

Early childhood educators in Ontario among lowest paid in Canada, advocates say ^[1]

Advocates are calling for a salary scale of at least \$30 to \$40 an hour for registered ECEs

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Excerpts

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The current rate of \$19 an hour makes the effective minimum wage the third lowest in the country, ahead of Saskatchewan and Northwest Territories, according to a policy paper released Tuesday by the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

Many childcare centres across the province are limiting enrolment or closing rooms because of a staffing shortage primarily driven by the low wages, said Alana Powell, executive director of the ECE association.

"We want to remind the Ontario government they need to show they care about ECEs and childcare workers by immediately raising wages," she said at a news conference.

"That is the only way we can retain ECEs in the sector, re-attract those who have left and recruit more skilled educators to the field."

The two groups are calling for a salary scale of at least \$30 to \$40 an hour for registered ECEs and at least \$25 an hour for non-ECE staff, who make up about 40 per cent of the workers in licensed child care.

Lecce says compensation bump coming

Education Minister Stephen Lecce says he will be releasing a workforce strategy this fall that will include a boost to compensation, though he would not say by how much.

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Lecce would not say if the plan will include a wage floor or grid for non-ECE staff.

Early childhood educators would also like to see the workforce strategy include non-compensation items such as a robust professional learning strategy and paid time to plan programming, Powell said. But the main thing she said she hears from ECEs is the need for higher wages, along with benefits and pensions.

No Ontario YMCA childcare centres at full operating capacity

Rachel Neville said she felt forced to leave her job as an ECE in licensed child care because she was earning \$18 an hour and couldn't afford to take the bus to and from work multiple times a day for her split shift.

"Leaving my job felt like I was betraying myself and the children and families that I cared for," she said at Tuesday's press conference.

"I desperately wanted to keep that part of myself alive, stay in the field, but it felt like the childcare system was ruining my life and the low wages left me with this impossible decision. It was so unfair that on the last day of work, I had to look at the toddlers and tell them I wasn't coming back."

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Ministry documents from the start of the consultations show that officials estimate the province could be 8,500 ECEs short by 2026.

And while the province plans to create 86,000 new childcare spaces, Ontario's financial accountability officer has estimated the additional demand spurred by lower fees will outpace the current expansion plans by more than 220,000 spaces by 2026.

Related link: Position paper on a publicly-funded early learning and child care salary scale [3]

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