

AECEO Submission to Ontario Budget 2023 Consultations

Introduction

Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) work in a diverse range of early years settings in Ontario, bringing their knowledge and unique skill set to their pedagogical, caring work with young children, their families and our communities. However, Ontario's qualified and experienced workforce are leaving the sector, and graduates of ECE post-secondary programs are not entering the profession due to poor pay and lack of decent working conditions. The 2023 Provincial Budget provides an opportunity to build and support a child care and early years system that cares for children, families and the workforce.

Licensed child care

The Canada-Ontario Early Learning and Child Care Agreement represents a significant step forward for the child care sector, but the workforce commitments in the agreement will do little to address the growing recruitment and retention crisis of RECEs and child care workers. The Ministry of Education has estimated Ontario will be short 8,500 RECEs needed to meet their expansion targets by 2025-2026. Educators know that the valuable work they do with children and families is worth more than the low wage floor of \$19/hour and the continued status quo of challenging working conditions due to inadequate funding.

To support RECEs and child care workers in the child care sector:

- **Invest an initial \$300 million to develop and implement a province-wide Salary Scale** for RECEs and child care staff/providers. A minimum wage of \$25/hour for all child care workers and \$30/hour for RECEs with decent work standards (e.g. benefits, paid planning time, paid sick days) is required to immediately protect and respect the early childhood workforce, and address recruitment and retention issues.
- **Increase the general child care allocation by \$240 million** to \$1.92 billion to keep pace with inflation, and meet increased costs that licensed child care is experiencing in daily operation.
- **Adopt and implement the child care community's [*Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario*](#)**, which sets out our vision and a shared path forward for Ontario child care.
- **Fund 7 permanent paid sick days** and additional 14 paid sick days during public health emergencies.

Kindergarten program

RECEs in Kindergarten programs are facing increasingly burdensome working conditions as they continue to work through COVID-19 and intersecting health crises with rising class sizes



and not enough resources. RECEs play an essential role in the Kindergarten team, but the low wages, precarious job security, and lack of paid planning time devalues this important work, leading to educator isolation and burnout.

To support RECEs in the Kindergarten program:

- **Reverse cuts to the education budget** and allocate funding to lower class sizes, increase wages, ensure paid preparation time and collaborative planning time for the Kindergarten Team, and ensure a healthy and safe work environment.

Conclusion & summary

This has been a historical and important year for child care in Ontario, and we congratulate the Ontario government on their signing of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement with the federal government. The Agreement represents a significant step forward for the sector, but Ontario must develop a real provincial workforce strategy and salary scale – one that will provide good careers with fair wages and decent working conditions for educators and early years staff. Without it, educators will continue to leave the sector and Ontario will not be able to staff existing child care spaces, or meet its expansion commitments to provide care to more families. As RECEs continue to engage in important work with children and families across all early years settings, they must be valued and supported through decent wages and working conditions.

In summary, we call on the Government of Ontario to:

1. Invest an initial \$300 million to develop and implement a province-wide Salary Scale for RECEs and child care staff/providers.
2. Increase the general child care allocation by \$240 million to \$1.92 billion.
3. Adopt and implement the child care community's [*Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario*](#).
4. Reverse cuts to the education budget and allocate funding to lower class sizes, increase wages, ensure paid preparation time and collaborative planning time for the Kindergarten Team, and ensure a healthy and safe work environment.
5. Fund 7 permanent paid sick days and additional 14 paid sick days during public health emergencies.

About the AECEO

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.

Appendix 1: Early Learning and Child Care system building diagram

