

ECE students calling on Ford government for better treatment of early childhood educators ^[1]

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EXCERPT

A group of students in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector at George Brown College (GBC), known as GBC Advocates, are fighting for improved treatment of ECE workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Although deemed essential by the provincial government of Ontario, these students do not feel as though ECE workers are being treated as such.

"We are deemed as essential workers for the economy to run, but yet we are not treated as essential workers," says Shevaun Burrell, a member of GBC Advocates.

Partnered with the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO), GBC Advocates are a group of 30 students in different programs within the School of Early Childhood at George Brown College. On a mission to foster awareness of issues facing the sector, critical thinking, and critical action towards these issues, GBC Advocates meet regularly to discuss community concerns, as well as informing others through their various social media presences.

Although expected to attend work every day during a global pandemic, members of the GBC Advocates group say that those employed in the ECE sector are still not eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, sick pay, or temporary pandemic pay. As a result, many ECE students at GBC say they have not felt safe to attend work placement amid these circumstances.

"When the second lockdown happened, and the new order that everything was going to be closed, Doug Ford closed down schools. But did he care to close down ECE centers, which are the hotspots of COVID-19? No. Did he really care about us? No. Did he consult us? No", says Elvin Valasco, a member of the group.

"We don't feel safe, we're working in precarious working conditions, students have to go to placement in a way that's dangerous for them."

Premier Doug Ford and Ontario Minister of Education Steven Lecce, have yet to respond to the requests of GBC Advocates, which have been addressed to them in several emails, written letters, and voicemails by the student group.

Only recently did Lecce begin to address ECE workers by their correct title, says GBC Advocates member Tegan Nguyen.

"Last year, in an interview, [Lecce] addressed us as 'early childhood assistants'," says Nguyen. "We have to have professional training in order to be recognized and registered as early childhood educators. That's why calling us by the right name is really important. And our minister just came to that point."

GBC Advocates continue to fight for the improved treatment of ECE students and workers, despite not being recognized by the provincial government. Last semester, the group spoke at the ECE Appreciation Day rally held by the AECEO and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) about issues facing the sector and how these issues impact students in particular. They have also served as occasional guest speakers during various ECE classes at GBC.

"We are here to build capacity for students, as some students may feel that they aren't advocates, but we are all internally advocates. We all have stories, our stories are political, so our duty and our objectives as a group is to empower students and inspire them to look within themselves to be advocates and leaders within their community," says Velasco.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: advocacy ^[4]

government ^[5]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/02/ece-students-calling-ford-government-better-treatment-early> [2] <http://dialognews.ca/2021/01/28/ece-students-calling-on-ford-government-for-better-treatment-of-early-childhood-educators/> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/advocacy> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8941>