

# Regulated Child Care Review: What We Heard

## Purpose

In 2018, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) announced our intention to move forward with a review and redesign of Nova Scotia's child-care regulatory and licensing framework.

Licensing practices have undergone changes over the last number of years, but not necessarily in ways that optimally supports the delivery of early years programming.

A new regulatory and licensing framework will be a foundational step for EECD to best deliver on the strategy laid out in our document "Affordable, Quality Child Care: A Great Place to Grow!"

We want the child-care sector in Nova Scotia to have a regulatory framework that is more effective and efficient in supporting child-care providers and operators, and

- better supports early years programming
- improves on the outcomes for child development
- fosters ongoing positive relationships between the sector and the province.

## Approach

The department contracted Davis Pier Consulting to conduct this review. In August 2018, Davis Pier engaged with major stakeholders in the regulated child-care sector through a variety of formats, including interviews, workshops, and public town halls.

Forty stakeholders, including child-care facility directors, agencies and agency family homes, government departments, and professional associations, were interviewed. Parents and guardians of children who attend child-care facilities and family homes were also interviewed for us to gain a better understanding of the challenges and strengths of the system from their perspective.

In addition, 14 town hall sessions were held across the province with total attendance of 327 (154 child-care facility directors and 173 early childhood educators [ECEs]).

## Recommendations

Nine recommendations resulted from the engagement sessions, observations, research, and consultation with department staff. The recommendations are themed into three categories as follows:

### 1. Licensed Facilities and Agencies

- **Provide greater flexibility on ratios** of staff to children for mixed-age groups to allow the movement of children between groups when it is appropriate to do so. Adjusting the ratios for mixed-age groups will keep Nova Scotia in line with other provinces.

- **Streamline the regulations through specific improvements** so stakeholders have a consistent and clear understanding of the regulations. Stakeholders identified issues within the regulations that, in their knowledge and experience, need to be amended or repealed.
- **Implement regulatory changes to better monitor programming and curriculum.** Currently, monitoring is done through self-assessment and there is no mandate to comply. Giving this authority to the department would ensure best practices are being followed and provide greater program accountability to government and the public.
- **Reduce the amount of detail in regulations and provide more guidance through policy directives** to allow greater flexibility to change requirements in a child-care environment as needed, while providing more clarity when a regulation is not clear.

## 2. Administrative

- **Design and implement a risk-based inspection system** that alters the frequency of inspections and requirements for facilities based on their history and relative risk. This would result in more efficient use of limited administrative resources and save time through abbreviated inspections. It does not mean that standards are lowered—in fact, it allows government to focus more on the facilities that need support.
- **Improve the processes associated with the regulations** to increase compliance and to make inspections more efficient. Stakeholders, licensing officers, and operators all agree that many of the forms and processes associated with compliance can be confusing.
- **Consider supporting the implementation of a professional body for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs)** that would be responsible for standards and classifications. This would reduce government’s administrative load, increase professional recognition for ECEs, and potentially address issues with out-of-province recognition.

## 3. School-age Programs (outside school hours)

- **Require all school-age programs to register and be subject to inspection**, which will allow better government oversight of all providers offering school-age child care (including recreation programs) and will give regulatory authority to monitor and take action to ensure the health and safety of children.
- **Create a set of rules to govern health and safety for school-age children** that would result in a minimum health, safety, and programming standard common to all programs, regardless of setting; be lighter than current practice in regulated child care; and allow for greater consistency.

## Update and Next Steps

Government heard through the consultation that the relationship between EECD and the child-care sector is positive and wants to continue to build on this with some immediate actions.

An Early Childhood Educator's Working Group has been tasked to identify and report on issues and concerns specific to ECEs who work in not-for-profit and commercial regulated child-care settings. We have continued the work related to recruitment and retention, most recently announcing the addition of seats for post-secondary training in early childhood education and the successful completion of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) pilot that added additional persons with a Level 2 classification into the system.

The Nova Scotia Before and After Program (NSBAP) is a new initiative using a new set of program delivery standards and a monitoring procedure for both recreation and child-care providers. This model has been successful in demonstrating how streamlined regulatory requirements can continue to maintain the health and safety of children in a recreation focused program.

Finally, we will develop a strategic plan to address the primary issues identified in the current childcare licensing and regulatory framework.

As Nova Scotia continues to grow universal pre-primary and regulated childcare, we will continue to look at all regulatory frameworks that guide our work to ensure they are modern, efficient, based on best practice and consistent where appropriate. All decisions regarding the recommendations and our direction forward will be based on evidence informed best practices, streamlined and effective regulations, and collaborative and relational approaches to licensing. Together, ongoing initiatives will create conditions that allow for greater flexibility, while maintaining a focus on the health and safety of children, which remains our main priority.



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