



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

Meeting 5: June 17th 2023, 9:30 – 4:00 pm

Background

The fifth meeting of the Minister's Early Learning and Child Care Engagement Table (ELCCET) was held on June 17th, 2023. The meeting was focused on two key objectives:

- Ongoing planning for strategic early learning and child care (ELCC) expansion by gaining input on key projections, cost drivers, assumptions and strategic priorities.
- Hearing members' perspectives on the key roles and responsibilities that need to be considered in the development of an inclusion strategy for the ELCC sector.

Agenda

1. Opening Remarks by Minister Becky Druhan
2. Group reflection and feedback on the first year working together as an Engagement Table
3. Expansion updates, feedback on preliminary assumptions and strategic priorities
4. Input on inclusion – identifying some key actions and responsibilities to achieve a vision of inclusive ELCC
5. Updates on other initiatives

Summary

The meeting began with a reflection on the first year as an Engagement Table. Themes of strengthened relationships and building trust across the sector and with the department arose as members shared their perspectives.

Deloitte, contracted to assist the Department with expansion planning, presented preliminary projections, calculations and assumptions. This work will help to guide future expansion planning. Member feedback will be considered as Deloitte's work with the Department progresses.

The last portion of the day was focused on inclusion. Members provided input on some of the actions that will need to be taken by sector partners to achieve an inclusive Early Learning and Child Care system. The frame for the discussion was 'Inclusion, a collective responsibility'.

Expansion

- The Department provided context regarding:
 - The current number and types of licenced Early Learning and Child Care spaces
 - Expansion projects underway
 - Lessons learned from previous expansion projects
- Elements of Deloitte's presentation included:
 - Key learnings from jurisdictional scanning
 - Forecasting demand and related assumptions

- Budgeting and relating assumptions
- Preliminary recommendations
- Table Members were asked to consider the assumptions related to demand projections, cost analysis and provide feedback based on their experiences as ECE's, operators, advocates and academics.
- Deloitte discussed opportunities for an interdisciplinary ELCC planning mechanism, and the Table shared their perspective on what this could look like
- Deloitte presented their approach to capital costing for space expansion, including assumptions, and Table Members provided feedback.
- Deloitte discussed potential space expansion partners for future expansion; the Table prioritized the following partnerships: health sector, municipalities, communities, Regional Centres of Education, universities, schools. For Family Home Child Care, partners should also include community housing and landlords.

Input on Inclusion

- The department presented inclusion strategy considerations. The presentation included:
 - An overview of best practices related to inclusive early learning and child care systems
 - Examples of inclusive education policies and related actions
- The table was asked to consider, through their lens (as a Parent, Operator or ECE), what actions each sector partner (Department, ECE's, Operators and Parents) need to take to achieve an inclusive early learning and child care system in Nova Scotia.
- Suggested actions for the department:
 - Integrated services to provide a continuum of care
 - Universal design for learning, and accessibility standards, as the lens for policies and procedures
 - Public education about the ELCC system so parents can better understand their options
 - Strengthened policies, standards, strategic planning and accountability mechanisms
 - Funding support to enable the appropriate staffing and systems to create a truly inclusive ELCC system
- Suggested actions for ECEs:
 - Recognition of personal biases and a culture of curiosity and open mindedness
 - Participating in more predictably scheduled communication and collaboration with parents and Directors about childrens' unique backgrounds, needs and abilities
 - Increased professional development supports
- Suggested actions for Operators:
 - Recognition of personal biases and a culture of curiosity and open mindedness
 - Creating time for regularly scheduled interactions with parents and educators regarding childrens' unique backgrounds, needs and abilities
 - Adopt centre-based practices that support a culture of inclusivity eg. communicate inclusion policy and practices, equitable hiring practices, working conditions that encourage professional development
 - Provide access to training on topics like social emotional development, self regulation and trauma informed care
 - Offer equitable options within programming (ex. flexible and extended hours of operation), enabled through strong Departmental policy

Suggested actions for parents:



- Clear and consistent communication and advocacy of their child's needs
- Regular and ongoing inquiry about the inclusion supports and resources available within their child's ELCC setting, through the Department, and through other government sources
- A willingness to leverage all resources available to them, including those outside of the ELCC system
- Allowing for dedicated time and space at pick-up and drop-off to interact with their child's care provider, receive and provide feedback, and participate in collaborative and solutions-focused discussions

Session wrap-up

The day concluded with brief updates on other initiatives, and discussion about the year ahead. The next in-person table meeting will take place this Fall.