Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO)
Pre-budget Submission

January 19, 2018
The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) is the professional association for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) in Ontario. We support RECEs in their professional practice and advocate for the recognition and appropriate compensation of the profession. Registered 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, EarlyON and family resource programs, and support services for children with disabilities.

Our vision is for all of Ontario’s children and families to have access to quality affordable early years and child care programs where registered early childhood educators and program staff are well supported with professional pay and decent work. This vision is founded on the assumption that early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a public good and a human right, not a commodity.

Quality, affordability and access are critical and interrelated parts of a thriving early years and child care system. High-quality programs support a child’s social, emotional and educational development in the here and now and build a foundation for lifelong learning. A stable, well-remunerated, professional workforce is the most basic element of quality early years and child care programs and an overarching ECEC system.

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that high-quality ECEC is directly linked to well-educated and qualified early childhood educators. The compensation and support available to educators and staff must recognize the essential role that they play in children’s days, months, years and future outcomes. Fair and appropriate wages and working conditions cannot be based solely or primarily on parent fees as the existing market model of child care instantiates. Staffing expenses are, typically 80-90% of child care centres’ operating budgets, while centre revenues are generated primarily from parent fees. With parent fees already beyond the budget of the majority of Ontario families, the only viable solution to creating access to high quality, affordable child care programs is through significant government funds devoted to the recruitment and retention of qualified, RECE professionals.

Turnover is much lower in a stable system where wages and working conditions for educators and staff are prioritized. Research shows that good wages and working conditions contribute to job satisfaction and ultimately to better outcomes for children and families. Improving recruitment and retention is critical with the anticipated demand for RECEs in more child care and EarlyON spaces.

Executive Summary of Budget Action Recommendations

- Implement a workforce strategy to ensure all ECEC staff have professional pay and decent work;
- Implement a provincial wage scale with a $25/hr minimum and a benefit package, including paid sick and personal leave days, for registered early childhood educators. We advise that the Government should commit at least $375 million as a first step to establishing a province-
wide wage scale for RECEs and program staff with entry level pay for RECEs at $25 per hour and commensurate compensation for other program staff;

- We support the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care in their call to allocate $600 million as a down payment on affordability; Begin operational funding of all licensed infant and toddler spaces in child care centres and establish a sliding fee scale in 2018-19; Expand the capital funding for the non-profit and public sectors to make a real difference in availability of child care spaces; Ensure all funding is indexed to inflation; Commit funding and resources to support system infrastructure including data and research;

Last year the AECEO recommended that the Government of Ontario develop a comprehensive workforce strategy for registered early childhood educators 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. By investing in a workforce strategy for RECEs 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.

The June release of Ontario’s Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework (2017) by the Honourable Indira Naidoo-Harris, Minister (previously) responsible for Early Years and Child Care and the Status of Women, changed the child care conversation. Building on the Premier’s 2016 commitment to expand child care by 100,000 spaces within five years, this policy framework commits to “. . . building a system with enough affordable child care spaces for all families who want them."

The Renewed Framework outlines seven key areas which are interrelated:

1. Increasing access to early years and child care services and programs for Ontario’s youngest children including an expansion plan for spaces serving 0 – 4 with operational and capital funding for the non-profit sector;
2. Ensuring a more affordable early years and child care system for parents;
3. Establishing an early years workforce strategy to address ongoing recruitment and retention challenges;
4. Determining a provincial definition of “quality” in the early years which emphasizes the centrality of a well-educated and remunerated workforce;
5. Developing an approach to promoting inclusion in the early years and child care settings;
6. Creating an outcomes and measurement strategy;
7. Increasing public awareness of the challenges and possibilities for Ontario’s early years and child care system.

Currently work is underway to address the access, affordability and workforce issues. Key activities include:

- The 47 municipalities and district service managers that oversee child care programs and services have submitted their plans for expansion and begun to implement the 24,000 spaces and $200 million announced in the 2017 provincial budget.
- Options for making child care services more affordable are being developed by Dr. Gordon Cleveland, University of Toronto economist, who is expected to report by February 2018.
- Work on a workforce strategy is in process. The Technical Advisory Group to the Ministry of Education, composed of sector representatives including, but not limited to, those from post-secondary institutions; early years and child care organizations representing child and family centres, child care centres, home child care, special needs; professional organizations; other related government ministries and others, is providing input to this process. With assistance from an external consultant, a workforce strategy is also expected by February 2018.

Every day, registered early childhood educators make the difficult decision to leave the sector and work they are qualified to do. We repeatedly hear from our members that low wages and poor working conditions hinder their ability to fulfill their professional responsibilities in early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs. An alarming concern amidst the rapid expansion of child care in Ontario is filling the 20,000 new required RECE jobs. As mentioned above, recruiting and retaining well-educated and qualified RECEs requires the Government of Ontario to interrupt the co-dependent relationship between staff wages and parent fees. This market mechanism is not serving parents or educators well, and in fact often brings the interests of these two essential groups of people in children’s lives into direct conflict with each other.

According to the Ministry of Education’s 2015 licensed child care survey we know that:

- 24% of Registered Early Childhood Educators working in licensed child care earn $15/hr or less;
- 45% of RECEs working in licensed child care earn between $15-$20/hr;
- 67% of other program staff working in licensed child care earn between $11-$15/hour;

We also know that 37% of licensed child care centres in Ontario are operating with exemptions to the Ontario Early Years and Child Care Act (2014) requiring a minimum number of RECEs in centres.

To begin to address these issues the AECEO recommends the immediate implementation of a provincially established, annually indexed, regional wage scale with a $25/hr minimum and a benefit package, including paid sick and personal leave days, for registered early childhood educators. The

---

wage scale must inform operational funding, while recognizing the level of education and years of experience for RECEs and staff in accordance with pay equity principles.

Operational funding for child care and other family resource and support programs is necessary to equitably raise the salaries, working conditions and morale of all RECEs and early years staff and to strengthen recruitment and retention of qualified staff. 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.

RECEs 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. RECEs 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. RECEs are held accountable to the public through the College’s Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. In addition, RECEs 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 empirical research and practical experience that a trained, professional RECE workforce with professional wages and working conditions is central to providing high quality experiences for the children and families accessing early childhood programs. 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 childhood education and care (ECEC), through accessible, quality, and affordable options has significant positive economic implications for individuals and for society. The work performed by RECEs 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. **RECEs 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 RECEs 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).
2. **RECEs 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

---

6 [http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/earlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/earlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm)
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.

3. **RECEs 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 RECEs and their early learning and care activities, interactions, and knowledge have a major impact on children’s well-being and development; it is only high quality early childhood education and care delivered by RECEs that truly supports Ontario’s objective of building a better future.

Even with the increasing professionalization of RECEs and the mounting evidence pointing to the immense importance of their work, RECEs have seen a very slow and limited increase in professional recognition through improved compensation and benefits. Low RECE salaries, inconsistent working conditions, and precarious work schedules have resulted in poor morale, job dissatisfaction and high staff turnover. Large numbers of RECEs are transferring from licensed child care programs to full-day kindergarten, or worse, are leaving the sector altogether. Child care programs across Ontario are significantly struggling to recruit and retain qualified RECEs in perpetually under-resourced licenced child care programs. 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 these pressing challenges the AECEO remains hopeful for the future of the early childhood (EC) workforce. There have been positive developments in the early years and child care sector, such as the 2017 Renewed Policy Framework and the Canada-Ontario Bilateral Agreement that show us that the Ontario government is taking action to address the issues that are having an impact on the sector. The pursuit of initiatives such as funding for in-service training and the Ontario’s Wage Enhancement Grant further demonstrate to us that efforts are being made to change elements of the early years and child care system. The challenge now becomes the optimal utilization of public funds to create sustainable and meaningful change rather than the current approach of the administratively burdensome and patchwork Wage Enhancement Grant (see above recommendations).

The existing piecemeal approach to improve compensation for the EC workforce cannot adequately address the deep, systemic undervaluing of RECEs as professionals. Provincial investments in well-developed, system-focused initiatives – such as a provincial wage scale beginning at $25/h for RECEs - will ultimately be more effective and cost-efficient in the long term. Without a comprehensive, coordinated, system-level approach that recognizes the professional status and work of all RECEs we will continue to see the most qualified and skilled RECE professionals withdraw from the sector. Public investments made in their post-secondary education and professional learning will be wasted. The

---


9 [http://www.childcarequality.ca/wdocs/QbD_LiteratureReview.pdf](http://www.childcarequality.ca/wdocs/QbD_LiteratureReview.pdf)
unique qualification, education, and skills of RECEs are of great public value and, therefore, deserving of public resources to ensure that this work is compensated appropriately.

As Ontario works to meet its five-year commitment of 100,000 new child care spaces in the non-profit sector, the affordability and workforce issues must be addressed. Without well-educated, remunerated and respected educators, quality childcare programs simply cannot exist. Recent data clearly illustrate that existing child care centres cannot recruit and retain enough qualified RECEs due to the notoriously low wages and poor working conditions RECEs experience. Currently, more than one-third (37%) of licensed child care centres in Ontario are operating with exemptions to the Ontario Early Years and Child Care Act requiring a minimum number of RECEs in centres. This situation will hinder the expansion of quality child care that Ontario families have now been promised.

The median $17.29/hour wage of RECEs across the province is simply not a professional or adequate wage reflective for tertiary-level educated RECEs. Sadly (though not surprisingly) of 200 third-year students in early childhood education at Ryerson in 2017, only two students planned to work in the child care sector as RECEs. At the same time, RECEs that remain in the sector are being stretched to the brink. Increasing professional expectations and development are virtually impossible to achieve within notoriously poor working conditions (little/no paid planning time, little/no compensation or time off for PD activity). Furthermore, 1 in 4 RECEs in Ontario finish their 8-hour days/40-hour work weeks to head to an additional part-time job to make ends meet.

The appropriate and necessary solution to the inter-linked problems of unaffordable child care and underpaid and undervalued registered early childhood educators and child care staff is for the Ontario government to provide operational funding to child care programs and set affordable fees while also establishing a wage scale for all programs across the province.

In November 2017 we released our recommendations report Transforming Work in Ontario’s Early Years and Child Care Sector calling for the government of Ontario to institute a province-wide wage scale for registered early childhood educators with a starting hourly salary of $25/hour. In a recent survey of 4,000 staff in the early years and child care sector (66% of whom were registered early childhood educators) conducted by the AECEO a majority of respondents across the province supported the introduction of a wage scale that takes into consideration level of education, years of experience, job

---

12 Personal communication with Dr. Brooke Richardson of Ryerson University. December 13 2017.
responsibility and role as an appropriate mechanism to improve wages in the early years and child care sector.\(^{15}\)

As a first step in implementing a wage scale for RECEs, the OCBCC and AECEO call for an immediate additional expenditure of $375 million in 2018-19. Preliminary estimates indicate that $450 million is needed to bring the 38,480 RECEs employed in licensed child care centres\(^{16}\) to the recommended new minimum of $25/hour. Current expenditure on the Wage Enhancement Grant (estimated at $118 million for 2017\(^{17}\)) could be rolled into the $450 million. An additional $43 million would be needed to align the wages of other child care staff to an appropriate wage grid. Additional funds are required to bring RECEs in other employment situations (EarlyON etc) to the new minimum of $25/hour, however, with no available wage data for RECEs working outside of the licensed child care sector we could not estimate the sum that needs to be included in this budget. In sum, $375 million in new spending is required to begin phasing in a province-wide wage scale. We also recognize there are still other important and outstanding workforce issues that must be addressed (i.e., training requirements, professional development, working conditions and pensions) and look forward to collaborating with the government to address these issues at a systemic level over the next year.

Ontario has much to be proud of in its recent efforts to transform the early years and child care sector. We also understand that working toward the goal of transformational change in the sector will be a multi-year process. Simply put, such change cannot and will not be successful without the well-compensated, stable, professional early childhood workforce that Ontario’s children and families deserve.


\(^{16}\) College of Early Childhood Educators Ontario. (2017) Survey of all members in good standing as of June 30, 2017. As presented to Workforce Technical Advisory Group-Oct. 11, 2017. Of 52,000 members, 74% or 38,480, reported licensed child care and others as their place of employment.

\(^{17}\) Ministry of Education. (Dec. 15, 2016) 2017 Wage Enhancement/Home Child Care Enhancement Grant (HCCEG) and Update on 2017 Child Care Service Agreement Packages. This memo was used to estimate the expenditure on WEG for RECEs in licensed child care. Available online at: https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/CCMemos_2017.htm.