

Thanks is not enough on this Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Thursday marks Child Care Worker and Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day in Ontario. Since the pandemic began, these professionals have grappled with program closures, layoffs, emergency child care, virtual programming, and ever-changing health and safety protocols. Through all this, ECEs and child-care workers have continued to educate and care for Ontario's youngest learners and to support their families with grace and resilience.

On this appreciation day, these educators deserve more than a thank you. They deserve decent work and pay that matches the qualifications, skills and vital importance of their work.

And yet, we have a provincial government that continues to undervalue this important workforce. Since coming into office in 2018, the Ford government abandoned a planned Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy. That plan included a wage scale for ECEs and child-care workers, which should have come into effect last year. They never included child-care workers in pandemic pay. And they continue to delay signing on to the federal child care plan that would include funding to boost child care workers wages.

This record of provincial inaction all comes at a cost — to the ECEs and child-care workers themselves, but also to children, families and our communities.

In May we published a report on Ontario's child care workforce, *Forgotten on the Frontline*, in which 42 per cent of child-care workers surveyed shared they have considered leaving the sector since the onset of the pandemic. They also reported more job-related stress and decreased job satisfaction. Little funding to hire cleaners means sanitizing increasingly replaces their meaningful time interacting with children. We warned that without immediate action, the sector's retention crisis would begin to directly impact child-care programs' ability to serve families.

Now we are seeing this crisis start to play out in communities like Grey County, where child-care programs are only at 70 per cent capacity because of staffing shortages — 800 families are on wait-lists.

While many sectors are facing current recruitment challenges, a child-care shortage will only compound that problem. Children and families are now trying to settle into new routines and return to the workplace, none of which is possible if ECEs and child-care workers continue to exit the sector.

So how do we move forward? The first step is for the Ford government to immediately sign on to the federal child-care plan to unlock \$10 billion in child-care funding. Then the province needs to listen to the voices of child-care workers. The community has created a Road map to Universal Child Care to guide the province as it moves forward — it's a plan that all parties would be wise to consult as we head into a provincial election next year. Thursday marks Child Care Worker and Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day in Ontario. Since the pandemic began, these professionals have grappled with program closures, layoffs, emergency child care, virtual programming, and ever-changing health and safety protocols. Through all this, ECEs and child-care workers have continued to educate and care for Ontario's youngest learners and to support their families with grace and resilience.

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Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: child care workforce ^[4]

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