

Northumberland County CWELCC Directed Growth Expansion Plan – Nov 1, 2025

The Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system is the Canada-Ontario agreement to lower parent fees for child care, increase access to spaces, support child care workforces, and support inclusive care for families. CWELCC is planned to reduce parent fees across infant to kindergarten (0-5 years) spaces to an average of \$10/day across Ontario by March 2026. The Ministry of Education (MEDU) announced in an April 22, 2025 memo to parents that daily child care rates could rise above the current CWELCC cap of \$22/day if a new Federal-Provincial child care agreement is not reached by April 1, 2026.

The Directed Growth Plan was introduced by MEDU in 2023 to create 86,000 net new CWELCC spaces across Ontario by December 31, 2026. Directed Growth space allocations identify the number of new spaces that MEDU will support through operating funding up to March 31, 2026. Within the original plan, Northumberland County was allocated funding to create 404 net new spaces toward this targeted growth. On March 31, 2025, MEDU recalibrated Directed Growth space and funding allocations for Service System Managers (SSMs) to allow the Province to better realize their target of 86,000 without going over. Northumberland County received an adjusted target from 404 to 245 spaces (including 2022 growth). Updated Start-Up Grant and Infrastructure Funds are provided below.

Prioritized Growth across Northumberland's Lower-Tier Municipalities

The Directed Growth Plan is meant to prioritize spaces to areas that have traditionally been underserved and/or have high populations of Ministry directed groups. Northumberland's Directed Growth Plan identified priority municipalities for targeted child care expansion in January 2023 as per MEDU direction. The lower-tier municipal rankings for Northumberland County from highest-to-lowest priority are:

1. Cobourg
2. Trent Hills
3. Port Hope
4. Brighton
5. Alnwick/Haldimand
6. Cramahe
7. Hamilton

Determining Directed Growth Priority Municipalities

Priority municipalities were determined in January 2023 using the following data:

- EarlyON attendance in 2022
- Number of Ontario Works (OW) recipients – adults and dependents as of December 2022
- 2017-2018 Early Development Instrument – number of children vulnerable in at least 1/5 developmental domains (emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, social competence, physical health and well-being, and communication skills and general knowledge)
- Number of children waitlisted for infant, toddler, and preschool care as of March 31, 2022
- Number of Fee Subsidy recipients as of December 2022
- Indigenous population according to 2021 Census data
- Number of children receiving Special Needs Resourcing in 2022
- Child care licensed capacity as of December 2022

Raw data for these variables were tabulated for each lower-tier municipality and adjusted to the municipality's population of 0- to 5-year-olds (according to 2021 Census data). Municipalities were ranked 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest) within each variable and ranked values for each municipality were summed across the 8 variables to yield a final Child Care Needs score. Ordering the highest-to-lowest Child Care Needs scores determined the priority areas listed in the section above.

Priority municipalities will have first consideration for Directed Growth spaces. Operators with active service agreements with the County will be the first considered for operating these spaces, after which new not-for-profit operators will be prioritized. Operators must be operating to at least 90% of their functional capacities across all age groupings to be considered. Northumberland County Early Years considers functional capacity as an operator's ability to fill spaces as they come available and is determined by license capacity, operating capacity, and waitlist size (see Definitions section).

Northumberland County recognizes that communities have unique child care needs and offer varying opportunities for expansion. Creating child care spaces is subject to the availability of existing buildings that meet the requirements of a licensed child care program (see *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*), municipal by-laws, public health mandates, and building and fire codes. Successfully expanding child care spaces also requires an available Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) workforce and meeting the Special Needs Resourcing of enrolled families. Therefore, all areas that propose

suitable space for renovation will be investigated for economic feasibility of expansion. Some municipalities will likely present greater opportunities to expand within Northumberland's allocated 245 CWELCC Directed Growth funded spaces.

The Early Years team works closely with our early learning and child care operators, Northumberland County's Director of Health and Human Services, and Northumberland County's CAO on implementing the Directed Growth Plan. This involves ongoing community consultations and surveys, targeted focus groups, one-on-one discussions, and reports to County Council. The Early Years team also seeks guidance with members of the Planning and Economic Development team, Public Works team, and Legal Counsel at Northumberland County regarding renovation, construction, and lease negotiations. The Early Years team and Early Years partners continue to engage lower-tier municipalities, public agencies, and private companies regarding space and funding supports.

Directed Growth Space Allocation and Total CWELCC Spaces - as of August 31, 2025

Table 1 shows the allocation of Northumberland County's Directed Growth spaces across priority lower-tier municipalities. Table 2 shows Directed Growth allocations according to site. Table 4 shows total Northumberland CWELCC spaces by operator.

The MEDU directed priority groups include children living in low-income families, children with special needs, children needing enhanced or individual supports, Indigenous children, Black and other racialized children, children of newcomers to Canada, and official language minorities. To reach as many of these populations as possible:

- Northumberland County Early Years caseworkers engage with families applying to or enrolled in Fee Subsidy (see Definitions section) to assist with system navigation
- Special Needs Resourcing is available for children with special needs (see Definitions section) to support their inclusion in child care
- The lower-tier municipalities that received Directed Growth spaces (see Table 1) account for large proportions of Northumberland's racialized (73%), newcomer (85%), Indigenous (74%), and language minority (76%) populations.

Table 1. Directed Growth spaces completed by December 31, 2025 by lower-tier municipality.

Lower-Tier Municipality	Directed Growth spaces completed by end of 2025
Port Hope	154
Trent Hills	47
Cobourg	15
Brighton	10
TOTAL	226

Table 2. Allocation of Northumberland County’s 245 Directed Growth spaces by site.

CWELCC Expansion Spaces - Completed and Operating					
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	Cobourg East	YMCA
2025	35	Community	Port Hope	Officelinx	Kinderlinx
CWELCC Expansion Spaces - Construction In Progress					
Year	Spaces	License Setting	Municipality	Project Name	Operator
2025	49	Community	Port Hope	Canton Hub	YMCA
CWELCC Expansion Spaces Remaining					
Year	Spaces	Project Possibilities			Operator
2026	19	Spaces available: 19 remaining from Directed Growth 11 redistributed under-utilized CWELCC spaces ** Project options include any combination of: 2x 15 space Family age group centres - agencies accommodating new spaces at current site(s) License setting and municipality to be determined			To be determined
Total	245				

* In a school but not school-board led

** Required as a direct consequence of the March 2025 Directed Growth space reallocation

Start-Up Grant Funding

Start-Up Grant (SUG) funding may be available to support the expansion of infant, toddler, and preschool expansion spaces that are in alignment with Northumberland County's Directed Growth Plan (see Table 2). SUG funding supports facilities creating, retrofitting, renovating, and/or expanding to accommodate maximum sizes for each age grouping of eligible children (see Table 3). Northumberland County's 2025 Start-Up Grant funding is \$322,487.

Table 3. Maximum group size per CWELCC child care age grouping.

Age Grouping	Maximum Group Size
Infant	10
Toddler	15
Preschool	24
Kindergarten	26
Family	15

Eligible Expenses: Centre-Based Applicants

- Play-based materials, equipment and furnishings (both indoor and outdoor)
- Non-consumable supplies/equipment to support the ongoing regular operation of the child care program (for example, appliances, IT, supplies to support learning environments while adhering to health and safety requirements)
- Renovations, additions, or repairs to current or potential child care facilities
- Leasehold improvements
- Changes to outdoor spaces as a result of expansion

Eligible Expense: Home-Based Applicants

- Play-based material, equipment and furnishings (both indoor and outdoor) that can be transferred between home child care licensees as required

Ineligible Expenses

- Purchase of land or buildings
- Debt costs including principal and interest payments related to capital loans, mortgage financing, and operating loans
- Property taxes
- Expenditures related to 6-to-12 age groups

- School-based child care spaces
- Indoor and outdoor renovations, additions, or repairs to home child care licensee premises or potential home child care licensee premises

Early Learning and Child Care Infrastructure Fund

Infrastructure Funding complements Start-Up Grant funding to support child care projects for underserved communities through the creation of new, not-for-profit, licensed child care spaces. Northumberland County's 2025 Infrastructure Fund allocation is \$1,743,343.

Projects supported by Infrastructure funds must be:

- Provided by a not-for-profit licensee or be directly operated by the SSM (i.e., not applicable to for-profit licensees). There are currently no directly operated child care spaces in Northumberland County.
- Centre-based (i.e., not applicable to home-based child care)
- Community-based (i.e., not applicable to school-based child care)
- Approved for enrollment in CWELCC
- Aligned with Northumberland County's Directed Growth Plan
- Supports care for children aged 0 to 4 (excluding children eligible to attend Junior Kindergarten)
- Supportive of inclusion for underserved communities including:
 - Communities in rural and remote regions
 - Communities in high-cost urban areas
 - Communities with low-income households
 - Communities with barriers to access including (but not limited to) racialized communities, Indigenous communities, communities with newcomers, communities with parents/caregivers/children with disabilities, and official language minority communities including Francophone children
- Communities requiring child care during non-standard hours
- Be eligible to receive Fee Subsidy payments from the SSM (see Definitions section)

Eligible Expenses

- Purpose built new construction, renovations, retrofits, and additions to community-based child care facilities. This includes expenses incurred through the planning, design, and building stages of these projects.
- Purchase of land or buildings
- Purchase of play-based materials, equipment, and furnishings (both indoors and outdoors)

- Purchase of non-consumable supplies/equipment to support the ongoing regular operation of the child care program (for example, appliances, IT equipment, supplies to support learning environments while adhering to health and safety requirements)
- Changes to outdoor play space required as a result of the creation of new child care spaces
- Leasehold improvements

Ineligible Expenses

- Debt costs, including principal and interest payments related to capital loans, mortgage financing, and operating loans
- Property taxes
- Amortization of existing assets
- Operating expenses
- Expenditures related to licensed child care programs for kindergarten and school-aged children and before and after school programs
- Expenditures related to facilities owned by school boards
- Expenditures related to licensed home child care spaces

CWELCC Space Redistribution – Improving Access Beyond Directed Growth

Northumberland County is exploring all opportunities to promote growth and maximize the operating capacities of all licensed CWELCC spaces. Within this plan, we are undergoing a process for selecting and redistributing current CWELCC spaces that are regularly under-utilized at some child care locations. Redistributing spaces does not contribute to Directed Growth, as the spaces being redistributed are those that were established at the onset of the Canada-Ontario CWELCC agreement (see top section of Table 4) and are not considered “net new”. Space redistribution serves to maximize operating capacity by reallocating licensed CWELCC spaces to operators and municipalities that can provide the requisite workforce. Operators must approve before their licensed CWELCC spaces are reallocated.

Table 4. Northumberland CWELCC Eligible Spaces as of August 31, 2025. Table does not include School-Age spaces, as they are not CWELCC eligible.

Child Care Centres	Infant	Toddler	Preschool	Kindergarten	Family Age	CWELCC Spaces
Brighton Children's Centre	<i>see below</i>	15	24	26		65
Cobourg Day Care	10	30	32	33		105
Compass Beehive	5	30	24			59
Compass Cobourg	10	15	45	26		96
Compass Hillcrest						0
Compass St. Michael's						0
Cooks Child Care Centre		15	24	26		65
Ganaraska Port Hope HS	10	15	39	26		90
Sunshine Heights	10	15	48			73
St. Peter's Pre-School			16			16
YMCA Baltimore				20		20
YMCA Beatrice Strong		15	24	26		65
YMCA Burnham				20		20
YMCA Gummow				26		26
YMCA Camborne				20		20
YMCA Cobourg			24			24
YMCA Colborne				26		26
YMCA Grafton Public				26		26
YMCA Grafton Family					15	15
YMCA Hastings				20		20
YMCA Kent				20		20
YMCA Merwin Greer						0
YMCA North Hope				20		20
YMCA Northumberland Hills				26		26
YMCA Percy				26		26
YMCA Plainville				20		20
YMCA Roseneath				26		26
YMCA Smithfield				26		26
YMCA Spring Valley				11		11
YMCA St Anthony's				26		26
YMCA St. Joseph's						0
YMCA Terry Fox		15	24	26		65
SUBTOTAL	45	165	324	548	15	1097
Licensed Home Child Care	Licensed Homes		Active Homes		MEDU Allocated CWELCC spaces/home	CWELCC Spaces
Compass	10		8		4	32
Wee Watch	23		14		4	56
SUBTOTAL						88
Directed Growth	Infant	Toddler	Preschool	Kinder	Family Age	CWELCC Spaces
Brighton Children's Centre	10					10
Ganaraska Riverside		30	40			70
Kinderlinx		15	20			35
YMCA Canton	10	15	24			49
YMCA Cobourg East					15	15
YMCA Warkworth		15	32			47
Remaining for 2026						19
SUBTOTAL	20	75	116	0	15	245
Spaces To Reallocate						CWELCC Spaces
St. Peter's Pre-School adjusting licensed CWELCC spaces from 24 to 16						8
SUBTOTAL						8
TOTAL						1438
MEDU Target for TOTAL Northumberland CWELCC Spaces						1442

Possibilities for Future Directed Growth

MEDU has no current space and funding allocations for CWELCC child care expansion beyond 2026. For Northumberland, this means no net new CWELCC expansion beyond the MEDU allocated target of 245 Directed Growth spaces. However, Northumberland County remains aware of expansion opportunities in the event MEDU makes funding available. Opportunities can range in development stage and include (but are not limited to) vacant municipal units zoned for child care and economically feasible for renovation, MEDU school builds, current operators expressing interest in expanding, non-CWELCC operators interested in joining their current programs with CWELCC, and non-CWELCC operators independently planning/completing space renovations or new builds.

Current possibilities for future expansion include:

Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir – Francophone school planned to be built by 2027

Definitions

Fee Subsidy: eligible families can receive financial support for full- and part-time licensed child care, approved camps or children's recreation programs, and extended day programs operated by school boards (including before and after school programs and non-instructional days). Ontario Works clients may use Fee Subsidy to support unlicensed child care if a licensed child care arrangement is not possible due to individual need and availability of service. Northumberland County Early Years caseworkers engage with families applying to or enrolled in Fee Subsidy to help with system navigation.

Functional capacity: an operator's ability to fill spaces as they come available and is determined by license capacity, operating capacity, and waitlist size.

Licensed centre-based child care: programs offered in a variety of public locations, are the holders of licenses, and can offer any combination of infant, toddler, pre-school, kindergarten, and school-aged programs.

Licensed home-based child care: providers offer care in a home for up to 6 children under the age of 13, including any of their own children under 4 years and up to 3 children under 2 years. Home providers are contracted and overseen by home child care agencies that hold licenses.

Licensed capacity: the maximum number of children, including the number per age category, permitted to receive child care at one time in a centre or home.

Operating capacity: the number of spaces that a licensed centre or home child care is able to serve as per staffing compliment and budget, up to a maximum of the licensed capacity.

Special Needs Resourcing: funding used to support the inclusion of children with special needs in eligible licensed centre- and home-based child care settings, camps, and recreation programs at no additional cost to families/caregivers. Under O. Reg. 138/15, a child with special needs means a child whose cognitive, physical, social, emotional or communicative needs, or whose needs relating to overall development, are of such a nature that additional supports are required for the child.