

P.E.I.'s early childhood educators getting a raise ^[1]

1st step in long-term commitment, says minister

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EXCERPTS

The P.E.I. government announced pay increases Monday morning for workers in the province's child care centres.

The increases varied according to the category of the worker.

- \$1 per hour increase for uncertified early childhood program staff.
- \$2 per hour increase for level 1 and 2 early childhood educators (ECEs).
- \$3 per hour increase for level 3 early childhood educators and centre directors.

The new pay is effective April 1, and will be fully funded by the provincial government.

"It's not as much as we were hoping for." — Kathleen Couture

Ashley Shoemaker is an ECE at Bright Futures Child Development Centre in Charlottetown and says the \$3 per hour increase she'll receive is long overdue — she currently makes \$16 an hour.

"The amount of work we do, the programming we do, there's a lot of curriculum now and a lot of education behind it. And the wages just haven't gone with it," said Shoemaker. "Now they are. But they need to keep going."

Will help keep current staff

The increase comes well short of a \$7 per hour demand from workers in French child care centres.

Those workers noted while they make \$15.60 an hour, educational assistants who often work in the same building earn \$22 an hour.

Kathleen Couture, the executive director of the board that manages four french child care centres, says she took note of the fact P.E.I.'s Minister of Education and Early Learning Jordan Brown called the increase "step one."

"It's not as much as we were hoping for but the promising part there is that there is a part two to come," said Couture.

"It's going really help us retain those who are currently in the field. And those that might be thinking of leaving, this might keep them here a little longer so we have more certified staff in our centres."

'Only a start'

Private, licensed centres do not have to follow the new wage grid — instead, staff there will receive two lump-sum payments.

- \$3,000 for certified staff.
- \$1,500 for uncertified staff.

"I think it'll be a big difference to try and recruit the staff to come to the centre, because you'll be able to offer that incentive twice a year to get them to come stay with you. But it's really only a start," said Jamie-Lynn Mosher, owner of Rainbow Beginnings Early Learning Centre in St. Teresa.

"It is really hard to recruit staff to come to rural P.E.I., let alone for just above minimum wage, without hiking parent fees."

'Falls well short'

In a written news release Monday, Green Party MLA Hannah Bell said government's wage hike "falls well short of what's needed."

"Government needs to articulate a clear and tangible commitment to increasing ECE wages beyond a small increase in an election year," said Bell in the release.

Brown defended the timing of Monday's announcement, saying it had nothing to do with the pending election.

He said while he has been lobbied for years to address ECE pay issues, his government wanted to wait until it had sufficient

research before it made changes.

"It was something that I've indicated and frankly taken heat for, that it was not appropriate to do it until we had the work, the evidence to ensure that what we're doing is the right thing," Brown said.

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