

Parents, kids march alongside N.S. early childhood educators in calling for fair wages Social Sharing ^[1]

'I don't want to Band-Aid this situation, I want a fix,' says Sackville ECE

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EXCERPTS

Dozens of child-care workers, parents and children took to the streets Thursday in downtown Halifax, waving colourful signs and calling for what they say is a long-anticipated and deserved raise in wages for early childhood educators.

Despite assurances from the province that raises are coming soon for early childhood educators, a number of child-care centres closed for the day while staff marched from city hall to the Department of Education as part of a planned walkout and day of action.

"There's a lot of, 'Why today? [Raises are] coming. Why don't you just wait?'" Bobbi-Lynn Keating, one of the event's organizers and the director of Peter Green Hall Children's Centre in Halifax, told the crowd.

"One minute more is too long. There's people that can't afford to eat.... I have [staff] that need bus tickets because they can't afford bus tickets the last two days before payday."

Early childhood educators (ECEs) in provincially funded, licensed child-care centres are paid based on a wage floor of \$15 to \$19 an hour depending on their education, according to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's website. The website notes "many employers pay their staff above the wage floor."

Compensation package coming

The Nova Scotia government has promised a compensation package this fall to improve the pay of ECEs as part of the \$605-million deal between the province and Ottawa to create \$10-a-day child-care spaces.

Hannah Rhyno, an ECE based in Sackville, expressed doubt Thursday that raises would come into effect any time soon.

"I don't want to Band-Aid this situation, I want a fix," said Rhyno. "Change is going to happen, but it does really need to change now because if we don't have any more ECEs, you don't have child care, and it's just bad for the economy."

Bri Gallant, who works as an ECE in Hammonds Plains, said she feels underappreciated in her field.

"It's very depressing ... it's hard to want to keep going to work every day and doing our best for the kids when we can't even do the best for ourselves."

Becky Druhan, the province's minister of education and early childhood development, told reporters Thursday the raise will happen in the coming weeks.

She said Nova Scotia is taking a different approach than other provinces that have promised compensation increases.

"Many of those provinces have announced but haven't yet delivered," said Druhan. "When we make that announcement, we want to be in a position to be able to implement it very quickly so that ECEs see money in their pockets, they don't just get to read about an announcement and wonder when it's coming."

9,500 new spaces

Child-care centres experienced an exodus of staff when Nova Scotia's pre-primary program came into effect in 2017 because they could not compete with the higher salaries, better working conditions and benefits offered by regional centres for education. The pandemic has only worsened staffing shortages.

The province is under pressure to recruit and retain ECEs so that it can live up the commitment of its deal with the federal government, which includes the creation of 9,500 new early learning and child-care spaces by 2025, with 1,500 of those new seats in place by the end of this year.

Christina Hubley attended the march Thursday with her toddler, Aurora. Hubley said her daughter's child-care teacher is like a second parent.

"Power is with numbers, and the more parents can support them [ECEs], the more they know that they are supported and loved. And they're so important," said Hubley. "They deserve everything."

Gallant said the purpose of the demonstration was to show that ECEs won't be walked over and overlooked anymore.

"We are a group of people who are strong when we stand together, and we are a group of people who matter."

Centres that were closed for Thursday's demonstration were expected to reopen Friday.

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