

Ontario to boost early childhood educator wages in bid to ease staff shortage ^[1]

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Excerpts

Ontario is set to increase the wages of early childhood educators in a bid to boost recruitment and retention amid a staff shortage that advocates warn could hamper the growth of the national \$10-a-day child-care program.

The government has drafted — but not yet released — a child-care workforce strategy based on consultations held earlier this year with dozens of groups, including advocates, experts, operators, municipalities and colleges.

The Canadian Press obtained Ministry of Education summaries on those consultation sessions through a Freedom of Information request and they show that the government was overwhelmingly told variations of "pay ECEs more."

Education Minister Stephen Lecce said in an interview with The Canadian Press that he received the feedback "loud and clear."

"What we heard is that we've got to do more to create more incentives to retain the workers and to recruit new ones, because we need thousands of additional workers to meet the needs to fill the 86,000 spaces that province is on track to create," he said.

"My assurance to the ECEs, to the workers in the sector, is that we're going to go further."

Ontario committed in its deal with the federal government on \$10-a-day child-care to set a wage floor of \$18 an hour in 2022 and increase it by \$1 a year up to \$25. But Lecce said he is heeding the calls to do more.

"I think these workers deserve it," he said, while not specifying what the increase will be.

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The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario has called for a minimum of \$30 an hour for ECEs and \$25 an hour for non-ECE staff members. Either one or two of the workers in a child-care room are required to be an ECE, depending on the age of the children.

Alana Powell, the association's executive director, said she is cautiously optimistic at the news that Lecce has committed to further increasing ECE pay, but worries it will still be less than what's needed and will be delayed by the rollout of a broader child-care workforce strategy.

"We know wages are the issue, we know the wage floor is far too low ... so why aren't we just sort of immediately addressing low wages while we continue to build these other longer-term strategies out?" she said.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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