

***Building Our Community from the Kids  
Up***  
**Child Care and Early Years 10 Year Plan  
2022 to 2032**

**2025 Status Report / Update**

# Accessibility

All children have the right to fully participate in a quality licensed early learning and care child program. Unfortunately, not all children have access for a variety of reasons including cost, availability, cultural barriers and/or special needs. As the CMSM for child care and early learning, City of Brantford strives to ensure that:

- Families know about available programs and how to access them.
- Families have access to child care and early years' programs that meet their specific needs.
- Families can make informed decisions about early years and child care programs to meet their specific needs.
- The Child Care and Early Years system is responsive to increased demands and the evolving needs of families.

## Key Action Update

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|------------|--|
| <b>1.1</b> | Provide the opportunity for all licensed child care providers, including those without a Purchase of Service (POS) agreement with the City, to be included in the OneList waitlist management system without cost to the child care operator by 2024. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Achieved.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ 100% of local licensed child cares, including both CWELCC-enrolled and non CWELCC-enrolled child cares, use OneList.</li></ul></li></ul>  |
| <b>1.2</b> | Licensed child cares using OneList will continue to offer child care spaces on first-come first-served basis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Amended policy.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Beginning in 2025, the OneList Policy will be amended to require all CWELCC-enrolled childcares to, through attrition, prioritize access for low-income families by reserving 20% of spaces for children receiving fee subsidy. This approach supports equity and inclusion by ensuring families with limited financial resources have dedicated spaces in the child care system.</li></ul></li></ul> |
| <b>1.4</b> | Support growth of the licensed child care system to meet the growing population with licensed child care spaces for 1 in 5 children through 2032. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Amended target.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Support the Ministry funded growth of CWELCC full day child care spaces by creating 1,026 new spaces by 2026, resulting in 32% of children aged 0-4 having access to a licensed child care space (1 in 3 children).</li></ul></li></ul>   |

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- Growth will be in accordance with Ministry direction regarding percentage of profit-based spaces and in accordance with population in the City and the County. In 2024, 206 new CWELCC-funded spaces were created.
- 1.5** Support school board partners in their applications for capital funding to build child cares at existing schools and all new school builds, with the expectation of 200+ new school-based child care spaces by 2025.
  - In progress.
    - Construction began in 2024 for the new elementary school and child care in West Brant, as well as an expanded child care centre at Banbury Heights Elementary School.
    - In January 2025, the Ministry of Education announced funding for three new elementary schools in Brantford-Brant—two in Paris and one in West Brant. Each school will include a child care centre, collectively adding 162 new child care spaces by 2029.
- 1.7** Leverage opportunities for capital funding through all levels of government to support the creation of additional child care spaces.
  - Achieved and ongoing.
    - In 2023 and 2024, \$2.68 million dollars in Start-Up Grant Funding was allocated to support the creation of new spaces approved through the RFP process.
    - In March 2025 the Ministry of Education announced a new funding stream called the ELCC Infrastructure Fund. This funding will complement the existing Start-Up Grant Funding by providing an additional \$2.1 million in financial support for the creation of new spaces in 2025 and 2026. This funding stream is available to non-profit operators only.
- 1.10** Prioritize and incentivize growth to child care spaces in (a) the 5 identified high growth population areas (b) in under serviced locations (c) offering non-traditional hours such as evenings or weekends (d) for age groups in most need (e) meeting other demand (i.e. French language or indigenous) by 2027.
  - In progress.
    - 864 community and school-based CWELCC child care spaces in the City and County have been approved.
    - Support the growth of remaining 152 CWELCC community-based spaces to achieve Ministry directed growth targets by 2026. Growth will be prioritized in areas with the lowest child care access rates.
    - Use the Access and Inclusion Framework as a guide to prioritize further space expansion. Future RFP's will continue to focus on equitable access to child care for children of low-income families, vulnerable children, children from diverse communities, children with special needs and Francophone and Indigenous children. Also

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focusing on access to flexible child care to support those who work non-traditional hours and in non-traditional locations, such as shift workers.

- 1.13** County of Brant to source space for a dedicated Paris EarlyON location.
- In progress.
    - In discussions with the County of Brant to establish a dedicated full-time EarlyON site in the new Brant Sports Complex and/or new Paris Public Library.
- 1.16**  
**NEW** Ensure that children with special needs have equitable access to EarlyON programs that are inclusive, supportive, and responsive to their individual needs.
- Achieved.
    - Launched in 2024, the new Accessible EarlyON program at the Family Resource Centre offers a welcoming space for children aged 0–6 with special needs and their parents or caregivers to connect. The program features sensory-friendly environments and activities that support developmental goals, along with occasional guest speakers who provide helpful ideas and resources.

# Affordability

Attending a high-quality licensed child care program comes at a significant financial cost to families. The City of Brantford administers funding to local licensed child care operators to help offset the costs of operating a child care site and reduce daily fees. Financial assistance through the Child Care Fee Subsidy program is available to eligible families to cover part or all of the cost of attending child care.

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- 2.1** Continue to provide timely Child Care Fee Subsidy for eligible families.
- Achieved.
    - Using Lean Green Belt principles, staff undertook a review of the Fee Subsidy Intake Process. The team identified key pain points and implemented several improvements, such as clearer application instructions, a streamlined online form, and more direct communication with applicants. These changes significantly reduced processing times and cut applicant follow-ups by 50%, reducing administrative workload for staff while improving the experience for families.
- 2.2** Leverage funding from all levels of government to keep fees affordable.
- Achieved and ongoing.
    - As of January 1, child care fees are capped at \$22 per day, meaning families will pay no more than this amount for licensed child care for children aged 0 to 5.
    - Locally, the average cost of full day child care for children aged 0 to 4 decreased from \$12,168 per year in March 2022 to \$5,412 per year in January 2025. See Figure 3 for further information.

**Table 1: Average Cost of Child Care**

|  | PRE-CWELCC        |          | CWELCC   |         |                         |         |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------|---------|-------------------------|---------|
|  | No rate reduction |          | \$22 cap |         | Average of \$10 per day |         |
|  | March 2022        |          | Current  |         | 2026                    |         |
| Program Type   | Daily             | Annual   | Daily    | Annual  | Daily                   | Annual  |
| Full Day program for children aged 0 to 4              | \$46.62           | \$12,168 | \$20.74  | \$5,412 | \$10                    | \$2,610 |
| Before and After School program for 4 and 5 years olds | \$19.00           | \$3,686  | \$12.00  | \$2,328 | \$10                    | \$1,940 |

*Table 1: Average Cost of Child Care*

# Inclusivity

Children with social or special needs must be welcome and included in child care and early learning programs. Inclusion supports healthy child development and positive self-esteem, facilitates the development of positive social skills, and supports the families of children with special needs. Research shows that all children benefit from inclusive child care, as it promotes respect and celebration of diversity.

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- 3.2** Make access to funded special needs resources available to all licensed child care, including those without a purchase of service agreement with the City of Brantford by 2025. This initiative will continue as funding allows.
- Achieved and ongoing.
    - All (100%) of licensed child cares in Brantford-Brant, including both CWELCC and non-CWELCC participating licensees, have access to special needs resources through Lansdowne Children's Centre.
- 3.8** Consider geographic areas of family risk / vulnerability in any review of EarlyON programming and location.
- In progress.
    - Exploring a digital sign-in system to streamline EarlyON attendance tracking, enhance programming planning and improve convenience for families. It would also provide deeper insights into participant demographics and help identify underserved areas, informing future decisions about site locations.
- 3.10** Develop an assessment and evaluation framework to measure inclusivity.
- Achieved.
    - Inclusion and Access Pathway for Early Learning and Child Care developed in 2023 and rolled out to all child cares and EarlyONs in 2024.
    - RISE for Early Learning Training was provided in fall 2024 to further extend learnings from the Pathway by providing child care and EarlyON staff with comprehensive knowledge, skills and practical tools to enhance equity and inclusion in learning environments.

# Quality

A strong child care and early years' system is comprised of high-quality programs that provide environments and experiences allowing children to safely explore and learn through play and inquiry. Educators are trained professionals who have experience in early child development and participate in ongoing professional development. High quality programs use materials and teaching styles that are age-appropriate, evidence-based and respectful of children's cultural background. Moreover, high-quality programs continuously look for ways to improve through quality improvement and capacity building initiatives.

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- 4.2** Support the Best Start Network (BSN) focused efforts on the recruitment and retention of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs).
- Ongoing
    - Children's Services Data and Program Analyst participates in the Best Start Network's Retention and Recruitment Taskforce and supports their efforts by sharing local and provincial workforce data, analyzing local trends and facilitating regular Staff Engagement Surveys.
- 4.3** Create mentorship opportunities for local ECE students and graduates.
- Ongoing
    - Youth Mentorship presentations high school students to create awareness of potential careers in ECE.
- 4.4** Continue to provide support to collaborative early learning workshops with the local Boards of Education, the Haldimand Norfolk CSM and capacity building agencies in Brantford and the Counties of Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk.
- Achieved and ongoing.
    - Workshops for ongoing professional development.
    - Distribution of Early Learning supports.

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### 4.10

Leverage local expertise and existing community mental health resources to support children, families and the workforce.

- Achieved and ongoing.
  - Staff from Lansdowne Children's Centre and Child and Family Services of Grand Erie EarlyON provided Circle of Security program, focusing on attachment and relationships, to parents and child care staff.
  - Launch of *Messiness of Parenting* Podcast. A podcast that shares honest stories, practical tips, and real-life experiences to support parents and caregivers through the joys and challenges of parenting, creating a welcoming space where every parent can feel understood, encouraged, and reminded they are not alone.

# Accountability

Early years and child care system management must be future-oriented, responsive and accountable. The CMSM is financially responsible in the distribution of funding to local operators.

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### 5.2

Grow funded child care spaces through support of school built child cares and through a competitive process open to both current and potential operators, prioritizing those applicants whose proposals meet community needs such as:

- 5 identified high growth population areas.
- In under serviced locations.
- Offering non-traditional hours such as evenings or weekends.
- For age groups in most need.
- Meeting other demand (i.e. French language or Indigenous).
  - Achieved and ongoing.
    - A competitive RFP process was conducted in fall 2023 and spring 2024, with another planned for spring 2025. Combined these will result in the addition of 697 new CWELCC-funded community-based child care spaces for children aged 0 to 5.
    - The RFPs were open to both new and existing operators, as well as for-profit and non-profit operators in adherence to ministry required auspice ratios.
    - RFPs prioritized growth in areas with the lowest child care access rates.
    - Informed City of Brantford By-law update to ensure clear and updated terms and provisions, in line with current legislation.

### 5.3

Update general operating fund practices by 2023 to ensure:

- The funding calculation is equitably applied to all eligible child care operators.
- The funding calculation is transparent and easy to understand.
- Funding is pro-rated for sites operating at capacity lower than a pre-determined threshold.
- The funding calculation includes all age groups.
- Funding is pro-rated dependent upon hours and days of operation.
  - Amended and Achieved.
    - New CWELCC Child Care Funding Formula released by the Ministry of Education in August 2024 and implemented for January 1, 2025.

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- The Cost-Based Funding Formula uses benchmarks based on data metrics to represent the typical costs of child care, ensuring that the funding model is both straightforward and reflective of actual expenses.
- The funding approach aims to be transparent, consistent across CMSMs and DSSABs, and clear for licensees; representative of the true costs of delivering child care in Ontario; simple to understand with minimal administrative burden; and accountable through cost controls and safeguards to ensure fair and responsible use of public funds.
- Locally, developed and shared clear procedures and instructions, along with a transparent funding calculation and reconciliation process, to ensure a clear understanding of CWELCC and City requirements among child care operators.

### 5.4 Optimize the use of technology to ensure operators have access to updated resources by 2023:

- Achieved and ongoing.
  - Financial support for operators to purchase up-to-date computer programs.
  - Free training provided to operators re: use of computer programs and reporting mechanisms.
  - Exploring a digital sign-in system to streamline EarlyON attendance tracking, enhance programming planning and improve convenience for families.
  - Participating in IT Modernization Service System Manager Advisory Committee (SSMAC) to help shape and pilot test new child care and early years data system.

### 5.6 Fully utilize online Fee Subsidy application system allowing for electronic submission of documents by 2023.

- Achieved.
  - All fee subsidy application documents are submitted and stored electronically.

### 5.7 Maximize EarlyON resources through the use of consistent hours and locations.

- Achieved and ongoing.
  - All EarlyON providers required to annually submit a Service Plan outlining regular program hours at each EarlyON site.
  - EarlyON providers collectively contribute to an online calendar, providing parents / caregivers with a centralized location for viewing upcoming EarlyON programs.

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- 5.8** Provide all Fee Subsidy services online or by telephone.
- Achieved.
    - As part of a Lean Green Belt project, staff enhanced the Fee Subsidy Intake Process by simplifying the online form, providing clearer instructions, and improving communication. Applicants now receive a phone call to assess their needs and offer personalized guidance on required documents. These improvements reduced processing times and follow-ups by 50%, lowering staff workload and improving the experience for families.
- 5.9** Amend service agreements to allow for an attestation regarding required policies, decreasing submission requirements in 2022.
- Achieved.
    - Service agreement requirements were updated to remove the need for annual document submissions. Operators must keep required documents on file and provide them upon request, reducing administrative burden and streamlining the renewal process while maintaining accountability.
- 5.12** Participate in the consultative process and support the development of the announced new Ministry of Education data system, aligning / replacing current data systems. Projected launch date 2027/2028.
- Achieved and ongoing.
    - In 2024 staff participated in several consultations and surveys to identify pain points within current data systems and provide recommendations for improvement.
    - Joined the Service System Manager Advisory Committee (SSMAC) to support confidential, technical-level discussions on developing and implementing a new provincial IT solution for Ontario's child care and early years sector, including offering to pilot test new system.
- 5.13** Implement LEAN practices to support efficient use of resources:
- Achieved and ongoing.
    - All staff participated in LEAN White Belt training in 2023.
    - 80% of staff successfully completed LEAN Green Belt training in 2024.
    - 4 LEAN Green Belt Projects completed between 2023 and 2025 including:
      - Project to support operators in completion of required reports to create efficiencies in staff oversight and analysis.

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- Project to streamline licensed capacity data collection and information tracking process.
- Project to improve Fee Subsidy Intake process.
- Project to streamline request / approval process for market rate per diem changes.

- 5.14** Conduct annual Compliance Audits with a sample of CWELCC-participating child care licensees, auditing each operator at least every four years. The purpose of the Compliance Audits are to:
- Support child care licensees with adherence to new requirements under the CWELCC Guidelines; and
  - Ensure accountability for public funding by verifying that funding has been used for its intended purpose, and the goals of the CWELCC system are being upheld.
    - Achieved and ongoing.
      - Beginning in 2023, staff conducted Compliance Audits on 4-5 child care operators each year.
      - In 2025 Compliance Audits will be expanded to include audit of OneList first-come, first-serve policy and new 20% fee subsidy requirement.
- 5.15**  
**NEW** Conduct Cost Reviews on CWELCC-funded centres / agencies with the most disproportionately high top-up allocations. The goal of cost-reviews is to gradually shift the overall cost of providing child care more standardized costs, as represented by Ministry developed benchmark allocations.
- To be implemented in 2025.
- 5.16**  
**NEW** Annually select a 5% sample of CWELCC-funded centres / agencies to undergo a Direct Engagement Report to verify that reported base fee revenue and cost are eligible, compliant with guidelines and that a reasonable methodology is used to pro-rate costs between eligible and non-eligible age group where applicable.
- To be implemented in 2026 based on 2025 year-end reporting.
- 5.17**  
**NEW** Collection and monitoring of operating capacity and vacancy data reported by child care operators to ensure that funding calculations are in alignment with actual service levels and spaces are filled where staff are available and there is a demand for services.
- Achieved and ongoing.
    - Staff collect and analyze operating capacity and vacancy data on a monthly basis. Child care operators with long-term vacancies are required to explain the rationale for vacancies

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and develop action plans to mitigate such vacancies where applicable.

- If long-term vacancies remain unmitigated, the City may provide funding based on actual enrollment as opposed to operating capacity. This measure ensures accountability for public funds.