

Regional wage scales for RECEs working in regulated childcare in Ontario ^[1]

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Regional Wage Scales for RECEs Working in Regulated Childcare in Ontario: A Discussion Paper provides a platform for discussing regional wage scales as a solution to address the on-going issues around compensation in the regulated childcare sector.

In this paper you will find information about what we know about wages in the regulated childcare sector, reasons for establishing wage scales, important principles underlying this work and a proposed framework for developing regional wage scales for RECES working in regulated childcare in Ontario.

Introduction

In 2007, The Ontario Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources¹, chaired by Dr. Donna Lero recommended the establishment of provincial guidelines for wages, benefits and working conditions for early learning and care programs and immediate increases in funding to enable these programs to implement substantial wage and benefit increases (p. 56 -57). The Expert Panel further recommended that municipalities should establish wage scales and benefits for childcare programs and practitioners in their jurisdictions, as well as expectations for working conditions. According to the Expert Panel, municipal wage scales and expectations should: (p. 57).

- be commensurate with practitioners' education, experience and responsibilities
- be comparable to those paid to other professionals with similar education and experience
- be consistent with provincial guidelines
- be based on wages and benefits currently paid by municipal programs and in other unionized environments (i.e., use municipal wage scales as a benchmark)
- reflect the principles of pay equity and avoid gender discrimination
- include provisions for a registered pension plan
- set out the conditions that support quality, including time for program planning, paid professional development and working hours.

More than 10 years later, these recommendations remain unrealized. Instead the latest data from the 2013 You Bet We Still Care! 2 report actually showed a 2.7% decrease in wages between 1998 and 2012 (after adjusting for inflation) for ECEs and other staff working in regulated childcare centres in Ontario. And while, as a result of the advocacy efforts of the Equal Pay Coalition, the current government is committed to closing the gender wage gap in Ontario the question remains as to how the ECE workforce's struggle for equitable compensation will be addressed.

In this paper the AECEO proposes a solution for discussion in the ECEC sector: the establishment of regional wages scales for Registered ECEs working in regulated childcare in Ontario.

The AECEO as the professional association for Ontario has successfully supported the growth and advancement of the ECE profession for the past 65 years. In reflecting on this work, including the establishment of the College of Early Childhood Educators, the role of ECEs in Ontario's full-day kindergarten program and the growing infrastructure and support for on-going professional learning, the AECEO board determined that professional compensation for RECEs is the missing link to full recognition and realization of the ECE profession. It became apparent, therefore, that the AECEO has a responsibility to dedicate substantial efforts to a campaign committed to finding a solution to this decades-old problem. The AECEO has received considerable support for its Professional Pay for Professional Work Campaign. In this next phase of the campaign, the AECEO seeks to work with government, other ECEC organizations, childcare programs, and individual early childhood educators to establish appropriate benchmark wage scales for Ontario's RECEs working within the regulated childcare sector.

Four important principles underlie the AECEO's work on proposed regional wage scales.

1. The cost of increased wages will not be downloaded to parents

The proposed wage scales which would lead to increased wages should not be managed by increasing parent fees. **The AECEO advocates for increased public funding for municipal and non-profit childcare programs.** The establishment of regional wage scales will provide a clear analysis of the "funding gap" between the cost of professional wages for early childhood educators and staff in childcare programs and actual

program funding. Regional wage scales will serve as a benchmark for programs but will not be mandatory without the appropriate public funding.

2. A comprehensive human resources strategy for the Ontario ECEC sector is required

Regional wage scales for registered ECEs working in regulated childcare is one part of a much-needed comprehensive human resources strategy for the Ontario ECEC sector. The AECEO3 has put forward recommendations for a coordinated human resources strategy with well-articulated short, mid and long term goals that include appropriate compensation, pensions, and good working conditions. The implementation of a human resources strategy as part of a modernized childcare system will attract and retain trained and committed professionals and significantly improve program quality.

3. Wage scales must recognize professionally prepared and educated staff in regulated childcare.

Decades of research have identified that professionally prepared and educated educators are key to enhancing and sustaining quality across the regulated childcare system. The AECEO recognizes that registered early childhood educators must demonstrate a professional commitment to upholding CECE Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice as well as engaging in expected continuous professional learning.

4. Principle of pay equity for the childcare workforce must be maintained

Regulations governing childcare programs only require a limited amount of staff to have an ECE credential and as a result many staff do not have the credentials that qualify them for registration with the College of Early Childhood Educators. We know that many of these staff have identical roles and responsibilities as RECEs in their programs and/or are working side by side with RECEs in team teaching models that include equal responsibilities for program planning and implementation and equal compensation. Ideally, there will be a shift towards increased requirements for educated staff through regulation over the long term (and access to training for those already working in these positions); however, we must ensure that we maintain the principles of pay equity in the short term by honouring the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. This discussion will therefore have to explore how accountability and responsibility through registration with the college is recognized and compensated in the context of current regulatory requirements and the variety of unique positions, working models and job descriptions throughout the regulated childcare sector.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: pay equity ^[4]

regulated childcare ^[5]

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