

## AECEO Submission to Ontario 2021 Budget Consultations

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

Our early learning and child care system was not working before the pandemic, and it is not working now. The current market approach relies on full enrolment, underpaid educators, and exorbitant family fees. ECEs and child care workers are leaving the sector due to increased risk and responsibility without appropriate pay and working conditions and an ongoing lack of recognition and respect, despite the undeniably valuable pedagogical and caring work they do with children and families in our communities. Many programs struggle to remain operational and many are closing their doors. 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.

ECEs in the Kindergarten Program are facing increasingly burdensome working conditions both in-person and in virtual teaching. ECEs are managing health and safety protocols with rising class sizes and not enough resources, transitioning to and supporting families with virtual learning, the ability of ECEs, engaging in meaningful pedagogical work while keeping themselves and children safe.

This will not improve without intervention. 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 2021 Budget.

### Therefore, we are recommending the Province:

- Invest an initial \$375 million to develop and implement a province-wide Wage Grid for ECEs and child care staff, as a first step to implementing “*Growing Together: Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy*.” A \$25 minimum wage is required to immediately protect and respect the early childhood workforce and address recruitment and retention issues.
- Immediately reverse \$49 million in planned cuts to child care
- Increase general operating funding by \$500 million to stabilize the child care sector
- Allocate funding to lower class sizes, ensure paid preparation time and collaborative planning time for the Kindergarten Team, and ensure a healthy and safe work environment.
- Allocate \$600 million to begin a transition to operational funding that supports low fees or no fees for families.
- Fund 7 permanent paid sick days and additional 14 paid sick days during public health emergencies

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