



Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) Pre-budget Submission

January 24, 2020

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) is the professional association for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) in Ontario.

We support RECEs in their professional practice and advocate for respect, recognition, and appropriate wages and working conditions for all RECEs. RECEs are fundamental to high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Ontario. Our members work throughout the province in programs for young children and their families, including regulated centre-based and home-based child care, full-day kindergarten, EarlyON programs, and support services for children with disabilities.

Our vision is for all of Ontario's children and families to have access to quality affordable ECEC programs where RECEs and program staff are well supported with professional pay and decent work. This vision is founded on the assumption that ECEC is a public good and human right, not a commodity.

Executive Summary of Budget Action Recommendations

- 1. Commit to continuing the \$2 Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG) and Home Child Care Enhancement Grant, and immediately extending the WEG to include RECEs and program staff in EarlyOn Centres.**
- 2. Reverse the \$48 million in cuts to child care and increase operating funding to keep pace with capital expansion.**
- 3. Develop and implement a publicly funded province-wide annually indexed wage scale with a \$25/hour minimum wage for RECEs and commensurate compensation for early years staff, a benefits package, including 7 paid sick and 10 job protected personal leave days.**

Commit to continuing the \$2 Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG) and Home Child Care Enhancement Grant, and immediately extending the WEG to include RECEs and program staff in EarlyOn Centres.

According to the Ministry of Education's 2019 licensed child care survey we know that:

- 5% of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) working in licensed child care earn \$15/hour or less;
- 42% of RECEs working in licensed child care earn between \$15-\$20/hour, and 43% earn between \$20-\$27/hour;
- 10% of directly approved staff and 30% of other program staff working in licensed child care earn between \$14-\$15/hour¹;

This means that in 2019, 90% of RECEs working in licenced child care are earning substantially below the Ministry of Education defined Wage Enhancement Grant Cap of \$27.75/hour². We also know that there are 1,187 EarlyON Child and Family Centres across Ontario³ where RECEs and program staff are not eligible for the current WEG. These figures highlight the unacceptable, inequitable, and persistently low-wages that Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) and program staff face in the ECEC sector.

Every day, RECEs make the difficult decision to leave the sector and the socially important work they are uniquely qualified to perform, while 1 in 4 RECEs in Ontario continue to work an 8-hour day/40-hour work week in addition to a part-time job to make ends meet⁴. We repeatedly hear from our members that persistent low wages and poor working conditions hinder their ability to fulfill their professional responsibilities in ECEC programs. Increasing professional expectations are virtually impossible to achieve within notoriously poor working conditions. RECEs and program staff are being stretched to the brink, and they deserve better. With little or no paid time for planning, collaborating with teaching partners and other professionals, or opportunities for professional learning, RECEs are working through their lunch hours and on their weekends to provide the best care and learning environments for children. Not only is this unjust for RECEs and program staff, over time these conditions erode the quality of experiences for children and families, and add to the precarity of the ECEC sector by contributing to ongoing recruitment and retention issues.

Recruiting and retaining well-educated and qualified RECEs, while making child care affordable for Ontario families, continues to be a challenge for early years programs across the province.

¹ Ministry of Education. (2019). *Early Years and Child Care Annual Report 2019*. [Author]. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/EarlyYearsChildCareAnnualReport2019.pdf>

² Ministry of Education. (2020). *Ontario Child Care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres Service Management and Funding Guideline 2020*. [Author]. Retrieved from https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/Memos/CC2019/EYCC08_EN_attach1.pdf

³ Ministry of Education (2019)

⁴ Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (2013). *You bet we still care! A Survey of Centre-Based Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada*. Retrieved from http://www.ccsc-cssge.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/Projects-Pubs-Docs/EN%20Pub%20Chart/YouBetSurveyReport_Final.pdf

What this complex situation requires is the Government of Ontario to commit to significant and stable funding directly to early years programs, in order to interrupt the co-dependent relationship between staff wages and parent fees. As such, we are calling on the Government of Ontario to commit to continuing the \$2 Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG) and Home Child Care Enhancement Grant and immediately extending the WEG to include RECEs and program staff in EarlyOn Centres.

Reverse the \$48 million in cuts to child care and increase operating funding to keep pace with capital expansion

Child care affordability for Ontario families is a serious issue. Child care is out of reach for the majority of families in Ontario – even those with incomes at or above the median income struggle to afford child care. The \$48 million in cuts to child care funding in Ontario threatens the stability of the early years sector, jeopardizing the well-being of 460,000 children and families who engage with these programs daily, and the RECEs and program staff who rely on these jobs. Furthermore, without funding to meet capital expansion, the system is at risk of becoming further unattainable and expensive. The only sustainable solution is through significant and stable government funding directly to child care programs in order increase access, keep fees low, and ensure decent work for RECEs and early years staff.

As substantial empirical research has shown, investment in the early years through accessible, quality, and affordable programs has significant positive implications for individuals and for society⁵. Most importantly, access to child care and early years programs support children, families, and communities in caring and living well together. Other positive impacts include increased opportunity for workforce participation for women and primary caregivers, reduction in poverty and social isolation, improved child and family well-being, and economic growth⁶. In their 2018 Economic Survey, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development reaffirmed the call for Canada to increase investments to non-profit and public programs to ensure that high-quality child care is accessible and affordable for all families⁷.

We are thus calling in the Government of Ontario to immediately reverse the \$48 million in cuts to child care and increase operating funding to keep pace with capital expansion as a first step

⁵ Bartik, T. J. (2009). Why universal preschool is actually a labour market program. *Employment Research*, 16(3), 8. Also see: Barnett, W. S., & Ackerman, D. J. (2006). Cost, benefits and long-term effects of early care and education programs: recommendations and cautions for community developers. *Community Development: Journal of the Community Development Society*, 37(2), pp. 86-100; Centre for Spatial Economics. (2009). *Understanding and Addressing Workforce Shortages in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Project: Literature Review of the Socioeconomic Effects and Benefits*. Ottawa: Child Care Human Resources Sector Council.; Fairholm, R. (2011, June 22). Economic Impacts of Early Learning and Care. *Early Education Economic Forum*, Atkinson Centre, OISE/University of Toronto. Toronto, Ontario: The Centre for Spatial Economics.; Kimmel, J. (2006). Child care, female employment and economic growth. *Community Development: Journal of the Community Development Society*, 37(2), 71-85.; Liu, Z. R., Ribeiro, R., & Warner, M. (2004). *Comparing Child Care Multipliers in the Regional Economy: Analysis From 50 States*. Cornell University Linking Economic Development and Child Care Research Project.; OECD. (2011, 12 05). *Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising, Country Note - Canada*.; Warner, M. E. (2006). Overview: Articulating the economic importance of child care for community development. *Community Development, Journal of the Community Development Society*, 37(2), pp. 1-6.; Wehner, J., Kelly, B., & Prentice, S. (2008). *Rural and Northern Childcare: A Summary of Economic and Social Evidence from Manitoba*.

⁶ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2018). *OECD Economic Surveys: Canada: Policy Insights*. [Author]. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/eo/surveys/Canada-2018-economic-survey-key-policy-insights.pdf>

⁷ *Ibid*

towards prioritizing children, families, and educators in Ontario. We further recommend that Ontario must commit to a universal system of affordable early learning and care to fundamentally and purposefully address the needs of children and families, ensure decent work for educators, and improve social and economic well-being of Ontario's citizens. Without a comprehensive, coordinated, systems-level approach that recognizes the professional status and work of RECEs and program staff, we will continue to see qualified and skilled professionals withdraw from the sector, fees will continue to rise, and child care will remain inaccessible for most families in Ontario. Therefore, the government must address these issues simultaneously, by implementing the *Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care's* 3 Big Ideas - increasing investments to ensure affordable fees, decent work for educators, and expansion in the public and non-profit sector.

Develop and implement a publicly funded province-wide annually indexed wage scale with a \$25/hour minimum wage for RECEs and commensurate compensation for early years staff, a benefits package, including 7 paid sick days and 10 job protected personal leave days.

Empirical research has consistently established that high quality ECEC is directly linked to well-educated and qualified RECEs. The compensation and support available to educators and staff must reflect their socially and ethically important work with children, families, and communities. Fair and appropriate wages and working conditions cannot be based solely or primarily on parent fees as the existing market model of child care necessitates. Staffing expenses are typically 80-90% of child care centres' operating budgets, and the revenue that sustains child care centres is primarily from parent fees.

Therefore, operational funding for child care and early years programs is necessary to equitably raise the salaries, working conditions and morale of all RECEs and early years staff in addition to strengthening the recruitment and retention of qualified staff. A wage scale, which recognizes the level of education and years of experience for RECEs and programs staff in accordance with pay equity principles, will ensure staff with equivalent education and work responsibilities are well-compensated no matter where they work in the sector in Ontario.

RECEs are uniquely qualified professionals who engage in meaningful, pedagogical, and caring work and contribute to thoughtful and purposeful learning environments with children, families, and communities. The impact of this work has been clearly documented in an overwhelming body of evidence highlighting the importance of early years programs for families with young children. RECEs have continued to advance their profession through increased levels of preservice preparation and ongoing in-service professional learning. In addition to mandatory professional registration and regulation through the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE), RECEs are also held accountable to the public through the College's *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*.

Even with the increasing professionalization of RECEs and the mounting evidence pointing to the immense importance of their work, RECEs have seen a very slow and limited increase in professional recognition through improved compensation and benefits. Low RECE salaries, inconsistent working conditions, and precarious work schedules have resulted in poor morale, job dissatisfaction and high staff turnover. As noted previously, large numbers of RECEs are leaving the sector altogether. Child care programs, as well as EarlyON programs (despite their public operational funding), across Ontario are significantly struggling to recruit and retain

qualified RECEs in this perpetually under-resourced ECEC system. This is having a significant impact on staff consistency in children's programs, on quality, and on ECEC sector stability. These problems will continue to plague the system for years to come if not addressed now.

In November of 2017 the AECEO released and presented to the Ministry of Education our workforce strategy recommendations report, *Transforming Work in Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Sector*. This report called for the government to institute a province-wide wage scale for Registered Early Childhood Educators with a starting hourly salary of \$25/hour⁸. In an AECEO survey of 4,000 staff working in Ontario's ECEC sector (66% of whom were Registered Early Childhood Educators), the majority of respondents supported the introduction of a wage scale that takes into consideration level of education, years of experience, job roles and responsibilities as an appropriate mechanism to improve wages amongst workers in child care and early years programs.⁹ This report also included the recommendation to include changing the positions of full-time designated Early Childhood Educators working in publicly-funded school systems to year-round and salaried status with compensation commensurate with other full-time educators in the public education systems¹⁰.

Recognizing their responsibility in ensuring fair wages and decent work for RECEs and early years staff, the Ministry of Education released the *Growing Together, Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy*,¹¹ which contained a commitment to develop and implement a wage grid for RECEs and early years staff by April 2020. A stable, well-remunerated, professional workforce is the most essential element of quality ECEC programs and this must be achieved without increases in parent fees or program costs. We are thus calling on the Government of Ontario to renew their commitment to the early years workforce by developing and implementing a publicly funded province-wide annually indexed wage scale with a \$25/hour minimum wage for RECEs and commensurate compensation for early years staff, a benefits package, including 7 paid sick days and 10 job protected personal leave days.

To reiterate, in order to move Ontario forward and to ensure that all citizens are able to live and care well, it is essential that the government immediately;

- 1. Commits to continuing the \$2 Wage Enhancement Grant (WEG) and Home Child Care Enhancement Grant, and immediately extending the WEG to include RECEs and program staff in EarlyOn Centres.**
- 2. Reverses the \$48 million in cuts to child care and increase operating funding to keep pace with capital expansion.**
- 3. Develops and implements a publicly funded province-wide annually indexed wage scale with a \$25/hour minimum wage for RECEs and commensurate compensation for early years staff, a benefits package, including 7 paid sick days and 10 job protected personal leave days.**

⁸ Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO). (2017). *Transforming Work in Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Sector*. Workforce Strategy Recommendations Prepared by the Decent Work Task Force. Retrieved from: http://www.aeceo.ca/transforming_work_in_ontario_s_early_years_and_child_care_sector

⁹ Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario. (Dec. 7, 2017) Presentation to Technical Advisory Group on Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy.

¹⁰ AECEO, 2017

¹¹ Ontario Ministry of Education (2018). *Growing together, Ontario's early years and child care workforce strategy*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/growing-together-eycc-workforce-en.pdf>