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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Commissioner of Social
Report: Services #2025-INFO-67
Date: August 29, 2025

Subject:

Directly Operated Child Care Value for Money Audit report, recommendations and management responses.

Recommendation:

Receive for information

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council with the Directly Operated Child Care value for money audit report, inclusive of recommendations and management responses.

2. Background

2.1 The Province of Ontario, required all Consolidated Municipal Service Managers/District Social Services Administration Boards (CMSMs/DSSABs) that directly operate child care centers, to retain independent advice (for example, third-party services) and conduct a value-for-money audit on their direct delivery of child care services.

2.2 Following standard RFP processes, Deloitte LLP (Deloitte) was selected as auditor. The audit was conducted with the support of the Internal Audit Division and management of the Children's Services Division in late 2024 and early 2025.

2.3 The purpose of the value-for-money audit is to determine whether federal and provincial funding is being used efficiently and effectively by directly operated centres, and whether the child care services could be more efficiently offered instead by a third-party provider. The scope and parameters of these value-for-money audits were to be established by the auditor conducting the audit.

- 2.4 The Province requires that the audit report, including recommendations and management responses be posted publicly. To fulfil this requirement the Region will post on our public [web page for the Region of Durham's Directly Operated Child Care](#) following Council's receipt of the report for Information.
- 2.5 As per the audit engagement process, CMSMs/DSSABs are responsible for responding to findings and recommendations made by the auditor, including whether the recommendations will be implemented.
- 2.6 Provincial funding will not be withheld or adjusted based on the findings of the value-for-money audit; however, the Ministry of Education may follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations received and CMSMs/DSSABs management responses.
- 2.7 As of the date of this report, the value-for-money audit for directly operated programs was a specific requirement for 2024, not an annual requirement.
- 2.8 The cost of the value-for-money audit is to be supported with administration funding provided by the province.

3. Directly Operated Child Care Value for Money Audit findings

- 3.1 Overall, Deloitte concluded that the Region's directly operated child care centres appear to be a value for money as it relates to the efficient and effective use of federal and provincial funding ability to drive affordability, accessibility, quality and inclusivity across both the directly operated and third-party providers.
- 3.2 A summary of Findings and Management responses are provided in the Executive Summary report. Additional details are found in the Full report.
- 3.3 Recommendations provided in the report have been reviewed and actioned by the Directly Operated Child Care management team, as detailed in the Executive Summary report – Durham Management Responses.

4. Relationship to Strategic Plan

- 4.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following Strategic Direction(s) and Pathway(s) in Durham Region's 2025-2035 Strategic Plan:
 - a. Healthy People, Caring Communities
 - H4. Support the development of healthy children and youth, including access to affordable and quality child care.
 - b. Strong Relationships
 - S5. Ensure accountable and transparent decision-making to serve community needs, while responsibly managing available resources.

- 4.2 This report aligns with/addresses the following Foundation(s) in Durham Region's 2025-2035 Strategic Plan:
- a. People: Making the Region of Durham a great place to work, attracting, and retaining talent.
 - b. Processes: Continuously improving processes to ensure we are responsive to community needs.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The findings of the Deloitte report attached affirm the value of the Regional Municipality of Durham's Directly Operated child care centres through the lens of Affordability, Sustainability, Accessibility, Quality and Inclusivity.
- 5.2 The Region's response confirms all recommendations provided in the report have been completed or are in-progress.
- 5.3 For additional information, contact: Julie Gaskin, Director, Child Care and Early Years Division at 905-668-7711, extension 2830.

6. Attachments

- Attachment #1: Durham Region – Children's Services Division 2024 Report on Regional Operated Child Care.
- Attachment #2: Durham Region – Children's Services Division 2024 Report on Regional Operated Child Care Executive Summary and Management Response.

Prepared by: Julie Gaskin, Director, Child Care and Early Years Division at 905-668-7711, extension 2830.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Stella Danos-Papaconstantinou
Commissioner of Social Services



Durham Region – Children’s Services Division

2024 Report on Regional Operated Child Care |

June 27, 2025

SCOPE OF LIMITATIONS

We have completed our review based on information provided by The Regional Municipality of Durham, noting the following:

1. We do not assume any responsibility or liability for losses incurred by the Regional Municipality of Durham, or any other parties as a result of the circulation, publication, or reproduction or use of this report contrary to the provisions of this report.
2. Our work does not constitute an audit or other form of assurance as defined by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario. Therefore, this work and the resulting report do not represent an auditor's opinion. Additionally, our work cannot assure that all errors, omissions, or irregularities have been identified. Our conclusions are based on reviewing information according to specific criteria in the format of a consulting report.
3. This report should be read in its entirety. Considering portions of the report or specific factors separately may lead to a misleading understanding of the process underlying it. Attempting to do so could place undue emphasis on particular factors, calculations, or analyses.
4. This report is based on the information, documents, and explanations provided to us, with our conclusions dependent on the integrity of this information as outlined in our scope of review. We did not verify the accuracy of third-party information, nor did we conduct investigative procedures to independently confirm the accuracy of such information.
5. If any of the information provided was inaccurate or incorrect, or if different information or assumptions are considered, the conclusions may vary, potentially significantly, from those stated in this report. Errors, omissions or irregularities of the materials provided could limit the associated benefits of the recommendations.
6. Management of the Region is solely responsible for any and all activities associated with accepting and implementing the recommendations. The scope of our work did not include any considerations or activities related to implementation.
7. We reserve the right, but will be under no obligation, to review this report, and if we consider it necessary, to revise this report in light of any information which becomes known to us after the date of this report.



Disclaimer

No opinion, counsel, or interpretation is intended in matters that require legal, tax or other appropriate professional advice. It is assumed that such opinion, counsel, or interpretations have been, or will be, obtained outside of the scope of this report.

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Executive Summary

PURPOSE

The Ministry of Education 2024 Ontario Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres Service Management and Funding Guideline (2024 Guideline) requires Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (“CMSMs”) to retain independent advice and to conduct a value-for-money review on their direct delivery of licensed child care services. The Regional Municipality of Durham (the “Region”) engaged Deloitte LLP to perform these services.

The purpose of the value-for-money review was to determine whether federal and provincial funding is being used efficiently and effectively by directly operated centres, and whether the child care services could be more efficiently offered instead by a third-party provider. The report, recommendations and management responses must be posted publicly.

SCOPE

No criteria were set at the direction of the Ministry. Deloitte proposed to review the 2021-2024 operations against the following five criteria aligned with Canada-wide Early Learning and Childcare (“CWELCC”) policy objectives: **Affordability, Sustainability, Accessibility, Quality, and Inclusivity.**

To support their conclusions, Deloitte reviewed existing Child Care policies, Regional monitoring practices and examples of their use in practice. Deloitte performed analysis when needed to draw conclusions on how the Region has ensured it is exhibiting positive behaviours for each of the five criteria.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

The Region of Durham’s directly operated child care centres appear to achieve the CWELCC policy objectives of Affordability, Accessibility, Quality and Inclusivity.

Findings in the Sustainability objective noted that the Region is providing an annual regional contribution to the operational costs of the directly operated child care centres to fund investments in Affordability, Accessibility, Quality, and Inclusivity. Our review concluded that third-party child care providers, including both for-profit and not-for-profit centres, do not have the same access to Regional contributions. Consequently, for-profit and not-for-profit providers need to manage within a budget and/or above break-even financial positions, which likely impacts the scope of the service offerings, and the affordability, accessibility, quality, and inclusivity of their services.

Indirectly, Deloitte saw the connection between the investments in Affordability, Accessibility, Quality, and Inclusivity to the ability to demonstrate child care excellence to third-party providers under their Service System Manager role, in each policy objective respectively.

Overall, Deloitte concluded that the Region’s directly operated child care centres appear to be a value for money as it relates to the efficient and effective use of federal and provincial funding and the ability to drive affordability, accessibility, quality, and inclusivity across both the directly operated and third-party providers.

Executive Summary

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the conclusions, Deloitte provided the Region with recommendations for improvement. The following pages summarize the observations, findings and recommendations. Management has been provided a detailed report.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

AFFORDABILITY

The analysis of the rates charged by the Region's directly operated centres reflects a commitment to affordability. The centres have consistently adhered to the CWELCC fee reduction guidelines, applying the required percentage reductions in fees for the 2022, 2023, and 2024 years. These reductions have resulted in lower child care costs for families, improving access to high-quality early learning and child care, in alignment with the objectives of the CWELCC program. Overall, the directly operated child care centres have successfully met the expectations of affordability.

Recommendation: Deloitte had no recommendations related to affordability.

FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

The analysis of the financial sustainability of revenues and expenses for the directly operated centres indicated a need for ongoing contribution from the Region. Despite efforts to manage costs effectively, the centres required regional contributions to achieve balanced budgets from 2021 to 2023, with a notable increase in contribution levels beginning after 2017. These elevated contributions were primarily driven by the freezing of parent fees, reduced enrolment during the pandemic recovery period, and the introduction of the CWELCC program, which reinforced the freeze on parent fees. The required contribution declined from \$7.9 million in 2021 to \$7.5 million in 2022, followed by a further decrease to \$6 million in 2023. Salaries at the directly operated centres are the largest expense, representing between approximately 86-88% of total expenses, and between 86-88% of operating costs.

The Region should assess its ongoing commitment to providing regional contributions to ensure the continued delivery of high-quality child care services. Overall, alongside effective cost management, the financial sustainability of the directly operated centres relies on these contributions.

Recommendation:

- It is recommended that if the Region of Durham decides to no longer provide the directly operated centres with contributions to their operating budgets, the Region should provide the directly operating centres with sufficient notice to allow them to adjust operations.

ACCESSIBILITY

The Region promotes accessibility through a waitlist policy, though it does not prioritize children with special needs or reserve spots for those terminated from other centres. The Region has also implemented a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) policy to guide the centres in providing accessible care and education, and the centres comply with corporate policies and expectations concerning the accessibility of their buildings and environments. 71% of the Region's priority neighbourhoods have a directly operated child care centre situated within them, demonstrating accessibility to vulnerable populations.

Executive Summary

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (cont'd)

ACCESSIBILITY (cont'd)

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that the Region integrate considerations for prioritizing individuals with diverse learning needs into the waitlist policy. This would improve access to child care services for children requiring additional support and would enhance transparency for parents and caregivers.
- It is recommended that the Region further evaluates the trade-off between a potential increase in quality as a result of serving less children within the Region, which could reduce the Region's ability to be accessible (e.g. through the use of the childcare space to provide a permanent Simulation Training Room and Professional Resource Library).

QUALITY

Delivery of How Does Learning Happen:

The Region has effectively incorporated the four foundations of the *How Does Learning Happen?* pedagogy into the daily operations of its directly operated centres. The Parent Handbook serves as a foundational document, outlining the approach to delivering high-quality early learning and child care and detailing the strategies employed by educators to guide daily curriculum planning. The integration of the four foundations of belonging, well-being, expression, and engagement was also evident during the site visits, providing meaningful insight into staff commitment to implementing these principles in practice.

The centres are subject to external monitoring by the Ministry of Education and internal monitoring by the Region through established practices designed to uphold high standards of care, including internal licensing audits and the Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC).

The Region has successfully embedded the four foundations into the daily practices and interactions within its directly operated centres. Deloitte has observed and the Region has demonstrated that these foundations are consistently reflected throughout the centres' environments, including classrooms, activities, and resources.

Staff Skills and Quality Delivery:

The Region has established policies and practices to ensure that employees possess the necessary skills and qualifications to deliver high-quality education and care. An extensive interview process, supported by detailed employee guidelines, helps to ensure that the most qualified candidates are employed as educators within the directly operated centres. Ongoing professional development is facilitated through internal training modules and support for employees pursuing further education. This commitment to employee development has contributed to workforce stability, with 28% of educators having served between 10 and 40 years, contributing valuable insight, experience, and institutional knowledge.

Recommendation:

- It is recommended that the directly operated centres establish structured knowledge transfer processes to mitigate the risk of knowledge loss due to staff retirements or departures.

Executive Summary

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (cont'd)

INCLUSIVITY

The Region has implemented a range of policies and practices that reflect its commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation. This includes a comprehensive DEIA policy that sets clear expectations for educators and families and is supported by continuous staff training. These training initiatives are intended to build awareness and capacity around equity and inclusion, with content addressing systemic barriers and promoting diverse perspectives. The Region actively monitors the implementation of these practices through mechanisms such as employee feedback, tracking of DEIA and Indigenous training, and regular site visits conducted by the program manager. These commitments were also evident during site visits, where Deloitte observed the integration of diversity, equity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation principles into daily programming and classroom activities.

Recommendation: Deloitte had no recommendations related to inclusivity.



OVERVIEW

Purpose

On November 30, 2023, the Ministry of Education (Ministry) released the 2024 Ontario Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centre Service Management and Funding Guidelines (Guidelines). The guidelines introduced a requirement for a third-party value-for-money review of municipal directed operated child care programs. The purpose of the value-for-money review is to determine whether federal and provincial funding is being used efficiently and effectively by directly operated centres, and whether the child care services could be more efficiently offered instead by a third-party provider. The Regional Municipality of Durham (the Region) directly operates eight child care centres that have been supporting children and families for over 40 years. The child care programs within the municipality include:

1. Ajax Early Learning and Child Care Centre
2. Edna Thomson Early Learning and Child Care Centre
3. Clara Hughes Early Learning and Child Care Centre
4. Lakewoods Early Learning and Child Care Centre
5. Village Union Early Learning and Child Care Centre
6. Pickering Early Learning and Child Care Centre
7. Sunderland Early Learning and Child Care Centre
8. Whitby Early Learning and Child Care Centre

The Region has engaged Deloitte to conduct a review of the operations of the directly operated child care centres in relation to the Ministry's and Region's mandates to identify findings and recommendations as outlined in the Guidelines. Deloitte (we, us) focused on children's services to provide an in-depth look at how Durham supports families and promotes the well-being of children in the community. The criteria and scope of the review have been established by Deloitte and agreed upon with the Region.

The Region of Durham Children's Services Division (CSD) within the Social Services Department plays two key roles within child care; one as the Service System Manager for Child Care and Early Years programs and the other as an operator of the eight directly operated child care centres. This report focuses on the Region's role as an operator of the child care centres and therefore, the Region has been evaluated on the criteria specifically to this role. As the Region is uniquely positioned to service in both of these roles, where applicable, the knowledge as the Service System Manager may be leveraged in recommendations as this knowledge is vital to assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities of the directly operated centres.

Sources of Funding

The eight child care centres are funded through a combination of federal and provincial funding, along with the fee revenue paid by parents. In 2024, the centres received a total of \$6,420,900 in annual funding. The centres have been relying upon regional contribution to further support its operations of approximately \$7,353,000 in 2021, \$7,584,000 in 2022, \$6,176,000 in 2023, and \$6,223,000 in 2024.

Overview

Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCC)

On March 28, 2022, Ontario secured a \$13.2 billion agreement with the federal government to fund the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system (CWELCC) system. This program aims to improve early learning and child care through a phased approach, focusing on five pillars:

- Improved affordability
- Improved access
- Sustaining high-quality services
- Inclusion
- Enhanced data and reporting

The CWELCC Agreement's funding supports the enhancement of Ontario's early learning and child care system by increasing quality, accessibility, affordability, and inclusivity (*Per the 2024 Service Management and Funding guideline, Pg. 11*).

Criteria and Scope

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (CWELCC) outlines five main areas in which the program is aiming to achieve improvement. These five pillars will serve as the primary criteria and scope throughout the value-for-money report. We have categorized the five pillars outlined in the CWELCC agreement as either an effective or an efficient criteria.

EFFICIENCY

1. Affordability
2. Fiscal Sustainability

EFFECTIVENESS

3. Accessibility
4. Quality
5. Inclusivity

Overview of the Report

This report will highlight and focus on each criteria in scope; quality, accessibility, affordability, inclusivity, and fiscal sustainability. Each criteria will contain two main sections:

1. What does the criteria mean to the Ministry, how does that tie to the criteria that have been set, and how that impacts the procedures conducted
2. Documentation and demonstration of how the Region measures against the VFM criteria by conducting a set of procedures

The procedures differ for each criteria; however, this structured approach aims to provide a comprehensive and clear evaluation of the criteria, facilitating a better understanding of how it is demonstrated by the Region and any potential enhancements.



AFFORDABILITY

What does Affordability mean to the Ministry of Education?

Per the Ministry of Education's Service Management and Funding Guidelines, Pg. 27-28, 37-38, affordability focuses on making child care services financially accessible to all families ensuring that cost is not a barrier to accessing high-quality care.

- **Fee Subsidies:** The Ministry provides fee subsidies to eligible families to help reduce the cost of child care, making it more affordable for low and middle-income families. This ensures that child care services are accessible to families from different socio-economic backgrounds.
- **Cost-Sharing and Financial Flexibility:** CMSMs and DSSABs are encouraged to use a flexible mix of funding and cost-sharing arrangements to manage the local demand for child care subsidies. This approach helps to stabilize fees and ensures that resources are allocated effectively to support affordability.
- **Cross-Jurisdictional Access:** Policies are in place to facilitate access to subsidized child care for families seeking care outside their home region. This ensures that families have the flexibility find affordable care that meets their needs, regardless of their location.
- **Special Provisions for Vulnerable Populations:** Ontario Works and other social assistance recipients are automatically eligible for child care fee subsidies, ensuring that the most vulnerable populations have access to affordable child care without additional financial burdens

Procedures

The following procedures and steps were performed to assess affordability:

Procedure 1: Determine the affordability of the rates being charged by the directly operated child care centres

- Obtain a breakdown of the rates from 2022 to today that the directly operated child care centres are charging families
- Compare the rates being charged to the respective decreases of expected CWELCC funding

Affordability (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Determine the affordability of the rates being charged by the directly operated child care centres.

The Region's directly operated child care centres are enrolled in the CWELCC program, a federal initiative that launched on April 1, 2022. The program aims to make high-quality early learning and child care more affordable and accessible to families across Canada by reducing child care fees over several years through a phased approach, with a target of achieving an average cost of \$10 per day by 2026. These subsidies are intended to support children under the age of six, with provisions for children nearing their sixth birthday who are still enrolled in a licensed child care program. The table below gives an overview of the child care rates for different programs from 2022 until 2025, demonstrating the impact of CWELCC on reducing fees for families. The table is divided into the time periods in which the child care fees were reduced:

Program	Rates			
	January 1, 2022 - August 31, 2022	September 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022	January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2024	January 1, 2025 - August 31, 2025
Infant Full Day	\$52.00	\$39.00	\$24.57	\$22.00
Toddler Full Day	\$46.50	\$34.88	\$21.97	\$21.97
Preschool Full Day	\$43.00	\$32.25	\$20.32	\$20.32
Kindergarten After School	\$20.00	\$15.00	\$12.00	\$12.00
Kindergarten Before & After School	\$26.00	\$19.50	\$12.29	\$12.29
Kindergarten Before School	\$16.00	\$12.00	\$12.00	\$12.00

*September 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022, is reflective of a 25% CWELCC reduction. January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2024, is reflective of a 52.75% CWELCC reduction.

As indicated in the table above, the Region is adhering to the reduction goals outlined in the phased approach. On September 1, 2022, fees were reduced by 25%, and as of January 1, 2023, an additional 37% reduction was implemented, reflecting an overall minimum reduction of 52.75% by 2024. The CWELCC system mandates that, effective January 1, 2025, any program rates that have not already been reduced to \$22 per day must be further reduced to this threshold, a requirement that, as indicated in the table above, the Region has complied with. It should be noted that in 2023, there was a daily rate floor of \$12, which explains why the daily rates for the Kindergarten After School and Kindergarten Before School programs did not decrease further. Prior to the implementation of the CWELCC program, the Region demonstrated its commitment to affordability by maintaining parent fee levels at 2017 rates throughout the duration of the pandemic. In addition to the CWELCC program, the Region offers fee subsidies to eligible families that need additional assistance with the cost of childcare which is explained further below.

Child Care Fee Subsidy Program

The Child Care Fee Subsidy Program is designed to assist eligible families with the cost of licensed child care for children up to the age of 12 and is available in addition to the CWELCC reduction. The program provides subsidies to reduce the fees families pay for child care services, making it more affordable for those in need of financial support. To be eligible for the Child Care Fee Subsidy, parents or guardians must be employed, attending school, receive Ontario Works benefits, or have a recognized special or social need (either themselves or their child).

Affordability (cont'd)

Conclusion - Procedure 1: Determine the affordability of the rates being charged by the directly operated child care centres

The Region of Durham has effectively implemented policies set by the federal and provincial governments to provide affordable child care under the CWELCC framework. It has successfully met CWELCC requirements by reducing child care fees in alignment with the guidelines, achieving reductions of 25% in 2022 and 37% 2023, for an overall reduction of 52.75% by 2024. The Region also offers a Fee Subsidy Program for eligible families to assist in providing more affordable child care. Furthermore, before the introduction of the CWELCC program, the Region maintained parent fees at 2017 rates throughout the pandemic, reaffirming its commitment to affordability.



FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

What does Sustainability mean to the Ministry of Education?

Sustainability involves ensuring the long-term viability and effectiveness of child care and early years programs. This includes maintaining financial health, supporting high-quality services, and adapting to changing needs and conditions. Per the 2024 Management and Funding Guidelines, pg. 27-30, sustainability involves:

- **Financial Health:** Ensuring that child care programs are financially stable through effective budgeting, cost management, and diverse funding sources. This includes the strategic use of provincial and municipal funds, parent fees, and other revenue streams to maintain operations and support growth.

Procedures

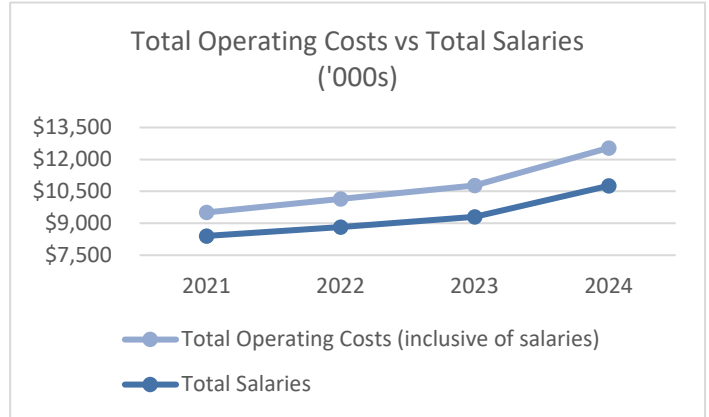
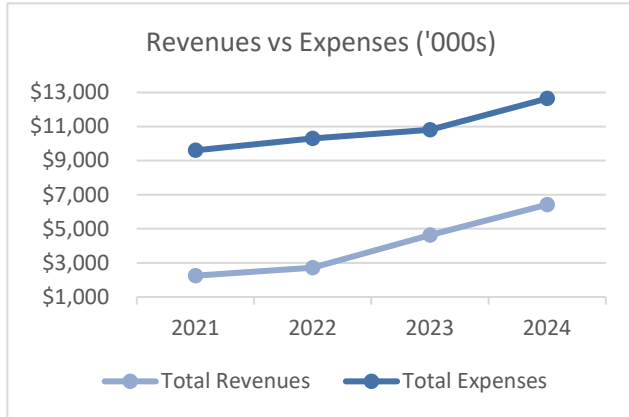
Procedure 1: Analysis of financial sustainability of revenues and expenses.

- Compared total revenues and expenses from 2021 to 2024
- Compared total operating costs to total salaries from 2021 to 2024
- Analyzed the total cost per child per day based on operating costs for the 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 years
- Analyzed the total funding received from third party compared to parent fees and operating costs

Fiscal Sustainability (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Analysis of financial sustainability of revenues and expenses.

We received and reviewed the financial data for the directly operated centres for the 2021 - 2024 years and analyzed the following trends:



Salaries are the largest expense for the directly operated centres which are approximately 86-88% of total expenses and 86-88% of operating costs. As highlighted in the Quality section, the Region had 15 new positions created from September 2023 to December 2024 which was a result of opening a new centre and increasing their capacity at the current centres. As a result, between 2021 and 2024, salaries have increased by 5% in 2022, 6% in 2023, and 16% in 2024.

Although operating costs have been increasing year over year, the Region has managed to control its costs effectively. The daily cost per child in both 2022 and 2023 are substantially lower than 2021, due to the notable increase in average enrollment.

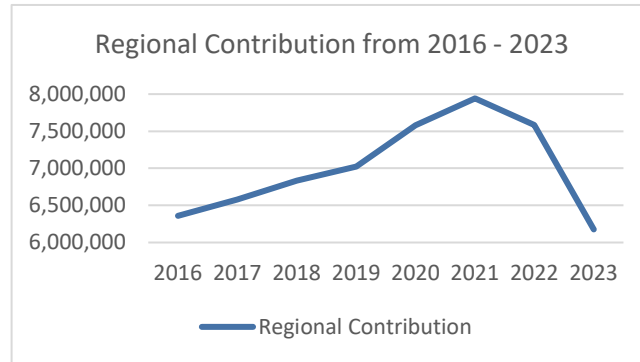
The increase in operating costs in 2024 are mainly due to repairs and maintenance at the centres of approximately \$285,000 (an 111% increase from 2023).

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total operating costs	\$9,508,730	\$10,150,496	\$10,768,898	\$12,540,880
Average total enrollment	294	344	392	418
Days open per year	248	248	248	248
Daily cost per child	\$130.24	\$119.08	\$110.91	\$120.98

Fiscal Sustainability (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Analysis of financial sustainability of revenues and expenses (cont'd).

Based on the financial data, the directly operated centres require a regional contribution in order to balance their total expenses over their total revenues.



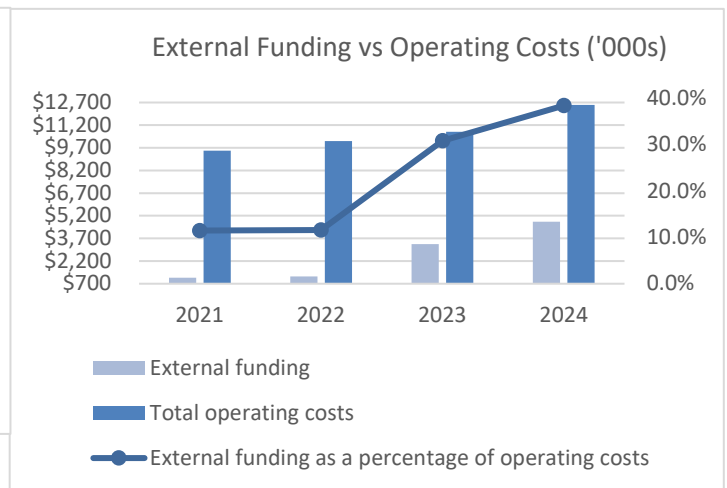
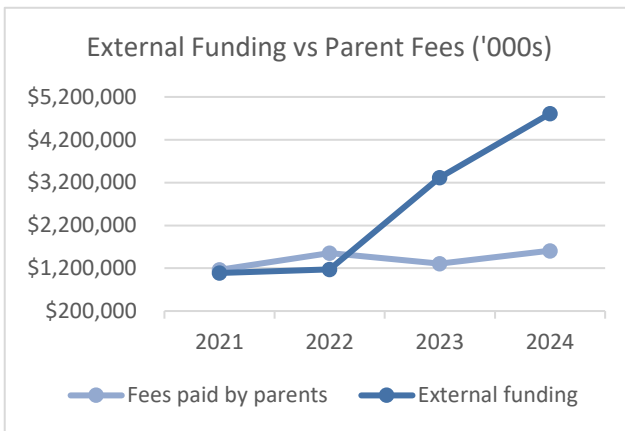
As demonstrated in the graph above, the regional contribution has ranged from \$6 million and \$7.9 million over the past eight years, with the contribution in 2022 amounting to \$7.5 million and declining to \$6.1 million in 2023. The Regional contribution began to increase in 2017 following a policy decision to maintain existing parent fee rates. This upward trend continued due to several contributing factors, with 2019 marking the final year of standard operations prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, directly operated centres were closed for a three-month period in response to the pandemic, and fee increases were further deferred during this time. As a result, the financial contribution from the Region increased significantly, as operating costs were no longer being offset by corresponding adjustments to parent fees. In 2021, while the centres were in a phase of pandemic recovery, enrolment levels remained low, leading to the highest Regional contribution recorded during the eight-year period from 2016 to 2023. By 2022, enrolment had returned to pre-pandemic levels; however, the introduction of the CWELCC program imposed a continued freeze on parent fees and allocated funding based on rates that had remained unchanged for five years. This pattern persisted into 2023, with further mandated fee reductions under CWELCC. Nonetheless, the financial impact was partially offset by an increase in operating capacity later that year, following the opening of a new centre.

The Region has the discretion and ability to allocate external funding, which consists of federal and provincial funding, to non-directly operated child care centres. Despite being eligible for the program funding, the directly operated centres rely on the regional operating budget to cover their overall expenditures in excess of the parent fees. They prioritize community needs, accessing funds only after community requirements, including subsidy waitlists, are fully addressed. The regional contribution can fluctuate from year to year depending on how the funding is allocated to the non-directly operated child care centres. Therefore, in years where more funding is allocated to the non-directly operated centres, it would result in a higher contribution to support the directly operated centres. Directly operated centres evaluate and use any leftover funds at year-end if they are significantly overspent and unallocated funds remain.

Fiscal Sustainability (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Analysis of financial sustainability of revenues and expenses (cont'd).

As outlined below, external funding allocated to the directly operated centres has increased from 2021 to 2024, with a 182% increase in 2023 and a further 45% increase in 2024. The overall increase is due to the CWELCC Fee reduction funding; however, the increase exceeds the mandatory CWELCC fee reductions in the corresponding years. This discrepancy results from the Region's method of allocating funding between non-directly operated and directly operated centres, as previously discussed. Despite these increases, the external funding covers only approximately 11% to 39% of total operating costs. It should be noted that parent fees have remained fairly stable throughout the year, largely due to the Region's ability to increase capacity within existing centres, as noted in the table below, in addition to the opening of a new centre in September 2023.



Conclusion – Procedure 1: Analyzing Accessible Spots

The analysis demonstrates an ongoing need for financial support from the Region, as directly operated centres required regional contributions to achieve balanced budgets from 2021 to 2023. The level of contribution increased significantly over the past eight years, driven by several key factors, including frozen parent fees, reduced enrolment during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the implementation of the CWELCC program, which reinforced the freeze on fees. Annual contribution levels also varied each year depending on how the Region distributed federal and provincial funding between non-directly operated and directly operated centres. Salaries accounted for approximately 86-88% of total expenses throughout this period, while operating costs increased by 5% in 2022, 6% in 2023, and 16% in 2024.

The Region must assess its continued commitment to a regional contribution moving forward to ensure the continued provision of quality child care services. Overall, the financial sustainability of the directly operated child care centres is contingent on these contributions and effective cost management.

RECOMMENDATION:

If the Region of Durham decides to no longer provide the directly operated centres with contributions to their operating budgets, the Region should provide the directly operating centres with sufficient notice (i.e., a minimum of 12 months) to allow the centres to adjust operations.



ACCESSIBILITY

What does Accessibility mean to the Ministry of Education?

Per the Ministry of Education's Service Management and Funding Guidelines, Pg. 12, 37-42, accessibility involves ensuring that child care services are inclusive, physically accessible, culturally responsive, and easily reachable by families, particularly those in need of subsidized care and those with special needs. Accessibility involves several key aspects:

- **Facilitating Access to Subsidized Child Care:** The Ministry emphasizes making reasonable efforts to facilitate access for eligible parents seeking subsidized child care outside their home region. This includes ensuring policies and practices are in place to support cross-jurisdictional applications and access to child care services.
- **Inclusion of French Language Services:** For CMSMs and DSSABs serving areas designated under the French Language Services Act (FLSA), specific requirements must be met to ensure the provision of French-language child care, EarlyON Child and Family Centres, and supports for children with special needs. This is to ensure that French-speaking communities have access to high-quality services in their language.
- **Cultural Responsiveness:** The Ministry emphasizes supporting special needs children and providing culturally responsive care, particularly for Francophone, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities. CMSMs and DSSABs serving areas designated under the French Language Service Act (FLSA) must ensure the provision of French-language child care and supports for children with special needs to ensure that French-speaking and culturally diverse communities have access to high-quality services.
- **Accessibility of Child Care Centres:** Child care centres are expected to ensure all children, including those with special needs, can fully participate in programs. This involves creating physical environments that are inclusive and adaptable to the needs of all children.

Procedures

The following procedures and steps were performed to assess accessibility:

Procedure 1: Analyzing Accessible Spots

- a. Review the policies in place to ensure accessibility.
- b. Examine the practices implemented by Durham to ensure their services are accessible to all children.
- c. While maintaining confidentiality, evaluate the number and percentage of accessible child care spots available by month over a 12 month-period that align to what the Region deems as accessible.

Procedure 2: Assessing Location Availability

- a. Evaluate whether the child care centre locations are easily accessible for the population they are intended to serve.

Accessibility (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Analyzing Accessible Spots

a. *Review the policies in place to ensure accessibility.*

Accessibility of Spots

As per discussion with the Region, all spots on their waitlists are considered accessible, and the waitlist operates on a first-come, first-served basis, with priority given to families receiving fee subsidies, thereby aligning with the Ministry's priority of facilitating access to subsidized child care. Although it is not a requirement by the Ministry, there is no specific prioritization for children with special needs or reserved spots for emergent situations. Upon speaking with the Region, while other child care providers may refuse service if a child's needs are deemed too significant, accepting children regardless of their need is a priority for the directly operated centres, and the Region will make efforts to enroll children in its programs if space is available and there is a need.

Waitlist Policy

Starting January 1, 2017, Ontario Regulation 137/15 section 75.1 (2) mandates that *"Every licensee that establishes or maintains a waiting list described in subsection 1 shall develop written policies and procedures that, (a) explain how the licensee determines the order in which children on the waiting list are offered admission; and (b) provide that the waiting list will be made available in a manner that maintains the privacy and confidentiality of the children listed on it, but that allows the position of a child on the list to be ascertained by the affected persons or families."*

The Region of Durham has implemented a waitlist policy that applies to all directly operated child care centres, as detailed in the Parent Handbook, and no charges, fees, or deposits are required for placement on the waitlist. The policy is made up of the following procedures:

- Parents interested in enrolling their child at a centre may join the waitlist by calling, completing an online form, or visiting the centre, at which time a waitlist information form will be completed by the supervisor.
- The waitlist is organized by the initial contact date, with priority given to subsidized families, siblings of currently enrolled children, children of school or regional employees, and those affected by proactive "move-up" strategies.
 - A child's eligibility for a particular age group is considered within the context of the "move-up" strategy. Should the first child on the waitlist be very close in age to moving up to the next age group, and there will be no space available in the next age group, the next child on the list may be admitted first.
- Parents are required to update their information every three months, and the supervisor will review and confirm whether there have been any changes. Parents may also inquire about their position on the waitlist and will be provided with their numerical placement.
- Children will be removed from the waitlist if there is no contact for one year or if a removal request is submitted.

Accessibility (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Analyzing Accessible Spots

a. *Review the policies in place to ensure accessibility (cont'd).*

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Policy

The Region has established a policy focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, which applies to children, their families, and educators, ensuring that children can learn and play in an environment where they feel safe, welcomed, and accepted. The policy outlines employee expectations regarding the provision of an accessible environment for children and families at the centre. This includes sharing information in an accessible format, developing Individualized Support Plans (ISPs) for children with special needs in collaboration with the child's family and external agencies, and adapting child care spaces to meet the needs of all children, such as accommodating wheelchair access. This policy also aligns with the Ministry's priority of providing accessible child care centres.

Corporate Policies and Expectations

The directly operated child care centres are required to adhere to both corporate policies and those specific to the centres, and they comply with these requirements through their accessible buildings and environments.

Procedure 1a: Conclusion

The Region has effectively implemented the objectives of establishing and maintaining a waitlist in accordance with section 75.1 of Ontario Regulation 137/15. The Region's waitlist policy outlines the procedures followed when children are added to the list and the required communication while they remain on it.

Although the waitlist policy includes some prioritization, there is no specific policy for the prioritization of children with special needs or emergent spots left open for children who are turned away or whose services are terminated. The Region has also implemented a DEIA policy to guide the centres in providing accessible care and education, and the centres comply with corporate policies and expectations concerning the accessibility of their buildings and environments.

RECOMMENDATION:

By implementing policies that prioritize individuals with diverse learning needs, it enhances the value of the directly operated centres within the community. Therefore, we recommend that the directly operated centres integrate such considerations into their waitlist policy to demonstrate that they are a priority.

Accessibility (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Analyzing Accessible Spots

b. Examine the practices implemented by Durham to ensure their services are accessible to all children.

Suggestion Box

During the site visits, Deloitte observed a suggestion box positioned at the front of one of the child care centres, allowing families to offer feedback or suggestions. This demonstrates the centre's commitment to providing all families with an equal opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas, or concerns anonymously, and its central location ensures accessibility for families across all programs.

Annual Parent Survey

The Region conducts an annual parent survey, allowing parents and caregivers of children attending the directly operated child care centres to provide feedback on their experiences. Based on Deloitte's review of some survey responses from 2023, it is clear that the Region's efforts to maintain an accessible environment are recognized by the families. For instance, 77% of parents reported observing evidence of their child's development through visual, written, and oral records, emphasizing that information is provided in accessible formats, in accordance with the expectations outlined in the DEIA policy.

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC)

The Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC), which is explained further in Appendix A, includes a review of DEIA practices, through which the centres are evaluated and given recommendations regarding the accessibility of activities, toys, materials, and the overall environment. For example, the directly operated centres are evaluated on whether community recreation resources are accessible to families, or whether a certain number of craft materials are accessible to the children for independent use. The Region also has a DROC committee that meets quarterly, with one representative from each directly operated centre in attendance. The committee reviews agenda items based on recent DROC scores and any challenges the centres may be encountering, reporting back to the directly operated leadership team monthly.

In addition to the practices mentioned above, the Region conducts verbal check-ins during employee meetings, facilitated by the supervisor, which occur quarterly and involve all employees at a centre, to assess and monitor accessibility practices. Furthermore, due to the extensive waitlists, centre supervisors monitor them on a weekly basis to ensure they remain as current as possible.

Procedure 1b: Conclusion

The Region has implemented several practices to monitor the accessibility of services at the directly operated child care centres, including a suggestion box, the annual parent survey, and the DROC. According to discussions with the Region, verbal check-ins during employee meetings are conducted to further monitor the implementation of accessibility practices, and centre supervisors review the waitlists on a weekly basis for any changes.

Accessibility (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Analyzing Accessible Spots

c. While maintaining confidentiality, evaluate the number and percentage of accessible child care spots available by month over a 12 month-period that align to what the Region deems as accessible.

All spots within the Region's directly operated child care centres can be accessed by any child regardless of their needs, and as such, there is no specific allocation of spots for children with accessible needs. The Region has provided monthly data for the 2021, 2022, and 2023 school years, detailing the number of children at each centre and the number of children requiring an ISP, which are created for children who need additional support in their learning and development. The table below provides an analysis of the proportion of spots occupied by children with ISPs as a percentage of the total spots occupied at each centre during 2021, 2022, and 2023:

2021	Ajax	Edna Thomson	Clara Hughes	Lakewoods (B&A included)	Village Union	Pickering	Sunderland	Whitby	Total
Average children per month	25.3	63.0	62.7	46.5	-	27.4	39.9	29.7	294.4
Average children requiring ISPs per month	0.3	1.0	5.0	5.0	-	3.7	1.8	5.7	22.4
Percentage of spots occupied by children with accessibility needs	1%	2%	8%	11%	-	13%	4%	19%	8%

2022	Ajax	Edna Thomson	Clara Hughes	Lakewoods (B&A included)	Village Union	Pickering	Sunderland	Whitby	Total
Average children per month	26.5	66.3	66.5	52.8	-	32.8	59.7	39.2	343.7
Average children requiring ISPs per month	0.8	1.0	8.0	6.8	-	6.0	3.5	2.8	28.1
Percentage of spots occupied by children with accessibility needs	3%	2%	12%	13%	-	18%	6%	7%	9%

2023	Ajax	Edna Thomson	Clara Hughes	Lakewoods (B&A included)	Village Union*	Pickering	Sunderland	Whitby	Total
Average children per month	32.3	73.9	84.1	51.7	8.9	34.0	63.8	42.8	391.5
Average children requiring ISPs per month	3.5	6.4	15.7	9.7	2.0	5.0	3.8	7.3	36.4
Percentage of spots occupied by children with accessibility needs	11%	9%	19%	19%	22%	15%	6%	17%	15%

*The Village Union centre opened during the summer of 2023; therefore, these numbers only represent five months of operation.

Accessibility (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Analyzing Accessible Spots

c. *While maintaining confidentiality, evaluate the number and percentage of accessible child care spots available by month over a 12 month-period that align to what the Region deems as accessible (cont'd).*

On average, the proportion of spots occupied by children with ISPs relative to total enrollment increased slightly from 8% in 2021 to 9% in 2022, with a larger increase to 15% in 2023. Based on the data over the three years, Clara Hughes, Lakewoods, Pickering, and Whitby have experienced higher percentages of children requiring ISPs, with Village Union also experiencing a high percentage during its first five months of operation.

A comparison of the Region's capacity to support children on ISPs with that of sites across the sector reveals that the directly operated centres consistently serve a higher number of children with additional needs. On average, the Region's centres supported approximately 3.2 children per site in 2021, 4.0 in 2022, and 4.6 in 2023. In contrast, sector-wide averages were 1.0 in 2021, 2.4 in 2022, and 2.9 in 2023. These figures highlight the Region's strengthened capacity to accommodate and support children requiring additional services.

Procedure 1c: Conclusion

The directly operated centres maintained consistent levels of spots occupied by children requiring an ISP from 2021 to 2022, followed by an increase to 15% in 2023, demonstrating the Region's ability to support children with special needs. Additionally, the Region's ability to serve a higher proportion of children on ISPs compared to sector averages further underscores the strong levels of accessibility offered by the directly operated centres for children requiring additional support.

Conclusion – Procedure 1: Analyzing Accessible Spots

The Region is working to ensure accessibility through the implementation and compliance with various policies and practices, including the waitlist policy, the Region's DEIA policy, and corporate policies and expectations. The consistent percentage of occupied spots by children requiring ISPs over the last three years reflects the Region's commitment to providing care and education to children with special needs. The Region has also implemented several methods to monitor these policies and practices, such as the suggestion box, an annual parent survey, the DROC assessment, and verbal check-ins during employee meetings.

Accessibility (cont'd)

Procedure 2: Assessing Location Availability

- a. Evaluate whether the child care centre locations are easily accessible for the population they are intended to serve.

The Region has implemented a Health Neighbourhoods initiative that analyzes socio-demographic data across 50 designated Health Neighbourhoods within the Region, seven of which have been identified as Priority Neighbourhoods by the Region's Health Department. These neighbourhoods require enhanced attention to improve their health and well-being and were identified primarily based on income levels, with lower education attainment and higher unemployment rates compared to the other Health Neighbourhoods. The priority Health Neighbourhoods are listed below, along with the directly operated centres that are located within them.

Health priority neighbourhoods	Directly Operated Centre
Downtown Ajax – Ajax	Ajax ELCC
Downtown Whitby – Whitby	Whitby ELCC
Lakeview – Oshawa	Lakewoods ELCC and Before & After
Gibb West – Oshawa	Village Union ELCC
Downtown Oshawa – Oshawa	N/A
Central Park – Oshawa	Clara Hughes ELCC
Beatrice North – Oshawa	N/A

As indicated above, five of the seven priority Health Neighbourhoods, or 71%, have a directly operated child care centre located within them, demonstrating their accessibility to vulnerable populations. Through community analyses, the Region identifies underserved areas—defined as locations where available spaces serve less than 35% of the eligible population and existing centres have low vacancy rates. This approach reflects the Region's commitment to enhancing access to child care wherever possible.

Both the licensed and operating capacity at the directly operated centres has increased by nearly 100 spots, or 33%, from 2021 to 2023, whereas the licensed capacity for the overall child care sector within the Region has grown by 6%, not including home child care agencies. While the Region has opened a new centre in 2023, they have worked towards increasing operating capacity at the directly operated centres in order to make the best use of the licensed capacity, which has reflected substantial growth in the centres' capacity to meet the needs of the community.

Accessibility (cont'd)

Procedure 2: Assessing Location Availability

- a. Evaluate whether the child care centre locations are easily accessible for the population they are intended to serve (cont'd).

Simulation Training Room and Professional Resource Library

During the site visit to the Lakewoods Child Care Centre, Deloitte observed the Oshawa satellite location of the Professional Resource Library and the Simulation Training Room—both of which were established by The Region of Durham to serve the early learning professionals in the broader child care sector within Durham Region, with funding from provincial and federal grants. Per the Region, the Resource Library plays a vital role in enhancing capacity-building within the child care community, with the Oshawa site focusing on culturally responsive Indigenous early years programming in collaboration with Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiyag Child & Family Services (DBCFS). It serves as a central hub for networking, collaboration between trainers and the Early Years Cultural Coordinator, and meetings to foster programming ideas. The library offers a variety of resources, including multiple Indigenous Sharing Kits, materials for creating hands-on experiences for both educators and children, Indigenous books, sacred medicines, giveaway items, and training/workshop bins, all available for borrowing by early learning educators to support culturally relevant programming.

The Simulation Room provides educators with a safe, low-risk environment to practice and refine their skills through realistic, hands-on scenarios. This immersive approach enhances knowledge retention, decision-making, and builds confidence and competence before educators encounter real-life situations. Designed to reflect community child care settings, the room supports the development of practical skills, with simulations focused on managing at-risk behaviours (such as elopement), creating engaging environments, addressing specific behavioural needs, and handling challenging conversations with families. While this room provides benefits, its use reduces the number of available spaces for children in a high-needs area by 24, thereby limiting the centre's capacity to provide child care services.

Conclusion – Procedure 2: Assessing Location Availability

The Region's directly operated centres are currently situated in five of the seven Priority Neighbourhoods, demonstrating the accessibility of their locations to vulnerable populations. Through ongoing community analysis conducted by the Region, further underserved areas or those requiring additional support can continue to be identified. Between 2021 and 2023, these centres have expanded their capacity at a faster rate than the sector overall, showcasing their strong ability to meet community needs. However, the use of the simulation training room at one of the directly operated centres reduces its capacity to accommodate children at that centre by 24, limiting access to care for additional families.

RECOMMENDATION:

Although the simulation training room enhances the ability of not only the directly operated employees but the child care sector to deliver higher levels of quality care and education, it does reduce the centre's ability to accommodate 24 additional children in the programs. The Region should further evaluate the trade-off between a potential increase in quality as a result of serving less children within the Region; therefore, reducing the Region's ability to be accessible.



QUALITY

What does Quality mean to the Ministry of Education?

Quality is connected to the Ministry of Education's commitment to ensuring that child care and family services meet high standards that support positive outcomes for children and their families. Per the 2024 Management and Funding Guidelines, pg. 110-111, 115-116, quality is characterized by:

- **Consistent and High-Quality:** services should consistently meet high standards to effectively support the needs of children and families.
- **Engaging and Responsive:** services must engage parents and caregiver and be responsive to the varied needs of families, including those from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.
- **Integration with Community Services:** programs should work in collaboration with the broader community services to provide comprehensive support.

Procedures

The following procedures and steps were performed to assess quality:

Procedure 1: Delivery of "How Does Learning Happen?"

- a. Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region to the centres around high-quality
- b. Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles.
- c. Observe and document practical examples of the four foundations (belonging, well-being, expression, and engagement) in the day-to-day activities and interactions

Procedure 2: Employee Skills and Quality Delivery

- a. Review hiring policies and practices to see if employees have necessary skills and qualifications
- b. Examine employee turnover rates to assess stability and continuity along with staffing levels and ratios to provide high quality care
- c. Evaluating whether employees have access to ongoing professional development and learning opportunities to enhance their skills

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

a. Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region to the centres around high-quality.

The *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (CCEYA) is an Ontario legislation that establishes the regulatory framework for child care and early years services, ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of children in licensed child care settings. The CCEYA outlines specific requirements for child care providers related to licensing standards, programming and pedagogy, and health, safety, and physical environment standards. These regulations help create a strong foundation for child care services, ensuring that children receive high-quality early learning experiences that support their development and well-being. While the CCEYA serves as the regulatory document for the Region, the Region develops the Parent Handbook and Program Statement to implement the principles outlined in the CCEYA within their directly operated centers. Page 23 of the *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years* outlines the four foundations for learning in the following table:

FOUNDATIONS	GOALS FOR CHILDREN	EXPECTATIONS FOR PROGRAMS
Belonging	Every child has a sense of belonging when he or she is connected to others and contributes to their world.	Early childhood programs cultivate authentic, caring relationships and connections to create a sense of belonging among and between children, adults, and the world around them.
Well-Being	Every child is developing a sense of self, health, and well-being.	Early childhood programs nurture children’s healthy development and support their growing sense of self.
Engagement	Every child is an active and engaged learner who explores the world with body, mind, and senses.	Early childhood programs provide environments and experiences to engage children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration, play, and inquiry.
Expression	Every child is a capable communicator who expresses himself or herself in many ways.	Early childhood programs foster communication and expression in all forms.

Parent Handbook

The Region incorporates Ministry requirements into its child care policies, aligning with provincial standards while addressing community needs. These expectations are communicated to families through the Parent Handbook, which serves as a guiding framework for high-quality child care and early learning programs. This information is shared with other child care operators as a best practice, encouraging them to develop their own handbooks based on that of the Region. The Handbook is updated annually or as needed to reflect any changes that occur throughout the year. Additionally, the Region integrates pedagogy and Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) principles into its overarching strategies to enhance program quality. These strategies shape daily curriculum activities and foster an optimal learning environment. The 11 strategies, pulled from pages five to 11 of the Parent Handbook, have been mapped to the four foundational pillars they best represent, as outlined on the following page.

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

a. Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region to the centres around high-quality (cont'd).

Belonging	Well-Being	Engagement	Expression
Support positive and responsive interactions between educators, children and families	Promote the health, safety and well-being of young children, families and educators	Incorporate a range of different experience modalities including indoor and outdoor play, active play, quiet play, rest and quiet time considering the individual needs of children	Encourage and enable children to interact and communicate in a myriad of ways with each other, with educators and with their communities
Foster engagement of and ongoing communication with parents about the program and their children	Provide both child initiated and adult supported experiences to foster development	Foster exploration and inquiry that is play based. Evidence from diverse fields of study tells us that when children are playing, they are learning	Use many languages to document and review the experiences of the children and the educators
Actively engage with community partners and provide opportunities for the children and families to develop close connections with a range of community supports	Provide many opportunities for a range of experiences that support each child’s learning and development, incorporating children’s individual support plans as necessary	Strengthen the capacity of educators to collaborate effectively with children, families and their colleagues through the provision of ongoing opportunities for continuous professional learning	

The requirements related to programming and pedagogy, as outlined in CCEYA, are effectively reflected in the four foundations detailed in the Parent Handbook. These foundations are not only integrated into the overarching strategies of the centres but are also consistently implemented in daily activities. Deloitte's site visits have confirmed that these practices are in place, demonstrating the centres' commitment to maintaining high standards of child care and early years services.

Monitoring Compliance and Contraventions Policy

The Region has a Monitoring Compliance and Contraventions Policy that mandates all employees at regionally operated early learning and child care centres adhere to the policies and procedures stipulated by the CCEYA as outlined in the CSD’s policy and procedures manual, which is accessible to all employees. New employees must review and acknowledge these policies during their orientation and are required to review them annually and whenever updates are made. Policies, updates, and individual plans are directly provided to employees, who are allotted time to review the materials and seek clarification to ensure compliance. Management supports regular reminders of policy and process on a day-to-day basis.

Monthly Health and Safety Checks

The Region demonstrates a commitment to high-quality standards by conducting monthly health and safety checks at each directly operated centre. The results are submitted to the Health and Safety Committee for evaluation of the safety and accessibility of the environments.

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- a. *Obtain an understanding of the policy implemented by the Region to the centres around high-quality (cont'd).*

Procedure 1a: Conclusion

In conclusion, the Region has successfully integrated the four foundations of the pedagogy into the strategies employed by the directly operated child care centres. This integration supports and shapes the desired environment for high-quality learning, directly influencing daily curriculum activities. These efforts are comprehensively outlined in the Parent Handbook, ensuring a consistent and effective approach to early childhood education. Additionally, the Region’s Monitoring Compliance and Contraventions Policy is in place to ensure that employees are aware of the policies and procedures outlined by the CCEYA that need to be followed.

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

b. Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles.

External Ministry Inspections

The Ministry of Education is responsible for administering and enforcing the CCEYA through the issuance of child care licenses and yearly inspections. Program advisors conduct annual inspections of child care centres to ensure licensing requirements are met, renew licenses, and provide support to licensees in maintaining compliance and improving program quality. During inspections, advisors collect information through the observation of program activities and employees, the review of documentation such as policies and records, and interviews with licensees and employees. Ministry staff also investigate complaints from the public regarding licensed child care and follow up on serious occurrences. Outlined below are the results of the inspections that have taken place at the Region of Durham’s directly operated child care centres for the years 2022, 2023, and 2024.

	Inspections	Non-Compliances
2022	9 Licensing Inspections 2 Monitoring Inspections	13
2023	7 Licensing Inspections 2 Monitoring Inspections	17
2024	9 Licensing Inspections 2 Monitoring Inspections	7
Total	31 Inspections	37 Non-Compliances

Upon further analysis of the non-compliances, it appears that the majority of the identified risk levels are concentrated at the higher end, with nine classified as critical, 20 as high, six as moderate, and two as low, although the number of critical non-compliances have decreased in the last three years. A summary of the non-compliances has been included in the table below, along with the number of non-compliances that were corrected immediately.

	Low	Moderate	High	Critical	Corrected During Inspection
2022	0	1	7	5	4
2023	2	4	9	2	9
2024	0	1	4	2	5
Total	2	6	20	9	18

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- b. *Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles (cont'd).*

Per the Ministry’s website, low non-compliances are not likely to pose a threat to the health, safety, and well-being of a child, although the possibility exists. Moderate non-compliances may pose an indirect threat to a child that could or has resulted in harm to the health, safety and well-being of a child. High non-compliances are those that pose a direct threat to a child that could or has resulted in serious harm to the child’s health, safety, and well-being, and could require professional intervention such as medical treatment. Critical non-compliances pose a direct threat to the child that could or has resulted in death.

Background

In early 2022, the centres were experiencing lower enrollment numbers and were focused on rebuilding after the impacts of the pandemic. However, with the introduction of the CWELCC program in March, enrollment at all centres increased substantially, resulting in the creation of waitlists and other changes that resulted in increased non-compliances as the centres navigated the changes.

The Region continued to face significant inspection findings and unresolved risks prior to management staffing changes in 2023. In April of 2023, a new Director for CSD was appointed and identified gaps within the directly operated child care (DOC) portfolio, including the issue of a single manager overseeing multiple portfolios. To address this, the new Director restructured the portfolio and established a dedicated manager position for DOC.

The newly appointed DOC manager, hired in September 2023, focused on addressing compliance gaps and implementing systems to ensure regulatory requirements were being met, including the introduction of internal licensing audits to improve the centres’ quality and inspection readiness. By late spring 2024, these processes were fully implemented, leading to minimal non-compliances, as evidenced by fewer non-compliances in 2024.

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- b. *Obtain an understanding of how the policy is monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles (cont'd).*

The Region has established various practices to monitor compliance with guidelines and policies, which are outlined in further detail below.

Internal Licensing Audits (2023)

The Region has implemented internal licensing audits that are conducted by the program manager of directly operated child care to ensure compliance and readiness prior to the Ministry’s inspection. These internal audits are performed quarterly, with a more comprehensive review taking place three to six months before the scheduled Ministry inspection. Internal audits are also conducted by each centre’s supervisor, who focuses on reviewing specific sections of the audit tool each month and addressing any issues that have been identified and resolved. Front-line employees are also encouraged to utilize the classroom audit tool to evaluate their programs.

DROC (2015)

The quarterly DROC assessments, which began in 2015, help to ensure that the directly operated centres adhere to operational standards and expectations to deliver the highest quality of care and education. At the conclusion of each assessment, each centre receives a summary report that outlines the observations, comments, and unmet requirements, enabling the centres to track their progress throughout the year. The Region also develops DROC inspection action plans for issues or recommendations that were identified during the inspection. The plan details the specific item in question, the corrective actions to be taken, and the date on which the issue was corrected. Examples of DROC summary reports from 2022-2024 and of an action plan have been included in Appendix A.

Monitoring Compliance and Contraventions Policy

As previously noted, new employees are required to review and acknowledge the policies upon hiring, and these policies must be reviewed annually by all employees, with a signed statement confirming their review and acceptance. Compliance monitoring is conducted through regular observations by supervisors, as well as through the annual completion of a Program Statement Monitoring Form for all employees, which documents their competency across various areas. Any instances of non-compliance are promptly addressed in accordance with relevant HR practices and in addition would be noted during mid-year checks for feedback and development conversations.

Procedure 1b: Conclusion

The directly operated child care centres are monitored externally by the Ministry through annual inspections, as well as internally by the Region through licensing audits, DROC assessments, and the Monitoring Compliance and Contraventions policy. These monitoring activities are conducted on a continuous basis. In 2023, number of non-compliances increased from 13 to 17. However, in 2024, following the introduction of the internal licensing audits, the number of non-compliances decreased to seven. This trend suggests that the Region’s internal efforts to improve compliance across the centres are proving effective. The increase in licensing inspections in 2024, coupled with a decrease in findings, further supports the effectiveness of these internal compliance improvement initiatives.

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Delivery of “How Does Learning Happen?”

- c. *Observe and document practical examples of the four foundations (belonging, well-being, expression, and engagement) in the day-to-day activities and interactions.*

Deloitte visited four of the directly operated child care centres – Ajax, Clara Hughes, Lakewoods, and Edna Thomson – and observed the integration of the “How Does Learning Happen?” framework into the day-to-day activities and interactions through various methods which have been described in greater detail below.

Portfolios and the Lillio App

Physical portfolios are created for each child in every class to monitor daily activities, identify areas of difficulty, and track progress towards learning or developmental goals throughout the year. Parents have the opportunity to review these portfolios in person during drop-off or pick-up, or they can access them through the Lillio app. This digital platform allows educators to document and track children’s learning and development while facilitating communication with parents. The app provides parents with updates on daily activities and their child's progress, including written summaries and photos that educators can capture and share in real time.

Simulation Training Room and Professional Resource Library

As previously mentioned in Procedure 2a) of Accessibility, Deloitte observed the satellite location of the Professional Resource Library and the simulation training room at the Lakewoods Child Care Centre, established by early learning professionals to support capacity-building within the child care community. This space is designed to enhance educators’ professional development by fostering the acquisition of practical skills, supporting the creation of engaging learning environments, and offering strategies for addressing behavioural needs, ultimately enabling educators to provide higher quality care.

Monthly Newsletters and Enrichment Opportunities

Each directly operated centre distributes monthly newsletters to all families, and the Region also offers enrichment opportunities for families. These enrichment opportunities involve employees, families, and community agencies collaborating on-site to enhance the centres’ programs. For example, employees with musical talents may bring instruments and lead a sing-along, parents may volunteer to read books to the children or present cultural activities, and community agencies, such as firefighters or police, may participate in Community Helpers presentations for the children.

Integration of the Four Foundations

The Region has provided pictures that showcase how the four foundations have been embedded in the day-to-day activities, which have been included in the following pages.

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Delivery of "How Does Learning Happen?"

c. Observe and document practical examples of the four foundations (belonging, well-being, expression, and engagement) in the day-to-day activities and interactions (cont'd).

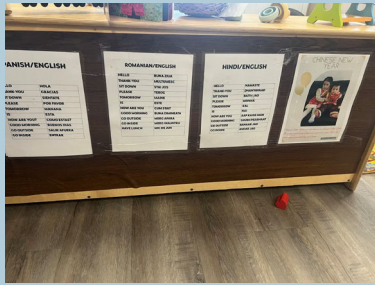


Expression

Expression

Play is fun but play is also the cornerstone for your child's future academic success. Children are able to communicate when they:

- initiate, respond to, and engage in reciprocal communication with others.
- Use language for a variety of purposes.
- Use varied forms of creative expression.
- Express themselves in their first language.
- Interact in meaningful interactions with peers and adults.
- Develop increased capacity to support future reading and writing.

[Image: Caragh singing and moving with Dana, Rose, Aryna, Amira and Tabia.]



The Four Foundations Throughout the Centres



Procedure 1c: Conclusion

Deloitte has observed the successful integration of the four foundations into the daily activities and interactions within the visited directly operated child care centres. The Region has effectively demonstrated how these foundations are incorporated into the centres' curriculum, resources, and overall learning environment.

Quality (cont'd)

Conclusion - Procedure 1: Delivery of "How Does Learning Happen?"

The Region has shown a strong commitment to embedding the four foundations of the "How Does Learning Happen?" pedagogy into the daily activities, interactions, and policies of the directly operated child care centres. This commitment is reflected in several ways, including the Parent Handbook, which outlines the four foundations and their integration into the centres' overarching strategies. During site visits, Deloitte observed the foundations being applied in the classrooms and throughout the centres, where employees and educators were seen incorporating these principles into their activities with the children. However, while the simulation training room enhances the ability of child care providers within the community to deliver higher levels of quality care and education within the child care system as a whole, it reduces that centre's ability to accommodate an additional 24 children. The Region should further evaluate the trade-off between a potential increase in quality as a result of serving less children within the Region, as the additional offering may only marginally increase quality. The centres are consistently monitored to ensure compliance with Ministry standards, both through external Ministry inspections and internal processes such as licensing audits, DROC assessments, and the Monitoring Compliance and Contraventions policy, all of which are documented for each centre.

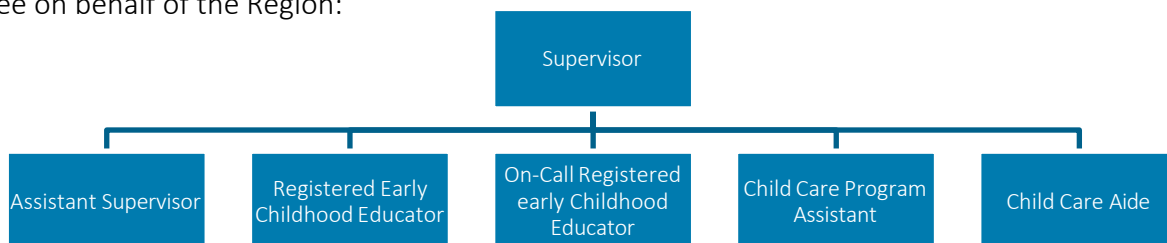
The Region has demonstrated its commitment to developing policies and practices and continuously monitoring them to ensure the delivery of high-quality education and care across the directly operated centres.

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 2: Employee Skills and Quality Delivery

a. Review hiring policies and practices to see if employees have necessary skills and qualifications.

The Region has the following organizational structure at each of the eight directly operated child care centres. These positions are overseen by a Manager, Program Manager, and a Director who serves as the licensee on behalf of the Region:



The Region utilizes a structured three-phase interview process to hire candidates for its directly operated child care centres. This process includes an evaluation of education and experience, a written assessment, and a formal interview. All employees at the directly operated centres undergo the same interview process, with the questions asked tailored to each role based on the skills required. To proceed to the interview stage, candidates must achieve a minimum score of 70% on the written assessment. The Region must also follow Human Resources policies for applications that are connected to a bargaining agreement.

Employee Guidelines

The Employee Guidelines policy requires that employees employed as Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) or those with RECE equivalency certificates must register with and maintain active membership in the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE). Annually, employees must provide proof of their membership to their supervisor, who is responsible for verifying their good standing on the public register.

A current job posting for an on-call RECE has been included below to demonstrate the skills and qualifications required by the Region, including those specified in the Employee Guidelines. According to the job description on the Region's website, the successful candidate must possess:

- A diploma in Early Childhood Education or equivalent as deemed by the College of Early Childhood Educators
- A current certificate of registration with the College of Early Childhood Educators is required
- A valid/current Standard First Aid Certification and Infant and Child CPR Certification
- Experience in a child development setting applying curriculum implementation, teaching strategy and behavior management techniques
- Knowledge of the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, the Early Childhood Educators Act, Child and Family Services Act, College of Early Childhood Educators Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, - Durham Region's Operating Criteria, How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years, WHMIS, the Health Protection and Promotion Act as well as community resources in the Durham Region
- Excellent interpersonal, written and verbal communication skills; conflict resolution and decision-making skills
- Proficient time management, observation and behaviour management skills

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 2: Employee Skills and Quality Delivery

a. *Review hiring policies and practices to see if employees have necessary skills and qualifications (cont'd).*

Employee Guidelines (cont'd)

- The ability to work independently and as part of a team
- The ability to travel to any of the 8 Child Care Centres within Durham Region (Pickering, Ajax, Whitby, Oshawa, Bowmanville and Sunderland) as required

The job description serves as a screening tool by clearly outlining the expectations and criteria for the role, ensuring alignment between the Region's needs and the qualifications of candidates.

Procedure 2a: Conclusion

The Region has established hiring policies and practices to ensure employees possess the skills and qualifications necessary to deliver high-quality learning and care in its directly operated centres. A comprehensive three-phase interview process, supported by detailed employee guidelines, helps identify and secure the most qualified candidates, thereby supporting the delivery of high-quality care and education. Additionally, clearly defined job descriptions outline the required traits and certifications, further reinforcing the selection of highly qualified individuals.

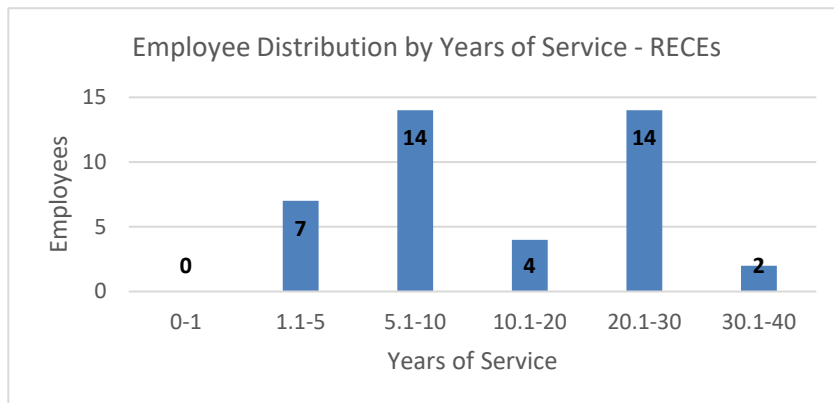
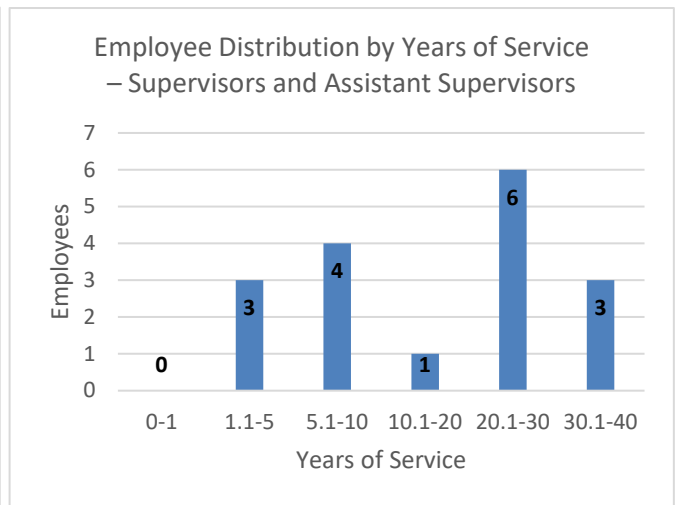
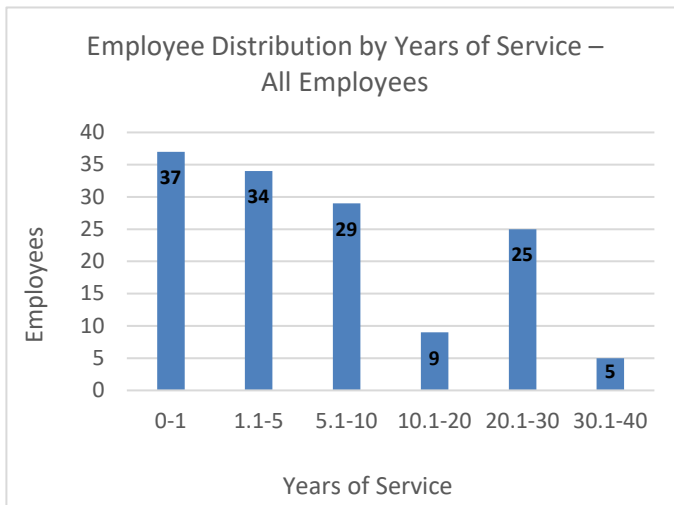
Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 2: Employees Skills and Quality Delivery

b. Examine employee turnover rates to assess stability and continuity along with staffing levels and ratios to provide high quality care.

As of December 31, 2024, the directly operated centres employ 139 employees, with an average tenure of 9.07 years and a standard deviation of 10.02 years, indicating considerable variation in the lengths of service among employees. The minimum tenure is 0.08 years (one month), while the maximum tenure is 35 years, illustrating the broad range of service durations. The median tenure is 4.33 years, and the 75th percentile is at 17.42 years, indicating that 25% of the educators have tenures longer than 17.42 years.

The graphs below illustrate the distribution of the employees at the directly operated centres according to their years of service, categorized into the following ranges: 0-1 years, 1.1-5 years, 5.1-10 years, 10.1-20 years, 20.1-30 years, and 30.1-40 years. For all employees, the number of employees decreases as tenure increases, with 51% of the centres' employees having tenures of five years or less, and 28% having tenures ranging from 10 to 40 years. The Region has 17 supervisors and assistant supervisors, with 82% of them having been with the Region for five years or more, indicating a high level of tenure in these roles. Additionally, there are 41 RECEs, 83% of whom have been with the Region for more than five years, with the majority having a tenure ranging from ten to 40 years.



Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 2: Employee Skills and Quality Delivery

b. Examine employee turnover rates to assess stability and continuity along with staffing levels and ratios to provide high quality care (cont'd).

Between September 2023 and December 2024, the directly operated centres experienced a higher level of employee turnover as evidenced by a combination of resignations (from on-calls finding full-time work, going back to school, or due to personal circumstances), retirements, and summer staff that were contracted. Concurrently, the Region expanded its operational capacity to serve more children. As a result of these changes, the Region hired 56 new employees, including 15 for new positions, with the remainder hired as additional on-call employees and to fill vacancies that arose from resignations and retirements. These changes led to a substantial influx of new employees during this period, which explains the high levels of employees with between zero and five years of service. In addition, given that the Village Union centre opened in 2023, the six new positions at this location also contribute to a higher level of employees between zero and five years of service.

Employee tenure plays a pivotal role in maintaining consistency and fostering a stable learning environment for young children. The Region benefits from a high proportion of long-tenured educators, supervisors, and assistant supervisors, many of whom have spent their entire careers at the directly operated centres. This tenure contributes to extensive experience, established relationships with children and families, and a deep understanding of the "How Does Learning Happen?" framework, which highlights the significance of responsive and nurturing relationships in early education. However, high tenure without established knowledge transfer processes or employee training to address turnover may result in the loss of valuable knowledge or expertise as tenured educators transition out and newer or future employees are brought in. In light of the anticipated increase in retirements among assistant supervisors over the next two years, the Region is offering four voluntary training sessions in 2025 as part of its succession planning efforts, aimed at employees interested in pursuing the role of assistant supervisor.

Discussions with the directly operated centres suggest that the majority of employee movement stems from internal redeployments, primarily driven by promotions or lateral transfers within the centres. Employees can submit transfer requests if they wish to move to another centre and are notified when positions become available. The Region's ability to accommodate these requests may enhance employee satisfaction and contribute to its success in retaining employees for extended periods, thereby supporting the delivery of high-quality learning.

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 2: Employee Skills and Quality Delivery

b. *Examine employee turnover rates to assess stability and continuity along with staffing levels and ratios to provide high quality care (cont'd).*

Procedure 2b: Conclusion

More than half (51%) of the Region's employees have been working at the directly operated centres for five years or less. However, 28% of the educators have been with the centres for between 10 to 40 years, bringing valuable experience and knowledge. Given the significant proportion of educators with shorter tenures at the directly operated centres, it is crucial to balance tenure with opportunities for professional growth to ensure educators remain engaged and equipped to implement innovative practices that support the development of children. Currently, the Region offers voluntary training sessions for employees interested in pursuing different roles or for succession planning purposes. However, the voluntary nature of these sessions may lead to a loss of knowledge if employees choose not to attend. Effective knowledge transfer from long-tenured employees to newer educators is crucial to mitigate the risk of knowledge loss due to retirements or employee transitions.

RECOMMENDATION:

To mitigate the risk of knowledge loss, it is recommended that the directly operated centres establish a process to ensure the effective transfer of knowledge from retiring or departing employees to newer employees. This could be implemented through a mentorship program or retention strategies that support continuous learning.

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 2: Employee Skills and Quality Delivery

c. *Evaluating whether employees have access to ongoing professional development and learning opportunities to enhance their skills.*

Professional Development

The Region, in their role as CMSM, has a team that provides employees within the child care sector with professional development opportunities throughout their careers, offering internal training and engaging in discussions with employees about their career goals, exploring ways the Region can support them in achieving these objectives. The Region will pay for trainings that align with employee goals, such as pursuing a RECE designation, and offer a range of free trainings that employees can participate in. Additionally, evening sessions are offered for employees enrolled in the Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) Program, which is required to maintain their Registered status, and employees are entitled to one paid training day per year. Employee feedback and development meetings are held quarterly, or more frequently as needed, and are documented in the Region's portal. The Region maintains an internal record of all training completed by employees and has provided the following list that includes some of the completed trainings. This list is not exhaustive, and mandatory trainings are indicated with an asterisk.

Ableism	Fire Warden Training E-learning	Children's Services Supervisor's Network
Accessibility Employment*	First Aid And Cpr/Aed Level C Training	DEI Representation in Program with EarlyON
Accessibility General*	Gen Ai Certificate	Supervisor's Network-Fostering a Healthy Workplace for Leaders
Accessible Word Forms	Health & Safety Awareness For Workers*	Making Sense of Sensory
Acrobat Pdf Errors	Indigenous Education Module	Activating the School Age Mind
Anti-black Racism Elearning*	Indigenous Histories And Reconciliation – Introduction and Modules 2 - 6	Indigenous History Awareness and Introduction to Kits
Asserting With Confidence	Introduction To Accessible Forms	Intro to Durham Region Operating Criteria
Attendance Support Program For Management	Introduction To Change Management	Community of Practice
Certificate In Leadership Excellence	Introduction To Versatile Enterprise	Early Learning Leadership Event
Creating Belonging In The Workplace	Words Matter - How Inclusive Is Your Language?	CoP Fostering leadership
Cyber Security*	Employee's Guide To Effective Employee Feedback & Development Planning*	Accommodating Children with Disabilities
DEI Foundation Education Modules 1 - 4*	School-Age Engagement	Make and Take Literacy Based Felt Board
Developing Management Skills - Sessions 1 and 4	Standing up to Bullying	Programming, Invitations to Play, and Observations
Workplace Violence - Risk Assessment Workshop	Workplace Naloxone Training For Opioid Overdose	Level One Jhsc Certification

Quality (cont'd)

Procedure 2: Employee Skills and Quality Delivery

c. *Evaluating whether employees have access to ongoing professional development and learning opportunities to enhance their skills (cont'd).*

The Region has provided the total professional development hours per site for the 2021 to 2023 years for full time, regular employees (excluding onboarding training) which have been included below.

Year	Total PD Hours	Total Number of Employees
2021	1,574.25	75
2022	1,416.50	69
2023	1,699.00	90

*It should be noted that Sunderland and Whitby did not submit hours for 2021, and 2022, respectively, so the number of PD hours in those years is likely higher

The table indicates that professional development hours across the centres have moved in relation to employee numbers over the past three years. The lowest number was recorded in 2022, when employees decreased from 75 to 69, while the highest number occurred in 2023, corresponding with an increase to 90 employees during that year. This demonstrates that staffing levels directly impact the professional development hours incurred within the centres.

Procedure 2c: Conclusion

The Region provides employees at directly operated centres with access to continuous professional development and learning opportunities, with the goal of enhancing their skills and promoting ongoing growth. This is achieved through a range of training courses and initiatives, such as an annual paid day off for training and financial support for courses that align with employees' career objectives.

Conclusion - Procedure 2: Employee Skills and Quality Delivery

The Region has implemented effective hiring practices to ensure that employees at the directly operated centres possess the necessary skills and qualifications to maintain high quality care and education. This is further supported by access to ongoing professional development courses and the continued assistance provided to employees in achieving their career goals. The Region's ability to retain long-tenured employees, as demonstrated by 28% of employees having been with the Region for 10 to 40 years, reflects high job satisfaction and a significant accumulation of experience and knowledge, which enhances their capacity to deliver high-quality educational experiences.



INCLUSIVITY

What does Inclusivity mean to the Ministry of Education?

Per the Ministry of Education's Service Management and Funding Guidelines, Pg. 58, inclusivity ensures that child care and early years programs are accessible, equitable, and welcoming to all children and families, regardless of their background, abilities, or socio-economic status.

- **Inclusive Participation:** The Ministry emphasizes the active and meaningful participation of all children in licensed child care and early years programs. This involves creating environments where every child feels valued and included, so that they can fully engage and benefit from the programs.
- **Authentic & Caring Relationships:** Inclusivity involves fostering genuine, supportive relationships between educators, children (e.g., a class-wide approach which doesn't separate or exclude children with individualized 1:1 treatment/actions), and families. The focus is on creating a sense of belonging and community within child care settings, helping children develop strong, positive connections with others.

Procedures

The following procedures and steps were performed to assess inclusivity:

Procedure 1: Identify how Diversity, Equity, Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation are demonstrated in the child care centres

- a. Obtain an understanding of the policies implemented by the Region to the centres around diversity, equity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation.
- b. Obtain an understanding of how the policies are monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles.
- c. Observe and document practical examples of how inclusivity, diversity, equity, and Truth and Reconciliation principles are integrated in the day-to-day activities, interactions, and practices. Evaluate inclusive practices by the centres such as individualized learning plans, culturally responsive teaching methods, etc.

Inclusivity (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Identify how Diversity, Equity, Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation are demonstrated in the child care centres

- a. *Obtain an understanding of the policies implemented by the Region to the centres around diversity, equity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation.*

DEIA Policy

As previously mentioned in Procedure 1a) of Accessibility, the Region has implemented a DEIA policy within the directly operated centres that outlines expectations for employees, families, and children in maintaining a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. A key guiding principle of the policy is that, for children to reach their full potential, they must see themselves represented as valued members of their community, as well as in their learning materials and program content. Section 5.3 of the policy states: *“The Regional Municipality of Durham Children’s Services Division is committed to an inclusive child care system that promotes positive and healthy environments for children. Inclusive child care means that quality services are provided for all children regardless of race, age, ability, language, culture, ethnicity or family structure”*.

The policy outlines expectations and provides support for educators, families, and children, as well as procedures to follow when responding to or witnessing incidents of racism or discrimination within the child care program. Employees are trained on how to identify racism, bias, and exclusion, as well as how to address these incidents and communicate with families when they arise. It also specifies that annual DEIA training is mandatory for all employees, and that employees must review and sign off on the policy annually. Employees are expected to foster inclusive environments by collaborating with families and community partners to ensure that all children feel included. Additionally, employees should integrate children’s religious practices, traditions, and family values into their learning plans where appropriate, as a way to demonstrate respect for and awareness of the families' cultures. The policy also includes a sustainability plan for DEIA practices, which ensures that DEIA principles will be incorporated into family orientation materials, the annual parent survey, and employee meetings.

The Region’s DEIA policy also incorporates recommendations related to Indigenous practices, which educators and employees are encouraged to implement. These practices have been included below.

- *Use a traditional territorial acknowledgment of Indigenous Peoples when meeting in person or use as an acknowledgement in email signatures.*
- *Apply the Two-Eyed Seeing Concept, introduced by Mi’kmaq Elder Albert Marshall. “Etuaptmunk, the Mi’kmaq word for two eyed seeing, the concept that with one eye, we view the world through Indigenous ways of knowing and with the other eye, we view the world through Western, or Eurocentric, ways of knowing”. Two-Eyed Seeing is an Indigenous world view that is about being mindful or open to alternative ways of knowing, considering multiple perspectives and valuing individual differences when delivering services.*
- *Staff are encouraged to look beyond their world views and consider Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, and to appreciate multiple perspectives.*
- *Staff are encouraged to engage with Indigenous families and develop meaningful relationships.*
- *DOC staff meetings and events will begin with a land acknowledgement, acknowledging that the Region of Durham exists on lands that the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg inhabited for thousands of years before European colonization and recognizing Indigenous Peoples as rights holders and stewards of the land.*

Inclusivity (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Identify how Diversity, Equity, Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation are demonstrated in the child care centres

- a. *Obtain an understanding of the policies implemented by the Region to the centres around diversity, equity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation (cont'd).*

Indigenous Resources

In addition to the internal courses provided by the Region on Indigenous history and reconciliation, the directly operated centres are also enrolled in Indigenous early years learning. This program, a partnership between the Region and Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag, an Indigenous child well-being agency, offers training that incorporates cultural programming from a Two-Eyed perspective. These courses are available through workshops for which employees can register. The Region also participates in an Indigenous Community Circle in which cultural programming and resources are provided for use.

Inclusion of All Children Policy

The Region has a policy focused on the inclusion of children, with the primary objective being that directly operated centres must provide inclusive environments for all children. Similar to the DEIA policy, this policy is to be reviewed upon hiring and annually thereafter. The policy stipulates that the needs of new children are to be assessed by the supervisor during registration through discussions with the child's family and by completing the Looksee Checklist, a developmental monitoring tool for children aged one month to six years. The Checklist outlines key developmental milestones for each age, provides parenting tips to support growth, and helps identify areas requiring further attention. The policy also includes the creation of an ISP for children diagnosed with special needs or enrolled with special needs, as well as specific requirements related to the ISP, such as annual review, sign-off, and storage of the plan.

Procedure 1a: Conclusion

The Region has established policies and practices that prioritize inclusivity, diversity, and equity within the directly operated centres. The DEIA policy and the Inclusion of All Children policy establish clear expectations for educators and staff in promoting inclusive environments for all children. In addition, employees participate in ongoing training focused on various elements within the DEIA policy, including strategies for incorporating them into early learning programs.

Inclusivity (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Identify how Diversity, Equity, Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation are demonstrated in the child care centres

- b. Obtain an understanding of how the policies are monitored by the Region to ensure execution and existence and evaluate the quality control measures in place to ensure adherence to these principles.*

The Region monitors policies focused on ensuring inclusivity through various methods. All training that is completed by employees, such as the mandated DEIA training and the Indigenous training, is tracked internally by the Region, as previously outlined in Procedure 2c) of Quality. Furthermore, the Monitoring Compliance and Contraventions Policy, as outlined in Procedure 1b) of Quality, ensures additional oversight, requiring employees to sign off annually on their review and acceptance of all policies, including the DEIA and Inclusion of All Children policies. DEIA performance measures are also incorporated into educators' feedback and development reviews, reflecting the Region's monitoring of these practices. The manager of directly operated child care and the program manager conduct quarterly and monthly visits, respectively, to observe the implementation of these policies at the centres, and discussions regarding the execution of these policies are held during employee meetings. Additionally, the DROC, which assesses the directly operated centres on a quarterly basis, includes an evaluation of the centres' inclusivity practices and their alignment with established standards.

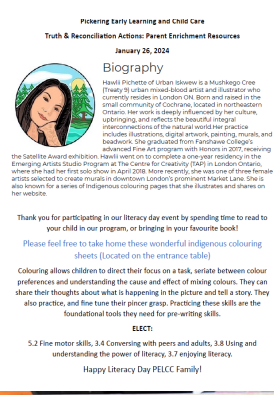
Procedure 1b: Conclusion

The Region employs several methods to monitor adherence to diversity, equity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation principles, including the internal tracking of DEIA and Indigenous training, annual sign-offs on all policies, the incorporation of DEIA performance measures into employee reviews, and site visits conducted by the manager of directly operated centres and program manager. Additionally, discussions regarding the centres' inclusivity practices take place during employee meetings that occur quarterly.

Inclusivity (cont'd)

Procedure 1: Identify how Diversity, Equity, Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation are demonstrated in the child care centres

c. Observe and document practical examples of how inclusivity, diversity, equity, and Truth and Reconciliation principles are integrated in the day-to-day activities, interactions, and practices. Evaluate inclusive practices by the centres such as individualized learning plans, culturally responsive teaching methods, etc. (cont'd).



Resource Room

During the site visits, Deloitte also observed the Resource Room, and although it primarily functions as an observation space for educators and specialists, it also houses Indigenous resources that are made available for all child care operators across Durham Region for use in their programming. This reflects the Region's commitment to providing accessible resources to other child care centres, ensuring the integration of Indigenous programming and fostering inclusivity and respect for Indigenous history. Additionally, this initiative supports Truth and Reconciliation by promoting awareness and understanding of Indigenous history.

Procedure 1c: Conclusion

The Region has successfully integrated diversity, equity, inclusivity, and Truth and Reconciliation practices within the daily activities and interactions at the directly operated centres. The Resource Room contains Indigenous resources that are made available for use by other child care centres in their programming, demonstrating the Region's commitment to fostering an understanding of Indigenous history and integration of it into the centres' curriculum. The Region has also effectively demonstrated the incorporation of these practices in the resources and curriculum.

Inclusivity (cont'd)

Conclusion - Procedure 1: Identify how Diversity, Equity, Inclusion + Truth and Reconciliation are demonstrated in the child care centres

The Region has shown a strong commitment to creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment for all children, families, and staff at the directly operated centres. The Region's policies ensure that employees receive annual DEIA training and also promote collaboration between the centres and families to ensure children feel included. Deloitte also observed the integration of diverse and inclusive practices into the daily activities of the centres, including crafts, classroom decorations, toys, and the daily menu. The centres' practices are monitored through quarterly DROC assessments, annual policy sign-offs, visits from the manager of directly operated child care and the program manager, and discussions during employee meetings.



APPENDICES

The Region of Durham has established a set of guidelines and standards aligned with the “How Does Learning Happen?” framework, referred to as the Durham Region Operation Criteria (DROC), with the purpose of ensuring the efficient and effective operation of child care centres. Implemented in 2015, these centres are assessed quarterly by the Region using checklists or measurement scales that evaluate operations based on expectations (i.e., does not meet expectations, needs improvement, meets expectations, and exceeds expectations). Operators are required to meet and maintain compliance with the DROC. These guidelines are tailored to each program (infant, toddler, preschool, and before and after school) and include specific criteria for nutrition and playgrounds. Additionally, there are operating criteria for various areas, including policies and procedures, administrative practices, and financial management processes. Following the completion of a DROC assessment, each centre receives a summary report that outlines the evaluator's observations, accompanying comments, and any requirements that have not been met. The supervisor and Quality Assurance (QA) employee at each centre then conduct an immediate debrief and implement any required actions. Training on specific topics is provided, with the QA offering additional support for a designated period. Additionally, DROC Action Plans are developed that outline the corrective actions the centre will take in response to any issues or recommendations identified during the assessment. If operators do not meet the DROC requirements, they must develop and implement an action plan within a specified timeframe. Failure to take action within the agreed timeframe may result in the imposition of sanctions. An example of a DROC Action Plan has been included below, and the scores from the DROC assessments at each centre from 2023-2024 have been included in the following pages:

Action Plan

The following is an example of an action plan created by the Region following a DROC assessment. The identified issues from the assessment are outlined, along with the corresponding action plan for addressing them and the date of completion.

Pickering ELCC DROC Inspection Action Plan

Date of Inspection: April 11, 2023

Item	Action Plan	Date Achieved
Visual schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the season changes over <u>still</u> keep images of the current season. Example it is now spring but there is snow outside. Recommended to add in spring images <u>regardless</u> if it looks like winter outside. 	April 12, 2023
Program plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommended no sited: to add in early riser activities instead of putting all slept 	Corrected during inspection
Developmental screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to complete screening for max <u>cassie</u> and maple. The document was completed, but the date was missing. <u>these</u> toddlers completed the toddler looksee's and educators were working on future goals in the preschool level as they were advanced. Recommended that if there are documents we are currently working on, we will put them in a separate <u>binder</u> so it doesn't look like they are incomplete. The documents were ahead of schedule. 	Corrected during inspection
Displays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add in more displays of children with differences. We had this in <u>place</u> but the children removed one of the <u>velcrow</u> displays and the other fell off the shelf 	Corrected same day.
Sensory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To exceed we need 2 planned. 1 was documented at the time of inspection. Moving forward 2 will be planned and implemented. 	Corrected same day
Public health posters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public health poster was updated that month. When looking online to download the newest version, the old version was the only one available. Challenged this: if they want us to use the correct version, but it is not available online, how can we meet this expectation. 	Once they loaded the correct poster online the posters were all updated. Moving forward they will ensure the website is kept current for operators. Supervisor and team will ensure the current poster is up and available.
Hand hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedure not followed. Soiled gloves removed but hand hygiene not performed. Recommended to add hand sanitizer to area to allow this to happen. Reviewed with entire team. 	May 2, 2023
Mirror	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mirror is in the room but mounted on the wall. Was not available in the dramatic area. Purchased small <u>hand held</u> mirrors to add into bin in area. In next order, will purchase another standing <u>mirror</u> for dramatic area. 	May 2, 2023
Disinfecting cots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disinfecting was completed, but the form was not signed off during inspection. 	Spoke to educators regarding keeping signage and

Appendix A (cont'd)

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC) – 2015

DROC Assessment Results 2023 - 2024

The Region has provided the following scores from the DROC assessments conducted at each centre during 2023 and 2024. Each section of the assessment includes a measurement scale from one to five and sub-items, with the assessor evaluating whether the centre meets the criteria, which in turn determines the corresponding score for that section. A weighted average of the scores across all sections of the assessment is used to calculate the overall score.

Ajax

2023		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Infant	4.38	4.86
Toddler	4.62	4.29
Preschool	4.40	4.44

2024		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Infant	4.54	4.71
Toddler	4.46	4.57
Preschool 1	4.27	4.33
Preschool 2	4.53	4.56

Clara Hughes

2023		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Toddler	4.50	4.57
Preschool	4.13	4.11
Kinder	4.27	4.50
School Age	4.27	4.83

2024		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Toddler	4.21	4.14
Preschool	4.13	4.11
Kinder	3.82	4.17
School Age	3.82	4.00

Edna Thomson

2023		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Toddler 1	4.17	4.57
Toddler 2	3.62	4.43
Preschool 1	4.17	4.11
Preschool 2	4.23	4.00
Preschool 3	3.77	3.89

Appendix A (cont'd)

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC) – 2015

Edna Thomson (cont'd)

2024		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Toddler 1	4.33	4.43
Toddler 2	3.96	4.29
Preschool 1	4.17	3.89
Preschool 2	4.27	4.44
Preschool 3	3.97	3.89

Lakewoods

2023		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Toddler	4.17	4.14
Junior Preschool	4.70	4.67
Senior Preschool	4.10	4.33
Before & After Program	4.73	4.67

2024		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Toddler	4.00	4.29
Junior Preschool	4.53	4.44
Senior Preschool	4.40	4.78
Before & After Program	4.82	4.67

Pickering

2023		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Toddler	4.17	4.71
Junior Preschool	3.77	3.78
Senior Preschool	4.43	4.44

2024		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Toddler	4.12	4.14
Junior Preschool	4.37	4.00
Senior Preschool	4.50	4.67

Sunderland

2023		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Nursery	4.00	4.56
Kinder	3.64	4.00
School Age	4.18	4.33

Appendix A (cont'd)

Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC) – 2015

Sunderland (cont'd)

2024		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Kinder	4.36	4.17
Kinder	3.64	3.83
School Age	4.09	4.17

Village Union

2023		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Before & After School	3.82	4.00

2024		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Before & After School	3.91	4.00

Whitby

2023		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Toddler	4.58	4.43
Junior Preschool	4.47	4.33
Senior Preschool	4.47	4.33

2024		
Section	Score	Interaction Score
Toddler	4.79	4.86
Preschool 1	4.63	4.67
Preschool 2	4.53	4.67



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Durham Region – Children’s Services Division

2024 Report on Regional Operated Child Care |

June 27, 2025

SCOPE OF LIMITATIONS

We have completed our review based on information provided by The Regional Municipality of Durham, noting the following:

1. We do not assume any responsibility or liability for losses incurred by the Regional Municipality of Durham, or any other parties as a result of the circulation, publication, or reproduction or use of this report contrary to the provisions of this report.
2. Our work does not constitute an audit or other form of assurance as defined by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario. Therefore, this work and the resulting report do not represent an auditor's opinion. Additionally, our work cannot assure that all errors, omissions, or irregularities have been identified. Our conclusions are based on reviewing information according to specific criteria in the format of a consulting report.
3. This report should be read in its entirety. Considering portions of the report or specific factors separately may lead to a misleading understanding of the process underlying it. Attempting to do so could place undue emphasis on particular factors, calculations, or analyses.
4. This report is based on the information, documents, and explanations provided to us, with our conclusions dependent on the integrity of this information as outlined in our scope of review. We did not verify the accuracy of third-party information, nor did we conduct investigative procedures to independently confirm the accuracy of such information.
5. If any of the information provided was inaccurate or incorrect, or if different information or assumptions are considered, the conclusions may vary, potentially significantly, from those stated in this report. Errors, omissions or irregularities of the materials provided could limit the associated benefits of the recommendations.
6. Management of the Region is solely responsible for any and all activities associated with accepting and implementing the recommendations. The scope of our work did not include any considerations or activities related to implementation.
7. We reserve the right, but will be under no obligation, to review this report, and if we consider it necessary, to revise this report in light of any information which becomes known to us after the date of this report.



Disclaimer

No opinion, counsel, or interpretation is intended in matters that require legal, tax or other appropriate professional advice. It is assumed that such opinion, counsel, or interpretations have been, or will be, obtained outside of the scope of this report.

Executive Summary

PURPOSE

The Ministry of Education 2024 Ontario Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres Service Management and Funding Guideline (2024 Guideline) requires Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (“CMSMs”) to retain independent advice and to conduct a value-for-money review on their direct delivery of licensed child care services. The Regional Municipality of Durham (the “Region”) engaged Deloitte LLP to perform these services.

The purpose of the value-for-money review was to determine whether federal and provincial funding is being used efficiently and effectively by directly operated centres, and whether the child care services could be more efficiently offered instead by a third-party provider. The report, recommendations and management responses must be posted publicly.

SCOPE

No criteria were set at the direction of the Ministry. Deloitte proposed to review the 2021-2024 operations against the following five criteria aligned with Canada-wide Early Learning and Childcare (“CWELCC”) policy objectives: Affordability, Sustainability, Accessibility, Quality, and Inclusivity.

To support their conclusions, Deloitte reviewed existing Child Care policies, Regional monitoring practices and examples of their use in practice. Deloitte performed analysis when needed to draw conclusions on how the Region has ensured it is exhibiting positive behaviours for each of the five criteria.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

The Region of Durham’s directly operated child care centres appear to achieve the CWELCC policy objectives of Affordability, Accessibility, Quality and Inclusivity.

Findings in the Sustainability objective noted that the Region is providing an annual regional contribution to the operational costs of the directly operated child care centres to fund investments in Affordability, Accessibility, Quality, and Inclusivity. Our review concluded that third-party child care providers, including both for-profit and not-for-profit centres, do not have the same access to Regional contributions. Consequently, for-profit and not-for-profit providers need to manage within a budget and/or above break- even financial positions, which likely impacts the scope of the service offerings, and the affordability, accessibility, quality, and inclusivity of their services.

Indirectly, Deloitte saw the connection between the investments in Affordability, Accessibility, Quality, and Inclusivity to the ability to demonstrate child care excellence to third-party providers under their Service System Manager role, in each policy objective respectively.

Overall, Deloitte concluded that the Region’s directly operated child care centres appear to be a value for money as it relates to the efficient and effective use of federal and provincial funding and the ability to drive affordability, accessibility, quality, and inclusivity across both the directly operated and third-party providers.

Executive Summary

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the conclusions, Deloitte provided the Region with recommendations for improvement. The following pages summarize the observations, findings and recommendations. Management has been provided a detailed report.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

AFFORDABILITY

The analysis of the rates charged by the Region's directly operated centres reflects a commitment to affordability. The centres have consistently adhered to the CWELCC fee reduction guidelines, applying the required percentage reductions in fees for the 2022, 2023, and 2024 years. These reductions have resulted in lower child care costs for families, improving access to high-quality early learning and child care, in alignment with the objectives of the CWELCC program. Overall, the directly operated child care centres have successfully met the expectations of affordability.

Recommendation: Deloitte had no recommendations related to affordability.

Management Response Durham:

The Region of Durham's Directly Operated centers have remained in alignment and compliance with the evolving CWELCC funding models. We ensured timely refunds during the initial CWLECC enrollment phase, and annually adjusted parent fees according to the CWELCC guidelines, down to the current maximum of \$22 per day. We are supportive of the current plan for the Province to further reduce parent fees to the average \$10/day benchmark by 2026.

FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

The analysis of the financial sustainability of revenues and expenses for the directly operated centres indicated a need for ongoing contribution from the Region. Despite efforts to manage costs effectively, the centres required regional contributions to achieve balanced budgets from 2021 to 2023, with a notable increase in contribution levels beginning after 2017. These elevated contributions were primarily driven by the freezing of parent fees, reduced enrolment during the pandemic recovery period, and the introduction of the CWELCC program, which reinforced the freeze on parent fees. The required contribution declined from \$7.9 million in 2021 to \$7.5 million in 2022, followed by a further decrease to \$6 million in 2023. Salaries at the directly operated centres are the largest expense, representing approximately 86-88% of total expenses, and between 86-88% of operating costs.

The Region should assess its ongoing commitment to providing regional contributions to ensure the continued delivery of high-quality child care services. Overall, alongside effective cost management, the financial sustainability of the directly operated centres relies on these contributions.

Recommendation:

- It is recommended that if the Region of Durham decides to no longer provide the directly operated centres with contributions to their operating budgets, the Region should provide the directly operating centres with sufficient notice to allow them to adjust operations.

Executive Summary

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (cont'd)

FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY (cont'd)

Management Response Durham:

The Region of Durham has supported directly operated licensed child care since 1971, with seven of our eight centres operational by 1976. Our centres were founded on the commitment of Durham's eight consolidated municipalities to provide quality care to families living in high priority neighbourhoods. From the start, the Region has remained committed to providing operational funding to keep child care fees low while ensuring quality child care programs remain accessible to children and families in our highest need communities.

The introduction of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care system (CWELCC) and the new funding model implemented on January 1, 2025, changes how child care is funded across the province. As CWELCC is designed to keep fees low for all families, it is projected to decrease or eliminate the need for discretionary operational funding top up provided by the Region.

The management team in Durham will continue to monitor funding needs and work with our Regional Council through the annual budget process to determine the level of continued supports.

ACCESSIBILITY

The Region promotes accessibility through a waitlist policy, though it does not prioritize children with special needs or reserve spots for those terminated from other centres. The Region has also implemented a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) policy to guide the centres in providing accessible care and education, and the centres comply with corporate policies and expectations concerning the accessibility of their buildings and environments. 71% of the Region's priority neighbourhoods have a directly operated child care centre situated within them, demonstrating accessibility to vulnerable populations.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that the Region integrate considerations for prioritizing individuals with diverse learning needs into the waitlist policy. This would improve access to child care services for children requiring additional support and would enhance transparency for parents and caregivers.
- It is recommended that the Region further evaluates the trade-off between a potential increase in quality as a result of serving less children within the Region, which could reduce the Region's ability to be accessible (e.g. through the use of the childcare space to provide a permanent Simulation Training Room and Professional Resource Library).

Management Response Durham:

The Region of Durham is committed to supporting children with unique learning needs both as a licensee and as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM). It is a long-held practice that our directly operated centres not only enroll children with diverse learning needs but actively accept children who have experienced an unsuccessful placement in other centres.

Executive Summary

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (cont'd)

ACCESSIBILITY (cont'd)

We do this in alignment with our CMSM role whereby our awareness of children experiencing placement breakdown in non-Regionally operated centers are known through our special needs resourcing network, our fee subsidy team and our contract compliance team who support families to maintain and secure successful childcare placements.

Our ability to support children with special needs is possible due to the skill and training of our Directly Operated center staff, comprised of many long-time employees with tremendous child care training and experience.

To ensure that support is maintained and to ensure transparency for parents and caregivers the management team is finalizing updates to our waitlist policy to include prioritization of children with special needs and children in receipt of fee subsidy. This will support our belief that all children are competent and capable and deserve to feel a sense of belonging.

- Prior to the introduction of CWELCC, the Region repurposed a portion of our Lakewoods childcare centre to operate a simulation training room and professional resource library focusing on indigenous culturally relevant programming. These spaces were used as training spaces to build the capacity of the early learning sector in Durham Region.

With the introduction of CWELCC, child care across the region including our Directly Operated centers, have experienced increased in enrollment leading to large wait lists for service.

In early 2025 the Region of Durham purchased the building at 600 Townline road in Oshawa. This building, located in a priority neighbourhood, has provided the opportunity to create a childcare early years hub including expanded programs and services. Among the programs and services to be offered, are an EarlyON child and family center, a licensed child care center and the relocation of the Sim room and Indigenous Resource library from our Lakewoods site. This will allow us to utilize more of our licensed capacity at Lakewoods for direct service delivery while maintaining the much-needed training facilities.

QUALITY

Delivery of How Does Learning Happen:

The Region has effectively incorporated the four foundations of the How Does Learning Happen? pedagogy into the daily operations of its directly operated centres. The Parent Handbook serves as a foundational document, outlining the approach to delivering high-quality early learning and child care and detailing the strategies employed by educators to guide daily curriculum planning.

Executive Summary

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (cont'd)

QUALITY (cont'd)

The integration of the four foundations of belonging, well-being, expression, and engagement was also evident during the site visits, providing meaningful insight into staff commitment to implementing *these principles in practice*.

The centres are subject to external monitoring by the Ministry of Education and internal monitoring by the Region through established practices designed to uphold high standards of care, including internal licensing audits and the Durham Region Operating Criteria (DROC).

The Region has successfully embedded the four foundations into the daily practices and interactions within its directly operated centres. Deloitte has observed and the Region has demonstrated that these foundations are consistently reflected throughout the centres' environments, including classrooms, activities, and resources.

Staff Skills and Quality Delivery:

The Region has established policies and practices to ensure that employees possess the necessary skills and qualifications to deliver high-quality education and care. An extensive interview process, supported by detailed employee guidelines, helps to ensure that the most qualified candidates are employed as educators within the directly operated centres. Ongoing professional development is facilitated through internal training modules and support for employees pursuing further education. This commitment to employee development has contributed to workforce stability, with 28% of educators having served between 10 and 40 years, contributing valuable insight, experience, and institutional knowledge.

Recommendation:

- It is recommended that the directly operated centres establish structured knowledge transfer processes to mitigate the risk of knowledge loss due to staff retirements or departures.

Management Response Durham:

The Directly Operated management team is committed to supporting our staff to learn and grow and share the collective knowledge of our experienced educators. We value the contributions and recognize the importance of experienced staff in the mentorship of new educators.

To support this, the DOC management team has developed both voluntary and mandatory trainings to support knowledge retention and transfer and encourage retention and succession planning. The programs and training offered include:

- An assistant supervisor training session consisting of two modules offered twice per year. This program is voluntary and began in the Spring of 2025.
- Voluntary training for interested staff on understanding the job competition process, which allows staff to review and ask generalized questions to help staff feel comfortable applying for new and promotional roles.

Executive Summary

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (cont'd)

QUALITY (cont'd)

- Mandatory joint staff training sessions began, allowing staff from different sites to gather and share programming ideas.
- The annual assistant supervisor network day, where assistant supervisors come together to share leadership and programming ideas and mentor one another in their roles as assistant supervisors with the support of DOC senior management.

Additionally, the recent expansion of our organization's cross-departmental mentorship programs has introduced formalized pathways for mentorship opportunities available to staff.

INCLUSIVITY

The Region has implemented a range of policies and practices that reflect its commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation. This includes a comprehensive DEIA policy that sets clear expectations for educators and families and is supported by continuous staff training. These training initiatives are intended to build awareness and capacity around equity and inclusion, with content addressing systemic barriers and promoting diverse perspectives. The Region actively monitors the implementation of these practices through mechanisms such as employee feedback, tracking of DEIA and Indigenous training, and regular site visits conducted by the program manager. These commitments were also evident during site visits, where Deloitte observed the integration of diversity, equity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation principles into daily programming and classroom activities.

Recommendation: Deloitte had no recommendations related to inclusivity.

Management Response Durham:

The Region of Durham is committed to continuous improvement of the programs and services we offer to our residents and staff through the lenses of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility.



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