



ASSOCIATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS ONTARIO
SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

REGARDING

Bill 10

An Act to enact the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, to repeal the Day Nurseries Act, to amend the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007, the Education Act and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts

Submitted November 18, 2014

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The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) commends the government's actions to improve child care in Ontario with the new child care legislation put forward in Bill 10, the Child Care Modernization Act. The short notice and limited time for formal consultation on the proposed legislation is disappointing, as this is a once in a generation opportunity to fundamentally change the state of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Ontario. The AECEO is hopeful that the government will engage in a more comprehensive consultation process with the ECEC sector to establish a new regulatory framework for child care programs in Ontario.

The protective measures put forward in Bill 10 are necessary to ensure the basic health and safety of Ontario's children. These measures, however, do not move away from a complaint based process for monitoring illegal and unsafe unregulated home child care. The AECEO believes that all children should have access to regulated child care and that the government should make immediate plans and investments to create more high quality regulated child care spaces.

New legislation is a necessary component of a high quality child care system. However, legislation alone is not sufficient for the development and sustainability of a high quality child care system. In addition to new legislation, we urge the government to undertake a more robust policy process in order to develop a comprehensive policy framework that lays out the province's intentions, rationales, short and long-term plans, and funding and evaluation mechanisms for a system of regulated child care.

Ontario still needs a human resources strategy for ECEC

The AECEO must once again articulate the urgent need for a coordinated human resources plan with well-articulated short, mid and long term goals that will ensure that Ontario has a knowledgeable and appropriately compensated ECE workforce necessary to support the development of quality programs. The implementation of a human resources plan as part of a modernized child care system will attract and retain trained and committed professionals and significantly improve program quality.

The wage increase for early childhood educators, child care staff and regulated family child care providers announced in the last budget was a positive step in the right direction, but ECEs and the child care workforce are still facing a market based system that results in low wages and inconsistent working conditions and benefits. A provincially established salary grid along with base funding for child care programs must be established to raise the salaries, working conditions and morale of early childhood educators.

The AECEO maintains that without well-compensated early childhood educators, a quality early childhood system cannot be built up and stabilized in Ontario. Indeed, the AECEO cannot imagine a modernized child care system if the wages of early childhood educators continue to be tied to a families' ability to pay child care fees. Nor can the AECEO imagine increasing ECEs'

public accountability in a modernized system without adequate professional recognition through improved compensation and benefits.

There are number of items in Bill 10 that are expected to, once again, lead to increased demands on ECEs in Ontario.

Curriculum framework

Paragraph 55(3) outlines the power of the Minister to “issue policy statements regarding programming and pedagogy that constitute high quality child care and early years programming and pedagogy that support children’s learning and development” (p. 45). With the recent release and promotion of *How does learning happen?*, it is expected that the use of this pedagogical framework will be mandated across the province once Bill 10 is passed.

The AECEO supports the implementation of a pedagogical framework for ECEC programs in Ontario. A pedagogical framework is an essential element of a high quality ECEC system and recognizes ECEs as competent and specialized professionals.

This framework will require ECEs to engage in on-going professional learning to fulfill the stated goals of critical reflection, pedagogical documentation and collaborative inquiry. These goals will also require working conditions that allow for the type of in-service professional development and child-free time that is necessary to facilitate these practices.

ECEs should not be expected to engage in a meaningful and effective process with a pedagogical framework without the concrete resources and support that will improve their working conditions and compensation.

Mandated professional development

The AECEO supports the amendments made to the Early Childhood Educators Act in Bill 10. The amendments will grant the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) with the regulation-making authority for a continuous professional learning (CPL) program, which is essential to the development and maintenance of a high quality ECE workforce. With the recent release of the voluntary CPL program from the CECE, it is expected that all ECEs will be required to fulfill ongoing professional development requirements in the near future. Again, the AECEO is optimistic that the CPL program recognizes ECEs as competent and skilled professionals.

Currently, Ontario’s ECEs do not have consistent opportunities to engage in professional development, expand their educational qualifications or enhance their leadership capacity. Further demands to engage in on-going learning and professional development cannot be achieved without adequate working conditions that consider this as a key part of RECE’s paid work.

Early childhood educators as professionals seek a range of in-service opportunities. But, as research has demonstrated, these opportunities cannot be one-time only events; rather ECEs need on-going professional learning and mentoring opportunities and professional networks provided by the very community that has promoted professionalism and growth all these years. To fully engage the ECE workforce and ensure equity in access to learning the ministry must utilize the expertise of existing organizations such as the AECEO, colleges and universities.

Extended day programs for school-age children in grades 1-6

The AECEO is pleased to see amendments to the Education Act that will promote the provision of extended day programs for children in grades 1-6 through the public school boards. However, there are concerns about the capacity of third party providers to carry out these programs without adequate support. The haphazard implementation of the FDK extended day component demonstrated a number of issues with the accessibility of extended day programs when left to the child care market. A more thoughtful approach to the implementation of these programs is needed, one that ensures equity across the province. For example, when third party operators are not able to meet the demand for the extended day program the school abdicates the responsibility to ensure access for all students that want it. As well, the cost that third party providers must charge to sustain these programs is cost prohibitive for too many families.

It is also important to highlight the working conditions that many FDK extended day programs have perpetuated for early childhood educators and other staff including the increase in part-time, split shifts. The recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced staff for these programs should be a concern in relation to the quality and consistency of these programs across the province

The promise of full-time, full-year well paying and respected jobs for Designated ECEs in the FDK program and extended day was not realized throughout much of the province due to the implementation of separate extended day programs, establishing a very clear distinction between the education and care components of the program. The AECEO would like to see Bill 10 strengthen the capacity of the Minister to give more guidance and support to the school boards for the purposes of executing extended day programs for all children. The creation of full-time, full-year, high quality jobs for ECEs should be an integral goal in this process if the government is intent on moving towards a modernized system of early learning and care with a professional workforce.

Over the last 60 plus years, AECEO's members have worked with the provincial government, municipalities, service providers, and families to build a child care system in Ontario. These professionals have adapted and innovated to meet the growing child care needs of families and children and to respond to new research and ideas in early childhood education. Early childhood educators in Ontario remain today a committed professional workforce who want a modernized child care system and who want to work with the Ministry of Education on its implementation.

Indeed, modernization of child care in Ontario will be driven on the ground by dedicated early childhood educators. Therefore, as an essential part of modernization, the AECEO urges the Ministry of Education to initiate a human resources plan so that Ontario's early childhood educators will finally achieve the professional recognition and status they so richly deserve.

Submitted on behalf of the AECEO Board of Directors by:

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