

Child care worker shortage looming ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A province-wide shortage of trained child care workers is threatening the rollout of full day kindergarten, advocates say.

About 20,000 early childhood educators are expected to be working in teams with kindergarten teachers by 2015 when the province's all-day learning initiative is fully implemented.

But child care workers have been leaving the field in droves due to low wages and poor working conditions, said Andrea Calver of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

And the better pay and benefits offered by school boards is prompting those still working in the profession to abandon their daycare jobs for the classroom, causing staff shortages in child care centres, she added.

"Where are the staff going to come from? The province doesn't have a plan," said Calver who is highlighting the issue at Queen's Park Wednesday as part of Child Care Worker Appreciation Day.

The province needs to work with colleges and universities to train more early childhood educators and encourage them to stay by improving wages and benefits throughout the sector, the coalition says.

"Without a strategy, full-day kindergarten won't succeed and community-based child care programs will continue to face a staffing crisis," Calver said.

Education Minister Leona Dombrowsky said she is working with Training, Colleges and Universities Minister John Milloy on the training issue, but made no promises on wages, which she said vary widely throughout the province.

"Child care is a priority for us," she said in an interview. "We believe this profession is very attractive for many reasons."

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-reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: advocacy ^[3]

staff ^[4]

school system ^[5]

pay equity ^[6]

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Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/10/10/child-care-worker-shortage-looming> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856>

[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/advocacy> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/staff> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/school-system> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/pay-equity>