

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

Meeting 3: October 22, 2022, 9:30 am – 4:00 pm , Comfort Hotel Bayer's Lake

Recap:

The third meeting of the Minister's Early Learning and Child Care Engagement Table (ELCCET) was held on October 22nd, 2022 and focused primarily on reconnecting to the vision for accessible, affordable, quality, inclusive child care and the transformation to a publicly funded system.

We reflected on what it means to build a publicly funded Early Learning Child Care system with a presentation from Guest Speaker Morna Ballantyne, who provided insights around the challenges and inequities of a market-based approach to delivering child care. Under a market approach, securing child care and providing access to early childhood education is viewed as the individual responsibility of the parent rather than a collective responsibility. Morna also reflected on the complexities of transforming early learning and child care from a market-based approach to a public system.

Examples and insights from other jurisdictions were reflected upon, including the reality that building a public system of early learning and child care in Nova Scotia was triggered by the signing of the Canada-Wide Agreement, but will take decades of ongoing evolution. It was suggested that implementing universal early learning and child care at a federal level will be similar in scope and complexity to the development and refinement of Canada's public education system.

In the afternoon, members shared initial feedback on how Nova Scotia's action plan could be successfully implemented by determining obstacles that are likely to be encountered, questions that need to be answered, and advice for solving those questions as transformation progresses.

Agenda:

1. Welcome from Education and Early Childhood Development Minister, Becky Druhan
2. Wage roll-out and agreement amendment: Questions and discussion
3. Enabling system change: Building an understanding of a 'publicly funded system'
4. Measuring impact: Early Development Indicators (EDI)
5. Implementation planning: Gain input on action plan implementation

Summary:

- 1. Key messages shared by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, Becky Druhan**
 - Transformation of the Early Learning and Child Care sector is decades overdue.
 - Implementing a wage scale for ECEs is a foundational step to delivering high quality early education and child care.

- This is the beginning of a cultural shift as we focus on a sector that has not received the attention it deserves, for decades. This is just the starting point. I firmly believe it is a strong starting point.
- While we cannot fix decades-worth of issues through one announcement, or with one initiative, or even within a few short years, we're making bold progress in the right direction.
- We need to accept that we will not always agree, but we also need to acknowledge that the status quo hasn't been working for many children and families in Nova Scotia and the only way to fix it is together.

2. Wage roll-out and agreement amendment questions

- Some Operators voiced concern about the amount of time (30 days) given to review and sign an amended funding agreement that will enable the Province to flow funding according to the recently announced ECE wage scale.
- The Department reiterated that an amended funding agreement must be returned before public funding can be distributed, and that supports are in place to assist Operators during the transition to the wage scale.
- Operators that have general questions about their funding agreement or require one-on-one support should contact the Department via their Early Childhood Development Consultant or via ECDSGrants@novascotia.ca to book a one-on-one appointment.
- The Department also acknowledged that it cannot provide legal advice regarding the amended funding agreement; Operators seeking legal opinion on the terms and conditions of their agreement should seek legal advice.
- Some members around the table cited disappointment and frustration about the ECE wage scale levels, while others expressed excitement that the wage scale will now be tied to regular public sector adjustments.
- Some members cited the emotional impacts that system transformation is having on the sector – they noted that uncertainty about the future is very challenging, especially for business owners, and that the sector is in a state of change fatigue and fragility, but that they have a desire to be part of a better future and to work collaboratively with the Department.
- The Department noted that while it does not yet have answers to many of the questions being asked, specifically the answer to what 'profit' looks like in a publicly funded system, staff remain committed to being transparent and as collaborative as possible throughout transformation.
- The Department reiterated the complexity behind determining the role of profit in a publicly funded system; this work will require detailed analysis, a dedicated working group, externally contracted subject matter experts and well-informed policy options. Detailed planning around the approach, resourcing and timeline for the Operational Funding Model is the next priority after ECE wages are implemented. Details will be shared with the sector as they become available.
- The Department reiterated that any provider who is facing financial challenges should contact the Department through ECDSGrants@novascotia.ca

3. Enabling system change: building an understanding of a 'publicly funded system'

- Presentation and Q&A with Guest Speaker, Morna Ballantyne – “Child Care Now”
- Morna described the challenges and inequities caused by a market-based system of child care.
- The table reflected on the concept of transformation toward a publicly funded system of early learning and childcare and recognized that it is highly complex, will take years to be fully realized, and will require disruption of familiar systems and processes.

4. Measuring impact: Early Development Indicators (EDI)

- The table received a presentation on the 5 critical development dimensions assessed by the EDI.
- Data shows that a correlation exists between investments in early years in Nova Scotia (pre-primary) education and diminishing vulnerabilities for early learners.

5. Implementation planning: Gain input on action plan implementation

- Members reflected on the 4 pillars of the transformation: accessibility, quality, inclusion and affordability. Notes from this exercise have been shared internally and will be considered in planning and team resourcing decisions.