

Meeting Summary: The Canada Wide Early Learning Child Care Engagement Table (ELCCET)

Meeting 4: February 4th 2023 – 9:30 – 4:00 pm

Background

The fourth meeting of the Minister's Early Learning and Child Care Engagement Table (ELCCET) was held on February 4th, 2023. The meeting was focused on two key objectives:

- Gathering information to inform possible updates to Nova Scotia's ELCC Action Plan for 2023-2026.
- Gathering input to help shape Nova Scotia's vision for early learning and child care, building upon the Canada-Nova Scotia Agreement and considering strategic priorities.

Agenda

1. Welcome from Education and Early Childhood Development Minister, Becky Druhan
2. Action plan updates & input via group discussion
3. Building a Child and Family Centered System – discussion and scenarios
4. Connecting to the vision – what does success look like now and into the future
5. Guiding Principles

Summary

Action plan initiatives were summarized and mapped to five priority areas: funding, quality & inclusive programming, system design & administration, workforce and spaces. As initiatives were discussed, Table members reiterated the importance of considerations, themes and initiatives related to each area.

Priority Area: System Design & Administration

- Determining the appropriate organizational (governance) structure to reduce administrative burden on operators and providers; the structure needs to reduce out-of-ratio tasks, drive cost efficiencies, ensure a provincially consistent high quality of service delivery and help families navigate the options and spaces available in their communities.
- Ensuring the right navigational supports, pathways, intervention outreach, and integration with government and local resources are considered as the system is designed, and embedded where appropriate.
- Conducting performance measurement and management to monitor the outcomes of the system; this needs to include data benchmarking, monitoring, and evaluation and must be enabled by technology.
- Assessing the integrated supports that children and families require and determining how to systematically connect ELCC programs to those integrated supports – examples include medical supports, paramedical supports, intervention supports, other community supports and resources.
- Determining the right pace to build and transition to the new system amidst capacity (space & staffing) shortages given growing waitlists.

- Generating public awareness of the critical impact of early learning and child care on brain development and long-term outcomes.
- Determining how to account for regional variations, and local community need as the system is built.
- Ensuring local community culture and heritage is retained and celebrated within the future system.

Priority Area: Funding

- Ensuring existing municipal and other public infrastructure (buildings, etc.) is leveraged appropriately to generate cost efficiencies.
- Determining the true cost to operate a fully inclusive and accessible space and ensuring the operational funding model matches this cost.
- Determining the right staffing mix and ratios to enable full inclusion and high quality service, and providing funding meet these ratios.
- Determining what an 'average' of \$10/day means for families as we work toward this milestone by 2025/26.
- Ensuring the future funding model accounts for the supports, supplies and infrastructure required to deliver high quality learning and care.
- Ensuring the subsidy program and policy are updated to align with the funding approach being developed.
- Ensuring expansion is appropriately funded to create fully (physically) accessible spaces, with consideration for dining space, break space, natural light and outdoor spaces.

Priority Area: Quality & Inclusive Programming

- Ensuring staff are trained through robust pre-service training, in-service mentoring, coaching and peer review, to deliver fully inclusive programming and culturally responsive practice.
- Providing staff with the time and financial support to continually improve their skills through mandatory and optional professional development opportunities.
- Ensuring staffing ratios enable the right mix of in-ratio and out-of-ratio work, for each position.
- Developing training to bolster cultural competency and cultural responsiveness.
- Ensuring education, training and classification are working together to recruit, build and retain a workforce that is equipped to serve *all* children and families.
- Ensuring ongoing quality improvement (curriculum, training, performance measurement, continuous improvement) is embedded within the system.
- Ensuring intervention outreach is embedded within the system.

Priority Area: Spaces

- Ensuring decision-making criteria enable equitable, appropriate expansion.
- Creating a clear definition of a space – for both full time and part time spaces.
- Ensuring capacity for emergency spaces exists within the system.
- Ensuring the system considers diverse space use needs, at the community level (seasonal vs year role, shift work vs standard business hours)

- Identifying what a fully inclusive space means, and recognizing that for children with complex needs, the definition of a full time or part time space may need to be flexible.
- Using the right provincial, municipal and population-based data to facilitate equitable and appropriate expansion and proactively anticipate demand.
- Developing a clear governance and accountability structure to manage space availability and access (considering the responsibilities of the province, municipalities, operators and providers).
- Creating forums to enable collaborative decision-making about expansion, at the community level.
- Identifying opportunities for strategic co-location of centres and providers near existing community resources, green spaces, and recreational facilities (rinks, pools, libraries).

Priority Area: Workforce

- Ensuring newcomer ECEs and newly graduated ECEs are properly supported by the local workforce and their leadership upon entry into the sector. This must include the right mix of on-the-job mentorship, peer coaching and leadership support.
- Creating a sustainable certification framework, with motivating pathways, to encourage professional growth and development.
- Ensuring support staff (cooks and others) are appropriately trained to deliver quality service and meet quality standards.
- Ensuring staffing ratios allow time for staff breaks, professional development, and planning.

Bringing Nova Scotia's vision to life

We asked members to envision the future of ELCC in NS in 2023 and consider how they would communicate this vision in writing. This is what they had to say.

- We have a publicly funded and managed system with true, universal access, for all children and families that is viewed as part of the lifelong learning continuum.
- Universal access to ELCC is viewed as a right, because it's in the best interests of children and families (firstly) and because it's an enabler of healthy communities and a productive economy.
- Well-funded and well-resourced centres and staff meet the complex needs of all families and children.
- Spaces are used efficiently and flexibly - they are available during emergencies
- Parents have choice about the type of care (home based, centre based) their child receives, when they receive it and where they receive it however they make these decisions with accurate information about the importance of ELCC from a brain development lens.
- Centres are comprehensive, one-stop shops that are central to the community and act as a hub.
 - The system is *truly* inclusive. Children have access to the integrated health, wellness, learning and language supports they need to fully participate on site and at scheduled times.
- Care locations are deliberately located and co-located to maximize the learning experience, safety and existing infrastructure
 - Near community-based recreation facilities like rinks, pools and libraries

- Near hospitals
- Near green spaces and gardens
- In consideration of existing municipal infrastructure
- The parents of children with unique abilities feel supported by the system and those working within it. Inclusion outreach is a key element of flexible service delivery; resources meet the child and parent where they are, which may mean at-home visits.
- Care is provided in culturally and physically safe environments with ample indoor and outdoor space, natural light and places to gather.
- The system values the lived, hands-on early learning and child care experience that exists in communities and finds ways to maximise this.
- Staff are well trained, properly compensated and are valued just as much as educators working in the P-12 system.
- The system is staffed to provide high quality care to all children with special consideration for the ratios needed to be fully inclusive of children with complex needs.
- The system is built upon a culture of continuous learning, innovation and professional development just as the p-12 system is; the system is funded and staffed to enable regular PD.
- And because of the increased tax base, the system pays for itself.

The session concluded with discussion about transformation values and guiding principles.