

PUBLIC DELIVERY OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDCARE IN BC'S SCHOOL SYSTEM



Key next steps in realizing the potential of affordable, public child care delivered by school districts using existing facilities and staff

CUPE BC represents more than 100,000 workers in British Columbia who deliver public services across a wide range of sectors including public and post-secondary education, childcare, community social services, community health, local government, transit, emergency services, and libraries.

We acknowledge that our province of British Columbia is located on the homelands of 203 distinct Indigenous nations and cultures; more than 30 different languages and close to 60 unique dialects are spoken in the province. We ask all participants to reflect, acknowledge and honour in their own way the First Nation land on which they live, work and play.



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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 neighborhoods 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.

OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since 2017, the B.C. government has made significant strides in delivering more affordable and accessible child care spaces over the past three years. However, despite these achievements, long child care waitlists persist across the province, and the number of available licensed spaces still falls short, especially with respect to school-aged childcare. Fundamentally, this is because B.C.'s 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. 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. CUPE members are proposing a wide-spread expansion of school-based child care, operated by school districts and staffed by existing, qualified employees. This model will add thousands of new before and after school childcare spaces at a very low cost by using existing public facilities and resources.

Important steps have already been taken by government to realize a comprehensive public system of school-aged care in the public school system. The recommendations herein, summarized below, would expand this work and have the potential to add thousands of new high-quality, cost-effective spaces that would help realize the promise of affordable childcare for every British Columbian.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Expand before- and after-school care pilot programs in every school district by fall 2023.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Fully fund childcare program start-up costs for school districts.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Directly fund a childcare programs coordinator in every school district.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Amend section 85.2 of the School Act to remove limits on school district childcare programs.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Make public delivery of before- and-after school care by school districts universal.

BUILDING THE SCHOOL-AGED CARE BRITISH COLUMBIANS NEED

The recent fee reductions and expansion of \$10/day spaces provides relief for parents of children five and under, but does not help those with school-aged children who continue to struggle with high cost, poor supply, and inconsistent quality of care for their kids. The public delivery of before- and after-school care on school grounds, by school districts, is the best and most accessible solution to address the ongoing shortage of school-aged childcare spaces.

Research supports the societal importance of accessible before- and after-school childcare.¹ Availability of school-aged childcare is associated with greater labour force participation among mothers of elementary school children.² Data from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning meta-analysis on before- and after-school care also suggests that high-quality after-school programs are associated with positive outcomes for children. The need for these programs is greatest for those of Indigenous identity, visible-minority status, immigrant status, and rural residents who are all under-represented in school-aged care programs.

Statistics Canada's 2022 Before and After School Survey found that "...having difficulties finding before- or after-school care can have consequences for parents and guardians, including affecting their ability to work."³ The Survey also showed that a majority of parents and guardians using before- or after-school care were forced to change their work schedule, with 43% working fewer hours, 30% having to use leaves and vacation time, and 28% forced to decline work.⁴

Expansion of school aged care will help families, improve the lives of parents and kids alike, and help bolster the labour force by preventing absence and attrition due to lack of available childcare.





RECOMMENDATION 1: EXPAND BEFORE- AND AFTER-SCHOOL PILOT PROGRAMS IN EVERY SCHOOL DISTRICT BY FALL 2023

The past several years has seen a number of examples of integrated childcare in our public school system, most notably the Seamless Day pilot program. This program, which integrates before- and after-school care with kindergarten classes, began with just four participating school districts, but was expanded in 2021 to a further 21 districts due to the overwhelming success of the model of integrated care and learning.

While the expansion of the Seamless Day model was an excellent step forward, the scope and reach of the pilot program remains narrow. No pilot sites exist in roughly half of B.C.'s school districts, and where they do exist, there is only one pilot site per district. The pilot program is restricted to the Seamless Day model for kindergarten classes only, and does not test other forms of integrated care. Budget 2023 provides an opportunity to expand the Seamless Day pilot to every school district, and multiple sites per district, to further illustrate the value of this model and to provide more care to communities with great need of school-age spaces.

The success of the Seamless Day calls for the expansion of this model into higher grades, where demand is great and more efficiencies exist helping to reduce space creation cost. Creation of pilot programs for integrated childcare delivered by school districts for students in grades one through seven would provide much-needed spaces, and demonstrate the effectiveness of using existing staff, primarily education assistants, to provide high-quality care. Due to the use of existing staff who would only work the before- and after-school hours, these pilots would cost substantially less than the Seamless Day sites, while providing opportunity to substantially expand school-based childcare in communities across the province.



RECOMMENDATION 2: FULLY FUND CHILDCARE PROGRAM START-UP COSTS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT

Public childcare provides higher returns than other government spending, as GDP economic multipliers are among the largest of any sector, and childcare availability reduces poverty and inequality, particularly for single mothers.⁵ In his 2012 paper for the IPPR, economics professor Pierre Fortin reports that Quebec’s public childcare system more than pays for itself. It has increased mothers’ labour force participation, and in turn the GDP, such that every \$100 in funding provided by the Quebec government has generated a return of \$104.⁶ Investing in public childcare is one of the safest bets policymakers can make, and this is certainly true for funding space creation and program start-up.

As school districts on-board direct delivery of school-aged care, they face undertaking a new function that many districts have never before managed. While the ongoing costs of before- and after-school care by school districts are very sustainable—aided greatly by the potential economies of scale and ability to make use of existing administrative structures, facilities and staffing—there are unique start-up costs that may serve as a barrier to new space creation. Districts need the resources to develop plans, amend existing structures, select staff, gather materials and develop basic programming.

To ensure that the rollout of integrated, school-based childcare does not detract in any way from daytime learning, school districts need to be provided the necessary resources for start-up costs. Fully funding start-up costs benefits the public education system overall as it provides an infusion of capital to support programming that helps families and kids, and provides additional financial support to the system, something supported by parents, trustees and workers alike.



RECOMMENDATION 3: DIRECTLY FUND A CHILDCARE PROGRAMS COORDINATOR IN EACH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Key in developing and maintaining in-house before- and after-school programs across all school districts, and in multiple communities, is coordination and oversight. School districts with existing childcare programs commonly have a staff person dedicated to coordinating childcare programming. This structure ensures that programs are planned, resources and integrated into the school district’s administrative, financial, logistic and pedagogical systems. School districts looking to develop new childcare programming must often begin by recruiting a coordinator, requiring an initial outlay of capital before any program has even been planned.

Through conversations with trustees and senior staff, school districts regularly identified the need for funding to support a dedicated childcare coordinator role. They further report that without such a role, already financially challenged school district and overtaxed administrative structures would need to absorb the additional work and cost of setting up and managing publicly run childcare programs. School districts identify the lack of financial support for such positions as a major, sometimes central, barrier to starting new in-house, public childcare programs.

The creation of regular, ongoing funding for childcare coordination across all school districts is a positive step towards building a universal public system as it enables districts to undertake the necessary work to realize the province’s vision. Funding can be provided with the necessary conditions to ensure accountability, with provisions that require progress on space creation and prevent positions being used to simply manage contracts with third-party providers. The required investment in these positions is proportionally low in respect of the number of potential childcare spaces that such an investment could help produce.



RECOMMENDATION 4: AMEND SECTION 85.2 OF THE SCHOOL ACT TO REMOVE LIMITS ON SCHOOL DISTRICT CHILDCARE PROGRAMS

In 2020, government introduced language to the *School Act* designed to encourage and enable school districts to operate school age childcare programs. This was a positive and critical move to enable a universal system of public school-based childcare; however, the several elements of the specific language used have created unintended barriers to providing the childcare families require.

The specific language used to describe the childcare school districts may provide appears to prevent districts from operating on professional development days and other days on which school sites are closed to students. This is precisely when parents need childcare most. The language would also extend to preventing districts from operating summer programs and offering childcare programs for children under the age of five. Not only does this language impede school districts from building childcare programs that are highly integrated and responsive to the needs of parents and families, but these restrictions appear to also contract government's own goals for school-based childcare.

The *School Act* should be amended to enable school districts to operate childcare programs for children up to 12 years of age, without restrictions, other than those requiring districts to do so on a cost recovery basis. This legislative change has no cost implications.



RECOMMENDATION 5: MAKE PUBLIC DELIVERY OF BEFORE- AND AFTER-SCHOOL CARE BY SCHOOL DISTRICTS UNIVERSAL

The creation of a comprehensive, provide-wide system of public school-aged childcare is an achievable goal. The public school system provides much of the necessary infrastructure required to make such a system possible, including the facilities, administration structure, labour force, and grounds. This model of childcare produces better jobs for a labour force comprised of mostly women, with substantially better pay than private-sector childcare run by non-profit societies. Childcare on school grounds is already a stated goal of the BC government, and the move of childcare into what is now titled the Ministry of Education and Child Care is a clear indication of a public education system ready to integrate child care at every level.

Currently, school districts play only a voluntary role in the provision of before- and after-school care. This means that across the province, there is no uniform approach to the provision of necessary childcare by the public education system. Parents in districts where there is no available school-based childcare must access the patchwork system of private care. Where school-based childcare does exist, it is too often provided by contract providers operating independently from our public system, with too few seats to meet demand, inconsistent pricing and varying levels of quality.

Conversations with school districts across the province indicate a sliding scale of interest in providing public childcare. Early adopters are among the first to volunteer for Seamless Day pilots and apply for other space creation funding. A second wave of districts has expressed interest, including those who now participated in the expanded Seamless Day pilot. Even more

districts would participate if funding was available for start-up costs and a childcare coordinator position. There are some districts, however, that are simply waiting for the BC government to signal that the provision of childcare is now a requirement, and who are unlikely to participate until that signal is sent.

Government has taken a wise approach to the expansion of public childcare in the school system. The model whereby such a change begins with pilot programs and targeted funding is sound, however, the number of programs and scale of funding has been very limited in respect of the vastness of the system and the enormous demand for spaces. For government to realize the potential of the public education system in delivering childcare, and meet its commitment to British Columbians, the expansion of this model of integrated public childcare needs to accelerate. This includes making clear that the provision of childcare will be a requirement for school districts.

The BC government should signal that the provision of in-house, publicly delivered school-aged care will be a requirement for school districts across the province. This communication is a key indicator for which many districts are waiting before taking action to pursue pilot projects and investment in direct provision of childcare. Such an announcement does not require a mandate to take effect immediately, and still leaves government with substantial flexibility regarding when and how such a mandate could come into effect.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Durlak, J. A. et al, 2010. "A Meta-Analysis of After-School Programs That Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents" *American Journal of Community Psychology* 45, 294 - 305. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9300-6>
- 2 Herbst, C. M. and Barnow, B.S., 2008. Close to Home: A Simultaneous Equations Model of the Relationship Between Child Care Accessibility and Female Labor Force Participation. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 29, 128–151. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-007-9092-5>.
- 3 Statistics Canada, 2022. Survey on Before and After School Care in Canada, 2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221014/dq221014c-eng.htm?CMP=mstatcan>
- 4 Ibid
- 5 Tasseven, O., 2017. The relationship between economic development and female labor force participation rate: A panel data analysis. In *Global Financial Crisis and Its Ramifications on Capital Markets: Opportunities and Threats in Volatile Economic Conditions*. <https://10.1007/978-3-319-47021-4>
- 6 Fortin, P. et al, 2012. Lessons from Quebec's universal low-fee childcare programme. Institute for Public Policy Research, <https://www.ippr.org/juncture-item/lessons-from-quebecs-universal-low-fee-childcare-programme>

