

Child care matters to everyone: A snapshot of child care in Ontario ^[1]

A highlight report bringing together recent data and community voices

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Source: Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

Format: Report

Publication Date: 20 Nov 2015

AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF ^[2]

Introduction

This report brings together recent data on child care in Ontario with community voices talking about lived experience. We weave together both numbers and personal perspectives to create a living snapshot of the state of child care in Ontario.

The latest data from the Childcare Resource and Research Unit's Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada series and municipal data from the Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative (OMBI) form the core of the numbers. These are presented together with community voices from around the province - individuals or groups that the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care has engaged with over the past year as part of our work around the province showing the value of licensed child care and early childhood educators to local communities. Each one of these people is a child care champion: parent, educator, community activist, faith leader, or economist. Together we are building a united movement around a simple idea - child care matters to everyone.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Ontario has seen an unprecedented number of changes in the last several years, for both good and ill. While the Ontario government has incrementally increased funding going to child care, most recently with an announcement of more capital funds to build child care in schools, all is not rosy.

2009's Pascal report was hailed as a game changer for ECEC in Ontario, but its truncated implementation left many key recommendations unfulfilled. Full-day kindergarten, new legislation and a new funding formula have all re-shaped the ECEC landscape in Ontario. While each of these changes has been positive by some measure or has brought good news for some, they have also led to instability for others. The impact of some of these changes has been harsh on licensed child care, and funding formula changes have created winner and loser municipalities across the province.

Regulated spaces continue to be too few, with spaces for only 17.7% of children 0-12 years. While space coverage has crept up incrementally each year, if we continue at the current rate of growth we will have spaces for 50% of children in 2065 - in fifty years. As the old slogan goes "Kids can't wait!"

We see disparity too in where spaces are located, with "daycare deserts" in places where it is not financially viable to operate. The closure of public child care has only exacerbated that problem. Something is broken when longstanding, high quality centres, built with collaboration between provincial, municipal and community partners 30 or 40 years ago begin to disappear.

How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years has been widely and warmly embraced by early childhood educators across the province. But while educators have risen to the challenge of increased expectations both from this pedagogical framework and from their professional College, ECE's still face an average wage of just \$17.47/hr, with a wide disparity across the sector. Part-time and precarious work has become the norm for too many in the early childhood

workforce, with only 59% having access to extended medical benefits and only 46.6% having access to a pension.

The child care market does us all a disservice as it limits government responsibility and leaves public planning and coherent delivery on the sidelines. In a child care market, non-profit and public centres - natural allies - become pitted against each other as both compete for limited funds.

In response to this era of change and uncertainty a resurgent child care movement is forming around a consensus that early childhood education and care matters to all of us. Longtime child care advocates have been joined by new voices who understand the importance of child care as a public good and a public resource. Community and citizen groups, labour, social justice, faith communities and economists are all speaking up for child care.

Together we are calling for a real early childhood education and care system, locally, provincially and nationally. And with a new federal government that has committed to working together with provinces, territories and Indigenous communities to create a national framework, there is a palpable sense of excitement, expectation and also nervousness as we see the possibility of a national child care strategy on the horizon. We - both province and community - must be ready to make it work.

Ontario must be ready to join the threads together, to set forth a coherent child care policy aimed at building a real system based on the principles of universality, quality, and comprehensiveness. We need a system that addresses both affordability for parents and decent wages for staff, that increases both access to spaces and quality of programs, and that supports both expansion of new centres and sustainability of existing programs. We need to move beyond the laissez-faire child care market, to embrace public planning and public governance of child care.

The community voices gathered in this report show that the community is ready. An early childhood education and care system for Ontario: build it right, build it now.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: affordability ^[4]

accessibility ^[5]

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