

# THE PUBLIC MODEL EXPANDING SCHOOL-AGE CARE WHEN OTHERS CAN'T

- [Implementation Guide now available](#) -



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As school-age child-care programs across Ontario close because of workforce shortages, the [Waterloo Region District School Board](#) (WRDSB) is meeting child-care demand with a model that is attracting significant interest from school boards, policymakers, and sector leaders across Canada. The success of the WRDSB's seamless day model demonstrates what is possible when school boards, municipalities, and the early years sector work together with a shared vision for children and families.

The "seamless day" or extended-day child-care model integrates before- and after-school care with the regular school day for children from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6. Early childhood educators (ECEs) lead the program, many of whom also work with children during the instructional day, creating continuity in relationships, routines, and learning experiences. Programs are delivered within the school setting and are based on Ontario's play-based

early years pedagogy. This helps children transition smoothly between school and child care while supporting working families with consistent, accessible care from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

To support boards and communities exploring this approach, the WRDSB, [Building Blocks for Child Care \(B2C2\)](#), and the Atkinson Centre co-developed an [implementation guide](#). This comprehensive, step-by-step guide walks school leaders through key areas for program implementation, including partnerships, staffing, fee structures, licensing, CWELCC participation, shared-space planning, inclusion, finance, and program operations.

The context for this work is urgent. Many regions are experiencing significant shortages of ECEs, resulting in instability and closures of school-age care. The guide indicates that prior to the extended-day model, split shifts and staffing shortages contributed to *“a steady decline in available spaces and program closures.”*

Before the board-operated model, fewer than 9% of WRDSB students had access to before- and after-school care. By 2025, extended-day programs were available in all 104 elementary schools across the WRDSB, with the board directly operating programs in 75 schools and supporting more than 4,000 children throughout the region.

The model addresses one of the sector’s most pressing challenges: workforce recruitment and retention. Extended-day programs within the WRDSB are staffed by full-time, unionized ECEs with benefits, pensions, and stable employment within the public education system. This stability helps reduce turnover while strengthening the continuity and quality of care.

Importantly, the seamless day model is not simply about child care; it is about creating integrated systems of support for children and families. The model strengthens inclusion, improves transitions for children, enhances school–family relationships, and expands equitable access to licensed care within neighbourhood schools.

To complement the guide, the partners also developed a *three-part video series* that provides insights into establishing the model and its benefits.

At a time when many jurisdictions are seeking sustainable solutions to ECE workforce shortages and declining access to school-age care, Waterloo Region offers an important example of what can be achieved through leadership, strong partnerships, and the smart use of public funding.

*Listen* to Melissa Hilton, Extended Day Program Manager at the WRDSB, discuss the board's extended day program.