

# Early Childhood Educators in Thunder Bay say salaries too low to staff Ontario's classrooms <sup>[1]</sup>

Thunder Bay kindergarten classrooms are shortstaffed as Ontario grapples with ECE shortage

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

### Excerpts

Lakehead Public School board is in dire need of more Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), but the president of the local ECE bargaining unit says low wages are making the career a difficult sell.

Shelley Crupi, who is also an ECE at the Lakehead Public School Board, said the average new grad will make around \$20/hour or \$40,000 per year, while the most experienced ECEs could earn up to about \$29/hour. Those salaries are too low for a challenging job that requires a two-year college diploma and maintaining registration with a professional regulatory body, said Crupi.

The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario has called for a minimum of \$30 an hour for ECEs, which would be \$62,400 before taxes if working a 40-hour week.

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Crupi said that school boards also have to compete with daycares, child care centres and other businesses that hire ECEs.

"I don't think that early childhood educators are recognized for the qualifications that they do have in educating young children," said Crupi.

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Many people misunderstand the depth of work ECEs perform in schools, said Cheri Mayes, an ECE at Lakehead Public School Board.

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Last year, the Ministry of Education raised the wage floor for registered ECEs to \$18/hour. This would be equivalent for \$37,440 on a 40-hour workweek.

"We increased wages by one dollar per hour this year and will do so every year going forward in the agreement," said Isha Chaudhuri, a ministry spokesperson said in an emailed statement to CBC News. This maxes out at \$25/hour, which would be \$52,000 yearly.

As the national \$10-a-day child-care program rolls out, demand for ECEs will continue to increase. If staff shortages are not rectified, the program could be significantly hampered.

The provincial 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."

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

### ECE work is rewarding, but tough

Riley Dolcetti-Hansen said that many people don't understand what exactly it is ECEs do in kindergarten, and don't get to see the differences they make in student's lives.

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