

B.C. families to benefit from school-age child care on school grounds^[1]

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EXCERPTS

More options for before- and after-school care are on the way for parents with the introduction of new legislation that will make it easier for boards of education to deliver licensed child care for students.

“Having child care on school grounds is a win for everyone – children remain in familiar surroundings throughout their day, parents save time and money, and it keeps costs down by using facilities already enriched for learning and play,” said Rob Fleming, Minister of Education. “Our government is committed to accelerating affordable, quality licensed child care spaces so families no longer have to face long wait-lists to access services that are often far from home and almost as expensive as their monthly rent.”

This legislation puts into the School Act – for the first time – recognition that school boards can directly operate before and after school care. Currently, if boards want to offer child care they must offer it through a separate, licensed provider. Boards will be required to have a child care policy in place that addresses reconciliation and inclusive education commitments, while prioritizing available space on their properties not being used for K-12 students.

To ensure families continue to have services they can count on, the legislation will allow a minister’s order to protect any spaces funded specifically for child care on school property.

“I’ve heard from too many parents and experienced first-hand as a family with a school-age child, that the lack of affordable before- and after-school care in our province has meant that they cannot return to work, even after their kids start kindergarten,” said Katrina Chen, Minister of State for Child Care. “Studies show having child care at schools ensures smoother transitions for children and better educational outcomes, and it also helps parents with a single drop off and pick-up location.”

These improvements build on work underway that will make it easier for school boards to work with licensed child care providers, share professional development and create inclusive, welcoming spaces for children to learn.

“Almost every parent has experienced the challenge of finding good quality before and after school care for their child,” said Stephanie Higginson, president, BC School Trustees Association. “This amendment to the School Act enables boards of education to offer that care directly, creating a natural alignment with the educational programming already offered during the school day. We applaud the government for taking this important step in ensuring more child care options for school-age children.”

Families throughout B.C. have benefited from the fastest creation of child care spaces in the province’s history, with more than 10,400 being funded in 15 months. Since launching in February 2018, the Childcare BC plan has also helped parents save more than \$320 million through the Affordable Child Care Benefit and Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative. Through these initiatives, nearly 29,000 families have received child care for no more than \$10 a day, since September 2018.

When a board of education wants to operate its own child care, it is eligible for operating and capital grants from the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Boards can use this funding to create non-profit child care programs based on the unique needs of their communities, with priority for culturally-relevant services for Indigenous families and support for students with special needs.

As part of the move towards making child care more accessible for families, personal education numbers (PENs) will also be expanded so children can be assigned a number before they formally start school – which is typically when they begin kindergarten at age 5. This change will reduce the paperwork that parents face and help provide seamless services from child care and early learning, to K-12 and post-secondary education throughout B.C.

To ensure children have access to high-quality learning opportunities and smooth transitions throughout their entire educational journey, the Ministry of Education also updated its Early Learning Framework in November 2019 after consulting with over 600 early child care and education stakeholders. The revised framework focuses – for the first time – on reconciliation and inclusive education, while expanding its scope to include infancy to eight years of age (formerly birth to five years of age).

“Before- and after-school care should be seen as part of a child's comprehensive educational experience, and this change supports child care providers in that aspect of their work,” said Sonia Furstenau, MLA for Cowichan Valley. “When we begin to tap into the full potential of B.C.'s underutilized educational infrastructure, our schools will be transformed into centres with the remarkable ability to transform not just our youth but entire communities.”

Investing in child care and early childhood education is a shared priority between government and the BC Green Party caucus and is part of the Confidence and Supply Agreement.

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