
REPORT TITLE: **Addressing The Child Care Workforce Shortage**

FROM: Sean Baird, Commissioner of Human Services

RECOMMENDATION

That the Director of Early Years and Child Care Services be authorized to negotiate Agreements with local Ontario colleges, that offer programs approved by the College of Early Childhood Educators, for the purpose of providing funding for the accelerated training of potential applicants and supporting recruitment of Early Childhood Educators in Peel;

And further, that the Region’s duly authorized signing officers or the Commissioner of Human Services be authorized to execute the Agreements, together with any further documents that may be required, on business terms satisfactory to the Commissioner of Human Services and on legal terms satisfactory to the Regional Solicitor.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Ministry of Education has provided the Region with \$11.5M in one-time federal funding (“Workforce Funding”) to address the child care workforce crisis by piloting new and innovative initiatives to retain and recruit a high-quality child care and early years workforce.
- Staff have developed a comprehensive plan to use the Workforce Funding, including a strategy for the accelerated training of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) that
- has been approved by the Ministry of Education.
- The objectives of this strategy are to recruit applicants to become qualified ECEs through accelerated programs, leadership training for the existing workforce, and attract new applicants to the field.
- The outcome will be approximately 1,905 additional ECEs entering the workforce in the GTA over the next two years.
- To implement this strategy, and through this report, the Director of Early Years and Child Care Services is requesting authority to flow funding directly to colleges to allow them to offer fully funded spaces/grants to qualified applicants.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

Child care is an essential component of Peel’s social and economic well-being. It allows children to thrive and grow and be set up for future success. A lack of quality child care is a barrier to enter or return to the workforce, especially for women. As general labour shortages increase across Ontario, child care will become even more important.

Addressing The Child Care Workforce Shortage

For many years, the recruitment and retention of qualified early childhood educators has been a challenge and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this situation. Throughout the past two years, ECEs have faced extra hours, additional duties, constantly changing health and safety requirements, and have been working on the front lines of essential service to enable families to continue to work throughout the pandemic. A 2021 survey indicated that as many as 72 per cent of Peel ECEs are considering leaving the sector¹.

At the end of 2021, child care enrollment in Peel remained low, at less than 45 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. Child care providers have said demand for child care is increasing, however, they are now challenged by staffing shortages.

In addition, the anticipated signing of the National Child Care agreement between the provincial and federal governments is expected to generate a significant increase in demand for child care. The federal government has set a goal that child care costs will be reduced by 50 per cent in 2022 with an aim of having child care at \$10 a day within 4 years. Staff project that, to meet growing demand, the number of licensed child care spaces in Peel for children under five years old would need to grow by approximately 40,000 spaces over the next four years.

Given that child care fees in Peel average between \$52 to \$77 dollars a day (depending on age of child) the new federal funding will likely drive many families to consider licensed child care. However, families will not be able to take advantage of these reduced costs if there are not sufficient qualified staff to provide the service.

As service system manager, with the support of the federal and provincial governments, the Region is taking steps to address the ECE workforce crisis.

2. Workforce Funding

As reported to Council through the 2022 Budget, as a result of a federal investment, the Ministry of Education provided the Region of Peel with \$11.5M to address the child care workforce crisis. This one-time funding is to be used to pilot new and innovative initiatives to retain and recruit a high-quality child care and early years workforce. These initiatives will complement Council's ongoing advocacy for a provincial ECE workforce strategy that includes recognition, recruitment strategies, wage enhancements and wage parity with school board ECEs.

The Ministry of Education has stated that the key objectives of this funding are to:

- Sustain the existing child care and early years workforce to ensure a more stable and high-quality early years and child care system.
- Enhance access to opportunities for the workforce that promote retention and recruitment, including professional development, training, and qualification upgrade programs.
- Grow the number of qualified staff in the early years and child care workforce to increase access to high quality licensed child care for families.

¹ Forgotten_on_the_frontline.pdf (nationbuilder.com)

Addressing The Child Care Workforce Shortage

- Attract and support the development of an increasingly diverse workforce to more effectively reflect the children and families accessing early years and child care programs.

3. Peel's ECE Workforce Plan and Accelerated ECEs Program

Early Years and Child Care Staff, in consultation with the sector, school boards and colleges, have developed a comprehensive ECE Workforce Plan which includes:

- Professional Development
- ECE Recognition/Awareness Campaign
- Mentoring Program
- An accelerated ECE program

The accelerated ECE program is a collaborative effort between Early Years and Child Care Service System Managers in the GTA (i.e., Region of Peel, City of Toronto, Region of Durham, Region of Halton) and Ontario colleges (i.e., George Brown College, Durham College, Centennial College, Mothercraft College, Humber College, Sheridan College and Seneca College) who offer programs approved by the College of Early Childhood Educators. This group will work cooperatively to address the child care staffing crisis and proactively prepare to expand the workforce to meet an increased demand for child care. The objective of this program is to recruit additional students to become credentialed Early Childhood Educators in compressed and/or accelerated programs.

Under this program, the colleges will decide which applicants are accepted to the accelerated ECE program and will provide the grants to qualified applicants. Regional staff will monitor outcomes achieved through this initiative by reviewing regular reports which will be provided to participating municipalities by the colleges. For Peel to be a part of this innovative solution, Early Years and Child Care Services needs authority to flow funding directly to colleges so they can offer a number of spaces at no cost and additional spaces at a reduced cost to qualified applicants.

The combined impact of this initiative will be approximately 1,905 additional ECEs entering the workforce over the next two years. It will use approximately 21 per cent of the federal workforce funding and the remainder will be used for professional development opportunities, an awareness campaign, support for mentorship opportunities and other key initiatives approved by the Ministry of Education.

Implementing the various aspects of the ECE Workforce Plan, including the accelerated ECE strategy, will help to stabilize the early years and child care sector, so it better responds to current and future needs.

Proposed Next Steps

Staff will work with Legal to establish all the necessary agreements. Staff will keep Council updated on the outcomes of this strategy as the accelerated/funded programs are completed and data is received from the colleges.

Addressing The Child Care Workforce Shortage

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

If the Region does not receive authority to participate in the accelerated early childhood educators program, then Peel may not benefit from the increase in qualified ECEs to address the early years and child care staffing shortage. The ECE shortage may prevent the necessary growth of Peel's child care sector, which will eventually result in waitlists for child care. It may also mean that families will not be able to benefit from reduced child care fees funded by the Federal Government when the National Child Care agreement with the Province is signed. In addition, ECE applicants from Peel may miss unique opportunities to receive grants to support their education and employment in the child care field.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As outlined in the 2022 Budget presentation, the Workforce Funding is a federal investment with no net impact on the 2022 budget and does not require any cost sharing or any regional funding.

CONCLUSION

In 2022, the Region of Peel has received \$11.5M in one-time funding to develop a workforce plan to recruit and retain ECEs in Peel. A key component to this plan is a joint initiative between GTA municipalities and local colleges to increase the number of qualified ECEs in the sector through accelerated programs and grant funding. Providing the staff authority to negotiate and execute agreements with local Ontario colleges is needed to increase the number of qualified ECEs and ensure there are qualified staff to deliver quality programming to children. Staff will keep Council updated on the outcomes of this strategy as the accelerated/funded programs are completed and data is received from the colleges throughout the life of the strategy.

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