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## Report 2025-004

**Report Title:** Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Expansion Plan  
December 2024 Update

**Committee Name:** Social Services

**Committee Meeting Date:** January 8, 2025

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**Approved by:** Jennifer Moore, CAO

**Council Meeting Date:** January 22, 2025

**Strategic Plan Priorities:**  Innovate for Service Excellence  
 Ignite Economic Opportunity  
 Foster a Thriving Community  
 Propel Sustainable Growth  
 Champion a Vibrant Future

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### Information Report

**That** the Social Services Committee receive Report 2025-004 'Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Expansion Plan Update' for information; and

**Further That** the Committee recommend that County Council receive this report for information."

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## Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress of Northumberland County's Access and Inclusion Direct Growth Strategy Expansion Plan's projects.

## Background

Ontario's vision for the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system is for more families in Ontario to have access to high quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive early learning and child care no matter where they live. Under the CWELCC agreement with the Government of Canada, Ontario is supporting the creation of 86,000 newly funded licensed child care spaces by December 2026.

Under the Access and Inclusion Framework, the Ministry of Education (MEDU) developed a model to allocate funding for new spaces for children aged 0-5 with a focus on improving equity of access by working toward a common provincial access ratio of 37%.

As per MEDU direction, Northumberland's Directed Growth Plan identified priority neighbourhoods for targeted licensed child care expansion. The plan was based on available data and incorporates such factors as existing child care capacity, demographics, socio-economic indicators, official language minorities, and capacity for growth. The rankings for each factor were combined to determine where to prioritize new child care spaces. As per the Directed Growth Plan, the neighbourhood rankings for Northumberland County, from highest to lowest priority, are:

- Cobourg
- Trent Hills
- Port Hope
- Brighton
- Alnwick/Haldimand
- Cramahe
- Hamilton

Northumberland County's current allocation is 404 new CWELCC supported spaces (59 school based and 345 community based).

While Northumberland County recognizes that all of our communities have unique needs and demands relating to child care, this expansion program is meant to prioritize spaces to neighbourhoods that have been traditionally underserved and/or have high populations of Ministry identified groups. However, all opportunities will be reviewed to consider all options that best serve our communities while being economically feasible. The creation of centre-based spaces is subject to the availability of existing buildings within the priority areas that meet the requirements of a licensed child care program. Details relating to the building requirements for licensed child care centres can be found in the *Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA)* and are subject to the approval of licensing, municipal by-laws, public health requirements as well as building and fire codes. While the focus is on the priority neighbourhoods, it is understood that some areas will have more opportunity to grow within Northumberland's allocated 404 CWELCC funded spaces. Northumberland's Directed Growth Plan further indicates that operators with active service agreements with the County will receive first consideration for expansion.

This report updates the information provided to Council in *Report 2024-134 Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Expansion Plan Update*.

## Ministry Impacts to the Implementation of the Directed Growth Expansion

Frequent changes to Ministry guidelines and updates to allocated funding make it difficult to plan and adhere to project needs. Initial decisions for all expansion projects are based on point-in-time guidelines and available funding. While allocated funds for expansion projects are initially considered to be fair and equitable per space, it is often the case that some projects require additional funding to be secured from other sources to address unforeseen challenges. As such, the funding allocated for expansion projects can be updated multiple times based on changing project needs and MEDU funding.

## Completed, In Progress and Under Consideration Expansion Overview

### Completed Projects

Table 1.

Completed CWELCC Expansion Spaces **					
Year	Spaces	License Setting	Municipality	Project Name	Operator
2023	10	School-based	Brighton	Brighton Public School	Brighton Children's Centre
2024	70	Community	Port Hope	Riverside (Ruth Clarke)	Ganarska Child Care Centre
	47	Community	Trent Hills	Warkworth	YMCA
	15	Community *	Cobourg	NCIS	YMCA
2025	35	Community	Port Hope	Officelinx	Kinderlinx
Total	177				

\* In NCIS but not school board led  
 \*\* Does not include licensed home child care expansion which is under Ministry review.

### Officelinx – Kinderlinx Child Care Centre

Kinderlinx Child Care Centre was licensed on April 20, 2023. At that time, the operator did not move forward to be part of the CWELCC program. With the Ministry implementing a new CWELCC funding model for children 0 to 5 for licensed child care and recognizing the proposed changes would have a negative financial impact for families and educators of Kinderlinx, the operator decided to move forward with an application to join the CWELCC program. Northumberland County's EY Team and Officelinx/Kinderlinx worked together during 2024 to successfully enroll Kinderlinx into Northumberland's CWELCC program effective January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. As part of the CWELCC program, families and educators will benefit from financial support, such as wage compensation support, capped fees and families having the ability to apply for fee subsidy. As this site was operational prior to enrolment in CWELCC, Start Up funding was not needed. The 35 spaces are now CWELCC funded, therefore they count towards Northumberland's growth target of 404 new CWELCC funded spaces.

### Projects In progress and Under Construction

Table 2.

Approved CWELCC Expansion Spaces In Progress					
Year	Spaces	License Setting	Municipality	Project Name	Operator
2025	49	Community	Port Hope	Canton Hub	YMCA
2026	49	School-based	Cobourg	Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir	To be determined

## **Canton – YMCA Operator**

The final quote for Canton was received on December 9, 2024. The YMCA (operator), the Municipality of Port Hope, and Northumberland County Early Years Team deemed the project as feasible after confirming financial contributions from all parties. This project is currently moving forward. The funds for this project had to be committed by the County by December 31, 2024, to secure 2024 Ministry Start-Up Grant funding.

## **Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir**

The Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir was approved to build a new school in Cobourg with a plan to open in 2026 that will include 49 CWELCC child care spaces for children infant to preschool.

## **Consultations**

The Early Years Team and the Early Years Financial Analyst continue to work closely with Northumberland's current early learning and child care partners on implementing the Directed Growth Plan. This is done through ongoing community consultations, targeted focus groups, and one-on-one discussions. The Early Years Team has ongoing discussions with the Director of Health and Human Services and the CAO. The Team is also seeking guidance with members of the Planning and Economic Development Team, Public Works Team, and Legal Counsel regarding renovation, construction, and lease negotiations. The Early Years Team and Early Years Partners continue to engage member municipalities, public agencies, and private companies regarding space and funding supports.

## **Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations**

Early Years Services are governed by the *Early Years and Child Care Act*.

## **Discussion / Options**

The goal of Northumberland's CWELCC Directed Growth Plan is to open 404 spaces by the end of 2026. Priority neighbourhoods will have first consideration, although all areas that have an available space that may be suitable for child care will be investigated.

Expressions of interest for enrollment in CWELCC Expansion are being accepted and reviewed on an ongoing basis. The Early Years Team is committed to fulfilling the geodemographics of the Directed Growth Plan by spreading the allocated spaces across all priority areas in Northumberland County. A limiting factor for approving CWELCC Expansion applications is uncertainty in how MEDU considers LHCC contributions to Northumberland County's CWELCC Expansion target. The Early Years Team is currently seeking Ministry clarification on this issue and remains cautious in approving CWELCC Expansion beyond the current projects.

There are limited staff resources for supporting the oversight of the expansion projects. County staff involved with planning and executing these projects are assuming unsustainable increases in workload. This is further impacted by the continual changes to administration funding that are often one-time or time restrictive. With restrictive administrative funding it is difficult to hire and train skilled staff. SSMs have requested that MEDU consider providing regular ongoing funding to support the implementation and ongoing management of the CWELCC program to sustain growth in the sector.

## Financial Impact

Table 3.

Project	Expected Spaces	October 2024				December 2024			
		Total Budget	Third-Party Funding	Northumberland Budget	Northumberland Cost per Unit	Total Budget **	Third-Party Funding ***	Northumberland Budget	Northumberland Cost per Unit
Riverside (Ruth Clarke)	70	\$710,000	\$30,000	\$680,000	\$9,714	\$792,000	\$72,000	\$720,000	\$10,286
Canton Hub	49	\$772,343 *	\$100,000	\$672,343	\$13,721	\$1,089,444	\$279,646	\$809,798	\$16,526
Warkworth	47	\$722,188	\$249,188	\$473,000	\$10,064	\$860,934	\$144,724	\$716,209	\$15,238
NCIS	15	\$223,907	\$0	\$223,907	\$14,927	\$223,907	\$0	\$223,907	\$14,927
Total	181	\$2,428,438	\$379,188	\$2,049,250		\$2,924,285	\$454,370	\$2,469,915	

\* Quote does not include exterior work, septic system, or contingency

\*\* Budgets updated to current estimates as of December 2024

\*\*\* Third party funding to be confirmed upon project completion

Table 3 highlights the total budgets, budgets for Northumberland County Ministry funding, and the estimated costs per unit attributed to the latter.

Riverside (Ruth Clarke), Warkworth and NCIS sites have had ministry inspections completed with no non-compliance items identified and the operators are anticipating licensing from the Ministry prior to the end of 2024. Canton Hub is proceeding to the renovation stage and is planned to be completed in 2025.

As identified in previous reports to Council, the allocated Start Up funding has consistently been insufficient to support the renovation of spaces to the standard required to operate a licensed child care. As a result, funding allocations need to be consistently reevaluated relative to the Ministry space targets that the County is attempting to achieve. The MEDU is aware and has communicated that Start Up funding was never meant to cover the full cost of renovating all allocated spaces.

The flexibility that the County had prior to 2025 within certain funding pockets to support expansion projects has been restricted with the new funding model. Therefore, future expansion projects may need to access funds from carryover funding and/or reserve funding. Wherever possible, the plan will be for the County to maintain consistency of funding between projects to support all expansion projects across the County.

### **Member Municipality Impacts**

Continue to seek opportunities to collaborate with member municipalities (space, funding support, etc.) to expand CWELCC allocated licensed child care spaces.

### **Conclusion / Outcomes**

This report is provided for information purposes.

### **Attachments**

N/A