

HOW B.C. CAN CREATE THE
NEXT 10,000 NEW CHILD CARE SPACES

A SHIFT TO SCHOOL-BASED DELIVERY OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE



Exploring an integrated approach to Early Childhood Education and care using the Seamless Day Model



BRIEF PREPARED BY CUPE NATIONAL RESEARCH

JULY 2020 (Version 2)

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OVERALL VISION:

The Canadian Union of Public Employees is a strong advocate for affordable, public child care. Our long-term vision is a public system of early childhood education and learning embedded in our existing public-school system in every community in B.C. – situated in neighbourhoods where families need them and in existing public facilities designed with the best interests of children in mind. To achieve this vision, we support the implementation of the \$10 a Day child care plan which would ensure children of all ages have the right to access publicly-funded and -delivered child care.

INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS A UNIVERSAL PUBLIC SYSTEM

This B.C. government has made significant strides in delivering more affordable and accessible child care spaces over the past three years. Since announcing plans to develop a universal child care system in 2018, the government has opened more than 10,000 new child care spaces in communities across the province, implemented measures to reduce child care fees, increased wages of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), and founded \$10 a Day prototype sites to explore how a universal system could operate.

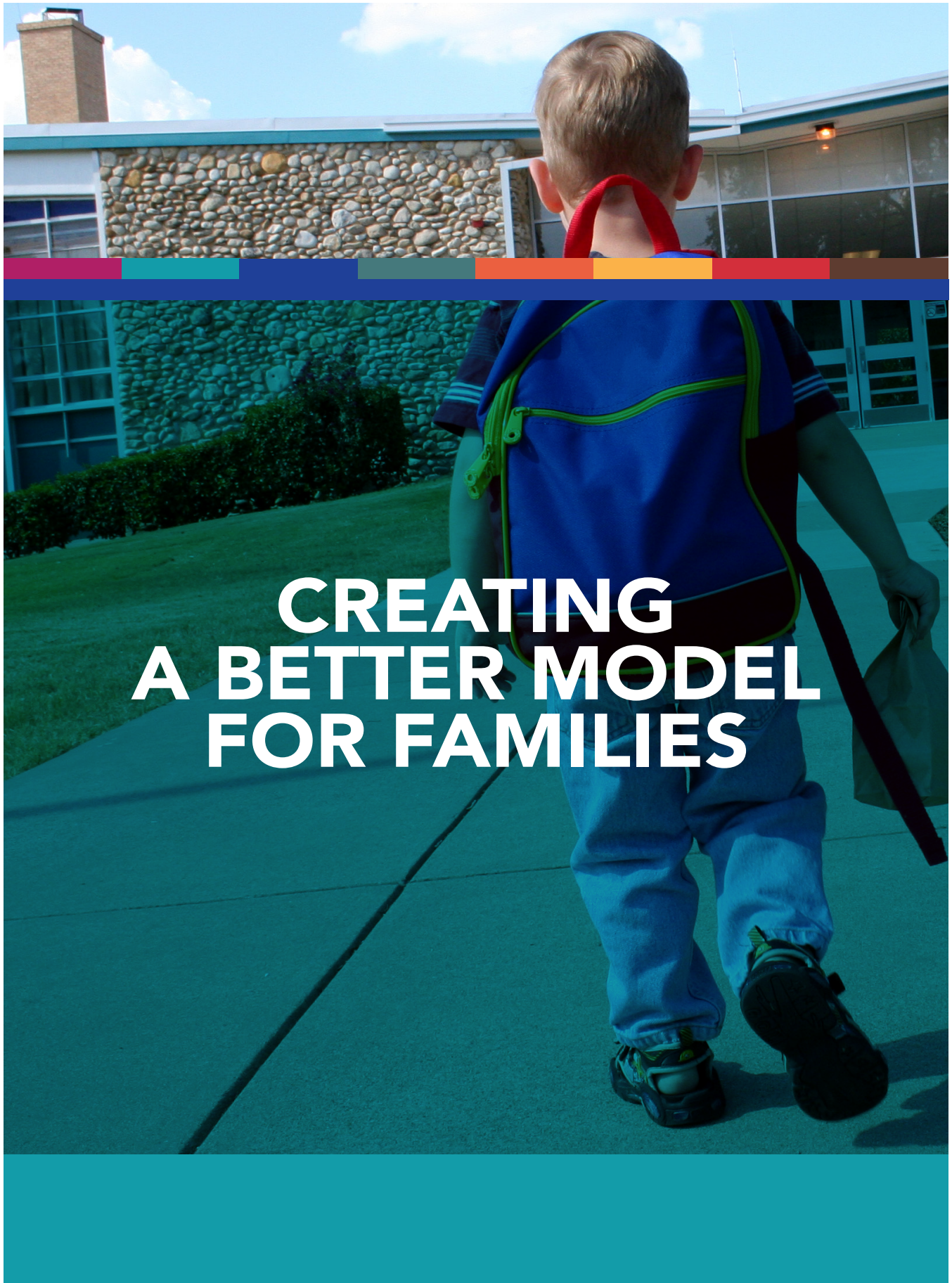
However, despite these achievements, fees remain high for many B.C. families, long child care waitlists persist across the province, and the number of available licenced spaces still falls short, with enough space for only 20 per cent of children.¹ Fundamentally, this is because B.C.'s strictly market-based child care system has led to an inadequate supply of child spaces, and an inequitable distribution of services. Simply put, families lack child care services – of any quality – where and when they need it.

While B.C. struggles with this challenge, a possible solution has been left mostly unexplored. The direct provision of early learning and care in existing elementary school facilities by school districts warrants serious consideration. Thousands of potential cost-effective spaces for before and after-school care exist in every corner of British Columbia and could be mobilized to make a significant impact in child care availability. Further, using an integrated approach to early childhood care and learning (ECEC) through a seamless day model, the government can simultaneously deliver a very high quality, value-added system of early childhood education. This would constitute the next important step towards a fully public system of integrated early care and learning.

While there are some obstacles to achieving this vision, such as licensing and staffing challenges, there are a series of accessible solutions discussed below. School District 53 is currently exploring these challenges and obstacles through a three-year pilot project in Oliver. The School District has successfully launched a 'seamless day' early care and learning model that stands as a strong example of how such a system can successfully address the need for high quality child care.

This brief will demonstrate that the implementation of the seamless day in school districts throughout B.C. would quickly open thousands of badly-needed child care spaces and also expand the development of B.C.'s public system of integrated early care and learning.

¹ ECEBC and CCCBC, 2019



CREATING A BETTER MODEL FOR FAMILIES

The current fractured system is failing children and families

Currently none of Canada's provinces or territories treat child care as an entitlement or right. Across Canada, five-year-olds have access to kindergarten, and although attendance is not always mandatory, this is treated as an entitlement similar to elementary school. Accordingly, and as described in *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2016 Report*, kindergarten is a public responsibility.

Conversely, paying for and finding child care for children younger than five in B.C., and outside of school hours for school-age children is a private family responsibility. (Friendly et al, 2018). In B.C., centre-based child care as it exists today is provided by both non-profits (representing approximately 51.4 per cent of the market, or 48,470 spaces) and for-profit centres (representing 48.6 per cent of the market or 45,676 spaces)², and the entire system operates under a 'user fee' market model.

There is significant evidence that the current system isn't working for B.C. families. Parent fees are among the highest in the country, with costs ranging from \$800 per month for preschoolers to over \$1,000 per month for younger children³. For many, the cost barrier is secondary to the sheer lack of availability. With only enough licenced spaces for less than 20 per cent of children, parents struggle to find any form of child care.⁴

Despite the low number of spaces, labour force challenges dominate the sector. ECE workers struggle with low wages and lack of benefits, causing significant recruitment and retention issues. Further, the educational requirements and associated costs for the prerequisite education and training to receive an ECE certificate aren't relatively comparable to the wage variance between those working in child care environments without that education. This creates less incentive for potential ECE workers to pursue the training and education that ensures child care programs are delivered by qualified trained professionals.

Unfortunately, the current market-based system leaves families with little choice over where, when, or what type of child care their child is enrolled in. These issues cause parents to make difficult choices around child care, and often force consideration of unregulated care that doesn't meet legal requirements and isn't monitored for health and safety. Where supply is so low and need is so high, the market model fails as there is effectively no consumer choice, and as a result, facilities with little oversight and dangerously low quality are allowed to prevail.

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates and the Early Childhood Educators of BC have presented a bold plan, called the \$10 a Day plan, that is widely accepted, and which significantly re-envision early childhood education and care (ECEC) in our province. We believe that the implementation of this plan is the solution to the current patchwork system of child care in B.C. We are not alone in this belief; a growing number of individuals, local governments, boards of education, labour unions and organizations, businesses, and advocacy groups support the plan⁵.

² Friendly, M., et al, 2018

³ As per \$10aday.ca/about, this is the provincial median

⁴ As noted in the \$10 a Day Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care & Learning

⁵ A full list of organizations that support the \$10 a Day plan can be found here: <https://www.10aday.ca/endorse>

As outlined in the \$10 a Day plan, a made-in-B.C. universal early care and learning system is built on well established evidence that:

- Public spending on the early years is a wise social and economic investment;
- Quality child care is early learning;
- High quality, early years programs promote healthy development;
- Children and families need, and have a right to, quality early care and learning; and
- Sound public policy builds universal systems that meet the diverse needs of today's families.

Why early learning matters

Lack of action on early learning leaves kids and families at a disadvantage

In the last decade the value of investing in children has gained considerable support.⁶ Reports such as *The Early Years Study* (McCain and Mustard, 1999) have played a key role in changing the dialogue in Canada surrounding child care and learning, and have proven that care and education are not separate concepts in their value to children's well-being and development.

The benefits of quality, well-designed ECEC programs are well documented (Pascal, 2009 and Honorable Margaret Norrie McCain, 2020.) As summarized in the 2017 *Early Care Report*, these benefits include providing kids with enhanced academic and socio-emotional competencies that contribute to increased earnings and better health and social behaviour as adults.



⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/33852192.pdf>

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) **Starting Strong V Report** (OECD, 2017) confirms that the transition from early childhood education to public school is a big step for children. Further investments in high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and smooth transitions between the various stages of early education are key for children's long-term learning and development.⁷ For most children in B.C., school-based kindergarten is currently the only place where ECEC and education overlap.

In recent years, Canada's largest investment in ECEC has been in full-day kindergarten for five-year-olds⁸. Several provinces, including Ontario and more recently Nova Scotia, have also expanded their public school systems to include access for four-year-olds. In Ontario they have designed this to be an additional year of kindergarten (junior kindergarten, commonly called JK), and in Nova Scotia they offer a Pre-Primary program that is free, voluntary and offered in the school setting. The goal of this program is to help children "transition into the school system and provide experiences that give children the best start to succeed in school and life."⁹

In Quebec, the provincial government has invested heavily in ECEC with a focus on a more affordable low-fee universal system. However, they have not fully integrated child care and education. Under their model, direct subsidies to three types of reduced-fee providers are offered: centre-based non-profit **centres de la petite enfance** (CPEs), family-based caregivers, and for-profit private **garderies** that conform to specified conditions.¹⁰ In total 83 per cent of children attend one of these types of programs.

Pierre Fortin, an economist at the University of Quebec at Montreal, says Quebec's work on child care has increased the participation of women in the workforce.¹¹ As noted in an Inroads journal article written by Fortin, in 2016 the labour force participation rate amongst women aged 20 to 44 in Quebec was 85 per cent, compared to 80 per cent elsewhere in Canada. He also noted that Quebec excelled worldwide with only Swiss women (at 87 per cent) having a higher participation rate and that this equates to approximately 70,000 more mothers entering Quebec's labour force.

As other provinces take steps to build the system by expanding early childhood education along with the provision of care, B.C. kids are being left behind. Not only are our province's kids not receiving the same care and education as those in other provinces, but B.C. families and parents are left without care options. They are disadvantaged compared to their counterparts in other provinces because of limited access to the employment market, greater child care costs, more educational responsibilities in the home and, ultimately, reduced economic capacity.

⁷ https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/starting-strong-v_9789264276253-en#page15

⁸ This includes children who turn five by December 31 of the year they start school

⁹ <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/pre-primary/faq-program-details>

¹⁰ <http://inroadsjournal.ca/quebecs-childcare-program-20-2/>

¹¹ As per: <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2018/12/affordable-daycare-subsidized-child-care-working-mom-quebec/579193/>

Moving towards an integrated system

Integrating early childhood care and learning creates advantages for government and families

A major barrier to building an integrated ECEC system in B.C. is the current division between education and child care. As described in *Integrating Child Care and Early Education: A Central Theme in Early Care and Learning*, implementing an integrated approach to child care and education eliminates the ‘split system’ approach where child care is viewed as a social service and early education services as education.

In an OECD review of Canada in 2004, no provinces or territories had merged their child care and education departments, yet today eight out of 13 have done so.¹² This has helped to reduce what the OECD previously identified as “the adverse effects of fragmented government”. The Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and most recently, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, now include policy and oversight for child care and related early years services within their education departments (Akbari, McCuaig 2017). B.C. is notably missing from this list.

Only five jurisdictions do not have an integrated approach:

- Yukon
- British Columbia
- Alberta
- Manitoba
- Quebec



¹² <http://ecereport.ca/media/uploads/2017-report-pdfs/ece-report2017-en-feb6.pdf>

Recent international trends show that an increasing number of countries with split systems are moving towards integrated ECEC settings regarding curricula and/or governing authority. This integration is associated with better ECEC quality, and can help enhance universal entitlement, provide more affordable access, recruit and retain better qualified staff, and aid in learner success by facilitating smoother transitions (OECD, *Starting Strong 2017*).

Three Ministries in B.C.

Currently, responsibility for B.C.'s early childhood education and care is split among three Ministries:

- Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD): Child care policy and funding programs, including child care subsidies; operating funding; major and minor capital funding; the ECE Registry; and Indigenous child and family supports.
- Ministry of Health (HLTH): Child care licensing, with monitoring carried out through local health authorities.
- Ministry of Education (EDUC): Kindergarten, StrongStart BC Early Learning Programs and the Ready, Set Learn initiative.

Research shows that countries with successful early care and learning systems house responsibility for both child care and education under one government branch.¹³

The research on this topic overwhelmingly supports this conclusion and the B.C. government should follow the recommendation of the Coalition of Childcare Advocates and Early Childhood Educators of BC and as outlined in the \$10 a Day plan to move the Child Care Branch and Minister of State for Child Care from the Ministry of Children and Family Development to the Ministry of Education. Over time other child care functions such as licensing, which are currently housed in other ministries, would also make the move to the Ministry of Education.

As outlined in *The Early Years Study, 4th version*, public education systems come with a ready-made infrastructure of oversight, facilities and human resources. (McCain 2020) The \$10 a Day plan outlines in detail other advantages of this move, as summarized below:

- Provisions for universal entitlement for all children;
- An existing public funding model;
- A system of democratic control and parental input;
- Ongoing public understanding and support for the current education system;
- A respected and fairly-compensated workforce; and
- An existing administrative and capital infrastructure able to deliver programming.

¹³ Friendly, et al (2018).

Lessons learned delivering school-age child care

Why B.C.'s plan for public school-age care must include early care and learning and be delivered by school boards

A fully integrated public early care and learning system in B.C. would address both early childhood education needs as well as provide child care for school-age children. Expanding the seamless day model for our youngest learners is a key first step in realizing this system. But work must also be undertaken to provide child care for students up to 12 years old within the system. While the arguments for school-age care provided by the existing public school system may be slightly different than those for younger children, they are not less valid and there is a great deal of overlap in the key benefits for each age group.

The final report of the Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission (Flanagan, Beach 2016) outlined a number of reasons why school boards should assume responsibility for school-aged child care of all ages. These arguments include the following:

- School boards have a mandate and legislated responsibility to educate and care for school-age children.
- Relying on individual parents and community groups to initiate, develop and operate child care programs results in inequitable distribution of services and inadequate supply.
- Younger school age children may benefit from having fewer transitions during the course of the day if child care and school are in one location, and the need to transport children to a community facility would be eliminated.
- Parents would have one drop-off and pick-up point for their school age children.
- Greater opportunities for communication between child care and school staff would likely result in increased coherence between school and child care, and the ability to identify and address any concerns about individual children.
- With a single body responsible for school-age children, administrative efficiencies could be realized and fragmentation of services eliminated.
- Staff working with school-age children may be employed in other positions within the school during the school day, reducing the number of split shifts and part-time jobs, and increasing networking opportunities with other school division employees.
- Expansion of new spaces would likely be able to happen at a faster rate than working with a third party, who would need to establish a board of directors and negotiate lease agreements and other conditions of occupancy.
- As school boards increased the supply of school-age programs in schools, using surplus or shared space, school-age spaces in community-based centres could be replaced with preschool spaces, with limited requirement for capital funding.
- School boards are likely to be able to operate with a greater degree of flexibility that potentially make it easier to respond to changing community needs. Physical standards would be consistent with those in the school, eliminating the difference in standards that currently exist between schools and child care centres.

To realize all of these benefits to their full potential, school districts would need to hold the licence and directly operate the child care program. Administrative efficiencies, seamless communication and control over flexibility, quality assurances, and staffing qualifications would be limited if school boards contracted with a third-party operator to deliver this service.





MAKING THE SEAMLESS DAY A REALITY

Taking a step towards a universal public system of integrated early care and learning



Outline of the Seamless Day Model

The seamless day is an extension of the traditional school day to allow for child care needs in a way that integrates the care model with classroom learning. It is delivered by an educator team consisting of a qualified teacher (or teachers) and an early child care educator (ECE) or ECEs who all share responsibility for planning and program delivery. It is meant to be seamless in terms of learning and programming, and not just logistically seamless through use of common facilities.

The model, typically used with learners in kindergarten and grades one and two, allows our youngest learners to arrive at their local public school for before-school care, where they would be greeted by an ECE. Before-school care takes place in the school classroom where the majority of the children will spend their day. When the bell rings for the school day to begin, the classroom teacher joins the ECE and students in the classroom for the school portion of the day. The ECE would remain in the classroom providing care and educational leadership in partnership with the teacher, based on the teacher's educational knowledge and training.

A second ECE joins the class just before lunch allowing for overlap and prep time, and is organized to enable the morning ECE to conclude their day during the lunch break. The afternoon ECE continues to provide supporting care and leadership in the classroom alongside the teacher until the formal school day is completed, and the after-school care program begins. The second ECE stays with the students and delivers after-school care until the completion of the after-school care hours.¹⁴

Before-school care

Classroom learning

After-school care



¹⁴ This schedule is for meant for consideration as a potential model, exact hours for extended day programs would be determined by school districts. This is the schedule currently being used in the Seamless Day Pilot Project in Oliver, B.C. Oliver is a smaller city with less commuting concerns, the extended day model in other parts of B.C. (for example the Lower Mainland) would need to take commuting concerns into consideration when deciding on extended day operating hours.

This model for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has some key benefits for children, parents, workers, and communities, and is superior to other forms of child care where integration only includes shared space for a number of reasons.

Benefits of the Seamless Day

The concept and importance of linking ECEC to public education is not a new idea, having been first introduced in the *Early Years 2* study in 2007 (McCain et al). The notion was further outlined in detail in *With Our Best Future in Mind* (Pascal, 2009), the 2009 report to the Ontario government on implementing early learning in Ontario.

Expansion of early learning into public school systems is often suggested as ensuring all five-year-olds have access to full-day kindergarten and then expanding public school to include younger children. However, this still does not solve the problem of before- and after-school care since the school day is typically 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and this is not what a typical workday looks like for parents.

The seamless day model looks to both deliver high quality ECEC while also solving a practical problem for parents and helping to alleviate the stress of finding quality before- and after-school care. Public delivery by school boards ensures high quality programs, better wages and working conditions for ECEs, and provides for oversight with an existing governance structure.

Importantly, the seamless day model provides a number of other key benefits for children and enhances the quality of care and education. Examples of these pedagogical enhancements are as follows:

- The presence of an additional educator in the classroom means kids get extra help and attention, including more customized care and learning and increased access to one-on-one assistance;
- ECE participation in the classroom deepens the care providers' understanding of, and relationship with, the kids for whom they are caring and allows for informed oversight and care based on events of the school day (including extra play time if it was a heavy learning day; assistance for those who had a difficult time grasping concepts; and appropriate classroom management for days where behavioural issues were a challenge); and
- ECE participation in educational leadership provides for planned education-based activities in care times that align with classroom learning and that reinforce concepts, skills and knowledge through purposeful play/play-based learning and teaching and learning activities.

The benefits of the seamless day are many: from increased learning, to better quality care, to savings from shared facilities and administrative structures, to better use of highly trained staff. Importantly, the seamless day is a means for B.C. to take a giant leap forward in early learning and ensure our youngest learners are receiving the social, educational, and behavioural support needed to ensure their success in future education and beyond.

Implementing the seamless day is an important starting point for the alignment of early years learning (child care) and public education. As described in the \$10 a Day plan, the eventual goal for a universal child care system in B.C. would be for school boards to govern a system of early care and learning and for child care to be integrated within the existing public-school system. Implementing the seamless day throughout B.C. would take us one step closer to realizing this for B.C. children and families.

Potential Challenges and Barriers

Achieving a universal public system of integrated early care and learning is certainly not without its challenges beyond simply funding such a system. However, many of the non-financial challenges can be overcome and will themselves help alleviate costs. In fact, the B.C. government has already started to make several of the changes necessary for this vision to be realized.

With the February 26 government announcement of changes to the School Act¹⁵ allowing School Boards to hold the licence and directly operate school-aged child care, the government has opened the door for inclusion of child care in the public education system. This joint announcement between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Family and Childhood Development demonstrates the government's willingness to align child care and public education, and displays significant leadership in furthering early learning and care in B.C.



¹⁵ <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020EDUC0009-000332>

Once passed, these changes allow school boards to be the owners and operators of school-aged child care, and provide a path for high quality before- and after-school programs to be delivered by school board employees at an affordable cost, with oversight from the school board at the most convenient location for parents. Further, these changes enable the expansion of the existing seamless day pilot project in School District 53 to kindergarten classrooms in school districts all across the province.

The expansion of the seamless day pilot project to a provincial scope, with school boards around the province holding the licence and directly operating before- and after-school child care in kindergarten classrooms, is an enormous first step to creating the next 10,000 child care spaces in B.C.

Licensing

While the recent changes to the School Act will allow school boards to directly operate before- and after-school programs, there are still licensing challenges that could, and should, be addressed by the government. Most of these licensing issues relate to the complexity of becoming licensed and the incongruities between the rules for licensed child care operations and those for the public school system.



While existing kindergarten and other classrooms meet the School Act's regulations, which apply during the school day, they may not meet the different regulations that exist for licensed child care centres.

Effectively, this incongruity means that the same classroom that meets all regulations and licensing requirements for students between the hours of 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., does not meet those same requirements before and after those times for the very same group of students.

The justification for distinct rules applied to licensed child care spaces that differ from those applied to the public school system is fundamental: those child care spaces were not envisioned to be in the public school system when the rule was created. Further, rules applied to licensing for child care spaces are designed for spaces not necessarily purpose-built for the care of children, nor run by a branch of government designed for the purpose of educating children. Accordingly, the rules as they exist are justified for their designed context but become unjustified (and in some cases absurd) in a public school context.

If purpose-built educational spaces in schools – including classrooms, art spaces, gymnasiums and outdoor space – are safe for students during the school day when overseen by qualified district staff, then they are also safe for the same students before and after school.

Therefore, the licensing process for child care programs delivered directly by school districts should be reviewed and amended to eliminate duplication and inconsistencies, and a streamlined licensing process should be created.

Not only would these actions very quickly open thousands of cost-effective, before- and after-school child care spaces; they would also make efficient use of existing infrastructure, human resources, governance structures, and staff delivering high-quality early learning. In consideration of the enormous expansion to child care availability and improvements to early learning, the benefit would greatly outweigh the initial challenges posed by these recommended changes.

Staffing

Recruitment and retention of ECEs is a major challenge in B.C.; however, the seamless day model offers several potential solutions to this obstacle.

As the union representing education assistants (EAs) in B.C. who work in the public education system, CUPE is very aware of the potential for EAs to also perform ECE work. A 2009 report prepared by the CUPE BC Region titled *Education assistants in British Columbia: an educational profile and agenda* showed that close to 1 in 5 of B.C.'s over 10,000 education assistants (EAs) also have ECE training and/or credentials.¹⁶

¹⁶ The number could be higher now as approximately 3000 more EAs are working in public K-12 schools.

While this data may have changed as it has been some years since this survey, this effectively demonstrates that public school support staff already contain a reservoir of existing ECE talent and expertise that can be tapped to ensure smooth implementation of ECE programs within the public-school system.

ECE positions in the seamless day model would offer full-time job opportunities to EAs who desire this employment with options to work as ECEs on a full-time basis, or just in the before- and after-school portions of the day as needed. Though simply having staff working as ECEs before and after school, and as EAs during the school day does not constitute the seamless day model, this form of integrated day would offer many benefits as an intermediary step as the ECE labour force adjusts to meet demands.

Further, in consideration of the 80 per cent of EAs without ECE training, there is a solution that would provide ECE training quickly and efficiently. With minimal additional investment, EAs lacking an ECE designation could qualify as ECE assistants and begin working likely within a six-month timeframe. This is an excellent means to bridge the labour force gap and aid in recruitment and retention. Skilled staff are essential in delivering quality early childhood education programs and while the continued use of the ECE designation as a minimum standard is not a long-term solution, it does provide an increased level of training to the “Responsible Adult” designation outlined in the current regulations.

As a long-term solution, the \$10 a Day plan recommendation to develop a diploma program as a minimum credential for educators is a desired target. To ensure all ECEs working in the public school system meet this requirement, a ladder education program could be developed and training could be provided through a combination of on the job training, professional development, and contract training. A prior learning assessment model¹⁷ could also be considered to evaluate how past experience relates to current qualifications.

After a certain number of years (to be determined at the time of implementation) the ladder education program would be phased out, and any new employees would need to meet the minimum educational requirements.

Finally, moving child care and ECE into the public education system will also more broadly address recruitment and retention issues within the ECE sector, as ECE positions in the public sector have fewer recruitment and retention issues, and unionized programs experience less turnover.¹⁸

¹⁷ “Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR) lets you use knowledge and skills learned outside recognized programs—including volunteer work, hobbies, on-the-job experience, or independent study—to gain exemption for particular courses in the program of your choice. Your knowledge and skills will be assessed, course by course, by faculty members in the program area.” (British Columbia Institution of Technology, 2020 <https://www.bcit.ca/admission/entrance-requirements/transfer-credit/prior-learning-assessment-recognition/>)

¹⁸ ECE 2017 Report

Funding

Affordability is a key piece of building a successful early care and learning system. An expansion of the seamless day model into all schools would have two components: the regular school day and an extended day program.

The extended day program would be optional for families, and would operate as a fee-based program. Rates would be set by school boards with transparency and accountability measures in place.

When beginning to integrate child care and education, the level and type of funding will shape the key elements of the program, including quality, accessibility, equity, human resources and physical environments. (Muttart Foundation, 2012). Consequently, any new ECE programs, including the seamless day model, delivered through the Ministry of Education must have adequate public funding to ensure their success. However, in consideration of the cost savings possible through the proposed model, the funding required would be comparable or potentially less than other models of before- and after-school care.





DEMONSTRATED POTENTIAL OR RE-INVENTING THE WHEEL: EXAMPLES WHERE UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE AND THE SEAMLESS DAY ARE **MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR FAMILIES**

This section focuses on three case studies that highlight how universal entitlement and school board involvement have helped to bring positive change to ECEC. The first example presents the way in which child care and education are delivered in Norway, where universal entitlement exists alongside a successful integrated ECEC model. Closer to home, two examples are presented from local school boards who are directly operating the seamless day model in kindergarten classrooms – one longstanding program from the Waterloo Region District School Board (Ontario) and one newer program from School District 53 in Oliver, B.C.

Kindergartens in Norway

The Nordic countries are considered leaders in ECEC, and among those, Norway is recognized as having a particularly effective model. A number of lessons can be drawn from Norway's impressive system which features universal access, an integrated education and care model, and a strong governance system. Norway has been successful in providing, and realising, a strong legal entitlement to universal childhood education and care and is one of the leading countries worldwide in this respect (*OECD Early Education and Care Policy Review*, Norway, 2015).

In Norway, ECEC is delivered through a well-established kindergarten system, which resembles what we commonly refer to as preschool in North America. The system is heavily regulated with well trained staff and focuses on delivering a high quality of care. The Kindergarten Act states that municipalities are the local authorities for kindergartens, and therefore much of the responsibility for the system lies with municipalities.¹⁹ While approximately half of Norway's kindergartens are municipally owned, municipalities oversee all public and private kindergartens in their districts. This allows municipalities to adapt kindergartens to their communities' needs.

A legal entitlement to a place in kindergarten from the age of one was introduced in 2009, and as of 2013 nearly 80 per cent of children aged one and two participate in regulated ECEC services, and 96.6 per cent of children aged three to five participate.²⁰

In 2006 Norway integrated child care and schooling under the Ministry of Education, and in 2012 certain tasks were delegated to its subsidiary Directorate for Education and Training, which facilitates smoother transitions of children across different levels of education and more coherent governance (OECD, 2015).

Compulsory school starts the year children turn six, and is divided into primary school (ages 6-12), and lower secondary school (ages 13-15). All municipalities must provide a before- and after-school care program for kids in grade one through four. The programs dictate that "facilities for school children must provide facilities for play and for participation in cultural and recreational activities appropriate for the age, level of physical ability and interests of the children".²¹

Norway stands as a great example of the success and positive outcomes that universal child care system can offer.

¹⁹ Norway does not have local school boards, municipalities are responsible for the oversight of schools.

²⁰ 2013 figure as per the OECD Early Education and Care Policy Review Norway

²¹ <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/education/school/the-norwegian-education-system/id445118/>

Waterloo Region District School Board (Ontario)

In 2010, full day kindergarten became universally available to all four- and five-year-olds in Ontario. This was one of the most significant expansions of publicly delivered ECEC in Canada in recent years. Today, Ontario offers a two-year, full-day, non-mandatory kindergarten.

Kindergarten is taught by an educator team consisting of certified teachers and registered ECEs, where teachers and ECEs share responsibility for planning and delivery of the program.

As of September 2017, school boards are also required to provide fee-based before- and after-school care for students in kindergarten to grade 6 where there is sufficient demand. The programs can be delivered directly by the school board or through a third-party program, and for children in grades three to six, youth development programs can also be considered.

The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) delivers their extended day programs (before- and after-school care) directly for students in kindergarten through grade six. The seamless day model is offered for students in kindergarten through to grade 2, and is led by ECEs in a fully-equipped kindergarten classroom (for students in grade 3 to 6, extended care is delivered through youth development programs. Delivery is primarily done directly by WRDSB with a small number of licenced providers that deliver programs on behalf of WRDSB at designated locations.)

As noted in a report that explored the WRDSB's seamless day model as part as a review on seamless early learning in Ontario, "children can spend as much time in [extended day programs] over the course of the year as they do in school. Good quality after school programming can extend and reinforce learning; poor quality undermines the gains made during the school day." (Janmohamed, Z., et al, 2014)

The WRDSB describes their vision for the extended day program as follows:

"...to provide equitable access to high quality child care, for parents and children across the Region.

The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) extended day program is complementary to the core kindergarten program and aligned with it in order to provide a seamless and consistent experience for children. The extended day program offers play-based pedagogy and makes use of shared resources and shared common spaces to create a seamless system of early learning for children and families.

WRDSB believes that all children should have access to before and after school programs and is committed to expanding before- and after-school programs in every school. Extended day programs have no waiting lists and parents can register for full-time or part-time care. Offering affordable, accessible, flexible programs to meet the needs of all families is an important part of a responsive, supportive system that promotes child and family well-being."²²

²² <https://www.wrdsb.ca/beforeafter/background/>

The program operates from 7 a.m. until the arrival bell, and from the dismissal bell until 6 p.m. Full days of programming are offered during staggered entry for kindergarten, and designated Pro D Days. Extended Day programs also operate at alternate program locations for March and Winter break.²³

Children can attend all five days of the week, before or after school, or any combination therein. Registration takes place online through a central system (OneList) for the district, and scheduling changes can be arranged through that system as well.

The seamless day model, delivered directly by a school board, shows how this program can eliminate transitions for young students, and provide universal access of affordable high quality before-and-after school care for families.



²³ <http://www.wrdsb.ca/beforeafter/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2018-Parent-Handbook.pdf>

²⁴ Our knowledge of this pilot project comes from interviews with the two CUPE members who are working as ECEs in this program. We want to note that currently there are two teachers who split the teaching time in the kindergarten classroom participating in the seamless day pilot project. One teacher teaches Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and the other teacher teaches Thursday and Friday. Both teachers and both ECEs work collaboratively to plan and deliver content to students.

Seamless Day Pilot Project School District 53 (Oliver, B.C.)

Beginning in September 2019, School District 53 (Okanagan Similkameen) implemented a Seamless Day Pilot Project in a kindergarten classroom in Oliver, B.C. The pilot program is based on the seamless day model in Ontario, and is delivered in a kindergarten classroom by a teaching team that consists of one teacher and two ECEs.²⁴

Both ECEs working in the pilot program have their ECE certificate, and an extensive background working in the ECEC field.

Currently, entry to the seamless day program is done by need on a first-come, first-served basis with priority being given to kindergarten students and those who need full-time care. Beyond that, access was offered to grade one students and siblings of the kindergarten students in the program. As the program evolves and grows the registration process could see changes to better serve the needs of families and the community.

Families can currently register their child to attend the program all five days before school, after school, or any combination of these options. Scheduling, billing and invoicing is currently done by one of the ECEs and the school takes care of payment (currently payment must be received in person and the District provides back-end accounting and receipts).

The morning program begins at 7:30 a.m. and parents drop off kids anytime between 7:30 a.m. and the morning bell. The after-school program ends at 5:30 p.m., but pickup commonly begins as early as 4 p.m. for some parents.

Through interviews with the ECEs working in this program, it is clear that there are several advantages of the seamless day model, and students and care givers are already seeing the benefits this program provides.



Among the key benefits of this program is consistency of care. The ECEs are so much better informed when they assume responsibility for care under this model than in other ECE environments.

“You know whether it’s been a good day or bad day. You know what [the children] were learning. You know if they need longer outdoor play, or more focused activities; whether they need more group time or more individual time. You know what is being taught and what units are being worked through so the activities before and after school build on the daytime learning.”

Educational integration was also cited a big strength of the model because participation in the classroom work allows ECEs to incorporate themes and learning from the day into before and after school care through a focused purposeful play and teaching/learning.

“There is no need to view recreation and learning as mutually exclusive – learning can be done through play. Activities and play informed by the classroom learning that can happen without the learners even realizing and this extends the educational value of the care being provided.”

The pilot project example also shows that students benefit from having a team of educators in the classroom, and that while the classroom teacher is responsible for learning outcomes and delivery of curriculum, the education team works together to lead in a collaborative way.

ECEs working in this pilot also report that there is additional opportunity for specialized care in the classroom ensuring that students social and emotional needs are met.

Parent feedback of the pilot project has been predominately positive. ECEs have heard that parents love that there is one drop-off and pick-up location. While this is obviously extremely convenient, it also reassures parents that their children will be safe and cared for throughout the entire day. Streamlined rules throughout the day (the same rules apply before, during and after school) is also seen as a positive for parents and ensures a smooth day for children.

The pilot project in Oliver is a small sample, but certainly provides the necessary evidence that the seamless day model is a viable and positive option. It demonstrates that the promise of the seamless day model outlined by academics and advocates is actually realized when the model is implemented.

From the fully-built-out example provided by Norway, to the intermediary example in Waterloo, and the fledgling program in Oliver, one can see how the work of School District 53 is the seed that could eventually grow into a very successful provincially-scaled, world-class program. It is up to government to invest the necessary resources to achieve the potential that is evident in these examples.

¹ ECEBC and CCCBC, 2019

Conclusion – It is possible to create more space and a better system at the same time

The B.C. government has made great progress in expanding child care seats; however, those seats have been added to a system with long-standing and ongoing structural problems. The absence of publicly delivered, high quality child care in B.C. means that families are forced to make tough decisions between less than ideal options, and all too often there is no choice at all.

However, there is a way to both keep positive momentum behind space creation and to fix the current system, and that is provincial implementation of the seamless day model.

Providing school boards the means and mandate to implement before- and after-school programs in kindergarten classrooms will provide a new round of system spaces — one that also addresses quality and provides value-added educational depth.

CUPE believes the time to do this is now, with research strongly backing the integration and alignment of education and child care and with Canada's minister in charge of federal efforts to expand child care saying there will be an additional 250,000 before- and after-school spaces in the upcoming federal budget.²⁵

The government has already taken the first step towards a better, public system through their commitment to a B.C.-made public universal child care system. With the \$10 a Day plan serving as a blueprint, aligning education and child care is the next key step that should be taken to achieving our long-term goals because it also responds to immediate needs.

To make this next step happen, government should review and revise the child care licensing regulations as they apply to school boards operating child care programs directly in order to streamline the licensing process and rationalize the rules between the two co-existent regulatory environments. Government must also prioritize child care funds towards enacting this model in the public system in recognition of the effectiveness, efficiency and quality the seamless day provides over other, for profit options.

As the international, national and local examples show, the seamless day is a key piece of a universal public system of quality ECEC. British Columbia can and should take this important step to make province-wide seamless day before and after school care a reality.

²⁵ <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/details-on-new-federal-daycare-spending-coming-in-budget-minister-says-1.4788744>



RECOMMENDATIONS

Begin the process of integrating early learning and care by moving the Child Care Branch and Minister of State for Child Care into the Ministry of Education.

Undertake action to limit the ability of school districts to contract out child care services to third-party operators; and/or cap the number of contract spaces per district.

Mandate that school districts become owner/operators of in-house before- and after-school care, focusing on an integrated model and working towards a seamless day model.

Expand the current School District 53 seamless day pilot project in Oliver, B.C. to kindergarten classrooms in school districts across B.C. with dedicated funding.

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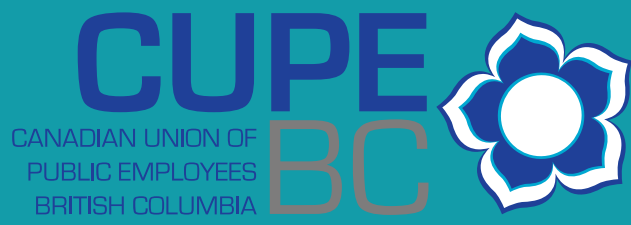
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For more information, please visit:
www.BuildSeamlessChildCare.ca

