

# Child Care Backgrounder

## Prepared for the FISA Board, February 2026

---

### Federal–Provincial Child Care Agreements and Implications

In Budget 2021, the federal government announced a historic \$30 billion investment over five years to establish a Canada-wide early learning and child care system. The government was not shy to admit that the initiative was geared towards growing the economy by having more women enter the workforce. While it also mentioned giving children the best possible start in life, the economic rationale was, and continues to be, the primary driver.

BC quickly signed agreements securing \$3.6 billion in federal funding, with commitments to:

- Reduce parent fees to an average of \$10 per day by the end of the 2025–2026 fiscal year
- Create 30,000 new regulated child care spaces by 2025–2026
- Implement a provincial wage grid for Early Childhood Educators
- Expand Supported Child Development and Aboriginal Supported Child Development services

In March 2025, B.C. signed a renewed agreement that will provide an additional \$5.38 billion in funding between 2026 and 2031.

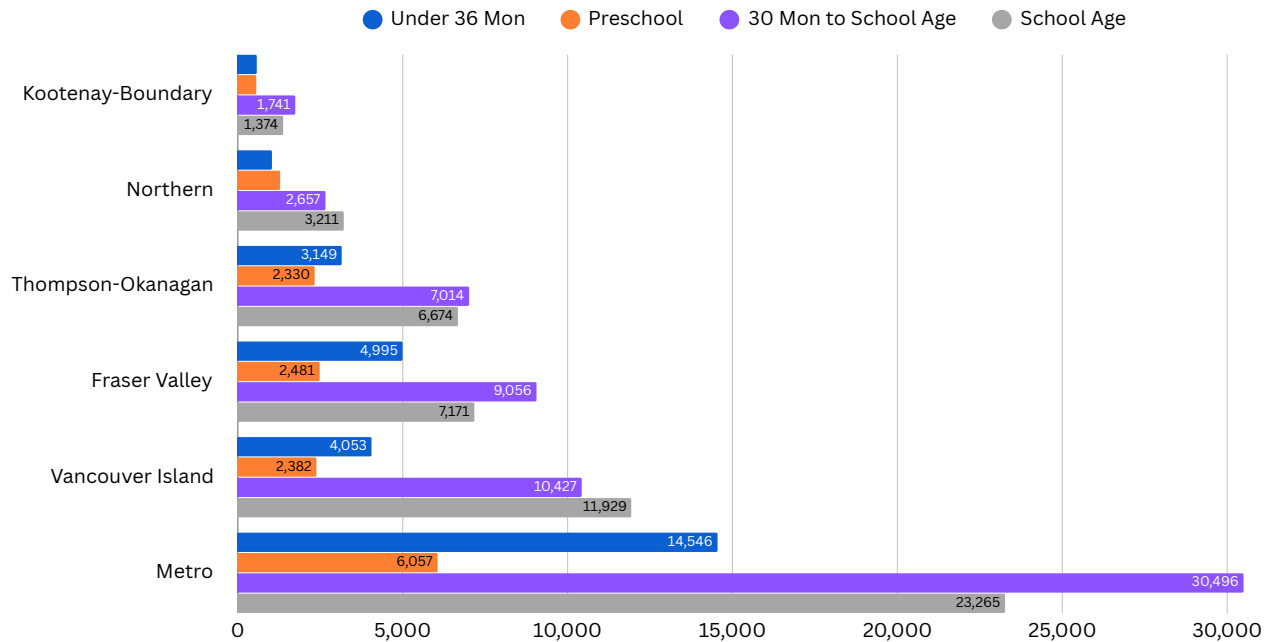
As part of broader system changes, Child Care was integrated into the Ministry of Education in spring 2022, aligning early learning and child care more closely with the K–12 education system. While MECC officials increasingly refer to their mandate as spanning 'from birth to graduation,' the licensing and oversight of child care facilities remains under the jurisdiction of regional health authorities.

---

### Child Care is Big Business

Child care is a significant economic sector involving substantial flows of money. Based on enrolment by care type and the average regional fees for each category, our calculations suggest that child care operators in BC generate roughly \$176 million in revenue each month. With continued federal and provincial momentum behind expansion and affordability, that number is likely to keep rising.

## Children Enrolled in Group Child Care - Dec. 2025



Region	increased child care enrolment since 2018
Kootenay-Boundary	89.50%
Northern	52.70%
Thompson-Okanagan	67.30%
Fraser Valley	80.80%
Vancouver Island	47.00%
Metro	50.60%

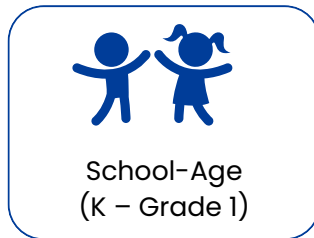
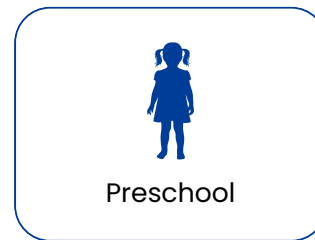
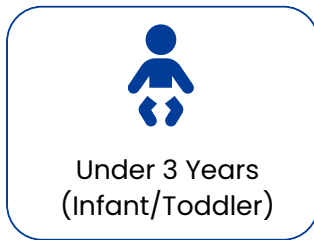
### Child Care Regulatory Framework:

The rules governing child care are complex, nuanced and strictly enforced.

### ECE Certification Requirements

- Infant Toddler Educator (ITE): ~1,300 hours of specialized training.
- Early Childhood Educator (ECE): ~ 900 hours of training.
- Early Childhood Educator Assistant (ECEA): completion of at least one ECE course.
- Responsible Adult: Must be 19+, clear a criminal record check, hold valid first aid, and possess 20 hours of child care-related training and relevant work experience.

## Child care licenses



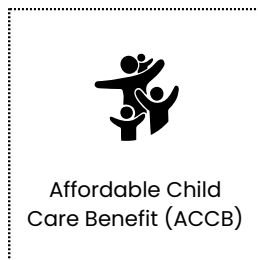
Staffing ratios and qualifications are mandated and rigorously monitored.

Category	Ages	Max Group Size	Child-to-Staff Ratio	Minimum Staff Qualifications
<b>Under 3 Years (Infant/Toddler)</b>	Birth to 36 months	12	1:4	1 Infant Toddler Educator (ITE)*
<b>2.5 Years to School Age</b>	30 months to Kindergarten	25	1:8, 2:16, 3:25	1 ECE (up to 8); 1 ECE + 1 ECEA (9–16); 1 ECE + 2 ECEAs (17–25)
<b>Preschool</b>	2.5 years to Kindergarten	20	1:10, 2:20	1 ECE (up to 10); 1 ECE + 1 ECEA (11–20)
<b>School-Age (K – Grade 1)</b>	Kindergarten & Grade 1	24	1:12	Responsible Adult
<b>School-Age (Grade 2+ )</b>	Grade 2 and older	30	1:15	Responsible Adult



## Child Care Funding

To support sustainable and affordable child care, the provincial government provides multiple funding streams.



### Affordable Child Care Benefit (ACCB)

Eligible families can apply for financial support to offset child care costs. Support amounts are based on factors such as household income (under \$111,000), family size, and type of care, with a maximum monthly amount of \$1,250 per family.



### Child Care Operating Funding (CCOF)

Child care providers can apply for support to cover day-to-day operating costs. Those receiving the CCOF face no restrictions on fees or hours of operation but cannot charge waitlist fees and must accept families receiving ACCB.

### Child Care Operating Funding (per child per day)

Category	4 Hours or Less	More than 4 Hours
Under 36 months	\$6.00	\$12.00
3 years to Kindergarten	\$2.74	\$5.48
Grade 1 to 12 years	\$1.40	\$2.80
Preschool	\$1.37	\$1.37



## Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI)

Providers can apply for funding to lower parent fees for all enrolled children, regardless of household income.

### Parent Fee Reduction Amounts (per child monthly)

Category	Funding
Infant or Toddler (0-36 months)	\$900
3 years to Kindergarten	\$545
Kindergarten	\$320
Grade 1 to Age 12	\$115
Preschool	\$95

### CCFRI Parent Fee Limits

To participate in the CCFRI, facilities must cap parent fees at or below the regional affordability benchmarks.

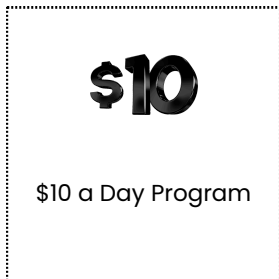
Region	0-18 Months	18-36 Months	3Y to K	K	Grade 1-12	Preschool
Fraser Valley	\$1,760	\$1,741	\$1,195	\$635	\$630	\$560
Metro	\$2,090	\$2,050	\$1,525	\$632	\$632	\$630
Vancouver Island	\$1,895	\$1,846	\$1,187	\$524	\$514	\$580
Northern	\$1,402	\$1,340	\$1,072	\$534	\$534	\$395
Thompson-Okanagan	\$1,591	\$1,589	\$1,096	\$571	\$567	\$551
Kootenay-Boundary	\$1,595	\$1,617	\$1,109	\$571	\$564	\$564

**Annual fee increases are capped at 3%, although exceptional circumstances may result in the allowance of a larger increase up to 10%. Rising costs of food, fuel, benefits, materials, expansion costs, or lost revenue from the removal of waitlist or optional fees are not deemed sufficient for an increase beyond the 3% cap.**



Effective April 2026, providers may only charge additional fees for extended hours after providing at least 9.5 hours of care during regular operations.

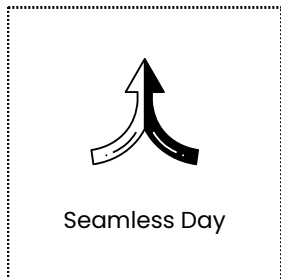
Administrative fees were frozen in 2022, and operators may not increase existing administrative fees or introduce new ones.



### **\$10 a Day Program**

First introduced in 2018 in B.C., child care facilities enrolled in the \$10 a Day program receive funding to offer families reduced-cost child care up to a maximum of \$200 per month for regular full-time care, regardless of family income. However, many providers say the funding model does not adequately cover their expenses, as it has not kept pace with inflation and the rising costs of operating a child care centre.

In Budget 2026, the \$10 a Day program was paused to stabilize it, placing a three-year freeze on the creation of new \$10 a Day spaces. Existing sites remain in place.



### **Seamless Day**

In 2022, the Ministry established a pilot program for a limited number of school districts and two independent schools (Abbotsford Christian and Langley Christian) for Kindergarten students. A morning ECE provides before-school learning and care. The ECE remained with the children in the classroom during the school day, working collaboratively with the classroom teacher. An afternoon ECE arrives mid-day to provide staff overlap and after school learning and care.

Although the program was targeted as child care funding, independent schools received only 50% of the Seamless Day funding amount given to public school districts.

## New Spaces Funding

Since 2019, BC has invested an estimated \$500M to create new child care spaces. Applications have been closed since August 2024. The exception to this is that school districts were allowed to submit child care new spaces requests as part of their 2025–2026 capital submission.

Although the exact number is unknown, several independent school authorities offering child care programs received new spaces grants resulting in millions of dollars of capital funding.

---

## Early Childhood Educator Workforce

BC continues to face a significant shortage of qualified ECEs, making it challenging to meet child care space targets.

### Early Childhood Educator Wage Enhancement (ECE-WE)

Increasing compensation is seen as a key lever to attract and retain people in the profession.

To qualify for ECE-WE, facilities must be enrolled in **CCFRI** or operate as a **\$10 a Day site**.



The ECE-WE is intended to supplement existing wages by providing an extra \$6.00 per hour for up to 195 hours per month (\$1,170). Providers are not permitted to use ECE-WE funding to replace base wages or scheduled wage increases.

Only certified Early Child Educators are included in ECE-WE. Assistants and Responsible Adults are not covered.

The total wage enhancement increased the median wage for Early Childhood Educators up to about \$29 per hour.

---

## Specialized Certification Grants

To incentivize advanced specialization, annual grants are available to ECEs working with children aged 0–5 who have at least 12 months of sector experience:

- \$2,000 for an Infant Toddler Educator OR Special Needs Educator certificate.
- \$3,000 for holding both certificates.

## ECE Student Bursary

Students studying in an ECE program can apply for up to \$500 per course, for a maximum of \$4,000 per semester, to assist with tuition while studying.

## ECE Workforce Bursary

ECEs, ECE Assistants, Responsible Adults, and StrongStart BC Facilitators who are currently working in the ECE field and would like to upgrade their credentials can apply for up to \$5,000 per semester to assist with tuition and other expenses, such as loss of wages or travel.

---

## Enlarging K-12 School Involvement in Child Care

In October 2025, the School Act was amended to enable public school boards to provide child care to children from birth to age four, in addition to school-aged children regardless of whether they are enrolled as students in the district, and to serve as the direct child care licensee rather than relying on third-party operators. Government also created a streamlined pathway to allow school board-operated child care programs to increase fees, while maintaining access to child care funding streams (CCFRI). At present, independent school authority-operated child care programs do not appear to have access to this same fee adjustment mechanism.

---

## Child Care on School Grounds

Child Care on School Grounds is a licensing category that is available to school districts and independent school authorities. Budget 2026 included \$25M to be used to expand child care on school grounds. It is uncertain if independent schools will have access to this funding.

---

## FISA Child Care Scan Spring 2023

In 2023, FISA was contracted by the Ministry to conduct a sector scan of child care operations within the independent school system.

At that time, there were

- 359 Independent Schools in BC, this includes non-FISA schools
- **159 had affiliated child care programs**
- 13 planned to open child care programs within 3 years
- 9,472 licensed spaces
- 7,140 filled spaces



- 109 schools were part of the ECE Wage Enhancement program
- 125 schools were part of the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative
- 6 schools were \$10 a Day sites

- 78 schools had afterschool clubs children ages 5-12 which were not licensed as child care facilities.

249 FISA members responded to the question, **“Should FISA’s mandate include affiliated child care facilities?”**



10% said no  
(24 schools)



46% were unsure  
(115 schools)



44% said yes  
(110 schools)

Schools with child care facilities offered to pay between \$0-\$10 for FISA to advocate on their behalf, with a match to the FISA K-12 fee being most common response (\$6.25 at the time of the survey, currently \$7.75)

7,140 filled spaces x \$7.75 = \$55,335