

Manitoba early childhood educators get pay bump as governments try to draw workers to sector ^[1]

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Early childhood educators and assistants in Manitoba will get a pay bump for the second year in a row as the federal and provincial governments attempt to bolster recruitment and retention efforts in the sector.

On Thursday, the two levels of government announced \$56.1 million from the Canada-Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Agreement will go toward boosting starting wages for child-care workers in regulated facilities focused on kids under the age of seven.

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning Minister Wayne Ewasko said for decades, early childhood educators in Manitoba have "felt undervalued."

"This wage increase recognizes the importance of their crucial work," he said during a funding announcement at the Morrow Early Learning and Child Development site at the René Deleurme Centre in southeast Winnipeg.

It will also "help us recruit and retain more staff to address labour market shortages," he said.

The federal government is contributing \$52.8 million, while Manitoba is chipping in another \$3.3 million to support wage increases for staff who work with kids ages seven to 12, Ewasko said.

The wage increases will come into effect in July.

Early childhood educators received increases of 12 per cent last summer through the same federal-provincial agreement.

Ewasko was unable to immediately say what the latest increases will mean to hourly pay rates for the different designations, but suggested the latest increase, combined with last year's, will amount to an 18 per cent raise for those starting out in the sector.

The latest funding enables not-for-profit child-care boards and owner-operators to offer "fair, consistent and competitive" wages, said Ewasko.

The provincial and federal governments announced the formation of an early learning and child-care wage grid last year. No such scale existed before last summer.

On Thursday, the province said the grid provides a wage framework and targets for different early childhood educator classifications. The hope is child-care facilities take that into account and work toward an average staff wage by July 2024.

"It's common knowledge that early childhood educators have been underpaid," said Camie Rettaler, a Level 3 early childhood educator. "One of the reasons quality educators have left the field is due to a lack of an equitable salary."

Rettaler, who has worked at the Morrow Avenue Day Care program for 15 years, said that wage gap was responsible for labour shortages in the sector.

When wages went up last year, so did morale, said Rettaler. She thinks the additional boosts this year through the wage grid will help retain staff and attract more.

"Even just my day-to-day life too, it has been just nice having that extra security too, especially with inflation," she said.

"Everyone always thinks of the future, how you're going to take care of yourself, how you're going to provide for yourself and your family as well," she said.

"So knowing that if I put in X number of years of service or if I get to this position in the program, that money will be there to get the salary that reflects that position title as well ... will keep employees in the sector."

Manitoba is planning to issue a request for proposals this spring for a consultant to do market research on wage grid examples elsewhere and come up with a broader implementation plan.

The province also announced \$2.1 million for four early childhood care centres, including \$662,000 for the René Deleurme Centre, to implement what's known as the Abecedarian Approach to early childhood learning.

That method, developed in the U.S. in the early 1970s, is an early childhood intervention that focuses on building language skills to foster cognitive, social and emotional development, along with improving reading and math skills.

Ewasko said that approach, which was piloted at a Winnipeg daycare more than a decade ago, has proven especially beneficial for kids in high-risk communities.

The René Deleurme Centre, situated in an area with a high newcomer population, was selected because it offers settlement and parenting programs for those in need of health and housing supports, Ewasko said.

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

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