

June 30, 2022

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
900 Bay Street, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON
M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Lecce,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees for the Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB), I would like to take this opportunity to highlight our concerns related to the child care sector in Ontario and the impact on before and after school programs in Simcoe County.

As per the *Education Act*, school boards are required to ensure the provision of before and after school programs in each elementary school where there is sufficient demand, and it is deemed viable. Up until 2018, all elementary schools in the SCDSB offered a before and after school program. However, in recent years, shortages of registered early childhood educators and other qualified staff have created significant challenges in the sector that has directly impacted the operation of before and after school programs in SCDSB schools. As a result of the recruitment and retention challenges in the sector, nine before and after school programs at SCDSB schools will not operate in 2022-2023, despite sufficient demand. In addition, the SCDSB anticipates an increase in program waitlists and the potential for further program closures. While the impact of program closures is felt at all schools, these closures disproportionately impact small and rural schools where families have fewer child care options.

The SCDSB has been proactive and taken several steps to assist child care partners with program implementation and viability. Some examples and highlights include, but are not limited to:

- employing a dedicated Early Years and Child Care Coordinator;
- collaborating with the County of Simcoe, other school boards and not for profit childcare providers to ensure a high-quality roster of experienced operators is available;
- regularly consulting with the Ministry of Education, Early Years and Child Care Division and provincial colleagues to create best practices and support effective partnerships in the Early Years programs;
- supporting the creation of low enrolment programs by absorbing administrative costs;
- where feasible, coordinating transportation between schools to allow students access to programs in other communities;
- assisting with hiring and retention strategies with all partners;
- piloting other program models, such as a.m. or p.m. only programs in order to avoid complete closures;
- providing board professional learning and development opportunities for all child care partners; and,
- ensuring the programs are supported through resources such as the board created guidelines and handbooks, inclusion facilitators, inspections (e.g. fire, health and licensing).

It is acknowledged that the current climate for employment, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has created unprecedented challenges never seen before in the sector. In addition to the steps the board has already taken, the SCDSB is committed to further action, where reasonably possible. Steps currently in progress include: assessing the feasibility of shared staffing models between board and operators; exploring educational partnerships to build capacity in the sector (e.g. Early Education co-op programs, summer co-op programs, Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) programs in Early Childhood Education, Recreation, Outdoor Education); marketing and advertising employment opportunities with child care partners within school communities; and, assessing the impacts of the new Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system. The SCDSB will continue with all reasonable efforts in collaboration with all child care, County and provincial partners in the provision of these services.

The staffing and recruitment challenges are not a localized phenomenon, or issues that can be solved by the SCDSB and its partners alone. While it is acknowledged that the Canada-Ontario Early Years and Child Care Agreement and Ontario's associated action plan mention supporting the child care workforce, the SCDSB Board of Trustees respectfully request that the province direct further focus on supporting the recruitment, development and retention of child care sector staff, along with a review of the current regulations and requirements. Without this support, the viability of legislated child care programs in schools and elsewhere will continue to remain in jeopardy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jodi Lloyd
Chairperson
Simcoe County District School Board

c: Hon. Karina Gould, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
Hon. Doug Downey, MPP, Barrie, Springwater, Oro-Medonte
Hon. Jill Dunlop, MPP, Simcoe North
Hon. Caroline Mulroney, MPP, York-Simcoe
Andrea Khanjin, MPP, Barrie, Innisfil
Brian Saunderson, MPP, Simcoe Grey
Board of Trustees, SCDSB
Chairs, Ontario Public School Boards' Association
All Simcoe County Municipal Clerks
Jan Janssen, Director, Children Services, County of Simcoe, Social and Community Services Division
Child care operators who provide programs in SCDSB schools
John Dance, Director of Education, SCDSB
Michael Giffen, Superintendent of Education, SCDSB
Corry Van Nispen, Superintendent of Business and Facility Services, SCDSB