



Response to, *“Consultation: strengthening early years and child care in Ontario”*

(Reviewing 2014 Child Care and Early Years Act)



“We must teach our children to smell the earth, to taste the rain, to touch the wind, to see things grow, to hear the sunrise and the night fall – to care”

– John Cleal, poet and artist

COMPASS

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE



OUR VALUES AND BELIEFS

TRUSTING
RELATIONSHIPS

LIFELONG
LEARNING

SAFE, CARING,
JOYFUL PLACES

RESPONSIBILITY
& ACCOUNTABILITY

COLLECTIVE
INTELLIGENCE

EQUAL
WORTH

CHILDREN ARE
THE HEART



TABLE OF CONTENTS

2. Compass ELC Values & Beliefs
3. Table of Contents
4. Executive Summary
5. Recommendations
6. Introduction to Compass Early Learning & Care
8. Methodology
10. Responses to 'Commitments' in, "Consultation: strengthening early years and child care in Ontario"
 - Commitment 1
 - Commitment 2
 - Commitment 3
 - Commitment 4
 - Commitment 5 & 6
16. Recommendations
18. Contact Information





Executive Summary

Child care in Ontario has undergone a major transformation in the last 10 years. With the launch of Ontario's pedagogy for the Early Years, , How Does Learning Happen (HDLH), the sector has leaned into children's learning and development, creating inviting spaces for children to grow, learn and discover the world around them. The four foundations of HDLH: belonging; engagement; expression; and wellbeing are a foundation for policy and practice and have given our sector a structure for a system based on quality indicators; a system that is responsive to parents, respects early childhood educators and their practice and is based on research on brain development. Consultation: Strengthening Child Care in Ontario, with proposed changes to ratios and group size, qualifications, and a registry for unlicensed providers, threatens to undermine the progress that we have made in these last 10 years. Children need time and space to build relationships, explore, create, discover. They need to feel safe and cared for by educators who understand them and create invitations for learning. Children can take many months when entering child care to move from an emotional state to a cognitive state as they build the strong relationships with the caregivers. This transition is supported with ratios that allow for one-on-one time for caregivers to attend to immediate physical and emotional wellbeing, and time for reflection about the children's learning and theories. After an extensive consultation process we know that parents, educators and administrators feel strongly that the proposed changes for younger children in larger groups with older children will not provide this. While several of the commitments laid out in this document are supported by Compass Early Learning & Care (CELC), many of the strategies in this document are not supported. In the midst of a pandemic, when women, people of colour, Indigenous people with disabilities and other marginalized communities are being disproportionately affected, these proposed changes are particularly disturbing. Ontario, we can do better than this.



Key Recommendations:

1. Build a system of early learning and care based on sound research, best practices, and community need. Work with the federal government to build a universal child care system based on the principles of affordability, accessibility, quality, decent pay and improved working conditions for RECE's and child care staff.

2. Support and grow the number of ECE's in Ontario to meet the need. We do not support watering down qualifications as proposed. Reinstate the Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy. Provide financial resources to increase wages and working conditions, including \$5 per hour for wage enhancement, and accessible, flexible educational opportunities for those wanting to get their ECE diploma.

3. Invest in more child care spaces to meet the growing demand for high quality, licensed programming instead of lowering ratios that put children and staff wellbeing in jeopardy.

4. Set standards to require all home child care provided in Ontario be part of the licensed system. Develop a protocol that will bring the unlicensed providers into the licensed system with dignity, mutual respect and accountability rather than establishing an alternate system of registering with no accountability. This can be done in a gradual process using a registry as a first step administered by the licensed child care agencies.

5. Establish round tables with diverse perspectives to find solutions, consistent with principles articulated in HDLH and the Ontario and BC Early Years Framework that support families and children and will develop a system of early learning and care that is accessible, affordable and is seen around the world as a standard of care that is to be aspired to.





Introduction to Compass Early Learning & Care

MISSION:

Compass Early Learning and Care (CELC) is a progressive, non-profit organization where we work collaboratively to provide excellence in early learning and care. The richness and uniqueness of our learning environments are an invitation for adults and children to discover together the joy of learning.

VISION:

CELC envisions a place where children are valued as citizens of today; where the principles of democracy guide our relationships with children, families, colleagues and our community.

ABOUT:

At Compass Early Learning and Care our programs offer a place for exploration, wonder and rich learning opportunities discovered through children's play. In partnership with families and children we provide a child centered, emergent curriculum that fosters and promotes the development of the whole child. Our days are guided by the interests

of the children and carefully framed and negotiated by our educators and staff. Our strong view of children as capable, competent and curious about the world around them guides the way in which we design our environments, experiences and interactions. The inspiration for our work comes not only from the children, but also from the educators of Reggio Emilia. We see curriculum as everything that happens in our days and consider each moment as an opportunity to build relationships and create an atmosphere that nurtures children and adults. We hold children and childhood in deep regard.

CELC is an \$18M childcare organization in East-Central Ontario

We have 351 staff who provide services through 38 licensed childcare programs and a licensed home child care agency with 50 licensed homes. We serve over 2000 families in the City and County of Peterborough, Durham Region, City of Kawartha Lakes and Northumberland County. In addition, we have 3 Initiatives that provide professional learning and experiential learning for children and adults.



2000+ # OF FAMILIES SERVED

351 # OF EMPLOYEES

190 FULL TIME/PERMANENT

48 10+ YEAR EMPLOYEES

CELC Initiatives:

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING & CONSULTING

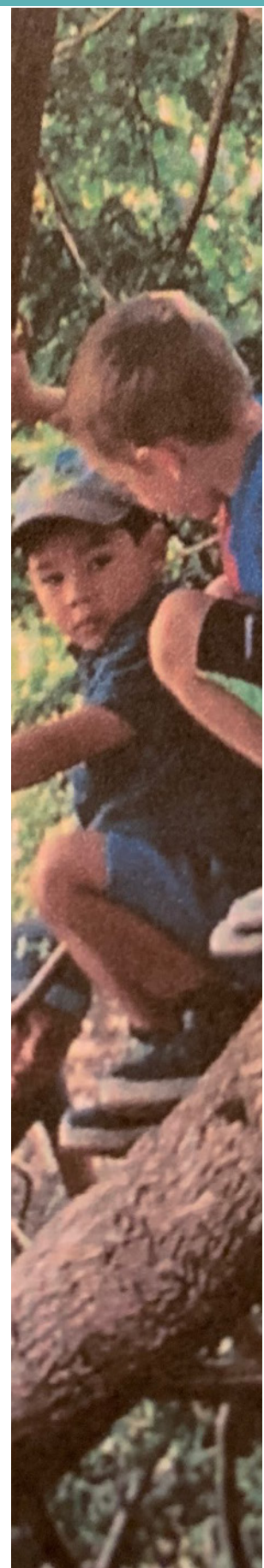
We have offered professional learning opportunities and consulting services throughout North America, Europe and Asia. Research from our classrooms is highlighted to promote reflective thinking and pedagogical leadership as fundamental to early learning and care. As a provincially recognized, high quality early learning and care organization, we provide professional learning through consulting services, study tours and centre visits/tours. All of our work is grounded in strong values and the high image we hold of children, educators and families.

MATERIALS INITIATIVE:

At Compass Early Learning and Care, we are working to build a better future for our children. We believe that this vision includes rethinking the materials and resources that find their way to landfill as junk or to the recycle bin. We are excited by the idea that many of these materials offer excellent learning tools for children. We re-purpose unwanted manufacturing cut-offs and discards for use by children, educators, families and artists. Our goal is to nurture a sense of value for materials, recognizing that we are connected to them through the people who gathered or mined the raw resources, the people who made them, delivered them, retrieved them for salvage and those who used them during their first life.

OUTDOOR INITIATIVE:

Compass Early Learning and Care is a licensed TimberNook Provider. At the heart of TimberNook programming is the philosophy that children flourish when given the time and space to play in sensory-rich, experiential learning environments. TimberNook is designed as an outdoor, sensory-rich experience that inspires, restores, and challenges children's minds and bodies. Therapeutic benefits of this program include improvement in coordination and balance, attention span, vestibular sense and auditory processing (Timbernook.com).



Methodology

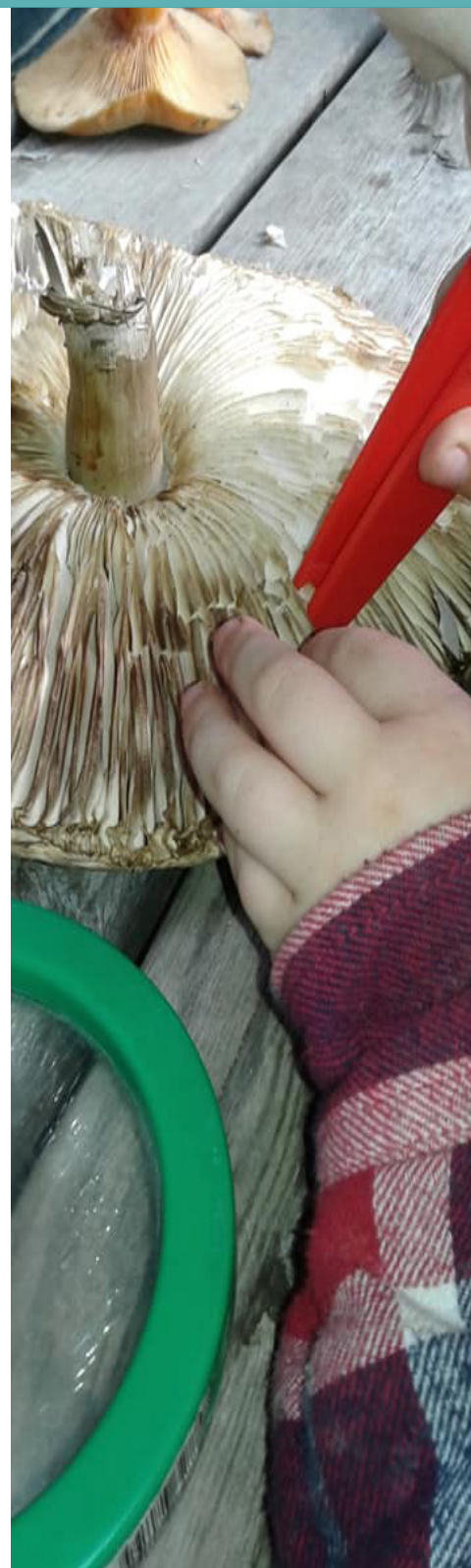
CONSULTATIONS

We conducted two staff consultations, one Home Child Care Provider Consultation and three parent and family consultations between the dates of October 27 to November 12, 2020 with over 75 direct participants. Their feedback was clear and consistent. The participants agreed that they did not support the proposed changes to Age Ranges, Ratios and Group sizes, Qualifications, and a registry for Home Child Care. Educators reported that the added responsibilities and cleaning presented during Covid has them feeling “overwhelmed” and couldn’t imagine adding more, younger children to that mix.

One Program Lead remarked:

“This is a Serious Occurrence waiting to happen.”

Parents were in agreement, with one parent remarking, “I don’t want my child to be the next Eva, because the government wants to put more children into a classroom.” Another parent stated that they were sorry for the parents coming into the system because they wouldn’t have the quality of care that they had. Still other parents remarked that it was appalling that the government was suggesting these changes during a pandemic, and that these changes would affect those in our society who are already disproportionately disadvantaged, including women, children, indigenous, people of colour and other marginalized groups.



RESEARCH

Research on early development is clear – relationships matter. Recommendations on the number of children per staff range from 3 infants to 4, for with a maximum group size of 6 to 8 infants (childcare.gov). The proposed infant toddler grouping far exceeds this at 12 children for 3 educators.

Our own experience at CELC has taught us the magic that can happen with smaller group sizes. We listen more and discover more and explore together. Children are far more adventurous, feeling a sense of safety and wellbeing.

There may be many administrators who are recommending this so that they can fill their classrooms. We ask that you resist this rhetoric.

It is not parents who are asking for more younger children in larger groups. It is not the educators who care for the children every day. They know all too well, the consequences of large group sizes.

These are children: a business strategy does not work unless it takes into consideration the social and emotional wellbeing as the primary goal.

Home Child Care Providers agreed that they did not support the development of a registry with no accountability.



United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #4 Quality Education:
Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote
lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Responses to 'Commitments'

[LINK TO STRENGTHENING EARLY YEARS AND CHILD CARE IN ONTARIO, 2020 REPORT](#)

COMMITMENT 1: SUPPORT QUALITY IN CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS SETTINGS

Compass Early Learning and Care supports the development of a quality statement. We are renowned for the quality of care and education that we provide in our programs. Our Executive Director of Pedagogy, Lorrie Baird, is an expert in pedagogical leadership and works closely with early learning and child care organizations across Ontario including Early On programs, child care organizations, municipalities, and community groups.



Lorrie is a co-author of the Ministry of Education document, **“Think, Feel, Act: Lessons from research about young children”**

Lorrie has spent the last 15 years of her career supporting quality early learning and care through pedagogical leadership. We would be pleased to support the development of the Quality Statement.

Compass Early Learning and Care supports a range of licensing processes to ensure that all children in Ontario receive a quality early learning experience. We would support a registry that was administered by licensed agencies and seen as a bridge to licensing. We would also support a provincial discussion on how partnerships of licensed agencies and providers can be strengthened. Further, the practices of home child care agencies have traditionally been built on a power-over model of oversight that is changing. However, the stigma remains. Efforts are required to bring unlicensed providers and agencies together.





Placing the registry with an alternate agency or with the Ministry of Education would undermine this relationship and create a two-tier system where complexity already exists.

HDLH has had a significant impact on the early learning and child care sector. Reflective practice takes time. This is time spent with children to understand and deepen their theories, as well as time spent with educators to study children's learning and play in order to provide learning opportunities that will further their exploration and discovery of the world around them.

We support building on this excellent work and recommend that the Ministry of Education provide resources to allow educators this valuable time for reflective practice and professional development.

"LEARNING AND TEACHING SHOULD NOT STAND ON OPPOSITE BANKS AND JUST WATCH THE RIVER FLOW BY; INSTEAD, THEY SHOULD EMBARK TOGETHER ON A JOURNEY DOWN THE WATER. THROUGH AN ACTIVE, RECIPROCAL EXCHANGE, TEACHING CAN STRENGTHEN LEARNING AND HOW TO LEARN."

~ LORIS MALAGUZZI



COMMITMENT 2: CREATE FLEXIBLE OPTIONS FOR FAMILIES & PROVIDERS

Compass Early Learning and Care supports flexible options for families that meet the quality standards identified by research and best practice. This does not include having more children of a younger age in larger group sizes.

We do not support the Schedule 2 changes for infant/toddler and toddler/preschool groupings. The last regulation changes included decreasing the hours in which child care programs could operate with reduced ratios. We supported this move because it was best for children and families. We do not support this new proposal because it is not best for children and families. There is flexibility within the current regulations to support choices for families and children. CELC works with our Ministry of Education Program Advisors to find solutions, within the guidelines, to meet family and program needs.

Compass Early Learning and Care would support a two-provider model with restrictions. This is not a model for every home or every provider. We would support a pilot project with a view to developing criteria for a successful model.

Compass Early Learning and Care does not support the removal of the 3-hour rule for specified authorized recreational programs. This again would create a two-tier system where the families who can afford the higher quality licensed child care program would pay for it. Those who cannot and don't qualify for subsidy would be forced to have their children in the free or low-cost recreational program with unqualified staff. This has been our experience in a number of schools where we operate alongside recreational programs.

Parents, educators and academics at CELC are saying a resounding NO to Schedule 2.



COMMITMENT 3: UPDATE STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS TO SUPPORT WORKFORCE RETENTION

Compass Early Learning and Care supports strategies to recruit and retain early childhood educators. The main barriers to this are poor wages and working conditions and lack of opportunities to get an ECE diploma. At CELC we have many educators in the apprenticeship program. There is a long waiting list and some educators wait over three years to begin their courses. We recommend that the provincial government improve access to the apprenticeship program and explore ways for colleges to increase access for part-time students. In addition, we recommend that the provincial government increase the Wage Enhancement Grants to \$5 per hour with a cap that matches the average highest wage for Designated Early Childhood Educators (DECE's) in the school system and municipal child care workers.

Compass Early Learning and Care does not support watering down qualifications for staff. We do not support redefining qualified staff to include child and youth care, recreation and leisure, or teacher qualifications.

Flexibility already exists in practice to allow for these qualifications on an interim basis.

We do support the expansion of the practice of Prior Learning Assessments at colleges to recognize the skills and experience that these individuals bring to their positions.

Compass Early Learning and Care does not support the allowance of unqualified staff to replace a qualified staff for up to two weeks. This is not a good policy option for quality early learning and child care. Our profession has worked hard for professional recognition. It will mean nothing if the requirements to have an ECE are diminished. As Early Childhood Educators, we embed HDLH into our daily practice. This is an ECE practice that is reinforced through education and discipline. We value other disciplines into our organization as part of a wholistic view of the child. To this end, when we find someone with the disposition who does not have their ECE, we make it mandatory as a condition of employment that they work towards their RECE designation. Watering down the qualification will not make our field more desirable, but access to education to obtain their ECE, and decent wages and working conditions will. For this reason, we are recommending that the Ministry of Education increase the wage enhancement to \$5 per hour for staff and \$40 per day for providers and to increase the cap to the average of the top DECE rate in the province.



COMMITMENT 4: CLARIFY REQUIREMENTS FOR INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

CELC supports the clarification of guidelines related to Special Needs Resourcing to reflect the best practices across the province. Hours of time spent on reports that need to be signed by multiple partners does not ensure a quality experience for families or children.

WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING:

- Benchmarks for inclusion of children with special needs that identify the strategies within the classroom to support the growth, development and social emotional wellbeing of identified children
- Integration of the infant development program and the special needs resource programs
- Identifying funding for enhanced staffing as a major component of a special needs strategy





COMMITMENT 5: SUPPORT INDIGENOUS-LED AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING

CELC supports an enhanced strategy for Indigenous-led and culturally responsive programming. At CELC, we have begun to think about, and include indigenous teachings into our orientation process and professional learning plans. Understanding our role as citizens in Truth and Reconciliation will create a more equitable society with a deep understanding of how colonialism has affected the livelihood and wellbeing of Indigenous people. We recommend that the concepts in the BC Early Learning Framework be adopted by Ontario to further this principle.



COMMITMENT 6: REDUCE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN AND ADDRESS ISSUES AND GAPS

CELC supports the reduction of administrative burden and red tape. Further to the measures outlined in the document, CELC recommends that the Ministry of Education review requirements for Director's approval, so that once an individual has Director's approval, that approval can be transferred to another program. Currently, another application for approval would need to be completed. Also, when supervisors return from a leave, they should not be required to be approved again.

Recommendations & Next Steps



Based on the above information compiled through consultations, research and reflection, we recommend that the Ministry of Education, through the Child Care and Early Years Act:

1. Build a system of early learning and care based on sound research, best practices, community need.

All proposed changes come from the premise of not watering down ratios, group sizes and age groups. As stated previously, recommendations vary as to the ratios for infants. However, the proposed recommendations far exceed those of most countries including the United States, not known for its exemplary child care. Compass Early Learning and Care has hundreds of children on our waiting lists for child care and we partner with the Ministry of Education to make accommodations whenever the guidelines in the CCEYA do not match the needs of the community. For instance, in rural areas, we have been grateful to work with our Ministry of Education Program Advisor to develop licensing groupings (such as family groupings) that work for families in these communities.

2 Support and grow the number of ECEs in Ontario to meet the need.

We do not support watering down qualifications as proposed. Provide more resources to increase wages, improve working conditions, and expand educational opportunities for those wanting to get their ECE diploma.

3. Invest in more spaces.

Meet the growing demand for high quality, licensed programming by investing in more child care spaces rather than lowering ratios that put children and staff wellbeing in jeopardy.





4. Set standards for all home child care to become licensed.

Develop a graduated system of licensing that can begin with a registry with the pathway to becoming a licensed provider through a system of dignity, mutual respect and accountability. Survey reports from Northumberland County and from the Coalition of Independent Child Care Providers of Ontario cite that independent providers are reluctant to join licensed child care agencies because they fear losing their independence and lower income potential due to agency administrative fees. In recent years the income of licensed home child care has increased with wage enhancement grants and base funding. Additional funding is required to meet the growing number of providers joining child care agencies. Support is needed for child care agencies and independent providers to create structures of transparency together, creating common goals and values that guide their work. Based on brain research that tells us

that we learn far more when we feel safe, respected and valued for our contribution, independent child care providers and agencies can work together to support a strong and healthy child care system for Ontario families. Creating another system to which the independent providers would belong will further breach this relationship and undermine the work to create more licensed spaces.

5. Establish round tables with diverse perspectives to find alternatives

Find alternatives that support families and children and will develop a system of early learning and care that is accessible, affordable and seen around the world as a standard of care that is to be aspired to. We recommend that the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care be invited to this table to represent the child care agencies and advocacy groups in this province.

COMPASS

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE



Parents as Partners

Families know their children best and we believe their contributions are essential to their child's learning and development.

Expression

We create a safe environment where the voices of children, educators and families are valued. We welcome all perspectives as an important part of building relationships and creating quality early learning.

Wellbeing

We offer joyful days of learning and laughter and time to discover and experience the world. Our nutritious meals are an important part of creating a healthy lifestyle.

Environments

Our playrooms are designed to engage children's natural desire to explore and discover the world around them. We hold a deep respect for our environment, offering children many opportunities to connect with nature.

Community

We promote and value a sense of personal integrity, social responsibility and respect for ourselves and others. We practice the principles of democracy and social justice in our organization and communities.

Leadership

As dedicated leaders, we are committed to advocating for the highest quality of care in our community and across the province.

Life-Long Learners

Growing and learning together is a lifelong journey that happens every moment of every day. We provide time and resources so that each child can benefit from the latest research and best practice in early learning.

Together we discover the joy of learning.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Sheila Olan-MacLean, CEO
Compass Early Learning & Care
(705) 927 7336
solan@compasselc.com

COMPASS EARLY LEARNING & CARE
553 BONACCORD ST.
PETERBOROUGH, ON K9H 0K2