

DATE: June 22, 2021

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee Michelle Draper

SUBJECT: Motions re: Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care

RESOURCE STAFF: Karen Mills, Natalie Prytyluk

REFERENCE: [Trustees' Handbook – Section 5.2.2 – Notices of Motion](#)

ISSUE

Notice of motion was served at the June 8, 2021, Board meeting.

BACKGROUND

The [Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care](#) (ECELC) was established in 2016 in response to the Mayor's Task Force for the elimination of poverty in Edmonton, which evolved into EndPovertyEdmonton. EndPovertyEdmonton identified six critical game changers to eliminate poverty in Edmonton within a generation. High quality, affordable child care was named as one of the six game changers and the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care was formed to provide leadership in managing, planning and supporting the development of a system of early learning and care services in Edmonton, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable families, including Indigenous, newcomer and families of children with special needs.

The Council is comprised of representation from the provincial Ministry of Children's Services, three Edmonton school boards, the City of Edmonton, EndPovertyEdmonton, the Muttart Foundation, Edmonton Early Years Coalitions, the United Way of the Alberta Capital Region, the Edmonton Community Foundation, the YMCA of Northern Alberta, the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta, MacEwan University, and others in the early learning and care field.

The vision of the Council is to develop a system of early learning and care for all children that is high in quality, universally available, accessible, affordable, and responsive to the diversity of individual children and their families. To achieve this vision, the Council has created four working groups focused on:

- research needed to inform decisions regarding early learning and care
- policies and regulations that affect early learning and care
- programming for early learning and care
- workforce issues related to early learning and care

From these working groups, the council has developed recommended actions for the City of Edmonton and for school boards to strengthen partnerships in support of a system of early learning and care, to reduce barriers for families of young children, and to contribute to eliminating poverty.

RELATED FACTS

- There is an increasing support for universal early learning and care, including the federal government's spring budget announcement and plan for a national system of child care.
- The urgency of creating a system of high-quality, affordable early learning and care has increased with the need to have a strategic economic recovery plan that will support many families, contribute to economic and social recovery from the COVID pandemic, and help address the critical ongoing work of EndPovertyEdmonton.
- In response to the changing landscape, ECELC has developed a set of recommended actions that can be taken by the City of Edmonton in support of the development of a high-quality early learning and care that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive for all the families that need it, including low-income and vulnerable families. The ECELC plans to present the recommended actions to City Council in the near future.
- The Recommended Actions for Education target pressing issues for families, and are designed to reduce barriers, and create and strengthen partnerships to support families of young children to access early learning and care.
- The ECELC is asking all Edmonton school boards for their support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **That the Board of Trustees provides a letter of support to endorse the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care's "Recommended Actions for the City of Edmonton."**
2. **That the Board of Trustees direct Administration to collaborate with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and explore the feasibility of implementation of the "Recommended Actions for Education."**

OPTIONS

Based on the information provided in this report, the following options are considered most appropriate:

1. Approve the recommendations as presented.
2. Provide feedback on desired changes to the recommendation(s) and ask that the revised recommendation(s) be brought to a future meeting.

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

The ECELC believes Edmonton needs an integrated system of early learning and care for its young children and families. To build a system that can accomplish this will require systemic, coordinated solutions to meet the needs of the city's diverse and expanding population.

Edmonton Public Schools' Board of Trustees is committed to high quality early learning opportunities for children across Edmonton. Priority 1 of the Division's Strategic Plan is, "Foster growth and success for every student by supporting their journey from early learning through high school completion and beyond." The first goal under this priority is, "An Excellent Start to Learning", with the desired outcome being that more children enter Grade 1 reaching emotional, social, intellectual and physical developmental milestones.

At the May 25, 2021, meeting, the Board affirmed their support of early learning by approving an updated [Early Years policy](#). The policy recognizes that, "the Division is an early childhood service provider as set out by Alberta Education and the provincial funding manual. There are many community organizations who serve as important partners in the provision of early years programming for families

in the Edmonton community. The Division acknowledges the diversity of perspective, expertise and services of these partners and values the opportunity to collaborate with them to provide additional support for children and families. The Board acknowledges the importance of strategic collaboration with community partners and various orders of government, including municipal and provincial, to advance funding, access and guidelines to support the needs of children and families in the community.”

In the budget just approved at the June 8, 2021, public Board meeting, Trustees made early learning a priority by directing \$40 million dollars to Kindergarten to Grade 3 education. Although these students typically make up 30 per cent of the learners, they will be receiving 37 per cent of the weighted enrolment allocation.

Our Board has also strongly expressed to the Provincial government [our concerns](#) about the reduction to Program Unit Funding (PUF) and the detrimental impacts it will have on children, their families and our education system (last year, 900 fewer children were able to access our programming because of the changes to PUF). We continue to advocate for funding of the PUF program to be restored to the equivalent per-student amount as 2018 levels, including Family Oriented Supports, allowing ECS providers to offer fully funded half-day programming, and that program funding be extended from two years to three years to include supports for Kindergarten.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of Recommendation 1, the Board Chair will send a letter of support on behalf of all Trustees to the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care to endorse the “Recommended Actions for the City of Edmonton”.

Upon approval of Recommendation 2, staff from relevant Division units will collaborate with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care to explore the feasibility of implementing the “Recommended Actions for Education”.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

- ATTACHMENT I ECELC Recommended Actions for the City of Edmonton
- ATTACHMENT II ECELC Recommended Actions for Education

MD:km

**Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care:
Recommended Actions for the City of Edmonton**

7 May 2021

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care recommends 10 actions that can be taken by the City of Edmonton and that will support many families, contribute to economic and social recovery from the COVID pandemic, and help to address some of the critical priorities found in the City Plan, the Economic Action Plan, and the ongoing work of EndPovertyEdmonton.

EndPovertyEdmonton identified early learning and care as one of six “game changers” that must be addressed if poverty is to be eliminated from Edmonton in a generation. EndPovertyEdmonton also recognized the need to work toward an integrated system of high quality and affordable early learning and care. The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) was created to pursue this work. It comprises eighteen institutional and community partners with expertise and experience in early learning and care.

The ECELC has worked diligently to assess current conditions and needs, to develop partnerships, to explore options, and to identify paths for moving forward. It is time to act. Based on its work to date, the ECELC recommends to the City of Edmonton actions in three categories (Policy, Initial Strategy, and Advocacy) that, together, constitute initial steps toward building a system that will

- provide high quality early learning and care that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive for all families that need it, including low-income and vulnerable families,
- nurture healthy social, emotional, and intellectual development in children, preparing them for success in school and in their communities,
- support families who need or want to improve their employment status and/or advance their education or training,
- advance the City of Edmonton’s commitments to economic recovery from the pandemic, to gender equity, to elimination of poverty, and to the wellbeing of Indigenous, newcomer, low-income, and homeless families,
- support specific objectives in the *Edmonton City Plan* (Direction 1.2.2, 1.3.3) and the *Edmonton Economic Action Plan* (Action 17),
- position Edmonton to benefit from the plan for a national system of early learning and child care, as described in the federal budget of April, 2021, and
- support the rights of children and parents (as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) and advance reconciliation (as prescribed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in its *Calls to Action*).

To build a system that can accomplish these outcomes, patchwork responses to immediate, short-term problems will not be sufficient. Systemic, coordinated solutions are required to meet the needs of the city’s growing population and diverse communities. Edmonton desperately needs an integrated system of early learning and care for its young children, from infancy to kindergarten.

Policy and Strategy

City Council has endorsed the EndPovertyEdmonton strategy, but Edmonton lacks an overarching early learning and care policy and strategy of the sort that provides strong guidance in municipalities elsewhere. Actions 1 and 2 will ensure that the City develops, implements, and monitors a clear policy and strategy that will guide the development of an integrated system of early learning and care in the years to come.

- Action 1: That designated City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners to create a policy and strategy to promote high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care in Edmonton, and that this policy and strategy be presented to City Council for endorsement.
- Action 2: That City staff and the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care report on progress to City Council annually and revise the strategy as necessary.

Elements of an Initial Strategy

Municipal governments in Canada typically are not primarily responsible for early learning and care. Nevertheless, many municipalities have chosen to improve the delivery of early learning and care services because they recognize its importance to the vitality of their cities and the wellbeing of their citizens.

In our review of municipal actions elsewhere, one key ingredient is the City's role in establishing partnerships with local school boards and other levels of government to address barriers to high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care. These barriers include lack of coordinated planning, inadequate assessment of needs, challenges to ensuring quality, lack of space, lack of affordable options, challenges to ensuring cultural responsiveness, and more. Actions 3-8 target some pressing issues and will create and strengthen the partnerships and capacities necessary for building a system. Implementing these actions will require active input from Indigenous and newcomer families and those marginalized by economic and social factors.

- Action 3: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners to ensure that high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care is part of ongoing plans regarding zoning (such as the Zoning Bylaw Renewal Initiative), space (such as the Joint Use Agreement), and neighbourhood development (including 15-minute districts).
- Action 4: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners to ensure that high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care is included in implementing elements of the *City Plan* and the *Economic Action Plan* that involve the development of healthy, vibrant communities.
- Action 5: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, local school boards, and other levels of government to convene and resource a Data Working Group to ensure that the data required for needs assessments and for planning and managing a system of early learning and care are collected, analyzed, and shared.

- Action 6: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, local school boards, and the provincial government to convene and resource a Problem-Solving Working Group to address problems in finding space, co-locating services, and addressing issues of affordability, quality, and inclusiveness in early learning and care.
- Action 7: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care and partners in other levels of government, postsecondary education, and community organizations to plan the development of two high quality early learning and care demonstration centres. These centres will help early childhood educators build the culturally sensitive competencies and dispositions needed to work effectively with diverse children and families. One centre would be devoted to meeting the needs of Indigenous children and families, and the other to meeting the needs of refugee and immigrant children and families.
- Action 8: That City staff engage with the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, and possibly with other levels of government, to create and fund a grant program designed to help early learning and care centres meet the needs of Indigenous and newcomer children and families and those marginalized by economic and social factors.

Advocacy

The City has been very effective in advocating for increased support for critical social development goals, such as improving transit and increasing the supply of affordable housing. Municipal governments can be powerful advocates to other levels of government and local school boards in support of high quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care. Implementing Actions 9 and 10 will allow the City to capitalize on opportunities related to building an integrated system of early learning and care by advocating in a timely and targeted fashion.

- Action 9: That the City, with advice from the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, advocate to the federal and provincial governments for a role in planning, implementing, and allocating federal funding for the anticipated national system of early learning and child care as it applies to Edmonton.
- Action 10: That the City, with advice from the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, advocate strongly for an integrated system of early learning and care that is high in quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive for all families that need it, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable families.

Conclusion

These actions can be initiated immediately, and subsequent actions can take place over the next few years after an overarching early learning and care policy and strategy are developed. The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care looks forward to working with City Council and administration to implement these actions. More detailed support for these actions will be available at ecele.ca, the website for the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care.

Edmonton Council Early Learning and Care Recommended Actions for Education

28 May 2021

Overview

EndPovertyEdmonton identified early learning and care as one of six “game changers” that must be addressed if poverty is to be eliminated from Edmonton in a generation. EndPovertyEdmonton has also recognized the need to work toward an integrated system of high quality and affordable early learning and care. The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) was created to pursue this work. It comprises eighteen institutional and community partners with expertise and experience in early learning and care.

The ECELC has worked diligently to assess current conditions and needs, to develop partnerships, to explore options. The following recommendations present an opportunity to act and identify a clear path forward. Based on work to date, the ECELC recommends, in partnership with the City of Edmonton and school boards, the following actions that provide initial steps toward building a system of early learning and care that will:

- provide high-quality early learning and care that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive for all families that need it, including low-income and vulnerable families;
- nurture healthy social, emotional, and intellectual development in children, preparing them for success in school and in their communities;
- support families who need or want to improve their employment status and/or advance their education or training;
- advance the City of Edmonton’s commitments to economic recovery from the pandemic, to gender equity, and to the wellbeing of Indigenous, newcomer, low-income, and vulnerable families;
- position Edmonton to benefit from the plan for a national system of early learning and child care, as described in the federal budget of April, 2021, and
- support the rights of children and parents (as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) and advance reconciliation (as prescribed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in its *Calls to Action*).

Edmonton needs an integrated system of early learning and care for its young children and families. To build a system that can accomplish the above outcomes requires systemic, coordinated solutions to meet the needs of the city’s diverse and expanding population.

School boards are in a unique position to be an integral part of the development, support and sustainability of a system of early learning and care that will benefit children and families in their journey to and through the education system. This requires school boards to partner with the City of Edmonton to address barriers to high-quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive early learning and care. The following five actions will target pressing issues for families, help to reduce barriers, and will create and strengthen partnerships to support families of young children to access early learning and care.

Action 1: That School Board staff engage with City of Edmonton staff, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, and other levels of government to convene and resource a Data Working Group to ensure that the data required for needs assessments and for planning and managing a system of early learning and care are collected, analyzed, and shared to inform distribution of and access to early learning and care within the City of Edmonton, school communities and neighbourhoods.

Action 2: That School Board staff engage with City of Edmonton staff, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, the provincial government, and community partners, to convene and resource a Problem-Solving Working Group to address issues in finding space, co-locating services, and addressing issues of affordability, quality, and inclusiveness in early learning and care in or around schools and communities where services are needed by families of young children.

Action 3: That School Board staff develop partnership guidelines or regulations to provide a framework for school and childcare partnerships within school buildings or nearby community child care centres within the school attendance area. The guidelines will outline school and child care engagement and collaboration to support high-quality programming, environments and child/family involvement. Examples may include involving child care centres in school events such as assemblies, sports days or artist in residence, and providing access to professional learning and resources for child care staff.

Action 4: That the School Board trustees, with advice from the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, advocate for an integrated system of early learning and care that is high in quality, affordable, accessible, and inclusive for all families that need it, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable families.

Action 5: That School Board trustees, with advice from the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care, advocate to the provincial government for funding and infrastructure guidelines to include dedicated child care space within new school builds and renovations, as a reliable support for families and children in the school community.

Conclusion

The Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care looks forward to working with the City Council, School Boards and administration to take action in developing and implementing an overarching system of early learning and care to support the needs of families and children into the future.