotia in response to four evaluation questions, identified and discussed in subsequent sections of the executive summary.

¹ Hemmeter, M. L., Santos, R. M., & Ostrosky, M. M. (2008). Preparing early childhood educators to address young children's social-emotional development and challenging behavior: A survey of higher education programs in nine states. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 30(4), 321-340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053815108320900>

² Voineau, M., & Damian. (2014). The Role of Socio-Emotional Development in Early Childhood. *Journal Plus Education*, 388-392.

DATA COLLECTION

Evaluation Question	Data collected
<p>1. How has the Pyramid Model influenced Inclusion Coaches and early childhood educators' knowledge, confidence and value in social emotional learning, positive behaviour support and assessment tools? How does coach/educator well-being influence their practice?</p>	<p>ECPW-Q Survey across NS ELCC sector (n = 429)</p>
<p>2. How are Pyramid Model programs engaging families? What enables and obstructs family engagement in the Pyramid Model?</p>	<p>Interviews with parents, directors, Pre-primary Leads, Pre-primary ECEs</p>
<p>3. How has the Pyramid Model influenced Program/Regional Leadership Teams confidence and ability to support professional practices related to social emotional learning?</p>	<p>Benchmarks of Quality (Program and Regional Leadership Teams)</p>
<p>4. What is influencing the implementation (through implementation drivers) of the Pyramid Model across Nova Scotia? What is the pathway to "effective" implementation?</p>	<p>Case study interviews with programs (n = 10) Focus groups (n = 2) Evaluation Survey (n=63)</p>

1. How has Pyramid Model influenced Inclusion Coaches and ECE's knowledge, confidence and value in social emotional learning, positive behaviour support and assessment tools?

How does coach/educator well-being influence their practice?

Over time there are positive changes in educators' practice as measured through increased scores over time in TPOT (Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool) and TPITOS (Teaching Pyramid Infant-Toddler Observation Scale). Although there is no current measurement at the child level, there were qualitative comments from case study sites about the related improvements in children's social emotional skills from the implementation of Pyramid Model.

In terms of well-being, a validated instrument was used called the Early Childhood Professional Well-Being Questionnaire. The items covered nine senses of well-being including their sense of security, communication, comfort, self-respect, affinity, agency, efficacy, engagement and contribution. The highest possible score to rank on the ECPW-Q is 135.

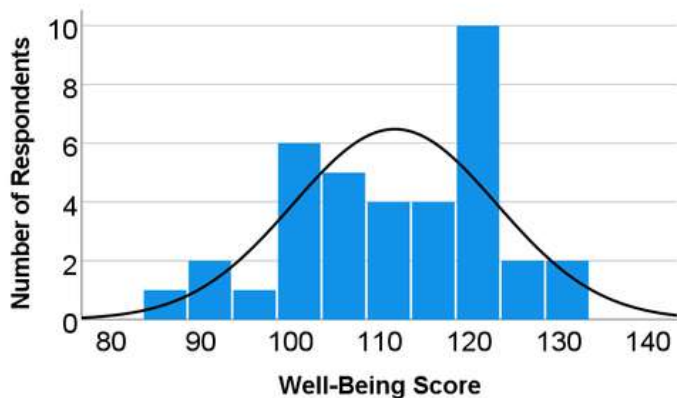
There was a relatively small but significant difference in well-being scores between Pyramid and non-Pyramid ECEs, with Pyramid ECEs having slightly higher mean well-being scores. Further research is needed to understand this connection and the potential impact of Pyramid Model involvement on early childhood professionals' professional well-being.

More information can be found in our [public summary](#).

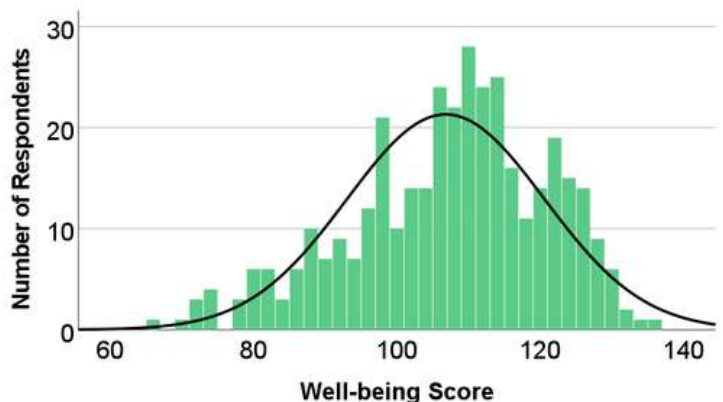
I appreciate that we are strength-based and work to build a strong relationship with our educators in order to create trust. - Inclusion Coach

I feel as though it [the Pyramid Model] has been extremely positive. It has challenged me to be even more reflective. My coach has been so supportive. - Pyramid ECE

Pyramid ECE overall well-being



Non-Pyramid ECE overall well-being



2. How are Pyramid Model programs engaging families?

What enables and obstructs family engagement in the Pyramid Model?

In May and April of 2023, interviews were conducted with a Pre-primary facilitator (n=1), RCC directors (n=2), ECEs (n=3), and parents (n=2) to gain an understanding of what enables and obstructs family engagement in the Pyramid Model .

From the information gathered at several participating programs it was identified that connections between programs and families improved while educators were participating in Pyramid Model.

For example, strong working relationships between Inclusion Coaches and one program resulted in further support in the form of workshops for families and staff related to social emotional learning. Both directors shared that they received a lot of support from their coaches in preparing materials to share with families, and one helped with hosting a workshop for families. One director said: *“Wow, it has changed, we thought we were doing a great job at building and supporting trusting relationships with our families... Pyramid has totally changed that further than what we had.”*

Success Stories

Self and Emotional Regulation

A Pre-primary Lead shared an example of a child who had stayed in Pre-primary for another year while waiting for access to support services. During this extra year, both educators and the child's parents emphasized an implementation of Pyramid Model practices and found a big change in the child's regulation skills; the facilitator explained:

“He's gone from using physical gestures and physical aggression to portray his wants and needs to, you know, just asking, taking a moment and really being able to communicate more with his family and his peers.”

Transition and Routines

A parent asked for help with transitions to school in the morning and the ECE suggested that she make a schedule. The educator shared the parent's feedback:

“...that was the easiest transition to coming to school that we have ever had, like she was so thankful and every day she's like, I can't get over how easy it is going through the schedule. Like she's looking for her schedule pieces every morning.”

Multiple Languages and Cultures

One director spoke about how participating in the Pyramid Model increased their awareness of the importance of incorporating multiple languages and cultures in their learning environments:

“...visuals have been really helpful too with the language barriers, because you don't have to be able to read the words.”

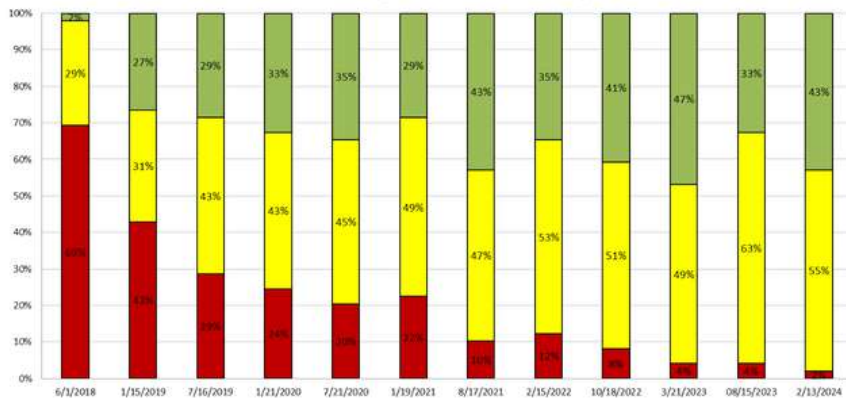


Further exploration with a larger sample of families is needed to understand the full impacts of the Pyramid Model on families and children.

3. How has the Pyramid Model influenced Program/Regional Leadership Teams confidence and ability to support professional practices related to social emotional learning?

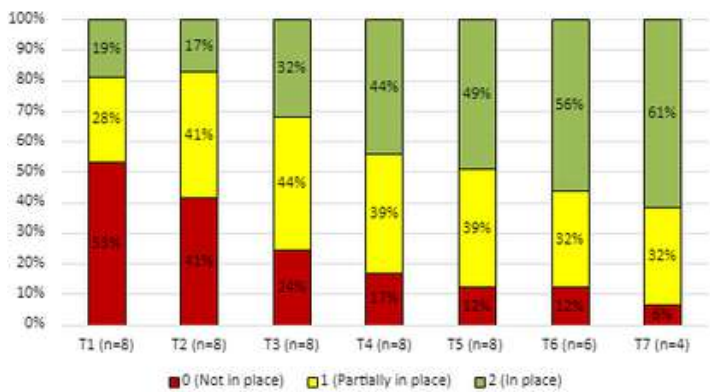
The third evaluation question addressed Program/Regional Leadership Teams confidence and ability to support social emotional related professional practice. It is identified that as programs and leadership teams continue participation in Pyramid Model, their ability to support practice increases (as seen in the figures of program and regional leadership team BoQs below).

Provincial Leadership Team Benchmarks of Quality



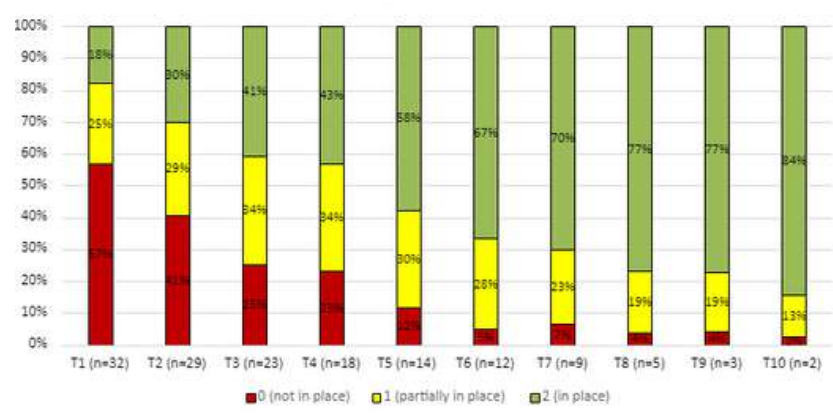
Between January 2022 and February 2024 there have been four Provincial Leadership Team BoQs completed by the PLT. Over time, the BoQs have generally decreased items not in place, and increased items partially in place and in place.

Pre-primary Program Benchmarks of Quality



There has been steady progress made on the PPP Cohort Program BoQs. Indicators in place are increasing while indicators not in place are decreasing

Regulated Child Care Program Benchmarks of Quality



There has been steady progress made on the RCC Cohort Program BoQs. Indicators in place continued to increase while indicators not in place have decreased

4. What is influencing the implementation (through implementation drivers) of the Pyramid Model across Nova Scotia?

What is the pathway to “effective” implementation?

To learn more about the Pyramid Model at a system-level, we collected a range of data from a variety of perspectives and roles involved with implementation. Information was gathered from the NSECDIS Planning Team, Coach Team Leads, Inclusion Coaches, Early Childhood Development Consultants, Pre-primary Consultants, and Pre-primary Leads. The following summarizes information from two focus groups and one survey (n=63).

System Level Context

Current structure

- The alignment of Pyramid Model strategies to inclusion practices helps to extend existing NSECDIS services to educators and programs.
- The central resource team at NSECDIS (e.g., Human Resources and IT) and funding from DEECD are supportive to overall operations related to Pyramid Model.
- The development of Leadership Teams for onboarding programs is essential to building relationships. Additionally, regular completion of Benchmarks of Quality supports Leadership Teams to reflect on and address challenges.

Internal communication (NSECDIS)

- The pathway of communication is supported through monthly meetings between CTLs and Regional Directors with the Director of Intervention Services.
- The process of reflective supervision between Coach Team Leads and Inclusion Coaches is strengthened through informal connection and communication.

Positive impacts

- NSECDIS is seeing more programs reaching out for Pyramid Model resources for their programs.
- Pyramid Model was described as well-aligned with existing ELCC initiatives by program participants such as Quality Matters and the Early Learning Curriculum Framework.

4. What is influencing the implementation (through implementation drivers) of the Pyramid Model across Nova Scotia?

What is the pathway to “effective” implementation?

System Level Challenges

Communication and collaboration between organizations

- A focus on collaboration between organizations is necessary to strengthen leadership as there is a lack of access to partnerships between organizations and minimal opportunities for providing feedback between organizational partnerships.
- Results demonstrated an opportunity to enhance the understanding and clarity regarding the provincial definition of inclusion, Pyramid Model vision and goals, and of systems level roles and responsibilities.

Communication within organizations

- There are inefficient communication pathways from CTLs to Regional Directors, especially if a CTL works across regions.
- Almost half of ECDCs and over half of Pre-primary consultants do not feel supported by their own organization in implementing and sustaining Pyramid Model.

Contributing to a lack of buy-in

- French language inequity within available resources and training for Francophone programs can contribute to slowing the progress of implementation.
- Current situational factors of the ELCC sector impact relationship building at the program level (e.g., illness, educator burnout, lack of qualified ECEs means fewer foundational ECE skills, turnover).
- Perceived ongoing misinterpretation of Pyramid can limit program’s buy-in (i.e., not directly addressing children’s behaviours, but building the capacity and confidence of ECE practice to respond to behaviours).

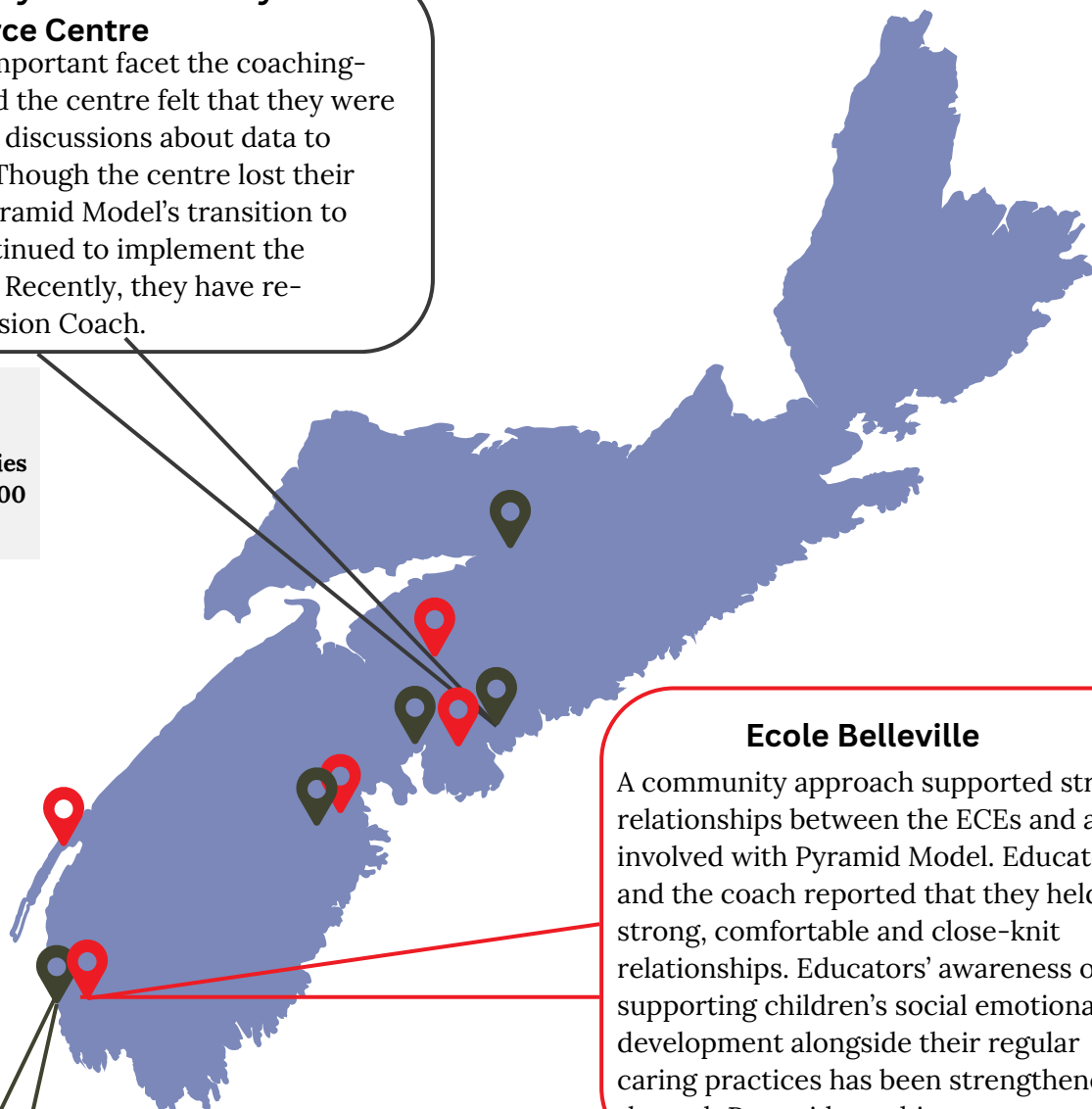
4. What is influencing the implementation (through implementation drivers) of the Pyramid Model across Nova Scotia?

Interviews with case study participants were conducted from September to December 2023. Ten programs were purposefully selected and invited to share their experiences with Pyramid Model implementation at their program or centre.

East Preston Daycare and Family Resource Centre

Communication was an important facet the coaching-educator relationship, and the centre felt that they were able to have collaborative discussions about data to reflect on their practice. Though the centre lost their initial coach during the Pyramid Model's transition to NSECDIS, the centre continued to implement the Pyramid Model practices. Recently, they have re-engaged with a new Inclusion Coach.

We pay respect to the histories, contributions and legacies of African Nova Scotian communities which have been here for over 400 years.



Ecole Belleville

A community approach supported strong relationships between the ECEs and all involved with Pyramid Model. Educators and the coach reported that they held strong, comfortable and close-knit relationships. Educators' awareness of supporting children's social emotional development alongside their regular caring practices has been strengthened through Pyramid coaching.

The Acadian and Francophone communities have long been a part of Nova Scotia. Acadians brought with them their traditions and culture.

BGC Yarmouth

The challenge of implementing Pyramid Model centre-wide when not all educators can be coached at the same time was addressed by a float educator who created an 'influencer kit' with their Inclusion Coach: a belt bag with visuals like the problem-solving kit or Tucker the Turtle. This kit allowed her to be responsive to the environment and implement Pyramid Model practices across the rooms, allowing the introduction of Pyramid to the rest of the centre.

4. What is influencing the implementation (through implementation drivers) of the Pyramid Model across Nova Scotia?

Big Birds Nest Daycare

The director and educators described feeling supported by one another as well as by their coach, brainstorming new ideas to approach challenges as a team. These strong relationships within the team have allowed them to implement Pyramid Model practices centre-wide. They are now building relationships with their new coach and ECDC to continue the implementation of Pyramid. They have taken a program-wide approach, reflecting on data to support ECE practice and using Pyramid Model visuals in all rooms.

Digby Elementary

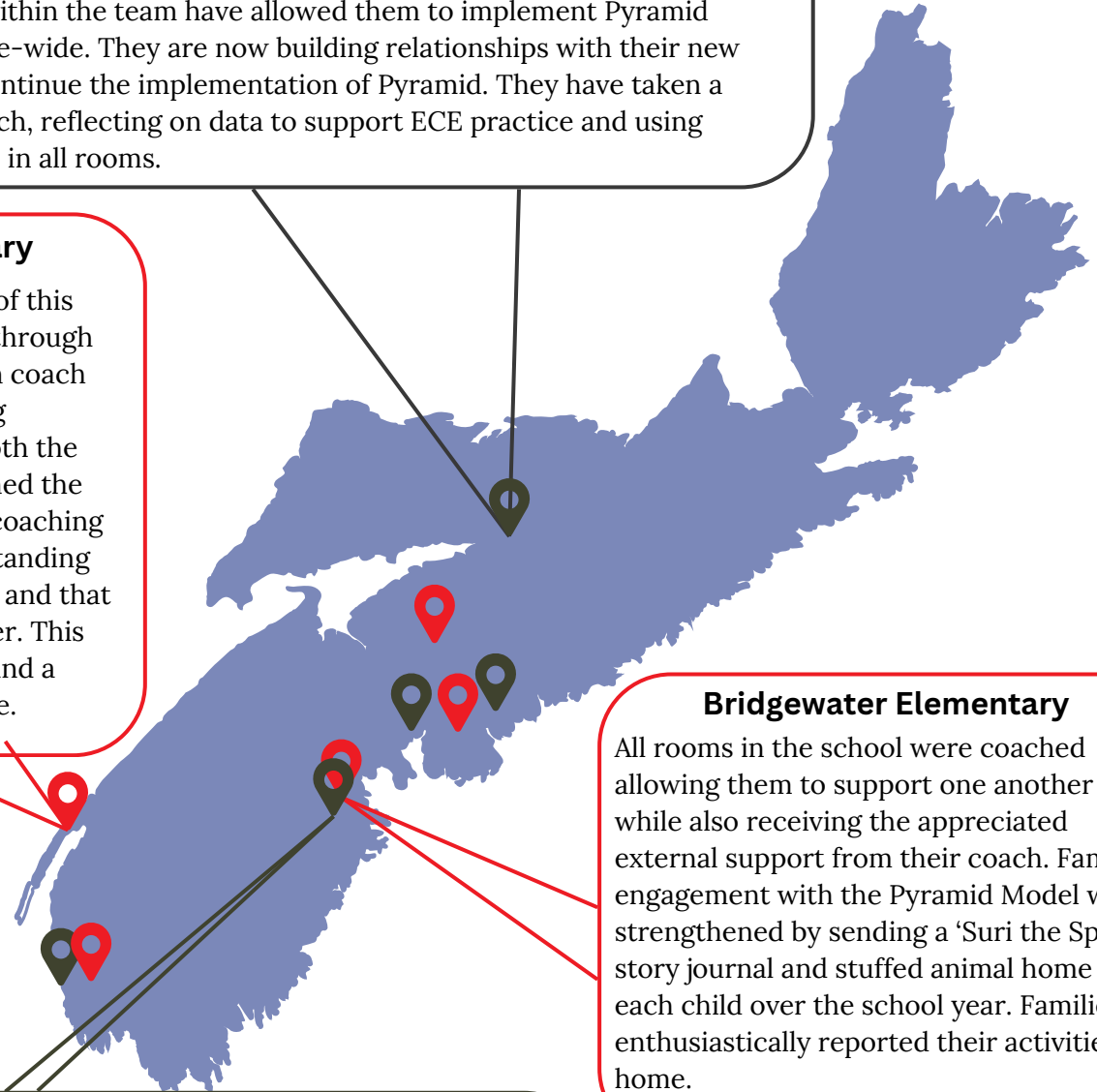
One particular strength of this program was described through the relationship between coach and ECE and their strong communication skills. Both the coach and ECE approached the Pyramid Model and the coaching process with the understanding that they were both new and that they would grow together. This led to a level of respect and a willingness to collaborate.

Bridgewater Elementary

All rooms in the school were coached allowing them to support one another while also receiving the appreciated external support from their coach. Family engagement with the Pyramid Model was strengthened by sending a 'Suri the Spider' story journal and stuffed animal home with each child over the school year. Families enthusiastically reported their activities at home.

Small World Learning Centre

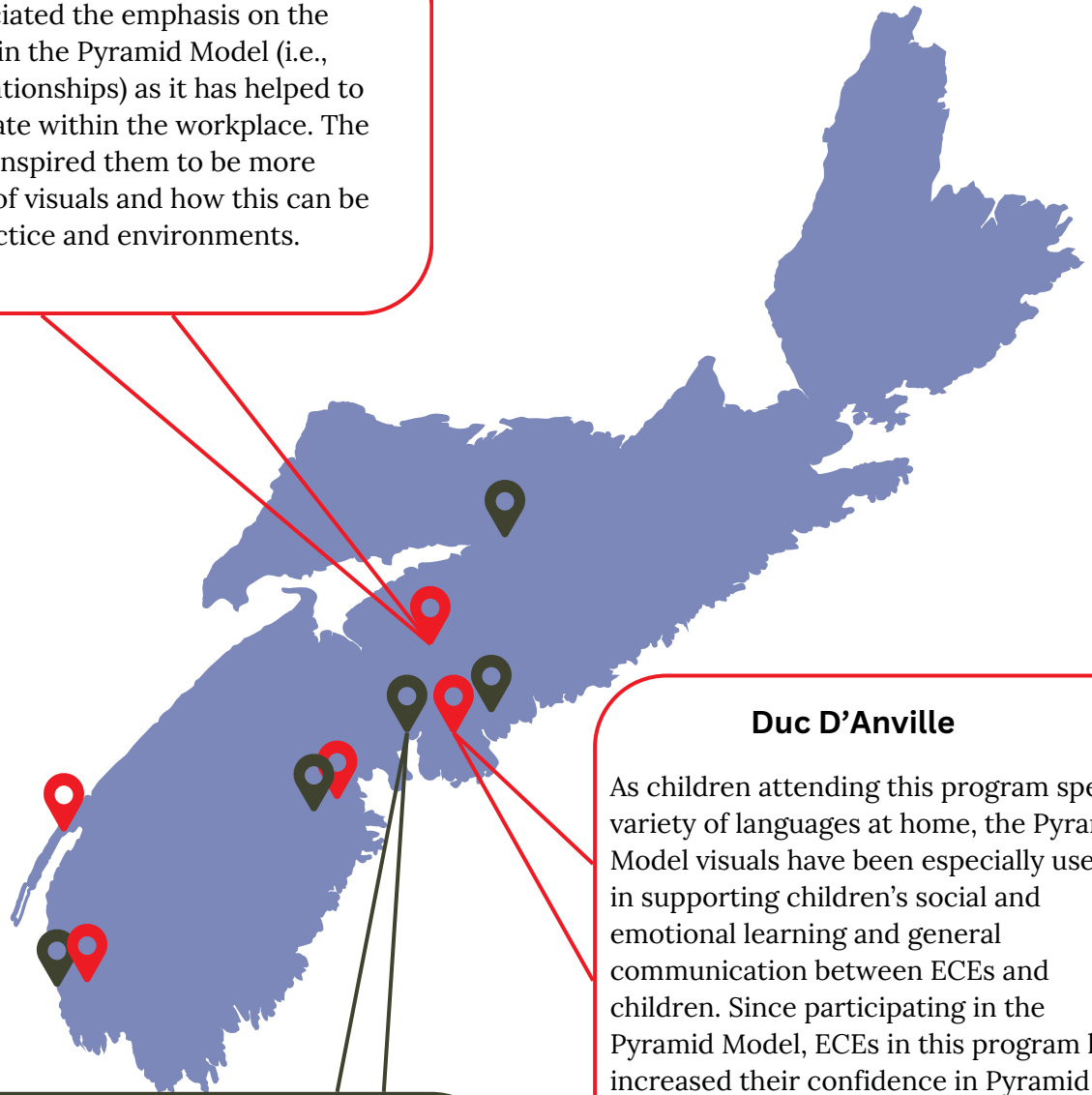
This centre was interested in the Pyramid practices and happy to receive support from their coach but felt that certain elements of the Pyramid Model were not fully aligned with their practice that prioritizes the outdoors. In partnership with their coach, this centre has been exploring ways that Pyramid Model can be adapted to align with their programming. For example, their coach has supported their goals by helping create resources and visuals for their outside environment. The program also noted limits of the observational tool as the two-hour observation window can only occur indoors, which was felt to not reflect their practice.



4. What is influencing the implementation (through implementation drivers) of the Pyramid Model across Nova Scotia?

Elmsdale District School

This program has appreciated the emphasis on the effective workforce within the Pyramid Model (i.e., positive professional relationships) as it has helped to reinforce a positive climate within the workplace. The Pyramid Model has also inspired them to be more reflective about the use of visuals and how this can be integrated into their practice and environments.



Duc D'Anville

As children attending this program speak a variety of languages at home, the Pyramid Model visuals have been especially useful in supporting children's social and emotional learning and general communication between ECEs and children. Since participating in the Pyramid Model, ECEs in this program have increased their confidence in Pyramid Model practice. Some aspects of the observation tool were noted as a challenge (e.g. flexibility to account for situational factors).

Point Pleasant Child Care Centre

The program was initially eager to participate in the Pyramid Model to expand its practice through coaching. The program appreciated that the initial data was reflective of their philosophies, showing high levels of relationship-building and family engagement. This program also expressed concerns with the expectations among some TPITOS/TPOT items and Pyramid Model practices as they felt it was prescriptive and misaligned with their practice.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD



The following considerations have been developed to identify key priority focus areas to support ongoing implementation and sustainability of the Pyramid Model in Nova Scotia.

Alignment of Pyramid Model to Nova Scotia ELCC

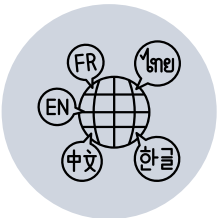
The alignment and long-term vision of the Pyramid Model needs to be clarified and communicated across the NS early learning and child care context. This needs to be integrated alongside the early learning curriculum framework (ELCF) and provincial goals for inclusion.

A comprehensive review of Pyramid materials and observation tools needs to be completed alongside of the ELCF.

Considerations for alignment and/or adaptations with the NS context (e.g., for outdoor assessments) need to be clearly communicated to all those involved with supporting and implementing the Pyramid Model.



Structural Support



Further evaluation is needed to clarify who is accessing Pyramid Model material through the NSECDIS eLearning Portal to understand knowledge gaps and enhance learning experiences (e.g., enhanced assessment and data literacy to interpret observation tools and motivate change).

Consideration of program coaching is essential, as it can shift the emphasis towards building internal capacity within programs, enable and sustain evidence-based practices in social and emotional development, and support further provincial scaling up to include more educators and programs.

Language inequities for Francophone programs need to be addressed through investment and supports. More translation of materials may be needed to support newcomer communities.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD



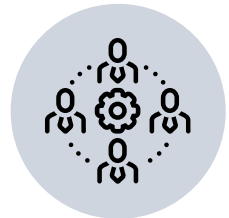
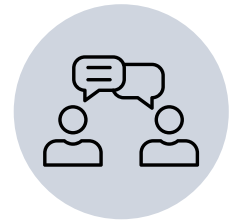
Relationships and Communication

Positive and transparent communication pathways between and within organizations can foster relationships and collaboration. Further provincial conversations may enhance relationships and commitment at all implementation levels.

A strong provincial vision of Pyramid Model's purpose and goals should be communicated across organizations. This needs to clarify the alignment of the Pyramid Model to the ECLF, inclusion, and quality initiatives.

Clarification of roles and intersections across organizations is needed to ensure understanding, willingness, and collaboration to support implementation.

A diverse group of representatives related to early childhood (e.g., mental health, ECE associations) should be invited to the PLT to build stronger partnerships across sectors.



Final Remarks



Findings demonstrate overall improvement in Pyramid Model practices for participating programs. It will be important to include the voices of all those involved in future evaluations. This includes a focus on educator, family, and child voice.

Additional evaluation activities must be designed alongside of broader ELCC sector initiatives to minimize burden and fatigue.

A focus on implementation science and systems change could support provincial planning and implementation.