

Early Learning and Child Care Child Care Centre Operations Policy Framework

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Preface

Overview

The Ministry of Education supports regulated child care facilities with funding for core operating expenses, such as adequate supervision of children and health and safety as outlined in [The Child Care Regulations, 2015](#).

The policy framework provides operational guidance to regulated and funded child care facilities to support effective and efficient management, financial sustainability, and compliance within the funding parameters of the \$10 a day child care program.

This framework clarifies:

- what services are considered core and supported by government funding;
- what services may be offered as enhanced or optional;
- what fees may or may not be charged under existing legislation; and,
- administrative and operational practices that support efficiency and sustainability.

The Role of the Child Care Centre Licensee

Child care centre licensees, whether sole proprietor or Board of Directors, hold primary responsibility for the governance and operation of a child care centre. This includes providing strategic direction, exercising financial oversight, and making operational decisions necessary to ensure the organization is financially sustainable, compliant with legislation, and responsive to the needs of children, families and staff.

The Government of Saskatchewan's [Early Learning and Child Care: Child Care Centre Board of Directors Guiding Document](#) outlines the roles and responsibilities of centre operators, including fiduciary responsibilities, policy development, financial accountability, risk management, and oversight of the child care operations.

The Role of the Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education's role is to administer and enforce applicable child care legislation, regulations, and funding agreements, and to provide policy direction and oversight to support regulated child care centres. The ministry does not direct or manage the day-to-day operations of a centre, which remains the responsibility of the Board of Directors and its management team.

Child Care Centre Revenue Streams

Regulated child care centres rely on multiple revenue streams to support daily operations and long-term sustainability. Understanding the source, purpose, and conditions attached to each revenue stream is essential for accurate budgeting, financial planning, and compliance with legislation and funding agreements. Facilities should clearly distinguish between these revenue sources and manage them accordingly.

Parent Fees

Parent fees are charged directly to families for child care services. Parent fees provide predictable revenue and must be applied in accordance with legislation and ministry policy.

Parent fees may also include administrative fees as well as optional fees for enhanced services. These optional fees must be clearly communicated and are not mandatory.

Government Funding

Government funding includes core operating grants and other funding provided by the Ministry of Education under the *Canada–Saskatchewan Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement (Agreement)* and [The Child Care Regulations, 2015](#).

Government funding is intended to support the delivery of core child care services for eligible children and must be used for the purposes for which it is provided. Centres are responsible for ensuring that expenditures align with funding conditions that may apply and that financial records clearly demonstrate appropriate, responsible use of public funds.

Enhanced Optional Services

Enhanced optional services are services that are not part of the government funded core child care program. These services may include specialty programming, transportation, optional excursions, or extended hours.

Child Care Centre Operations Policy Framework

Part 1: Fees

Core Service Fee

A Core Service Fee is charged by regulated child care centres to fund the cost of delivering core child care services in accordance with legislative and funding requirements. For eligible children, the fee is set at \$10 a day or \$217.50 per month and is supplemented with additional government funding.

Core services include:

- supervision and care for up to 10 hours per day;
- staffing to meet required ratios;
- foundational programming (i.e., [Play and Exploration Early Learning Program Guide](#));
- meals and snacks;
- developmentally appropriate equipment and materials supplies; and,
- administration necessary for the operation of a child care centre.

Policy

Regulated child care centres participating in the \$10 a day child care funding must:

- charge no more than the regulated core service fee for children who attend 10 hours a day or fewer; and,
- deliver all legislated and funded core child care services within the core service fee of \$10 a day for all eligible children.

Enhanced Optional Services Fee

Enhanced Optional Services fees are charged when optional services are provided to families. These services are extra and are not funded through the Core Service Fee. They are offered at the discretion of the centre and must be clearly distinguishable from core services.

Enhanced optional services may include, but are not limited to:

- specialty programming (i.e. swimming or music lessons);
- transportation;
- excursions;
- personal items such as diapers, sunscreen, bug spray etc.;
- a reasonable rate for extended hours of care beyond 10 hours per day (within parameters identified in Appendix 1 Standard Hours of Care and Extended Hours Fee);
- enhanced nutrition options beyond regulatory requirements; and,
- offering additional services for which communities may have demonstrated a need for, such as before and after school programs.

Policy

Centres may charge fees for Enhanced Optional Services under the following circumstances:

- Families who opt out must be provided with a reasonable alternative that meets core child care requirements (e.g., receive the standard meal or snack instead of an enhanced option).
- Fees are described and outlined in the [Parent Handbook](#) provided to all families and in the service agreement.
- Fees are documented with receipts and follow accepted accounting standards.

Administrative Fees

Administrative Fees are associated with the administration and management of a child care centre. These fees are separate from the daily core service fee or enhanced optional service fee. Administrative Fees must be reasonable and directly related to administrative functions.

Administrative Fees can include but are not limited to registration or enrolment processing fees.

Policy

Centres may charge administrative fees provided that fees are:

- outlined clearly in written policies with appropriate notice;
- applied consistently;
- related directly to administrative functions;
- approved by the centre's board of directors;
- reflected in the [Parent Handbook](#) provided to all families;
- documented with receipts following accepted accounting standards; and,
- accounted for transparency in the centre's budget and financial statements.

Annual Fees

Annual fees may be charged by facilities that operate under a governance model requiring formal membership or board participation. These fees relate to governance participation rather than the provision of child care services, for example, Cooperative Membership Fees.

Policy

Annual or governance-related fees:

- must be clearly stated in governance bylaw documents; and,
- must be clearly disclosed to families in the [Parent Handbook](#).

Late Fees

Late fees, such as late pick up and late payments, are charged when children are picked up after operating hours as per the service agreement agreed upon by the parents or when scheduled payments are not made on time. Late-pick up fees are different than extended hours fees and are considered separately.

Policy

Facilities may charge late fees provided that fees are:

- clearly outlined in written policies;
- communicated in advance;
- included within the agreement for services; and,
- applied consistently.

Fees in Lieu of Volunteer Time and Fundraising

As applicable to each type of incorporated entity, facilities may offer opportunities for families to participate in activities such as fundraising or contributing time to support community-building initiatives. In certain cases, facilities may allow families to choose to pay a fee instead of participating.

Policy

Where a facility sets a volunteer and/or fundraising requirement, the following apply:

- Families may be required to either take part in identified volunteer or fundraising activities or pay a set fee if they choose not to or are unable to participate.
- Facilities must clearly explain the requirements at the time of enrolment, including what activities are available, expected timelines, and the amount of the fee(s) in lieu of volunteering or fundraising.
- If families choose to volunteer and/or fundraise, the facility must provide a clear plan outlining the activities, expected contributions (i.e., hours or tasks), and how participation will be recorded.
- Facilities must ensure there are sufficient volunteer and/or fundraising opportunities available throughout the year to reasonably allow families to meet participation expectations.
- A fee in lieu of volunteering or fundraising should reflect the expected level of participation (e.g., hours or fundraising targets).
- Facilities must clearly identify whether any fee in lieu of participation is applied per child or per family and apply this approach consistently.
- Facilities may offer flexible payment options, including installment payments, where a fee in lieu of participation is required.
- Any changes to volunteer and/or fundraising requirements must be communicated to families in advance, in accordance with timelines set out in the parent handbook, to allow families time to review and ask questions.
- The volunteering or fundraising requirement must be applied consistently.
- The fee must not affect a child's access to care or the quality of services provided.

Non-allowable Fees

Non-allowable Fees are fees that are prohibited as they undermine the \$10 a day child care federal provincial agreement provisions or are prohibited by provincial legislation

Policy

Facilities shall not charge fees for:

- core child care services;
- waitlist or application fees;
- inclusion or disability-related supports;
- facility infrastructure, capital, or maintenance costs;
- mandatory donations; and,
- routine program supplies or materials.

It is important that child care centres are upfront with families as to the fees they are charging and the parents'/guardians' obligations related to fee schedules, timing of payments etc. The included appendix provides a sample template that programs may wish to post in their facility and include in the parent handbook. This ensures transparency and clearly identifies expectations. These fees should also be captured with the agreement for services signed between the child care centre and the family.

Part 2: Child Care Centre Operational Efficiencies

Effective operational and administrative practices are necessary to support financial sustainability, continued compliance with legislation, and the ongoing delivery of affordable child care services.

Regulated child care centres must manage their operations within available funding and revenue by controlling expenses, aligning operations with funding, and identifying efficiencies within existing resources.

Programming

Programming involves the planning and delivery of daily learning experiences that support children's development and well-being in accordance with licensing requirements and early learning principles.

Policy

Facilities are expected to:

- deliver programming that is grounded in play and exploration as a primary approach to learning. Facilities can access play and exploration resources and supporting documents through the Ministry of Education's [Early Years Portal](#);
- use natural and recycled materials to support creativity and critical thinking while managing material costs responsibly; and,
- regularly seek input from frontline staff on programming practices that reduce waste and improve efficiency, such as conserving art supplies and identifying energy-saving practices within the facility.

Space Utilization

Space utilization is the effective use of child care spaces to ensure funded capacity is maximized.

Policy

Facilities are expected and encouraged to:

- ensure spaces are fully utilized;
- maintain enrolment alignment with funded capacity ; consider cost per child per day and staff to child ratio cost, and adjusting enrolment mix or staffing assignments when specific rooms or age groups operate at a deficit;
- manage vacancies; and,
- align operating hours with demonstrated demand.

Right-Sized Staffing

The alignment of staffing practices and resources with enrolment, attendance, and legislated ratios.

Policy

Facilities must always maintain compliance with legislated ratios and are encouraged to:

- adjust staffing levels as needed to prevent overstaffing. The [Budget Template](#) is a planning and monitoring tool that can support staffing and overall financial management;
- schedule staff based on attendance patterns, with higher coverage during peak times and reduced coverage during lower-attendance periods, while maintaining required ratios; and,

- use attendance information and available scheduling tools to stagger staff shifts to align shifts with full-time, part-time, and occasional care needs.

Menu Planning

Menu planning involves the provision of meals and snacks that meet nutritional requirements while managing food-related costs. To support this process, refer to the nutrition guidance outlined in the [Child Care Licensee’s Manual](#), including:

- [Appendix 4 – Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating](#);
- [Appendix 5.1 – Menu Planning Form](#);
- [Appendix 5.2 – Menu Requirements Backgrounder](#); and,
- [Appendix 5.3 – Nutrition in Child Care: Questions and Answers](#).

Policy

Facilities are encouraged to:

- review menu plans regularly, at minimum seasonally, to ensure alignment with the [Child Care Licensee Manual](#) and [Canada’s Food Guide](#);
- for newly opened centres, menu planning should be completed prior to opening to inform budgeting, purchasing, and staffing decisions;
- implement a rotating cycle menu (e.g., three- or four-week cycles) to simplify planning, support bulk purchasing, and improve consistency;
- identify cost-effective food options that meet nutritional standards such as beans, legumes etc.;
- update cycle menus periodically to reflect seasonal food availability and introduce variety while maintaining familiarity for children;
- take steps to reduce food waste through portion planning, menu consistency, and appropriate food storage practices;
- participate in bulk-buying cooperatives or joint purchasing arrangements with other child care facilities or school divisions, where available;
- explore partnerships with community organizations, particularly in rural or remote areas, to offset transportation or freight costs for food and supplies; and,
- consider, where operationally appropriate, meal and snack schedules (e.g., snack–lunch–snack) that meet nutritional requirements while reducing the need to provide additional meals, i.e., breakfast.

Centre Operation and Responsibilities – Fiscal Oversight

Fiscal responsibility means managing financial resources in a way that supports the ongoing operation and sustainability of a child care centre. Child care centre operators are responsible for financial oversight and decision-making and are expected to carry out their duties in accordance with the [Early Learning and Child Care: Child Care Centre Board of Directors Guiding Document](#).

Policy

Child care centre operators are expected to:

- maintain accurate and complete financial records;
- use public funding only for its intended purposes;
- monitor revenues and expenditures on a regular basis;

- prepare an operating budget when applying for or renewing a licence; demonstrating financial viability based on expected revenues and expenses;
- develop and review annual budgets that account for routine operating costs and foreseeable pressures such as repairs, staff replacements, and inflation;
- review financial information regularly to identify cost pressures and inform decisions related to optional services; and,
- comply with all reporting and audit requirements.

Helpful Links

[*The Child Care Act, 2014*](#)

[*The Child Care Regulations, 2015*](#)

[*Child Care Licensee Manual*](#)

[Early Learning Portal](#)

[Early Learning Resources](#)

For Additional Information:

Phone: 1-855-824-9419

Email: childcare@gov.sk.ca

Website: saskatchewan.ca

Appendix 1 Extended Hours Fees – Maximum Limits

The maximum amounts a child care centre can charge for care over 10 hours per day are shown in the table below. Centres can choose to charge *less* than these amounts, but not more.

Maximum Hourly Fee for Centres		
Centres in Regina, Saskatoon, or within approximately 25 kilometers from the downtown core of these two locations (e.g. Pilot Butte, White City/Emerald Park, Balgonie, Lumsden, Grand Coulee, Pense, Martensville, Warman, Dalmeny, Osler, Clavet), or the Northern Saskatchewan Administration District (e.g. La Ronge, Beauval, Cumberland House, Creighton).		
Space Type	Hourly Extended Fee Maximum	Total Extended Hourly Fee Maximum per Month
Infant	\$5.48 per hour	To a maximum of \$223.60 per month
Toddler	\$4.34 per hour	To a maximum of \$177.00 per month
Preschool	\$4.06 per hour	To a maximum of \$165.60 per month
Centres in Other Locations		
Space Type	Hourly Extended Fee Maximum	Total Extended Hourly Fee Maximum per Month
Infant	\$4.08 per hour	To a maximum of \$166.40 per month
Toddler	\$3.62 per hour	To a maximum of \$147.63 per month
Preschool	\$3.29 per hour	To a maximum of \$134.45 per month

The hourly extended hours fee maximums are set at seven per cent of the daily fee schedule limits for new centres. The total amount of hourly extended fees per month is capped at 20 per cent of the full-time fee limit for new centres.

Appendix 2 Child Care Centre Fees Template

This is a sample template that programs may wish to post in their facility and include in the parent handbook.

Facility Name: _____		
Effective Date: _____		
Fee Type	Amount	Notes
Parent Fee (per child)	\$ _____	Must align with provincial requirements (\$10/day where applicable)
Enhanced Optional Services - Families must choose to participate		
Service	Amount	Unit (per day/week/month/event)
Enhanced nutrition option	\$ _____	_____
Transportation	\$ _____	_____
Excursions/Field Trips	\$ _____	_____
Specialty Programming	\$ _____	_____
Extended Hours	\$ _____	_____
Administrative Fees		
Registration/Enrolment Fee	\$ _____	One time
Membership/Board Fee	\$ _____	Annual
Late Payment Fee	\$ _____	Per occurrence
Late Pick-Up Fee	\$ _____	Per minute/hour
Fee in lieu of Fundraising / Volunteer Participation	\$ _____	Per child/family