

Meeting Summary:

The Minister's Early Learning Child Care Engagement Table (ELCCET)

Meeting 9: June 8th, 2024, 9:30 am – 4:00 pm

Summary

The ninth meeting of the Minister's Early Learning and Child Care Engagement Table (ELCCET) was held on June 8th, 2024.

The meeting focus was:

- The approach for developing an **operational funding model for licensed and provincially funded early learning settings**, and the structure of working groups to inform the work. The discussion focused on what a successful funding model would look like and the primary cost drivers in a child care centre.
- **ELCC expansion**; included updates on current projects designed to support expansion and feedback on modular child care centre designs.
- The **Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care** provided an update and engaged the group in a feedback session.
- **Updates** and feedback were provided on other initiatives such as subsidy program enhancements; revised food and nutrition standards in licensed early learning settings; the early learning curriculum framework, the quality matters assessment program and school aged care space growth.
- **Year-end feedback** was solicited on ways to enhance Engagement Table processes and membership for the upcoming year.

Agenda

1. Minister's Remarks
2. Operational Funding Project and Working Groups
3. Expansion Updates
4. Space Expansion Enablers
5. Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care
6. Updates
 - a. Subsidy
 - b. Food and Nutrition
 - c. Curriculum Framework and Quality Matters
 - d. School Aged Care
7. Considerations for Engagement Table in 2024/25

Discussion Details: Operational Funding Model

Table members provided advice on what a successful operational funding model for publicly funded early learning and child care settings should consider.

The overall themes included:

- Sufficient funding for administrative support so Directors can work to the full scope of their role.
- Ensuring funding appropriately supports quality programming, not just meeting minimum licensing requirements. In particular:
 - Funding to purchase and prepare quality food (including travel or delivery fees), appropriate wages for cooks, and funding to enable cooks to update their skills.
 - Funding to cover building occupancy costs, ongoing maintenance costs (including outdoor play spaces) and contingency funding for unanticipated repairs and capital improvements.
- Funding for professional learning and funding to hire substitutes while staff participate in professional learning.
- Flexible funding to account for the diversity that exists within each centre. Diversity can include but not be limited to:
 - The cost impacts related to where a centre is located,
 - The cost impacts related to the ages of the children being served (infants are typically more expensive to care for than toddlers or pre-schoolers); and
 - The cost impacts of children with unique needs (supplies, staffing, and other individual supports needed to ensure full participation).

Expansion Update

The Department provided a brief update on child care expansion progress, which can be found at: <https://childcarenovascotia.ca/families/child-care-spaces>

Space Expansion Enablers

The Department provided updates and gathered feedback on the following:

- The development of draft *ELCC Design Guidelines*. Guidelines are intended to support child care best practice and compliance with regulations. Volunteers from the Table were identified to provide additional input on the draft document following the meeting.
- Modular Child Care Centre Designs, intended to support the creation of potential future child care centres using modular construction practices.

Discussion Details: Modular Design

Table members provided detailed and thorough feedback on several modular designs. Feedback focused on improving flow and adjacency considerations, design to support quality environments, and the day-to-day implications of the design choices for families and staff. For example, providing staff lockers near the building's exit and providing sufficient storage space for supplies. Another important design consideration is to ensure rooms have enough space to allow for future flexibility to adapt for various age groups as communities change and grow.

Federal Secretariat

Table members received an update from the Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care. The Federal Secretariat brings together governments, experts, and stakeholders to collaborate on the implementation of a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system. The Table was asked to give feedback on the implementation of the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement in Nova Scotia. While acknowledging the significant progress made to date, Table members identified several pressure points in Nova Scotia. Among them were:

- Waitlists:
 - Management of waitlists is a significant administrative burden on child care operators.
 - A lack of school aged care spaces prevents many parents from enrolling their child(ren) in Pre-Primary; this creates added strain on the availability of preschool spaces in child care centres and family homes.
- Workforce:
 - Nova Scotia relies on internationally trained ECEs to augment its locally available workforce, but foreign immigration processes can be very challenging for ELCC operators / employers to navigate.
 - The implementation of a publicly funded wage scale for ECEs is helping to recruit and retain individuals to the sector, but there is a need to consider wage support for non-ECE staff, such as cooks.
- Operational funding:
 - The implementation of a sustainable and appropriate operational funding model should be a key priority of the Province as it is a foundational element of system stabilization, and sustainable growth.

Other Updates

Early Learning and Child Care Subsidy Program

The Department shared information on the recently updated Child Care Subsidy program. Effective May 29, 2024, applicants are no longer required to provide liquid asset value. This

change makes it easier for families to save for milestones like home ownership and retirement, without impacting their eligibility for the program. In addition, the program application form is now digital, which reduces administrative burden on families and operators and decreases processing time.

Food and Nutrition Standards

Plans for the launch of the *Revised Food and Nutrition Standards for Licenced Child Care* were shared and Table members advised that cooks would need support to understand and implement the new standards.

Curriculum and Quality Matters

The planned timeline for the launch of the Early Learning Curriculum Framework was shared and Table members suggested that the Department should consider condensing the period between the launch of each module, enabling a quicker roll-out to the sector.

The Quality Matters Program redesign was also discussed, and members shared feedback on sector support during implementation.

School Age Care

The Province is currently prioritizing the growth of school aged care spaces through the Nova Scotia Before and After (School) Program. An additional 1,500 spaces are planned to open in the 2024/25 school year and a further 1,500 spaces in the 2025-26 school year.

Considerations for Engagement Table Year 3

A group discussion was held to review the work of the Engagement Table over the last year and consider processes for the upcoming year. The group identified possible areas for improvement and suggestions for Table membership. These ideas will be considered by the Minister.

The Engagement Table contributions over the past year were noted and the Department looks forward to working with new and returning members over the 2024/2025 year.

The next in-person table meeting will take place on October 26, 2024.