

TO: Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Service Administration Boards (CMSMs and DSSABs)

FROM: Phil Graham
Assistant Deputy Minister
Early Years and Child Care Division

DATE: April 15, 2021

SUBJECT: Time-Limited Public Health Actions – Schools and Child Care

Thank you for your continued efforts in keeping children, families, and child care staff safe during this challenging time. The Ministry of Education is committed to keeping you informed of measures Ontario is taking to protect public health and safety, and the purpose of this communication is to inform you of the following new measures.

Today the government announced that it will provide emergency child care for school-aged children, free of charge, starting Monday, April 19, 2021. This follows the province's decision to close all elementary and secondary schools, publicly-funded and private, for in-person learning following the April Break. The government will continue to listen to the advice of public health experts, and we will provide an update once a safe return to in-person learning is recommended.

Impact on Child Care Operations

Similar to the approach in January-February 2021 and recognizing the foundational nature of child care in providing a trusted and safe environment for children so that parents can work, the following is being implemented:

- Child care for non-school aged children (i.e., children aged 0-4) will remain open for the duration of this time-limited public health action. This includes child care offered in licensed child care centres and in home-based settings.
- During the period when elementary schools are operating virtually, licensed child care centres, authorized recreation and skill-building providers and district school boards will be prohibited from serving school-aged children*.
- Before and after school programs are not permitted to operate during this period. These programs may resume operation when elementary schools return to in-person learning.
- To support the parents of school-aged children who may not be able to support

their child's learning or care at home, the Ministry of Education will once again be working with partners to implement an Emergency Child Care (ECC) program for school-aged children of front-line workers, at no cost to eligible parents, during the period when schools are operating remotely. Please see below for further details.

- Operators of before and after school programs that are required to close will be prohibited from charging fees or otherwise penalizing parents during this time period (e.g., parents must not lose their respective child care spaces).

*For clarity, there may be some children who despite being school-aged (i.e., Junior/Senior Kindergarten) are not registered in school and are currently enrolled in licensed child care. Operators with Junior/Senior Kindergarten-aged children who are not registered in school but are instead registered in licensed centres as of April 12, 2021, may continue to serve these children throughout the duration of this time-limited public health action, including the period when elementary schools have moved to a virtual learning model.

Health and Safety

Everyone in the child care sector has worked incredibly hard to put in place the strict health and safety measures, including but not limited to:

- Screening every day for COVID-19 symptoms before any individual enters the child care premises (The COVID-19 School and Child Care Screening Tool is available to assist with symptom screening);
- Practicing good hand hygiene habits throughout the day;
- Practicing physical distancing;
- Wearing a mask and eye protection; and
- Avoiding sharing objects, toys, food, water bottles or other personal items.

The health and safety of children and child care staff and operators has been our primary concern throughout this pandemic. It is of the utmost importance that all child care settings continue to adhere to these measures to be able to remain open to serve families.

Targeted Emergency Child Care (ECC) for School-Aged Children

Eligibility

The government is implementing the broadest eligibility list to date, including health care workers, child care workers, grocery store and pharmacy workers, and those working directly in the COVID-19 vaccination effort. Note that any individual whose child was registered in an emergency child care program delivered by a Consolidated Municipal Service Manager or District Social Service Administration Board during the time period beginning on April 6, 2021 and ending on April 16, 2021 is also eligible for the provincial emergency child care program. Please see Appendix A for the eligibility list.

ECC Locations

All established ECC settings must be located within existing licensed child care settings and board operated extended day programs in order to support expedited

implementation. It is suggested that existing, licensed before and after school program locations transitioned to full day programs could be the best option, however CMSMs/DSSABs, working with operators and school board partners have the discretion and oversight to plan all ECC locations.

School boards are being requested to make school buildings accessible to allow for the continued operation of both regular child care and emergency child care for school-aged children while in-person learning in elementary schools is unavailable. Please continue to work with your school board partners to ensure collaboration and the smooth operation of child care programs.

Please note that child care staff/providers implementing ECC for school-aged children are asked to create conditions that support students' engagement in remote learning (e.g., provide a suitable space and time in the ECC; support log-in to remote learning, if required), but are not responsible for managing the requirements of each child's individual virtual learning environment.

Health and Safety Requirements

In order to support the safe and healthy operation of ECC programs for school-aged children, all established ECC programs must adhere to the following requirements:

- All requirements set out in the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA) as well as all current ministry policies and guidelines (i.e. the operational guidance documents for child care and before and after school programs) must continue to be followed.
- All health measures put in place by your local Public Health Unit.
- Your local Medical Officer of Health must be advised of all settings established.

Funding

Consistent with the approach during the time-limited public health actions in Winter 2021, the Province will provide funding support for ECC. Costs for ECC will be covered during the period elementary schools are closed for in-person learning province-wide and/or in regions identified by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health.

CMSMs and DSSABs are being asked to keep track of funding associated with managing and operating ECC sites and will be asked to provide a rationale for the incurred costs. For ease of completion and to ensure consistency, a sample budget template has been provided (see Appendix B) and includes additional clarity on funding parameters in the instruction sections. CMSMs/DSSABs will be asked to report funding for both child care centres and home child care providers providing ECC in the budget template.

CMSMs and DSSABs are required to complete and submit this template to the ministry. The ministry will follow-up with further information on the submission due date for this specific ECC period. However, for planning purposes, you can anticipate that this template will be due to the ministry within 6-8 weeks following the end of provincially-

directed ECC in your region.

As a reminder, where eligible, operators should continue to access federal support programs under the Canada Economic Response Plan. As well, eligible operators should apply for provincial programs available to businesses:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/businesses-get-help-covid-19-costs>

Next Steps

Planning Templates

Attached you will again find the planning template (see Appendix C) which you have already received. Thank you to those who have already submitted their planning templates; it will be reviewed as quickly as possible and you will be notified when it is approved. If you have not yet submitted a planning template we are asking you to return it to the ministry at tpa.edu.earlylearning@ontario.ca (copying your Early Years Advisor), today (April 15, 2021) if possible, to provide time for sites to be approved before Monday April 19, 2021. This plan will provide the ministry with the information necessary to support the approval and oversight of the child care centres providing emergency child care programs for school-aged children within your communities.

Although home child care settings do not require ministry approval to operate as they are not subject to closure, in order to get a full picture of their plans, the ministry is asking CMSMs and DSSABs to also list licensed home child care agencies that will be providing ECC in their planning template.

Reminder when filling in the template:

- Only child care centres included in local plans reviewed and approved by the ministry will be permitted to provide ECC to school-aged children. You will receive a notification from the ministry when your planned centres have been approved.
- Proposed ECC sites should be prepared to meet all requirements under the CCEYA for school-aged children.
- Proposed ECC sites must have a general operating and/or fee subsidy purchase of service agreement, otherwise one will need to be entered into between the operator and the CMSM/DSSAB.
- The ministry understands that not every CMSM/DSSAB will require emergency child care programs however, please take the time to indicate so on the planning template (i.e. check “yes” or “no” and provide a rationale if no emergency care settings are required).
- A new section has been added to the template should you wish to seek approval to include a group/sector in the eligibility that is not on the provincial list.

Reporting

Attached is an attendance reporting template to be filled in twice per week, where ECC is operational. The reporting template should be submitted by noon to tpa.edu.earlylearning@ontario.ca (copying your Early Years Advisor) as follows:

- Monday noon - report attendance for the previous Wednesday-Friday.
- Wednesday noon - report attendance data for Monday and Tuesday.

When submitting your attendance reporting, please also indicate in your email if you have a waitlist and the size of the waitlist (if you do not have a waitlist, you do not need to submit this information).

We recognize that the decision to move to virtual learning and emergency child care for school-aged children will affect people's every day lives, but it is a necessary step in trying to slow the spread of COVID-19. Everyone has worked incredibly hard to keep our child care settings as safe and healthy as possible, and with your continued support we can do our part to keep everyone safe.

The ministry continues to put the health and safety of Ontario's children and families at the forefront. We also continue to depend on the authority and discretion that service system managers hold in order to make decisions that best support the early years and child care sector in your communities. Please continue to let us know how we can support your efforts during this challenging time.

Thank you,

Phil Graham

Appendix A: Eligibility List – Emergency Child Care

Appendix B: Budget Template – Emergency Child Care

Appendix C: Planning Template – Emergency Child Care

Appendix D: Reporting Template – Emergency Child Care