

Funding education support: More support to meet demand for early childhood educators ^[1]

Author: Patel, Sarita

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EXCERPTS

British Columbia has seen a demand for early childhood educators (ECE) and the province assigned \$4 million within the Canada-BC Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Agreement to provide additional bursaries through the ECE Education Support Fund.

The B.C. government launched the enhanced ECE Education Support Fund in Sep. 2018, with a target of supporting 4,000 students by the end of Mar. 2020.

To date, this program has provided more than 5,400 bursaries to students pursuing their ECE education goals. This was done by adding an additional \$1.9 million in 2019 to the initial \$10-million investment.

"It's going to bring our total funding close to about \$16 million to support early childhood educators in BC through our childhood BC plan," says Katrina Chen, BC's minister of state for child care.

"The Government of Canada is pleased to work with the Government of British Columbia to help train more qualified early childhood educators," says Ahmed Hussen, federal Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

The program is open province-wide including, Okanagan College which does have an ECE program. Students that need extra help can apply and they'll be awarded in the regular process.

Future ECEs, as well as current ECEs, can benefit from bursaries of up to \$4,000 and \$5,000. The applications closed Oct. 11, 2019, due to the high demand but funds are now available for students who were waitlisted during the fall semester, as well as for students attending recognized post-secondary programs in the winter semester.

"We originally targetted about funding for 4,000 students we actually added more in 2019 - we added \$1.9 million because of the strong interest. I think that now people finally see early childhood education as a good career," explains Chen.

Thus far they've funded over 6,400 bursaries to support students through their training and education.

Chen hopes that the bursaries will help not only current students but recruit future students in the ECE field because she believes there is a demand for early childhood care in BC.

"Local parents struggling to find childcare spaces and local childcare providers have shared with me that they've been struggling to find early childhood educators," says Chen.

Chen says working with the federal and provincial governments is apart of the plan to build a better future for EDEs and parents.

"This is the first time the provincial government is really focused on investing in early learning and childcare after years of parents struggling with not being able to find childcare services or afford childcare services," explains Chen.

"The majority of a child's brain development happens before the age of five," said Katrine Conroy, B.C.'s Minister of Children and Family Development.

"As a former ECE, I know what a rewarding career this can be and the critical role early childhood educators play in helping children in their earliest stages of life, which is why I'm so proud of our government for supporting this program and the important work ECEs do," adds Conroy.

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