

AECEO Submission to Ontario Fall 2020 Budget Consultations

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario is the professional association for registered early childhood educators (RECEs) in Ontario. We advocate for respect, recognition and appropriate wages and working conditions for all RECEs and a high quality, publicly funded early childhood education and child care system.

Our child care market system was not working before the pandemic, and it is not working now. This market system relies on full enrolment, underpaid educators, and exorbitant parent/family fees. Many child care programs struggle to remain operational, many have yet to reopen, and some are already closing their doors. At the same time, many RECEs and child care workers are leaving the sector due to increased risk and responsibility without appropriate pay and working conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has also thrown families and their finances into disarray. Many families, predominantly women, are being forced to make impossible decisions about balancing work and their children's care needs. This will not improve without intervention.

We are also hearing from early childhood educators who are facing increasingly burdensome working conditions in the Kindergarten Program. As class sizes rise and new health and safety protocols are necessary, the ability of RECEs and their teaching partners to engage in meaningful pedagogical work is becoming compromised. This will deeply impact the experience of our young children.

Early childhood education must be an economic and social priority as the province continues to fight the pandemic and work towards long-term recovery, and is therefore a top priority for the Fall 2020 Budget. This requires immediately increasing the child care budget in order to maintain the current system, while increasing investments over time to grow the capacity of the licensed non-profit child care sector and increasing support for RECEs in the Kindergarten Program.

Therefore, we are recommending the Province:

- Allocate funding to lower Kindergarten class sizes, ensure paid preparation time for RECEs, and collaborative planning time for the Kindergarten Team.
- Invest \$500 million to stabilize the child care sector during the pandemic. This must be in addition to any Federal dollars received.
- Allocate \$635.5 million as a down payment to support child care affordability and begin to transition to fully base-fund programs to support low family fees.
- Continue the wage enhancement grant, while committing an initial \$375 million to develop a province-wide Wage Grid for RECEs and child care staff, as promised in "[*Growing Together: Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy*](#)", which, according to the Ministry of Education website, is its plan to "build a stronger, more robust workforce by recruiting and retaining more educators in the early years and child care sector."

Ontario must work collaboratively with the Federal government to create a national child care system. The time to value and fund care and education is here.