



# THE SEAMLESS DAY PROJECT

## 2024-2025

■ Bridging Education and Care

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# Introduction & Background

Ontario is both a beneficiary and victim of the early start that it got in the development of child care services and practices in Ontario public schools. As a result, child care in schools has now become the dominant site for child care in Ontario. “As of March 31, 2023, 55.2% of child care centres and 65.0% of child care spaces were in publicly funded schools. The number of licensed child care centres allocated in publicly funded schools increased by 6.5% in 2022–23 compared to the previous year and spaces increased by 9.3% in the same period.

Ontario was an early adopter of establishing school-based child care. In the late 1970’s, through the 1980’s and 1990’s hundreds of child care centres were opened for both preschool and school-aged children in public schools. This initiative was institutionalized in 1987 when the government decreed that all new schools also had to include child care centres.

Despite the fact that all four- and five-year olds had access to free half-day kindergarten at the time, child care was treated as a separate, private service compared to the free and public character of education.

These early developments tended to entrench the split service provision of care and education. Kindergarten continued to be seen and valued as a public “educational” service for young children while child care continued to be dealt with in a patchwork system as a private service for poor or working women. As early as 1998, Laura Johnson and Julie Mathien conducted a comparison study of early childhood education service and practices in

Ontario, Alberta, New Brunswick and Quebec, [Early Childhood Services for Kindergarten-age Children in Four Canadian Provinces: Scope, Nature and Models for the Future.](#)

This discussion was connected to the issue that high quality child care plays a vital role in supporting children’s development while enabling parents to balance work and family responsibilities. By the 1990’s there was a lot of discussion about the “seamless day” and getting rid of the split system whereby kindergarten-age children could be facilitated in a seamless kindergarten program uniting care and education. The University of Toronto’s

Institute of Child Study sponsored a nation-wide Integration Network Project and national



symposium discussion aimed at introducing new models of extended day kindergarten. At the same time, the OECD was emphasizing “integration” in its Starting Strong surveys of international child care between 2006-2010.

But it was the Toronto First Duty -inspired by Early Years Study (McCain & Mustard, 1999) and supported by the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, City of Toronto and Toronto District School Board Project that propelled the concept of the seamless day to becoming a key principle in the transition from part-to-full day kindergarten (Corter, Janmohamed & Pelletier, 2012). This project put into practice the seamless day, researched the outcomes and disseminated the results widely. The Toronto



First Duty Project made it inevitable that the concept of the “seamless day” would be central in the 2009 Charles Pascal report, titled *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*. This comprehensive blueprint was commissioned by the provincial government to guide the transformation of early childhood education in the province, the keystone being the implementation of a full-day kindergarten across Ontario. Pascal recommended the “seamless day” as the best way to improve a child’s education while allowing parents more consistent and flexible child care options (Pascal, 2009).

It was a comprehensive blueprint commissioned by the Ontario government for transforming early childhood education in the province. The report recommended the implementation of a full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year old children across Ontario. It was the best way to improve a child’s education while allowing parents more consistent and flexible child care options (Pascal, 2009). The report focused on the importance of before-and-after school care kindergarten programs (BASK), emphasizing the benefits of quality extended day and year-round programs for those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds (Pascal, 2009). It also aimed for a seamless transition between before-and-after school care and the regular school day for children. One of the major barriers to creating an integrated or seamless early childhood program in Ontario is the ongoing divide between education and child care. The two sectors differ in their delivery structure, legislation, and funding. The introduction of a seamless day aims to integrate the two sectors to provide children with consistent enrichment and care, modernizing the education to respond to the needs of today’s families.

Ontario launched its full-day kindergarten program in 2010. To be phased in over five years, the announcements highlighted the importance of the integrated or seamless day. The initial seamless day plan involved school boards directly operating BASK programs for four and five year-olds. However, this approach was met with backlash from a number of school boards and from the child care sector, as it was in direct competition to non-profit and private child care providers. There was great concern that the new program would impact their revenue and viability, especially where the kindergarten cohort was concerned. There were also concerns about school boards being unqualified to provide early childhood care as they are primarily



focused on education. As a result, the Ontario Government amended the regulation to permit school boards to choose whether to directly operate BASK programs or to contract third party providers to offer them (Ministry of Education, 2021).

Through internal data collection studies, some school boards concluded that there was unequal access to child care for families within the third party operated child care model. Entire communities were underserved with no child care options in schools in lower income communities. Access to BASK programs for all children, became the vision for school boards taking on the Extended Day program.

Since the introduction of a seamless day approach in 2010, the alignment between school boards and Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) programs has seen significant development, with a notable increase in integration and collaboration. The 2021 Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) action plan continues to endorse the importance of provincial BASK programs, by noting that “Ontario school boards are required to provide before-and-after school programs in each elementary school in Ontario for students in kindergarten to grade 6, where there is sufficient demand and viability” (B2C2, 2023). CWELCC also pledges to provide resources and assist families with a seamless transition between the school system and child care. (B2C2, 2023) There is a need for alignment between the school system and child care as the majority of Ontario’s child care centres are in public schools. In 2022, more than 54% of child care centres were located in public schools and almost all were operated by not-for-profit third party providers. Only a small portion of child care services are directly operated by school boards (B2C2, 2023).

# The Seamless Day Approach: What is it and how does it work?

In Ontario, a seamless day plan refers to an integrated approach to early childhood education that works to combine kindergarten and child care into one entire-day program.

The plan aims to create a cohesive experience for families and allows children to seamlessly transition between formal education and early learning activities provided by child care. The seamless day plan involves designated early childhood educators (DECEs) working with kindergarten teachers to provide children with education and continuous care. It is designed to ensure that the two care settings do not conflict with one another. Ideally, children stay with the same teachers and care staff all day which reduces the need to hire child care staff that work split shifts.

The closest examples of these kinds of operation in Ontario are located in schools where school boards directly operate both kindergarten and before and after school programs.

As of September 2024, the following school boards operated these programs. Some operate exclusively directly operated programs; other combine directly-operated with private child care centres operating the before and after school component (usually non-profit centres):

- Waterloo Region District School Board
- Waterloo Catholic District School Board
- Toronto District School Board

- Ottawa Carleton District School Board
- Ottawa Catholic District School Board
- Halton District School Board
- Conseil des écoles catholique du Centre-Est
- Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario
- Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario

Typically, school boards hire one Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT) teacher and two registered early childhood educators (now known as designated early childhood educators (DECEs) but registered with the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators). Some boards hire additional non-RECE staff as supplemental or replacement staff.

Typically, the way it work (with some variations) is:

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RECE starts the program at 7:00 a.m. – works till 2:30 p.m. (with half hour break)

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The OCT joins the program at 9:00 a.m. (225 minutes; preparation time 75 minutes)

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The second RECE joins the program 11:30 a.m. and works till 6:00 p.m. (with half-hour break)

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There are different practices with regard to PD days and school holidays. Examples:

- Some boards require DECEs to work full days on PD days
- Some boards try to rotate DECEs so that they also get some professional development opportunities alongside the teachers.
- Some boards close on PD days and offer DECEs professional development opportunities.
- March break and Christmas holidays (one week) are usually covered by DECEs and assistants.
- Some boards rotate these arrangements.
- Most boards operate in the summer holidays but four do not. (WRDSB, WCDSB, TDSB, CPGN)

Supplies, equipment, and space are shared for all children

The current policy on BASK programs allows schools to either deliver their own publicly funded directly operated before-and-after school program or arrange a contract with a third party child care provider, which can be any licensed for-profit, public or not-for-profit organization.

In Ontario, the school boards receive relatively stable and consistent funding directly from the Ministry of Education for the instructional component of the day. School boards are expected to ensure cost recovery for additional expenditures incurred in offering services for the extended part of the day. This is achieved through parent fees and some government grants. This also applies when the extended day is contracted to third-party childcare providers. Any extra costs incurred by the school boards are passed on to third party operators who recoup them through a mix of government subsidies and parent fees. School boards and/or third party providers can recover a portion of their costs from the Ministry of Education under CWELCC but there exists

uncertainty in the sector concerning the level of predictable financial support.

As noted earlier, most BASK programs in schools are organized by third party operators. There are crucial structural differences between the two options listed as in the following table on the following page.

Additionally, DECEs are hired by the school board and their salaries are paid for by the Ministry of Education. As a result, they are offered benefits, paid sick time, pension and treated as school board employees. During the summer months, these employees are not paid but the majority apply for and receive Employment Insurance.

ECEs from third party operators do not receive the same benefits and flexibility. These ECEs are usually asked to work two shifts: one from 7:00-9:00 am and a second shift from 3:30-6:00 pm. Some school boards try to assist child care operators by hiring the child care staff for lunch duty or to act as supply staff in the kindergarten programs.



Directly Operated School Board Programs	Third-Party Child Care Operator Programs
<b>Administration and Oversight</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managed directly by the school board</li> <li>• School principals have direct oversight together with centrally appointed managers and a team of supervisors</li> <li>• Integrated with school policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managed by a child care operator through a contract with the school</li> <li>• No direct oversight by school staff</li> <li>• Coordination between schools and child care programs</li> </ul>
<b>Licensed or Unlicensed</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most directly operated programs have now transitioned to becoming licensed by the Ministry under the Early Learning and Child Care Act, and are therefore, subject to the regulations of the Act.</li> <li>• The directly operated programs that are now licensed may, and usually have, signed on to the CWELCC agreement in order to take advantage of the reduced fees to support parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of child care programs are licensed under the Ontario Early Childhood Education and Care Act and can take advantage of CWELCC funding.</li> </ul>
<b>Staffing</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff are employed by the school board</li> <li>• Three educators in each classroom: one Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT);</li> <li>• Two Designated Early Childhood Educators (DECEs) (one for the AM shift and one for the PM shift)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The instructional day is staffed by one OCT and one DECE.</li> <li>• Extended day staff are employed by the third-party operator</li> <li>• One qualified staff (usually a Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE) as set out by regulation.</li> <li>• Ages 44-68 months - 1:13</li> <li>• Ages 68 month -13 years - 1:15</li> <li>• Other staff may be unqualified</li> <li>• Staff are hired for the early morning shift, often, 7-9 a.m. and then brought back for the afternoon shift from 3:30-:00 p.m.</li> </ul>



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Directly Operated School Board Programs</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Third-Party Child Care Operator Programs</b></p>
<p><b>Funding and Fees</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The kindergarten part of the day is funded out of the Ministry of Education funding for the “instructional day”.</li> <li>• The BASK program is funded on a “cost-recovery basis” by a combination of parent fees and CWELCC fee reduction grant</li> <li>• If the program is licensed under the Early Learning and Childhood Act, eligible parents may receive a subsidy towards their fees as authorized by the local Service System Manager (SSM) – the local municipality. In turn, the SSMs receive their funding from the Early Learning and Childcare Division of the Ministry of Education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the BASK program is licensed by the Early Learning and Child Care Division of the Ministry of Education, the costs for BASK programs are funded 52.75% by the Ministry of Education Early Learning and Child Care Division and 47.75% by parent fees. (as of September 2024)</li> <li>• Eligible parents may have their fees subsidized by the local SSM.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Integration with School Programs</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seamless integration with the school day, facilitating smoother transitions for children.</li> <li>• Consistent educational philosophy and curriculum alignment with the school’s programs.</li> <li>• Children with special needs are supported on a continuum between the instructional day and the BASK portion of the day.</li> <li>• Licensed BASK programs must follow “<a href="#">How Does Learning Happen</a>”, <a href="#">Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years</a>.”</li> <li>• Unlicensed BASK programs are not subject to Early Learning and Child Care regulations or curriculum.</li> <li>• All supplies and equipment and classrooms are shared</li> <li>• There is continuity for the children between the different parts of the day. Children have the same learning and care plan throughout the day.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have different educational philosophies or program approaches compared to the school.</li> <li>• Licensed BASK programs must follow “<a href="#">How Does Learning Happen</a>”, <a href="#">Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years</a>.”</li> <li>• Coordination between the school and the third-party provider is required to ensure smooth transitions.</li> <li>• However, privacy legislation prevents teachers/DECEs in kindergarten programs sharing information about the children with the third party child care staff unless they have entered into a specific agreement, signed by the parents.</li> </ul>

# Challenges of a Before-and-After Kindergarten (BASK) Program



## Shared Spaces

In school board interviews and focus groups, conducted in 2023, B2C2 heard that the shared space between kindergarten classes and the child care programs is often the most difficult issue. This seems to apply to both directly operated programs and programs operated by child care centres.

It is particularly acute in many situations where BASK programs are operated by third parties. Some kindergarten teachers view the classroom as 'their' space and dislike sharing with child care staff outside of school

teaching hours. It can get in the teacher's way of lesson planning and other preparations required for the following school day. Similarly, child care staff find it difficult to move into different classrooms throughout the school year due to accommodations made for teachers. The shared spaces harbor resentment from ECEs as they compare their working conditions/spaces and wages with kindergarten teachers.

## Red Tape and Lack of Information

A Ministry of Education Guide is urgently needed to assist the process of transition.

The guide can feature success stories or examples of regions that have already licensed their program. It can include an explanation of initial costs, recommended fee structures and expected funding. The guide can also include advice on establishing relationships with licensed child care partners and showcase the benefits of doing so. The guide should include a jurisdictional scan of funding requirements differing by regions so that all programs within Ontario can benefit from the information. When programs are licensed, it enables kindergarten-aged children (up to age 6) to participate in CWELCC. It will increase accessibility and affordability for lower-income families.

## Funding for Coordination and Management of Directly Operated Programs

As well, this report recommends school boards hire more extended day supervisors or similar staff to reduce the administrative workload for DECEs. This will create a better work life balance for DECEs as they will no longer have to spend personal time on administration. As a result, there may be more incentive to work for a directly operated program since they can access additional support from these extended day supervisors. There is also the issue of interprofessional collaboration between kindergarten teachers and DECEs. To resolve conflict, this report recommends school boards host workshops where all staff can collaborate and get to know each other before the school year begins. Through these workshops, the DECE and schoolteacher can work together to set program guidelines and assign responsibilities. It may reduce potential conflicts and tension that arise later.

## Staffing

All school boards indicated that RECE staff shortages are creating problems for the child care and BASK programs, in the same way that they do in all child care programs in Ontario. The main reasons for these staff shortages include:

- Low wages are no longer competitive with other professions requiring similar qualifications.
- Lack of career options for professional staff
- Due to workplace stress and insufficient pay, 1 in 4 RECEs plan to leave the profession after 5 years of employment (Akbari et al., 2024)
- Strongly perceived lack of respect and value for early childhood educators.
- Many RECEs do not want to work split shifts in third party programs
- Many RECEs don't want to work the PM shift in the directly operated programs although some school boards are offering a shift premium of \$1/per hour to provide incentives.

This issue of staff shortages is exacerbated in BASK programs run by third party child care operators because ECEs are offered employment in split shifts. Generally, ECEs working for third party operators work before 9 a.m. and again after 3 p.m. This split shift schedule is pleasant to some potential employees, but undesirable for many more, making it difficult to recruit qualified staff and leading to a high staff turn over. Furthermore, managing staff schedules and ensuring consistent program delivery are difficult within split shift arrangements. There are challenges associated with coordinating schedules, insufficient financial resources, and facilitating coherence between education and care. Third-party providers often disrupt continuity, leading to children working with multiple educators in a day.

There tends to be resentment by ECEs working in child care programs because their counterparts working in kindergarten programs (whether this is just for the instructional day or for extended day programs) earn higher wages, receive better benefits, and have job security working with the school boards.



Staff working in school board directly operated programs do not have to work split shifts. Instead, staff shifts typically (with different scenarios in different schools) run from 7:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. for a full 7 hour day and 35 hour work week. This creates a more attractive workplace environment for potential staff. School board members state that it is easier to recruit and retain ECEs because they receive higher wages and benefits, because of being hired directly by the school board. They also have

greater job security, appear to be more valued by their employers and have greater respect. These are unionized public sector positions whereas very few staff working in child care centres are unionized.

As mentioned by one of the school board staff, the ECEs working in extended day programs appreciate the prestige:

“The staff compare themselves to the teachers in the classrooms, e.g “I don’t have enough time with my teacher” etc. Because they work WITH the teachers, they compare themselves to them and not to other ECEs in the field.”

In cases where children require special care, additional resources are needed to promote inclusivity and accessibility. School board staff noted that extended day programs with third party operators do not receive specific funding or support for children with special needs, making it difficult to provide the necessary care and support. This lack of funding and support is a significant challenge, as the costs need to be built into the budget. Staffing challenges have led third party operators to stall their expansion and close many of their BASK programs which directly affects the spaces available for children.

## Professional Development, Planning and Preparation Time

As the DECE must be always in the classroom during the day, they lack the time to plan their upcoming programs and schedules. This often results in personal time being used to create programs or where they can fit it in when children are picked up. BASK programs should provide sufficient paid time for DECEs to work on programming outside of class times on a regular schedule. This can include time during professional development days.



## Funding

Funding is cited as the major reason why school boards are reluctant to take on operating child care programs directly. School boards are required to operate all BASK programs on a cost recovery basis. This basically means that they must charge fees to the parents that cover their costs. Fees to parents tend to be high for extended day programs, especially for school-aged children who are not covered by CWELCC funding. For Kindergarten BASPs this may be less of a problem going forward as the Ministry plans to reduce fees to an average of \$10/day by Fall 2025 so that the remaining costs would be covered by the Ministry (Government of Canada, 2022).

## Subsidy Eligibility

The eligibility for fee subsidies should be modified to accommodate greater enrollment options and should cancel the requirement of an activity status. The provincial government's subsidy system for low-income families includes an activity requirement for parents to be working or studying. The flat fee to parents under CWELCC funding does not have these constraints. By setting the eligibility of some subsidies to require parental employment or studying, parents may be excluded from certain employment opportunities because they cannot afford child care. This creates a circle of poverty that further limits accessibility to child care for lower-income families. Subsidies for families with special needs children should also be expanded to cover the additional costs for extra staff assistance.

## Licensing

Many directly operated programs are licensed in Ontario which means they can participate in CWELCC and reap the benefits of the reduced fees. However, some were

hesitant to license their programs due to unclear funding guidelines and worries about additional administrative requirements. The Ministry of Education Funding Formula has now been announced and is being studied by the sector to determine its efficacy. Early signs indicate that funding will be more generous and stable under the new funding formula. Licensing is crucial as it allows for greater accessibility for lower-income families who can greatly benefit from reduced child care fees.



# Benefits of a Seamless Day Program



## Accessibility

Directly operated programs are offering greater access to children across the province. School boards offering third-party programs are offering, on average, space for 9% of eligible children, compared to an average of 35% of directly operated programs.

## Holistic Approach and improved learning experience for children

A seamless day program encourages “interest-based activities and social skills development” stemming from a holistic approach. The program operates based on the How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years which ensures consistent approaches to learning and care across the province (Government of Ontario, 2014).

School board members spoke highly of the benefits of a seamless day program, stating that on-site child care either significantly or very significantly improves the learning experience for children in later grades. School staff and ECEs were able to communicate with one another to learn about a child’s behavior, allowing them to be proactive in assessing and providing early intervention for children who may struggle with learning challenges. Children were in constant touch with the same educators that they learned to trust. As the directly operated BASK programs operate as an extension of the school day, parents and staff can easily communicate with each other on any issues. Due to strict privacy laws, teachers in kindergarten programs cannot speak to third party child care staff about any issues in their classroom without written permission from parents.





# Conclusion and Recommendations

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### 1. Assessment and data gathering

That the Ministry of Education require regular reporting from the school boards on the number of children provided with BASK services (of all kinds). Create a standard survey for viability threshold for school boards to use that is consistent across the province and will assist the Ministry in assessing if school boards are meeting the requirement to provide care where there is sufficient demand. The Ministry can analyze this data to determine priority areas and action the Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan to address systemic barriers, discriminatory practices and improve access to child care for all families.

### 2. Encourage a seamless day approach in all BASK programs

That the Ministry of Education encourage the seamless day approach in all BASK programs by:

- Setting clear viability threshold guidelines on the level of demand needed to offer BASK programs in schools and require school boards to report back annually. The timelines should be consistent across the province as well as making provision for additional families to join the program in later months.
- Establishing clear guidelines about determining “viability” to operate a BASK program in the schools. This should be conveyed to school boards and school boards should be required to justify any “non-viable” options.
- providing incentives for school boards to offer directly operated programs by providing adequate funding for them to expand directly operated programs in schools.
- covering the costs of extended day programs including equipment supplies, accommodation and professional development in the same way as the instructional day. This would result in reducing the burden to parents, so they are only covering staff-related costs. This approach ensures that high quality child care is provided and aligns with a child's educational and social development needs.

### 3. Require the use of certain resources

That the Ministry of Education circulate and require school board senior staff to use the two resources, Working Together in a Shared Space and Building Enriching Partnerships.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

### **4. Expand and extend subsidized spaces**

That the Ministry expand and extend the provision of subsidized spaces to ensure all eligible families in Ontario have access to high quality ELCC.

### **5. Subsidy eligibility brought in line with CWELLC eligibility**

That subsidy eligibility be brought into line with eligibility for CWELCC families making all children eligible without the activity requirement - working or studying or a child with special needs.

### **6. A dedicated guide with information about licensing and guidelines**

That the Ministry of Education provide a dedicated guide with clear guidelines and information about licensing BASK programs to provide ease of transition to directly operated programs and reduce red tape.

### **7. A symposium organized about how to transition programs**

That the Ministry of Education organize a Symposium on how to transition to a directly operated program within the next 12 months.

### **8. Additional funds for professional development of DECEs**

That the Ministry of Education provide additional funds for DECEs working in directly operated programs to access professional development opportunities and programming/preparation time.

All these recommendations work to better support the families, children, and staff involved in the BASK programs. A seamless day model offers greater accessibility and a stable, higher-quality environment for children. It offers a more integrated approach to child care, meeting the needs of all families in Ontario.

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