

Child care and early learning e-newsletter

December 2, 2021

Welcome to The Regional Municipality of Durham's Child Care and Early Learning updates e-newsletter. These e-newsletters provide licensed child care operators in Durham Region with updated information related to child care.

This edition includes the following topics:

Funding Updates

General Operating Program Funding – POS Operators Only

Funding Applications for COVID-19 Related Absences and Mandated Closures – POS Operators Only

Clarifications on Cohorting

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

Funding Updates

For 2021, the Ministry of Education has allowed municipalities to use some flexibility within our current budget to maximize support provided to child care operators. There has been no additional funding provided by the province for child care services in 2021.

As our Division wraps up spending and meeting our mandated obligations, we have also been able to reduce the pressure on child care operators and parents due to the COVID-19 absence policies. Supporting children, families, and our child care partners is our priority as we move forward with additional funding supports for COVID-19 related absences and mandated program closures. These additional funding supports were made available to operators with a Purchase of Service Agreement (POS). See below for more information.

Questions related to funding allocations or contractual obligations can be directed to Julie Gaskin, Manager, Early Learning at Julie.gaskin@durham.ca.

Thank you for the work you do, providing quality child care for children and families in Durham Region.

General Operating Program Funding – POS Operators Only

The annual GOP survey has been uploaded to the Operator Portal.

The data collection period is for the week of November 15, 2021.

Mark the date on **your** calendar to be sure submissions occur on time. **Surveys due:**

December 3, 2021, for **Single-Site** operators

December 8, 2021, for **Multi-site** operators

All GOP data collected informs our planning for the upcoming year and ensures your centre is adequately supported.

Funding Applications for COVID-19 Related Absences and Mandated Closures – POS Operators Only

Funding applications for COVID-19 related absences and closures have been processed.

COVID-19 Related Absences

For Absenteeism Applications, we are pleased to share that we are able to approve funding to operators based on the submitted Absenteeism Applications – specifically, the amounts requested to be reimbursed to parents. We have included an allocation for the months of November and December; the amount was estimated using the applications submitted and is to reimburse COVID-19 related absences. Additionally, an allocation of 10 per cent administration funding for operators to offset the expense of administering refunds/credits to parents is included.

For the period of September 1, 2021, to December 31, 2021 fees must not be charged (or credit/refunds provided) for children who are absent due to COVID-19 related reasons.

We encourage operators to work with families to provide refunds/credits for COVID-19 related absences that occurred between April 1, 2021, and August 31, 2021.

Operators are required to use absenteeism funding to reimburse or credit any family who was charged fees during a COVID-19 related absence(s) using the absenteeism funding. Refunds/credits must be processed within 60 days of receiving the funds from the Region.

Closures due to COVID-19

Applications for closures include the closures of child care rooms, centres, or provider homes that were ordered closed or supported to close by Durham Region Public Health and closures of programs due to Ministry of Education Mandate (school-age program closures).

For Closure Applications, we are pleased to share that we are able to approve funding to offset the costs incurred during closure where no fees were charged.

Payments to operators

Payments to operators who submitted applications will be made within the next week, with organizational 2021 GOP Schedules to follow. Schedules will outline a summary of allocations, including Absenteeism Applications, Closure Applications, Safe Restart Funding, and core GOP allocations.

Clarification on Cohorts – All Operators

The Children's Services Division continues to work with the Ministry of Education to find ways to support the child care community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The following guidance was communicated from the Ministry of Education regarding cohorts and assigning children to different groups throughout the day to accommodate staffing needs:

“Licensees of child care centres are required to ensure that groups maintain a minimum physical distance from one another in accordance with the requirements set out in the updated Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak document; however, the regulation does not prohibit licensees from assigning children to different groups throughout the day to better accommodate staffing needs.

Child care centres must be able to demonstrate that children who are together for any part of the day are a single group and not two separate groups in the same space. Some possible ways of demonstrating this could be through a combined attendance sheet and consistent staffing and group assignments (wherever possible).

For example, two toddler children (out of a group of 10) consistently arrive prior to 8:00am. The remaining toddler children arrive after 8am. The licensee could assign the two toddlers who arrive early to the preschool group until 8am (provided mixed age approval has been granted and ratios/max group size allow for the children to be in the group). The toddler education could then start at 8am when most of the children arrive and those two toddlers would then be assigned to the toddler group for the rest of the day.”

Cohort guidance from Durham Region Public Health

We have consulted with Durham Region's Health Department regarding the use of this approach. The Health Department has set out some guidance on how to do this as safely as possible if your centre participates in this process. Participating child care centres must maintain clear documentation that demonstrates the groups or cohorts as they may exist during different parts of the day (e.g., accurate attendance records, including the time each child spent in the group). Clear documentation is important to support efficient and fast contact tracing, if necessary. Additionally, maintaining strict infection prevention and control measures (IPAC) is critical to reducing the potential spread of COVID-19, particularly if children are assigned to more than one group throughout the day.

As a general reminder, the following IPAC measures support reducing the spread of COVID-19 in the centre:

- Daily screening is completed prior to children/staff/anyone entering the centre.
- Maintain attendance records as outlined in the Ministry's Guidance.
- If children are grade 1 or older, they must wear face coverings. Children in Kindergarten are encouraged to wear face coverings, if tolerable. Face coverings are not recommended for children age 2 or younger. Follow Ministry's Guidance for masking requirements for children and staff when indoors and outdoors, and during physical activities.
- Practice proper respiratory etiquette.
- Focus on when, and how to perform hand hygiene.
- Frequent cleaning and disinfection (e.g., frequently touched surfaces, washrooms, toys/materials/equipment).
- Keep daily logs should we need to do any contact tracing.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

EarlyON Child and Family Centres have recommenced indoor programming at a reduced rate due to COVID-19 restrictions. Indoor capacity for the EarlyON groups will increase as restrictions are lifted. Anyone over the age of 12 who attends indoor programming must be fully vaccinated. EarlyON continues to provide virtual and outdoor classes which all participants are able to access. We have a new online registration process to make it easier for parents/caregivers to find and register for programs. To find out more about EarlyON or to register for any of the programs, please visit www.durham.ca/EarlyON