

Early childhood educators in Nova Scotia to get a pay raise ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Early childhood educators in Nova Scotia are set to see a significant increase in their rate of pay.

The provincial government announced Tuesday that most of the 2,600 early childhood educators (ECEs) in regulated child-care settings in Nova Scotia are set to receive a pay raise in the range of 30 per cent.

"We've heard, we know that this work is decades overdue," said Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Becky Druhan at the announcement Tuesday. "This is a significant improvement for our ECEs."

The move comes as inflation pushes up the cost of living, and as Ottawa and Nova Scotia bring in a new funding framework that aims to gradually lower daycare fees and create more child care spaces. Any benefits for educators are still being worked out.

Some early childhood educators will see a raise between 14 and 43 per cent, depending on their classification level and experience.

The wage increase will be retroactive to July 4.

"ECEs will see money in their pockets soon and the work on the benefits will follow," said Druhan.

Reaction from the room full of students and providers at the announcement was mostly positive.

"It's a great starting place and it's definitely an improvement from yesterday," said Janessa Williams, executive director of the Needham Early Learning Centre.

While Joe Kinsman, co-owner of Becky's Daycare, says he is pleased by the change, he says he has concerns private daycares still can't compete with the pre-primary program hiring.

"The concern is it's just going to continue," said Kinsman. "We're just going to continue to lose ECEs because we're still not at a level, the same level, as what the schools are paying ECEs."

Other private providers want to be able to expand seats.

"They're promoting that they are opening seats but not for profit, only for non-profit, and I think the public is missing out on that," said Lesley Corbett of the Tallahassee Early Learning Centre.

The province says it will provide additional funding to employers by Nov. 1, to allow operators to pay staff in accordance with the new wage scale by mid-November.

The new wage scale will apply to Level 1, 2, and 3 ECEs and directors working in licensed centres and family home child-care agencies that receive funding from the province.

"This initiative, like other initiatives under the Canada-Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, such as lowering of parent fees and creating new spaces, is setting the stage for transformational change," said Christine McLean, associate professor in the department of child and youth studies at Halifax's Mount Saint Vincent University, in a government news release Tuesday.

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It is moving early learning and child care in Nova Scotia from a patchwork of services and service delivery models to a publicly funded and publicly managed system, one that recognizes child care as a common public good and not a market-based service where a parent is 'lucky' to find, afford or access suitable child care."

The cost of the wage increase for early childhood educators is estimated to cost taxpayers about \$100 million each year, cost-shared through the federal-provincial Child Care Agreement. According to the provincial government, Nova Scotia currently spends about \$25 million each year in wages to childcare operators. With the bump in wages, the province will be spending \$75.4 million.

Druhan noted that more work is needed on a benefits plan, including retirement benefits. She says the details of the plan will be rolled out

sometime in 2023.

Beginning next year, the provincial government says it is set to spend an additional \$120 million over three years on early learning and child care.

CHILD CARE CRISIS

For months, daycare operators have been sounding the alarm on what they say is a child-care crisis in the province.

Operators have said they are struggling to recruit and retain educators, leading to staffing shortages. They say the shortages, combined with the rising costs of operating a daycare, are creating the crisis.

Some daycare operators have also said they are losing staff to the province's pre-primary program, which launched in 2017.

The issues have forced some daycares in the province to close their doors, leaving many parents scrambling. The Fall River Childcare Centre announced this month that it will close next month.

Nova Scotia has pledged to create 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. That promise is tied to its funding deal with Ottawa.

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

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