

To: Licensed Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centre Service Providers

From: Darlene Edgar, RECE. Director

Date: August 21, 2020

Re: Information to support reopening of the licensed child care and early years system

On July 30, 2020 the Ministry of Education (MEDU) announced that as of September 1, 2020, child care centres may return to maximum group sizes as set out under the *Child and Early Years Act, 2014* Care (CCEYA) (i.e. licensed age groups prior to the COVID-19 outbreak). As well, EarlyON Centres and before and after school programs may also re-open beginning September 1, 2020, with all programs adhering to strict health and safety measures in order to operate.

The announcement was followed by the release, on August 13, 2020, of three (3) MEDU operational documents: a revised version of the Child Care Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak, as well as operational guidance for the re-opening of EarlyON Child and Family Centres, and the 2020-21 Before and After School Kindergarten to Grade 6 Policies and Guidelines. The resource documents have been developed to reflect the updated health and safety measures to be in place for the fall, as well as specific guidance related to each program.

The following provides a brief update to help support the reopening of the licensed child care and early years system.

Attestation and COVID related policies

As per MEDU direction, licensed child care service providers are required to notify the MEDU of the intended opening date through an Attestation Form, at least two (2) days prior to the intended reopening date. As well, licensed child care service providers are required to submit any COVID-19 related policies and protocols, setting out enhanced health and safety protocols, to Niagara Region Children's Services for review. The submission of policies and protocols to Niagara Region Children's Services does not preclude licensed child care centres from reopening upon Ministry direction.

With the recent release of the revised version of the Child Care Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak, licensed child care service providers need not resubmit revised policies and protocols to Niagara Region Children's Services. For those licensed child care service providers still planning for the reopening of a centre(s) in the coming weeks, please note the following process:

1. A minimum of two (2) days prior to your anticipated date of reopening, complete and submit the Attestation Form to the MEDU and Niagara Region Children's Services (copy jackie.galloway@niagararegion.ca).
2. On the same day that the Attestation Form is submitted to the MEDU and Niagara Region Children's Services, submit any policies and protocols developed setting out

enhanced health and safety protocols in response to COVID 19 to Sharon Milne at sharon.milne@niagararegion.ca.

3. Over the course of weeks, Niagara Region Children's Services staff will review your policies and protocols, and if necessary, may contact you for additional information or suggested changes etc.

Should you have any families in receipt of child care fee subsidy, you must ensure the family has a new approval from the Fee Subsidy Caseworker assigned to the client, prior to the family returning to child care.

Lastly, please refer to the guidance policy Priority Placement of Children During COVID-19. Licensed child care service providers are asked to consider the placement of children of priority families noted in the guidance document, in alignment with provincial direction. It is anticipated, there will be a limited number of child care spaces available to families and support should be given to priority families where ever possible.

Before and After school programs

Niagara Region Children's Services is working with local school boards to conduct a second round of viability testing to determine the need and viability of before and after school care come September. While viability testing had been completed earlier this year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the return to school is not mandatory, and parents/guardians have the option for children to attend in-person come September, or through online learning. As such, the demand and viability for before and after school programs in schools needs to be reassessed.

Parents have been directed to register/update their information on the OneHSN Child Care Registry Portal, as to their child care needs in September 2020. Having the most current data possible will inform discussions regarding viable school locations for before and after school care, and any necessary planning. Please note, that licensed child care service providers choosing to operate before and after school are not mandated to be operational for September 8, 2020. For licensed child care service providers located within a school, Niagara Region Children's Services recommends deferring the start of before and after school care until September 14, 2020. The additional time would allow school boards to assess their reopening plans prior to adding the additional complexity of before and after school programs.

For licensed child care service providers who do not operate within a school, Niagara Region Children's Services would recommend beginning the program on the first day of school. However, Niagara Region Children's Services is mindful that this is the operational decision of the licensed child care service provider, and that operations may require more planning, and therefore would open sometime after September 8, 2020.

Niagara Region Children's Services will be hosting a conference call in early September (date to be determined) to discuss before and after school. Details for the conference call are forthcoming. Please submit any questions regarding the provision of before and after school care to Sarah.glenney@niagararegion.ca . Any health and safety related question should be directed to Niagara Region Public Health, and any questions related to licensing should be directed to your MEDU Program Advisor.

14 Days' Notice To Families

As per the MEDU announcement on July 30, 2020, families whose children attended a licensed child care centre immediately before the emergency was declared, must be given

at least 14 days' notice to accept a placement available on or after September 1, 2020. Licensed child care service providers can begin charging fees once a space has been accepted by a family. If a parent chooses not to accept a space, the licensed child care service provider will be permitted to require fees to hold the space or will be able to offer the space to another family. Please be advised that Niagara Region Children's Services will not cover the cost to hold a space for subsidized families.

Based on the MEDU directive, if licensed child care service providers reach out to those families to provide the notification about returning on September 1, 2020, service providers can determine next steps for a licensed child care space. After September 1, 2020, the parent fee revenue becomes the source of income for all spaces that are occupied.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

On July 30, 2020, the MEDU announced EarlyON Child and Family Centres can reopen as of September 1, 2020. This announcement was followed by the release of operational guidance for the re-opening of EarlyON Child and Family Centres on August 13, 2020.

While EarlyON Child and Family Centres can reopen as of September 1, 2020, centres across Niagara will not be reopening until the development of a local plan, in alignment with the operational guidance and direction from Niagara Region Public Health, to ensure the health and safety of staff, children and their families. Niagara Region Children's Services will be hosting a conference call with EarlyON service providers (date to be determined) to discuss in-person service provision, as well as the continued provision of virtual services to support families remotely.

Federal Safe Restart Funding

On August 14, 2020, the MEDU announced the Federal Safe Restart Funding (SRF) as part of the provincial September Reopening Plan. The Federal SRF supports a shared commitment by the Ontario and Federal governments to ensure a safe, sufficient and adequate supply of child care is available to support the gradual return to work of parents as the economy reopens.

The MEDU has provided the Niagara Region Children's Services with Federal SRF funding to issue to licensed child care centres and EarlyON Child and Family Centres, by December 31, 2020. These funds are to be used for:

- Additional personal protective equipment (PPE, such as gloves, gowns, etc.),
- Supplies for enhanced cleaning,
- Additional staff needed to meet enhanced health and safety requirements,
- Support for short term vacancies as operators transition to return to full capacity, and
- Minor capital required in accordance with MEDU reopening operational guidance or local public health requirements.

Niagara Region Children's Services will determine the requirements and approval of this funding through continued expense reporting, September to December 2020, with service providers. Further information will follow in the next funding update and reminder for the August COVID-19 expense reports due by September 14, 2020.

Respectfully,

