

Advocates say increase to Ontario ECE wages doesn't go far enough for retention of workers ^[1]

Demand is rising for \$10 a day childcare, in a bid to ease the shortage of early childhood educators, the province is boosting their hourly pay. However, advocates say it won't be enough to attract and retain underpaid workers.

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Excerpts

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The province announced an increase to the wage floor for a Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) from \$20 per hour to \$23.84 per hour. It's expected to rise to \$25.86 by 2025.

Education Minister Stephen Lecce said the increase will create wage parity with those working in schools and allow daycare centres to keep more workers.

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The province said they are supporting the retention of workers by allowing those who are unregistered but have six months of experience in the sector to be eligible to receive financial support to obtain an ECE diploma. The workforce strategy also includes \$18.5 million per year to establish a dedicated professional development day.

"Of course, an hourly wage increase for very low-paid educators is good news. Obviously, we're happy that the lowest paid are going to see wage increases," said Morna Ballantyne, executive director of Child Care Now.

"What we would like to see is a much higher wage set in a provincial wage grid, which would ensure a much higher wage standard that then would be the basis for recruitment and retention."

Ballantyne said they hoped to see an increase to at least \$30 per hour for ECEs and \$25 per hour for anyone else who works in a childcare centre.

Lecce said this announcement was just limited to those registered.

"Today's announcement is specific to ECEs, as per the priority," said Lecce. "This agreement is creating clear laddering opportunities for the non-ECEs to actually become ECEs. And we're actually paying the costs associated with that credential upgrade."

"It's far too limited ... more than registered early childhood educators need big wage bumps to be able to keep the sector strong," commented Ballantyne.

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To increase exposure to the profession, the government will also be supporting the expansion of the dual credit program in secondary schools

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"We do believe that this comprehensive five-pillar plan is going to help meet the needs and bridge those gaps to help us achieve 86,000 additional spaces," said Lecce. The new childcare spaces include more than 18,000 in Toronto.

Ballantyne disagreed.

"I do not believe it is enough ... it's not just that there are not enough staff to open and expand licensed programs so that more families have access, but existing programs are having to downsize and close."

She said another barrier they are seeing across the country is not enough public funding to pay for the cost of building new centres or

expanding existing facilities.

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