Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario
Ph: 416-487-3157 • Toll Free: 1-866-93-AECEO (23236) • Fx: 416-487-3758 • www.aeceo.ca

AECEO submission to the
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs' Pre-budget consultation process
February 2017

The Association for Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) is the professional association for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in Ontario. We support ECEs in their professional practice and advocate for the recognition and appropriate compensation of the profession. Early Childhood Educators are fundamental to high quality early learning and child care. Our members work throughout Ontario in programs for young children and their families, including regulated child care, full-day kindergarten, family resource programs, and support services for children with disabilities.

In September, the Ontario government made a significant commitment to expand licensed child care in the province by creating 100,000 new spaces over the next five years. This would double the number of licensed child care spaces for children 0-4 years of age (currently there are enough licensed spaces for 23% of children 0-4 yrs)[1] and create 20,000 new jobs in licensed child care in Ontario. MPP Indira Naidoo-Harris, Minister responsible for Early Years and Child Care has referred to this commitment as Ontario's opportunity to be transformative, to be groundbreaking and to be visionary. The AECEO commends the Government of Ontario for its commitment to improve life for children and families in Ontario and we support the concept of transforming the current patchwork system of early years and child care services that parents and families struggle to navigate. We strongly recommend that funds in the 2017 budget be directed to the Ministry of Education to support systemic solutions that address affordability for parents and low compensation for Early Childhood Educators and early years staff. We recommend base funding of operational costs for non-profit and community programs coupled with a sliding fee scale as a funding structure to ensure professional pay and decent work for all ECEs and early years staff

Executive Summary of Recommendations

The AECEO recommends that the Ontario Government develop and invest in a comprehensive workforce strategy for the ECE profession that includes:

- A provincially established, annually indexed, regional wage scale [2] along with annually indexed base funding for child care and other family resource and support programs in order to equitably raise the salaries, working conditions and morale of all ECEs and early years staff and to strengthen recruitment and retention. A standardized wage rate in the early years and child care sector will ensure staff with equivalent education and work responsibilities are paid a similar rate of pay no matter where they work. These initiatives would further contribute to higher and more consistent quality across programs. The Government of Manitoba announced a wage scale program on January 12, 2016.

- We support the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care's call for at least **$500 million** in capital funding for Year 1 of the child care expansion to begin to make a real difference in availability of spaces; **provide $300 million** in new operating funding to keep pace with expansion of spaces, to support child care services directly and kick start a process of system transformation. The province should contribute an additional **$75 million** to address immediate crises faced by existing programs;

- The province should commit to moving from the current broken fee subsidy system to an affordable sliding fee scale, and begin work immediately to design an affordable fee model that works for all Ontario families;

- A provincial mandate and supporting funding arrangement to make the Designated ECE position in full-day kindergarten a full-time, full-year position comparable to that of elementary school teachers;

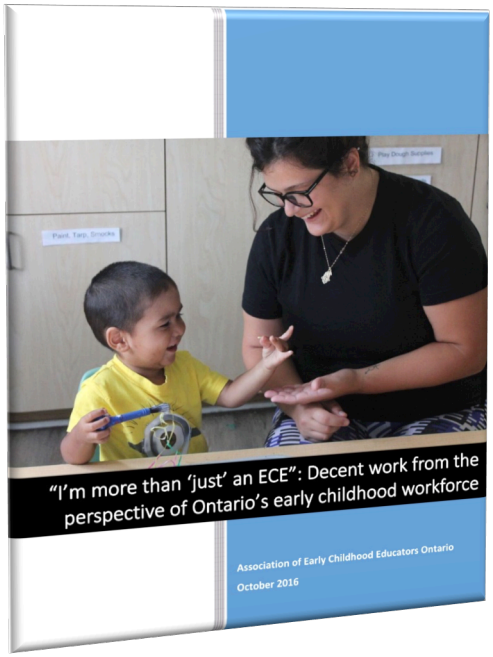
- Support for essential ongoing education and professional learning for early childhood educators and early years staff at all levels, no matter where they work;

- Appropriate infrastructure support, including funding to facilities, programming, curriculum development, and early childhood education and care organizations.

Context

The AECEO has recommended that the Government of Ontario develop a comprehensive workforce strategy for ECEs in order to address the long standing and systemic issues of low wages, inconsistent working conditions, high turnover, and job dissatisfaction that plague the early years and child care sector in Ontario.[3] By investing in a workforce strategy for ECEs and early years staff that has clear goals, targets and sustained funding, Ontario will be working toward the important objective of investing in people's talents and skills while also addressing the gender wage gap in female dominated sectors.

Every day, ECEs make the difficult decision to leave the sector and the work that they love due to low wages and challenging working conditions that hinder their ability to fulfill their professional roles in early years and child care programs. An alarming concern as the anticipated transformation of early years and child care in Ontario rests on the ability of the early childhood (EC) workforce to take up 20,000 new jobs. In order to recruit and retain well-trained, well-educated and passionate ECEs it is imperative that the Government of Ontario address the root of the problem: staff wages cannot be tied to parent fees.



- 24% of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE) working in licensed child care earn less than $15/hr.

- 45% of RECEs working in licensed child care earn between $15-$20/hr

- Hourly wages of Designated ECEs in FDK are higher but due to fewer paid working hours and summer layoffs annual salaries still work out to be close to the same.

- RECEs working in Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres have not seen a raise for over a decade.

- Through our consultations with ECEs and early years staff the AECEO has identified a 'professionalization gap' that exists within the sector. The professionalization gap refers to the rapid increase in the expectations and responsibilities of ECEs with very little improvement to wages or professional working conditions.

To address these issues the AECEO recommends a provincially established, annually indexed, regional wage scale [4] along with annually indexed base funding for child care and other family resource and support programs in order to equitably raise the salaries, working conditions and morale of all ECEs and early years staff and to strengthen recruitment and retention. A standardized wage rate in the early years and child care sector will ensure staff with equivalent education and work responsibilities are paid a similar rate of pay no matter where they work. These initiatives would further contribute to higher and more consistent quality across programs. The Government of Manitoba announced a wage scale program on January 12, 2016.

ECEs are skilled professionals with a specialization in facilitating young children's development and learning. The impact of their work extends beyond the child to include the child's family and their community. The value of this work has been clearly documented in an extraordinary body of evidence highlighting the importance of healthy child development and supports for families with young children[5]. ECEs have continued to advance their profession through increased levels of professional preparation and on-going professional learning, as well as being regulated by the College of Early Childhood Educators. ECEs are held accountable to the public through the College's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. In addition, ECEs continue to face amplified pressure to implement a number of key programs offered by the government under increasingly higher quality standards and frameworks.

It has been well established through research and experience that a trained, professional ECE workforce with professional wages and working conditions is central to providing high quality experiences for the children and families using these programs.[6] This is of course significantly important, as we know that in

order to achieve the intended benefits of early childhood education and care for children and families programs need to be of the highest quality.

As studies of have shown, investment in early years learning and education, through accessible, quality, and affordable options has significant positive economic implications for individuals and for society[7]. The work performed by ECEs is directly tied to Ontario's objective of *investing in people's talents and skills* in many notable ways. Here are three that we would like to highlight:

1. **ECEs care for young children while parents/guardians continue to work or study in order to develop and use *their own* talents and skills.** The essential role that ECEs have in strengthening regional and nation-wide economic prosperity by assisting parents who are combining work, studies, and family responsibilities has been well documented by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in their highly regarded, rigorous reviews of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in member nations (including Canada).[8]
2. **ECEs work with young children in a range of early years programs that support a crucial phase of development during which children develop the basic cognitive, social and emotional skills used to thrive in learning and developing their own unique talents and skills.** A 2013 accord released by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education highlighted that there has been a shift in Canadians' understanding of the importance that early learning experiences have in shaping the quality of children's lives. We are now, more than ever, aware that high quality learning programming is an essential part of all responsible care for children.[9]
3. **ECEs possess unique talents and well-developed skills that are the key to the quality of early childhood education and care programs.** It is widely acknowledged that ECEs and their early learning and care activities, interactions, and knowledge have a major impact on children's well-being and development;[10] it is only *high quality* early childhood education and care delivered by ECEs that truly supports Ontario's objective of investing in people's talents and skills.[11]

Even with the increasing professionalization of ECEs and the mounting evidence pointing to the immense importance of their work, ECEs have seen a very slow and limited increase in professional recognition through improved compensation and benefits. Low ECE salaries, inconsistent working conditions, and precarious work schedules have resulted in poor morale, job dissatisfaction and high staff turnover. Particularly in licensed child care programs, ECEs are transitioning over to full-day kindergarten, or worse, are leaving the sector altogether. It is the experience of many child care programs across Ontario that qualified ECEs cannot be recruited to work in these under-resourced early childhood environments that serve our youngest children. This is having a significant impact on child care staff consistency, program quality, and sector stability that promises to endure for years if it is not addressed now.

Even amongst the challenges that still exist for ECEs, the AECEO remains hopeful. There have been positive developments in early years policies that show us that the Ontario government is aware that there are issues that are having an impact on the sector. Important initiatives such as funding for in-service training and although flawed, Ontario's Wage Enhancement Strategy demonstrate to us that efforts are being made to change elements of the early years and child care system.

A piecemeal approach, however, cannot address the systemic undervaluing of ECEs as professionals which will continue to result in low wages and inequitable working conditions across the various programs that ECEs are delivering. Provincial investments in well-developed, more system-focused initiatives in early years and child care will ultimately be more effective and more cost-efficient in the long term. Case in point: public resources devoted to post secondary training and in-service supports are shown to be more efficient and effective with concurrent investment in wages and working conditions. Without a comprehensive approach that recognizes the professional status and work of all ECEs we will continue to see qualified and passionate ECEs withdraw from the sector – public investments in their post-secondary training and professional learning will be wasted. The talents, skills and work of ECEs are of great public value and, therefore, deserving of public resources to ensure that this work is compensated appropriately.

The AECEO asks that the Minister of Education confirm the Province's commitment to sustaining funding for the Wage Enhancement Grant in 2018 as an interim measure while the Ministry of Education works to establish a provincial wage scale and moves toward the goal of transformational change in early years and child care. Furthermore, allocation for the wage enhancement grant for child care staff should be extended to provide coverage for all hours for which staff is paid, and eligibility widened to include ECE staff in family resource and support programs who bring the same specialized training to the families and children who depend on these services.

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[1] Friendly, Grady, Macdonald & Forer(2015). Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada, 2014. Toronto: CRRU http://childcarecanada.org/publications/ecec-canada/16/03/early-childhood-education-and-care-canada-2014

[2] https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aeceo/pages/797/attachments/original/1447178740/AECEO_discussion_paper_on_wage_scales_FINAL_Sept_2015.pdf?1447178740

[3] http://www.aeceo.ca/response_to_modernizing_childcare_discussion_paper

[4] https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aeceo/pages/797/attachments/original/1447178740/AECEO_discussion_paper_on_wage_scales_FINAL_Sept_2015.pdf?1447178740

[5] http://nieer.org/publications/ece-consensus-letter-researchers

[6] http://www.movingchildcareforward.ca/images/policybriefs/MCCF_canadas_childcare_workforce.pdf

[7] Bartik, T. J. (2009). Why universal preschool is actually a labour market program. *Employment Research, 16*(3), 8.

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[8] http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/earlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm

[9] http://www.csse-scee.ca/docs/acde/Accord_Early_Learning_En.pdf

[10] http://www.oecd.org/publications/starting-strong-iv-9789264233515-en.htm (*Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*, released October 2015)

[11] http://www.childcarequality.ca/wdocs/QbD_LiteratureReview.pdf