



AECEO pre-budget submission to the Honourable Charles Sousa, Minister of Finance Ontario budget 2015

The 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. Our members are working 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, among others.

The AECEO has recommended that the government develop a comprehensive workforce strategy for ECEs in Ontario in order to address the systemic issues of low wages, inconsistent working conditions, high turnover, and job dissatisfaction¹. Investing in a workforce strategy for ECEs, with clear goals, targets and sustained funding would fulfill the objective of *investing in peoples' talents and skills* presented in the government's four point economic plan.

The work done by ECEs is directly tied to investing in people's talents and skills in three ways:

1. ECEs are often the ones who care for young children while parents/guardians continue to work or study in order to develop and use their own talents and skills.
2. ECEs are working with young children in multiple programs that support a crucial phase of development in which children develop the basic cognitive, social and emotional skills used to thrive in learning and developing their own unique talents and skills.
3. ECEs possess very unique talents and skills that are the key factor in supporting the quality of early childhood education and child care programs and, therefore, the outcomes of point 1 and 2².

Background

ECEs are skilled professionals with a specialization in nurturing young children's development and learning within the context of supporting the child's family and their broader 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 children³. 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 Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators. 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 programs⁴. This is of course incredibly 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.

Despite 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 (hourly and/or annually), inconsistent working conditions and now, increasing split-shift work as a result of the implementation of full-day kindergarten have resulted in poor morale, job dissatisfaction and high staff turnover. Particularly in regulated child care, early childhood educators are leaving the sector and replacements cannot be recruited, which has had an on-going negative impact on staff consistency and stability, and program quality.

There have been some positive developments for ECEs in Ontario, including funding for pre and in-service training and the new wage enhancement for ECEs and other staff in regulated child care. However, this piecemeal approach cannot address the systemic undervaluation of ECEs as professionals and the resulting low wages and inequitable working conditions across the various programs that ECEs play a vital role in delivering. Without a comprehensive approach that recognizes the professional status and work of all ECEs we will continue to see qualified and talented ECEs walk away from the field. The talents, skills and work of ECEs is of great public value and, therefore, is deserving of public resources to ensure that this work is compensated appropriately.

ACTION ITEMS:

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

- A provincially established salary grid along with base funding for child care and other family resource programs in order to equitably raise the salaries, working conditions and morale of all early childhood educators and child care workers. A standardized wage rate in the child care and family resource 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.
- We support the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care's call for "an immediate \$300 million fund (annualized) to address the immediate [child care] crises. In addition, to begin to address the shortfall of child care spaces, we recommend \$100 million to increase spaces across the province. Funding should be tied to inflation".

- 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.
- A system of data collection and evaluation to monitor the recruitment and retention of trained ECEs across the varying programs currently being delivered to support early childhood education and child care.

¹ http://www.aeceo.ca/response_to_modernizing_childcare_discussion_paper

² http://www.childcarequality.ca/wdocs/QbD_LiteratureReview.pdf

³ <http://nieer.org/publications/ece-consensus-letter-researchers>

⁴ http://www.movingchildcareforward.ca/images/policybriefs/MCCF_canadas_childcare_workforce.pdf