



## **Status of Child Care Centres in the Toronto District School Board**

**To:** Planning and Priorities Committee

**Date:** 22 January, 2024

**Report No.:** 01-24-4646

### **Strategic Direction**

Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being  
Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being  
Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that this Report be received.

### **Context**

Under Ontario's child care legislation (Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014), Service System Managers (Municipalities) are responsible for the planning, funding, administration and operation of licensed child care services in their designated jurisdictions. The City of Toronto's Children's Services Division holds these responsibilities for Toronto, and works closely with local school boards to plan and deliver various programs across Toronto's early years system. The Board recognizes its important leadership role in supporting this joint-planning, and the ongoing delivery of early years programs in TDSB schools. As stated in section 6.3 (Strategic System Leadership) of our Early Learning and Care Policy (Policy 022), "Partnerships will continue to be developed with all levels of government, where appropriate, to support the development, expansion and management of child and family programs and child care in schools".

This Report to Board summarizes the status of child care and before- and after-school programs in TDSB, and illustrates the breadth of our existing system, as well as opportunities for system enhancement in our schools. On September 27, 2023, the Board put forward a Motion (a) That the Director present a report by the end of November 2023 on the status of child care services across the TDSB, including an update on the 17 new child care centers announced by the Province from 2017; and, (b) That the Director work with the City's Children's Services Department to identify inequities of access across the board, such as in underserved areas such as Scarborough and the Northwest, including, scan or mapping of child care services across the city and in the TDSB, based on data from the Board's own sources but also from children's services data from the City of Toronto.

To address systemic issues concerning child care availability, access, equity and affordability, in 2016, Toronto Children's Services commissioned the Licensed Child Care Demand and Affordability Study from a research team led by Dr. Gordon Cleveland and Dr. Michael Krashinsky. In the Report submitted to City Council following this study ([Growing Toronto's Licensed Child Care System – Report to Council \(2017\)](#)), aspirational commitments were made by the City to build capacity in the child care system to meet demand and provide high quality, licensed child care for 50% of children between 0-4 years of age by 2026.

Over the past several years, purpose built child care centres and existing program expansions (capacity increases) have resulted in additional infant, toddler and preschool spaces and programs across the City, and in TDSB schools. While child care is the joint responsibility of the Province and the City, TDSB remains committed to promoting early years programming in schools, and a seamless day model for children and their families.

***Child Care (0-4) Landscape:***

Currently in the City of Toronto there are approximately 870 licensed child care centres serving children between the ages of birth and 3.8 years. Twenty-five percent (25%) of those centres are co-located in TDSB's schools. Of the 446 elementary schools in TDSB, approximately 47% have co-located child care programs offering 8,307 spaces to infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children. Appendix A demonstrates the breadth of licensed 0-3.8 child care programs across Toronto, including those co-located in TDSB schools. As reflected in Appendix A, there are few geographical gaps in Toronto's licensed centre-based child care system. To address existing access inequities however, areas with disproportional child care availability are prioritized by Toronto

Children's Services, in its legislated service system planning responsibilities related to child care.

In addition to these licensed child care programs, EarlyON Child and Family Centres are also available to families with children from birth to age 6 in TDSB's schools. TDSB directly operates 75 of these programs and provides space in schools to community organizations for the provision of an additional 21 programs.

**Child Care Capital:**

As outlined in Policy 022 and PR691, in partnership with the City of Toronto, the Board may submit applications for capital funding to various levels of government to develop new child care programs in schools for children from birth to 3.8 years of age. The Board's vision of schools as community hubs to improve accessibility and continuity of programming and service, has remained front and centre in its capital planning opportunities for decades. The Board will continue to include child care opportunities in its capital planning discussions and submissions to the government. Priority neighbourhoods for child care growth will continue to be identified by the City of Toronto, in alignment with its mandated Service System Plan. Appendix B demonstrates the City of Toronto's identified areas of priority for Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) expansion, with TDSB child care capital identified.

The Provincial trend over the past decade has been developing licensed child care programs in schools. Since 2012-2013 there has been a steady increase in child care centres located in schools: from 2,422 centres in schools in 2012-2013 to 2,996 in 2021-22. This trend is even more prominent with the number of spaces in schools which, as shown in Figure 2, have more than doubled since 2012-13. Community-based centre growth has seen the reverse trend, with a decline from 2,628 centres to 2,549 between 2012-13 and 2021-22. Thus, given the City, Provincial and Federal commitments to expand child care spaces through the Canada-Wide Early Learning & Child Care system and other growth plans, there will continue to be increased pressures on school boards for child care space and growth.

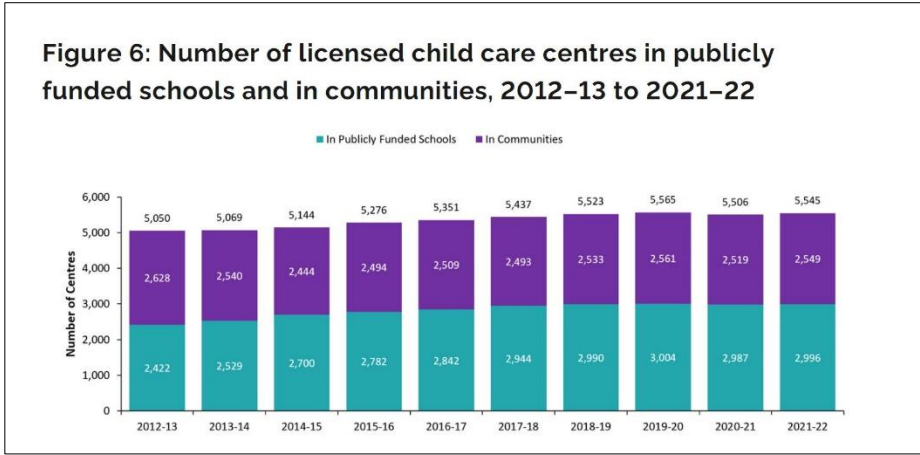


Figure 1: Number of licensed child care centres in schools vs. community

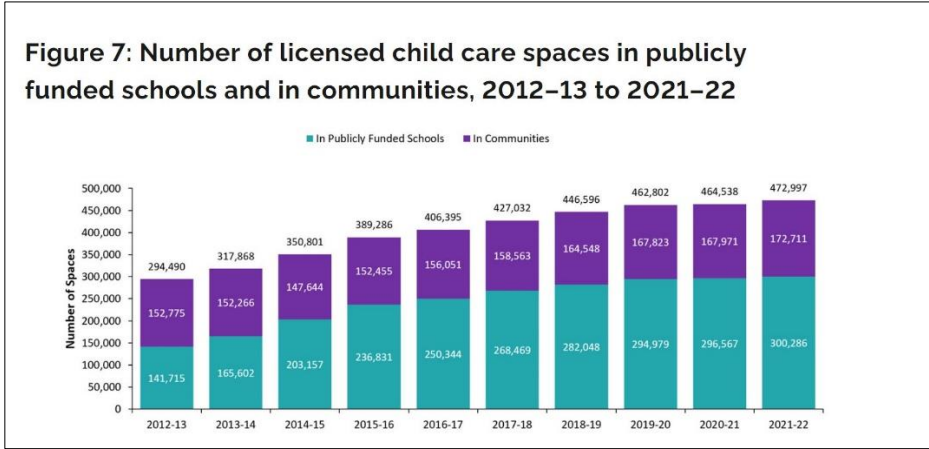


Figure 2: Number of licensed child care spaces in schools vs. community

**Child Care Capital Projects and System Inequities:**

The 17 TDSB child care capital projects that have Approval to Proceed (ATP) to tender from the Ministry of Education are still under consideration, however there is a risk these projects will not be able to proceed. These 17 child cares are projected to create over 1,000 child care spaces in areas with the highest demand for subsidized childcare. As shown in Appendix C, these are located throughout Scarborough and in West/Northwest areas of Toronto, areas where families continue to face significant inequities. Unfortunately, significant delays by the Ministry in giving our Board ATP, combined with Ministry benchmarks that do not reflect current construction costs has left the Board unable to proceed without significant additional funding from the Ministry. The estimated project costs will exceed the recent funding approved by the Ministry of Education by 43% for these 17 child care centres.

In addition to these 17 projects, TDSB is also awaiting for Approval to Proceed from the Ministry for an additional 11 planned child care capital projects. These projects have been in various stages of approvals since 2017, and similar to the 17, have been planned in areas of the City where there is disproportionate availability of licensed child care to families with young children. Overall, together with the City, TDSB has planned for 28 new licensed child care centres across Toronto, none of which can proceed at this time. And while these projects remain on paper, thousands of families with young children struggle to find access to quality child care in their communities.

Appendix B shows priority areas of the city where the City of Toronto's, Children's Services has targeted CWELCC expansion based on proportional access to licensed 0-3.8 programs. Of note, Scarborough and Northwest Etobicoke are the two largest areas of the city, with high CWELCC priority, where there are significant gaps (access inequities) in licensed programming for infant, toddler and preschool-aged children and their families. In these areas, only 18-30% of families have access to a licensed child care space. By comparison, medium and low priority CWELCC areas of the city currently serve between 30-54% of families with young children.

In the absence of the required capital funding from the Ministry of Education to move forward with these planned and necessary capital projects, despite the Board's continued commitment, existing inequities in these areas may further increase. This is particularly true for specific Northwest City Wards where population growth is expected (e.g., Humber River-Black Creek; York South-Weston). TDSB child care capital projects can play a significant role in not only addressing service gap inequities, but also in supporting Children's Services and the Province's CWELCC expansion targets. TDSB is committed to moving forward with its planned capital projects but cannot do so in the absence of required Ministry funding.

## **Action Plan and Associated Timeline**

Discussions with Ministry of Education staff, and the City of Toronto to address funding concerns with the 17 child care projects with ATP have been ongoing since 2020, when TDSB first learned about the Ministry benchmark discrepancies. Despite TDSB's commitment in 2020 to put forward an additional \$14.3M from the Board's Proceeds of Disposition to get these projects off the ground, along with recent [media coverage](#), and a [letter to the Minister](#) from the Chair of the Board, on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023 Minister Lecce told The Trillium that the latest offer was a "final 25 per cent." Furthermore, the Minister reported that "It's up to them [the board] now to make that decision, we'll

respect it and while they do their thing, we're going to keep building child care in a much quicker fashion.” The Minister has indicated the government will develop a plan once it hears from the TDSB about its intentions to proceed with the 17 projects.

The Board continues to support the development of child cares in schools and remains committed to discussing opportunities for building centres in schools. To that end, TDSB will continue to include child care capital plans in its capital project submissions to the Ministry of Education. Priority areas, such as those identified by the City, and outlined in Appendix B, will continue to be the areas targeted for child care capital in TDSB schools in an effort to address the service inequities faced by families in these communities.

## **Resource Implications**

There are no additional resource implications at this time.

## **Communications Considerations**

There are no communication considerations at this time.

## **Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)**

Policy 022 - Early Learning and Care Policy

Procedure PR691 - Licensed Child Care and Before- and After-School Programs: New and Expanded Programs in Schools

## **Other Resources:**

1. [Growing Toronto’s Licensed Child Care System – Report to Council \(2017\)](#)
2. [Ontario’s Early Years and Child Care Annual Report 2022](#) (source of Figures 1 and 2)
3. [Toronto Children’s Services, Raising the Village - Child and Family Inequities Score](#)

## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Licensed child care landscape in Toronto

Appendix B: TDSB Child Care Capital projects and priority CWELCC areas

Appendix C TDSB’s 17 Child Care Capital Projects with ATP

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