

June 14, 2021

Provincial and territorial governments are moving forward to design their plans for expanding early learning and child care that they will propose for upcoming bilateral discussions. The recent [weekly e-Newsletter](#) from Atkinson Centre points to the limitations of expanding non-profit child care and points to the value of public education's infrastructure for early childhood education for preschool children.

Regards,



Hon. Margaret Norrie McCain

**Atkinson Centre Weekly e-Newsletter**  
**June 10, 2021**  
**The hidden fragility of child care**

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“Opening a new ELCC facility is a challenging endeavour. Not-for-profit societies require members of the public to volunteer their time to serve on the board of the society. Such board positions are not easily filled as the members of the public with interest and knowledge to serve in this capacity are often overtaxed by serving on numerous boards. Given this, societies often struggle to fill their board seats or address the high turnover of board members,” reads the bilateral agreement discussing plans to develop early learning and child care facilities.

The agreement goes on to identify the challenges for community boards overseeing construction, recruiting staff and then managing the operations of a what is essentially a small business. “Operational difficulties often result in facilities opening, just to close in a few years resulting in inconsistent services for many communities.”

Similar challenges are cited in almost every bilateral agreement; testimony to how ludicrous it is to expect volunteers to create an essential service. The weakness of the non-profit sector leads some Premiers to herald the private sector to meet child care needs. A study of B.C. child care showed over a third of all centres closed within four years of opening, with for-profit facilities faltering at an even greater rate than those operated by non-profit agencies. The pandemic has acted as an accelerant as centres shut without plans to reopen.

This is why some provinces and territories are turning to their school systems to meet need. Contrary to critics, mandating schools to accommodate younger children is not more expensive than subsidizing child care. Space in schools can often be repurposed for less cost than a new child care build. Development and administrative costs, as well as professional supports can be integrated into the infrastructure of schools rather than creating new systems in the private sector.

Québec is an established case in point. It subsidizes child care at an average of \$10,980 per space annually, in addition to charging parents \$8.35 a day. Schools receive \$8,551 annually per child. No parent fees are levied for the school day. Parents requiring extended hours pay \$8.50 a day. Québec schools don't face the same trouble recruiting and keeping staff as found in the child care sector. Parents appreciate their school's early learning programs; where available, 98 percent of children participate. There are many examples from both small and large jurisdictions demonstrating the ability of schools to scale up quickly to include younger children. Even during the height of the pandemic Québec added almost 1,000 new PreK classrooms.

The rationales for federal investment in early learning and care are many. Families need help. Children need the stimulation of other children after months and months of isolation. Economic recovery depends on mothers returning to work. Deciding on whether to invest substantial new public dollars patching up a fragile sector with a 1-in-3 failure rate or to grow one with a proven track record for stability and public trust, shouldn't be a difficult choice.