

December 22, 2021

Minister Stephen Lecce
Ministry of Education
5th Flr. 438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

Honourable Minister Lecce,

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) is the professional association for ECEs in Ontario and our mission is to build and support a strong collective voice for early childhood educators (ECEs) so they can participate in and influence positive change that benefits ECEs, children, families and communities. We are writing today to share the voices of Early Childhood Educators and early years staff across Ontario who continue to be frustrated by the lack of respect and recognition for their work, and care and consideration for their wellbeing. Early childhood education and care programs have been an integral part of Ontario's COVID response throughout the pandemic, and the ongoing dearth of support for the ECE workforce has created an untenable situation. Alongside our numerous policy reports, recommendations and campaigns, we wrote you directly one year ago today, asking you to take action to better respect and support ECEs, early years staff and child care providers across Ontario. One year later, we are still waiting for concrete action that responds to the needs of the ECE workforce.

ECEs and early years staff have continued to be on the front-lines, implementing enhanced health and safety protocols, that while necessary and important, have increased their workload and called on them to be innovative in their pedagogical and caring practices without additional enhanced resources. They have risen to every challenge and ensured that children in their programs are receiving the care and learning experiences they deserve. They have continued to be professional in their response to changing protocols and conflicting communication, they have built confidence in families, and they have done this while being concerned about the health and wellbeing of children, their communities, themselves, and their own families.

The ECE workforce has been clear about their experiences. In May 2021, the AECEO and Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) co-authored the report [*Forgotten on the Frontline*](#), which raised the voices of ECEs and child care workers/providers. We heard that:

- 43% reported that they have considered leaving the sector since the onset of the pandemic.
- 13% were actively looking for opportunities outside the sector.
- 54% reported decreased job satisfaction.
- 89% reported an increase in job-related stress.
- 36% reported a decrease in planning time.

We included 10 policy recommendations to address the experiences of the ECE workforce, none of which have been delivered.



Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario

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In July 2021, the AECEO and OCBCC developed a *Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario* - toward our vision of what a Canada-wide child care system can and must be in Ontario. The Roadmap includes 20 key policy interventions to achieve universal child care in Ontario and address ongoing workforce challenges. None of our recommendations have been met.

We are experiencing an ECE workforce crisis in Ontario. Child care programs are being forced to close rooms, limit enrolment, or change operating hours because they are unable to retain their current staff and recruit new staff. We have heard repeatedly that wages and working conditions are the primary problem being experienced by the ECE workforce and we have been clear about the solutions. Yet, there has been no action which addresses these ongoing challenges or implements sustainable, long-term solutions.

As we see rising COVID numbers across the Province, ECEs are experiencing challenges accessing booster vaccines, the ECE workforce and child care programs have been left out of Rapid Antigen Test distributions, and there is no break in sight as many will continue to provide care over the holidays. They face further uncertainty as they negotiate the needs of their own children and elderly family members and fears about their own health and the health of their families. Still, ECEs and child care staff/providers will be there to ensure that children are cared for and families and communities are supported, to ensure their early childhood spaces are as safe as possible during this time. They are deserving of respectful acknowledgement of the work they are doing and Ministry action to address their areas of concern.

While the early childhood education and care sector has been referred to as essential throughout the pandemic – many across Ontario feel, instead, that they are being treated as if they are expendable. We know that ECEs and early years staff are essential – they were before COVID and will be after. They deserve decent work and professional pay that acknowledges the important work they do caring for and educating young children and supporting families and communities. We urge you to listen to their voices and take action to address their concerns. We know their work is integral to Ontario's COVID response, and thus far they have responded to your every call. It is time to respond to theirs.

Sincerely,

Alana Powell, RECE
Executive Director, AECEO