

# Early childhood educators feel 'devalued' by Gallant government

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Early childhood educators and directors say they feel "devalued" by the Gallant government after the province failed to provide funding to Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick (ECCENB).

The association's grant funding hasn't been approved for the 2017-2018 fiscal year, resulting in 14 layoffs since January and the announced closure of ECCENB's office.

ECCENB represents industry professionals and provides professional development to educators.

High Five! Early Learning Centre owner and operator Wanda Butt, who is also the ECCENB Region 3 committee president, said the association has allowed her and other educators to work with children in a "non-cookie cutter way."

"We don't feel that the government sees early childhood educators as professionals and I think that's a big thing," Butt said. "And when they take professionalism away from us, it truly shows that maybe they don't value us as professionals."

Bookworm Daycare owner and operator Lee Russell said the association creates tools to help educators and directors in their day-to-day business and dealings with children.

Russell, who is also a representative and ECCENB provincial board member, said she agrees the lack of funding is a blow to the sector.

"I don't feel that we're being valued by government as educators in the way that we expect to be," Russell said. "It's a very intricate process that we have to go through. It's very complex. It's not 'walk in, turn on the TV, play with the children,' there's learning involved. It's an educational process and the association helps us in that every day."

In an email to Global News, a spokesperson from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development said the association is being funded until the end of March, which is the end of the fiscal year.

"The provincial government has not shut down the ECCENB's office, according to information from the organization, ECCENB continues to operate, but will do so through the board of directors and the members. This was a decision made by the organization," the department spokesperson wrote.

The department said they provided ECCENB with \$500,000 in funding in 2016-2017 and \$500,000 in 2015-2016.

"The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development budget will be tabled during the Main Estimates process for 2017-2018," the statement said. "An amount of \$500,000 is still planned to support the professional development of childcare educators working with young children."

Jody Carr, an Oromocto Lincoln MLA and the opposition's Education and Early Childhood Development critic, said the layoffs lead to a lot of questions about the sincerity of the government and where their priorities are. He said the government hasn't specified that ECCENB will be the recipient of the funding and there could be a call for tender.

Carr said the government needs to be clear on what they're doing and need to provide information to the public and ECCENB.

"Ideally, you want the government to have a conversation and a dialogue with the organization that's involved and to see that lack of communication and making statements through the media is very disconcerting," he said.

-reprinted from Global News

**Region:** New Brunswick [3]

**Tags:** quality [4]

funding [5]

workforce [6]  
space shortage [7]  
cuts [8]  
professionalization [9]

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[2] <https://globalnews.ca/news/3268808/early-childhood-educators-feel-devalued-by-gallant-government/> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7854> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/quality> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/workforce> [7]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/space-shortage> [8] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/cuts> [9]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/professionalization>