

N.S. early childhood educators stage walkout over delayed pay raises ^[1]

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Source: CTV News Atlantic

Format: Article

Publication Date: 8 Sep 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

More than 100 early childhood educators in Nova Scotia staged a walkout over delayed pay raises Thursday morning.

The group marched through downtown Halifax protesting "inaction" from the provincial government.

Nova Scotia's Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has said it will establish a wage top-up for early childhood educators this fall. The wage upgrade is tied to the \$605-million federal-provincial agreement that will see daycare costs drop to \$10 a day in 2026.

The current wage floor for early childhood educators in Nova Scotia is between \$15 and \$19 per hour, depending on level of training.

Educators say they are losing teachers due to low wages and burnout because of increased demand for their services.

"We feel like it's time for the government to acknowledge that we deserve to be paid, you know, for what we're worth and acknowledged for what we're worth," said early childhood educator Margot Nickerson.

For Nickerson, who also served as a rally organizer, a raise is a long time coming.

"Many early childhood educators are suffering right now with inflation and the fact that they haven't had a raise since 2014," said Nickerson. "And even when they got that raise in 2014, it was far below what we would call a living wage in Nova Scotia."

Parents were also among those who protested Thursday.

"The ages from zero to five are crucial in terms of providing kids with a safe environment where they feel loved and seen as themselves," said parent Sarah Fancy. "I really feel that early childhood educators should be supported in the same way that are school-aged children are."

Premier Tim Houston said there was no need for this protest because the provincial government recognizes that wages need to be improved.

"I want to assure the ECE's that the adjustment is coming and we feel the urgency," Houston said. "We're working as quickly as we can."

The frustration is mounting among early childhood educators as they believe the government depended on them during the pandemic, and they deserve more.

Minister of Education and Early Childhood Education Becky Druhan says the provincial government is working on the logistics with all learning centre operators on how they will roll out the increased funding for wages.

An announcement regarding a pay raise for early childhood educators is expected in the coming weeks, but opposition leaders say the province is stonewalling and the increased wages are needed now.

"This is an urgent situation," said Nova Scotia Liberal Party leader Zach Churchill. "Everyone is experiencing the impacts of inflation and the cost of living, and we are losing ECE's to other employment opportunities where they can be paid more money."

The rally organizer says they won't rule out further job action until the government follows through on wage increases.

There are 330 private and non-profit childcare centres across Nova Scotia. The province has pledged to create 9,500 new early learning and child-care spaces by 2025.

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