

Kathleen Wynne announces pay raise for early childhood educators ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Child care workers at provincially licensed centres and home daycares are getting a \$1-an-hour increase this month and another dollar hike next year, Premier Kathleen Wynne announced Monday.

"Let's not pretend that your work has always been valued as it should be. We know that it has not so today I am very proud to announce we have taken action to increase wages for early childhood educators and front line child care professionals in licensed child care setting," Wynne said in Kingston, Ont.

Child care advocates welcomed the move as "long overdue."

"When daycare workers heard about the wage increase last year they were ecstatic," said Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "They will be happy that this is finally going through."

The wage increases were outlined in last year's budget in an effort to close the gap between early childhood educators working in the publicly-funded education system and those in the licensed child care sector.

"It's time to bridge that gap," Wynne said.

However, it is up to the licensed child care operators to apply for the provincial funding. Only workers making less than \$26.27 an hour will be eligible for the bump up. The budget set aside \$269 million in funding over three years.

"Closing the wage gap means that licensed child care operators can hire and keep the best early childhood educators possible. It means more parents will have the confidence that they are getting high quality child care," Wynne said.

NDP MPP Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth) said increasing salaries for workers in this sector is just part of the answer to child care availability.

"As much as it is good idea to give out pay increases to child care workers, I think the government has got to do a lot more around affordability and availability to help families," he told the Star.

Tabuns said there are parents in his riding who are spending \$1,900 a month for child care which "puts an incredible burden on them."

There are more than 5,000 licensed child care centres across Ontario. Access to licensed child care has grown by more than 130,000 spaces since 2003, according to the education ministry.

The new provincial cash will help non-profit centres that are struggling to pay good wages while keeping fees low for parents, said Ferns at the coalition. About 75 per cent of licensed child care spots in Ontario are offered in public or non-profit settings.

But the coalition, which represents Ontario's non-profit child care sector, wonders how the government is going to ensure commercial centres spend the money on wages and don't use the funds to increase their profits.

A pay raise is the best investment Ontario can make in the future of a strong early childhood system, said Shani Halfon of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, the professional association for registered ECEs.

"The research is clear that if you want quality, it's all about the staff," she said. "Good wages encourage good staff to stay in the field."

"As a parent, I also think it's a good place to put the money," said Halfon, whose 8-year-old is in before- and after-school care. "Parents want daycare staff to earn better wages, but they can't afford to pay higher fees."

The province's decision to cap the wage increase at \$26.27 an hour is fair, Halfon said. The average ECE working in full-day kindergarten classrooms earns between \$20 and \$26 an hour while many employed in child care centres with the same professional training make

between \$13 and \$15 an hour, she noted.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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