

# Provincial and Territorial Government Initiatives to Address Early Childhood Educator Recruitment and Retention Through Postsecondary Early Childhood Education Programs: Are they viable and sustainable?

A Discussion Paper  
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## Land Acknowledgement

Each of the authors acknowledges the lands of the First Nations, Inuit and Metis on which this discussion paper was developed. Canada's Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework serves as an inspiration and helps us see how collaborations between governments, advocates, post-secondary faculty and early childhood educators is a “spider web’ of relations” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 79).

## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to contribute to critical discussions across Canada about government initiatives to increase the role of postsecondary early childhood education (ECE) programs in addressing recruitment and retention issues in the ECE workforce sector. While specific information about the initiatives is provided the paper seeks to explore what might be their intentions and implications from the perspective of faculty in ECE post-secondary programs.

## Background Context

As part of the 2021 federal budget, the Government of Canada announced a “plan to build a Canada-wide, community-based system of quality early learning and child care” (Government of Canada, 2021, p. 101). Canada-wide early learning and child care agreements between the federal government and all provincial and territorial governments except for Quebec,<sup>1</sup> detail the plan to create this system. The long-hoped-for

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<sup>1</sup> “While the Government of Québec supports the general principles of the Early Learning and Child Care Framework, it does not adhere to the Framework as it intends to preserve its sole responsibility in this area on its territory. The Government of Québec expects to receive its share of the federal funding and will continue to invest significantly toward programs and services for families and children” <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories.html>

agreements have provoked much excitement for families with young children and early childhood education professionals, including those who teach student-educators at post-secondary institutions. However, the federal and provincial/territorial governments' committed plan to create a Canada-wide early learning and child care system requires addressing a number of ECE workforce issues. One of these issues concerns the recruitment and retention of qualified early childhood educators needed to stabilize the sector and fulfil the promise of increased child care spaces across Canada. As faculty/professors teaching ECE student-educators at post-secondary institutions in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario, we have followed various provincial and territorial initiatives indicated in the Canada wide early learning and child care agreements to increase the number of early childhood educators in the workforce through postsecondary ECE programs. Particularly, we have paid attention to how these initiatives may impact current post-secondary ECE programs and the range of professional competencies that graduates of these programs require to work responsively, respectfully, and compassionately with young children, their families and communities.

A more specific motivation for our interest in the initiatives arose when the School of Education and Childhood Studies (ECCE) at Capilano University was asked to participate in a recruitment initiative launched by the B.C. provincial government that will attempt to fill "10,000 net new jobs openings for certified ECEs and assistants in the coming decade" (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2022). This initiative, called Dual Credit, allows high school students in grades 11 and 12 "to earn both high school and post-secondary credits toward careers in early childhood education" (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2022). Students who successfully complete this program specializing in early childhood education as part of a vocational training pathway will be eligible to apply for an Early Childhood Education Assistant certificate. In response to this initiative, Capilano University's ECCE department voted to decline participation in the dual-credit program for reasons that will be explored throughout this discussion paper.

At Mount Royal University, an early learning and child care micro credential program with English language instruction and core disciplinary courses is being developed to be delivered through Continuing Education. This initiative is in response to Alberta's ten-year recovery plan to "strengthen the role of post-secondary institutions in the reskilling and upskilling of [the] workforce" (Government of Alberta, 2021, p. 23) and to increase capacity in the early learning and child care sector in the province (Canada-Alberta Child Care Agreement, 2021). The program is specifically designed for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and international students as a bridge to ECE diploma and degree programs and leading to Level 1 certification in Alberta. Individuals who take the micro credential program (pending

government approval) must meet the entrance criteria to be admitted into diploma and degree programs. The micro credential program aligns with a recommendation in a Muttart Foundation (2023) report that states “the introduction of induction programs and workplace supports for new staff entering the field with a Level I certification and dedicated funding to help them complete certificate and diploma credentials through public post-secondary institutions (including funding for English language supports)” (Muttart Foundation, p. 29). While bridging programs with combined English language instruction and ECE courses are important for supporting EAL and international students to gain entry into post-secondary ECE programs, our concern is that a micro credential program will actually increase the number of educators with level 1 certification in Alberta. Currently, 40% of early childhood educators in Alberta hold a level 1 certification which requires 45 hours of approved post-secondary coursework or completion of a 54-hour online orientation course through different educational pathways. Will this percentage increase as a result of this and other micro credential programs in the province? This also raises questions about the government’s and the sector’s intention to raise the educational bar with necessary financial and learning supports to level II certification as the minimum entry requirement for ECE positions in Alberta.

In light then of what is happening in British Columbia and Alberta we wondered if other provinces and territories have launched similar initiatives. In the following section, drawing on Chart 1 (Appendix 1), we provide an overview and analysis of what different provinces and territories offer as ECE workforce retention and recruitment strategies through post-secondary institutions.

## Overview and Analysis of Provincial and Territorial Retention and Recruitment Initiatives Through Post-Secondary ECE Programs

Chart 1 provides in one column an overview of provincial and territorial ECE retention and recruitment initiatives through postsecondary institutions. The second column, if known, identifies a projection of the number of new ECEs needed as provinces and territories create more child care spaces. Information about government provincial and territorial initiatives was located in Canada-wide provincial/territorial child care agreements with the federal government, government media releases and the Childcare Resource and Research Unit’s summary of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements and Action Plans (2022). Other sources examined were workforce studies from the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (2021), the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development (2022) and the Muttart Foundation (2023), visions of the roles and responsibilities of ECEs in the BC, Alberta and Ontario early learning frameworks, ECEBC’s visionary position paper on the role of the ECE (2021), and

the Atkinson Centre's e-newsletters. While our initial interest in this discussion paper focused on British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, we were curious about the kinds of initiatives other provinces and territories are undertaking. We hoped that an analysis of the chart would reveal some common and different directions provinces and territories are taking to address ECE recruitment and retention issues through post-secondary ECE programs. In addition, as we conducted our analysis, we were guided by several questions about the initiatives identified in Chart 1:

1. To what extent will these initiatives be successful? Will they meet their desired outcomes?
2. Are the initiatives sustainable?
3. Will these initiatives contribute to creating a new kind of ECE as articulated in the early learning frameworks of many provinces?
4. Are the initiatives visionary and do they project values and understandings that rethink care, education and the work of early childhood educators in contemporary times?

In the next section, the initiatives are organized into three categories to capture the different ways governments intend to address ECE workforce recruitment and retention issues through postsecondary ECE programs.

### Wages/Benefits/Pension Plan

While the focus of this discussion paper is on the role of post-secondary institutions in increasing the number of ECEs entering and staying in the field, every ECE workforce survey concludes that low wages along with other working conditions such as workload and paid preparation time, significantly contribute to why these institutions may struggle to recruit applicants and why their graduates fail to enter or stay in the field (AECEO, 2021, Atkinson Centre, 2022, Muttart Foundation, 2023 and OECD, 2020). For example, studies conducted by the Atkinson Centre (2023) indicate that “almost 50 percent of qualified educators leave licensed child care within the first three years. A further 40 percent leave between five and ten years.” The Atkinson Centre (2023) concludes:

the sector is losing staff just as they should be most comfortable in their careers. It creates a revolving door of relationships, which is harmful for children and staff morale. The constant turnover requires inordinate recruitment and orientation effort; energy better spent by directors supporting their staff teams.

Therefore, it is necessary to determine what provincial/territorial governments plan to do about ECE low wages. The underlying assumption is that better wages, benefits and pensions will attract more applicants to post-secondary ECE programs and motivate them to enter and stay in the field upon graduation.

Chart 1 indicates that most provinces and territories are using wage enhancement grants to address low wages. Four governments (BC, Alberta, PEI, the Northwest Territories) are also offering ECE staff a retention incentive to encourage them to remain in the sector. For example, in Alberta, all employed ECEs who work an average 30 hours-plus are eligible to receive a one-time payment of \$900 (ToDoCanada, 2022).

At the same time, most provinces and territories acknowledge that a wage grid that recognizes, depending on the province or territory, scope of practice, educational standards and competencies, specialty training, years of experience and fair compensation a living wage is necessary. In Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador and PEI an ECE wage grid is in place. Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut have established their own target dates for the design of a wage grid. Saskatchewan, for example, is developing “a renewed funding model which recognizes the wage grid and compensation as an essential feature of child care funding” (CRRU, 2023, p. 30). In Alberta, a Compensation Framework Report (2023) is underway to develop an ECE wage grid although this work is not driven or supported by the government. The next step is a refinement of wage grid based on community engagement and inclusion of competencies to be completed in 2023. British Columbia has committed to developing a wage grid without details and a target date while Ontario has not declared a commitment to a wage grid, instead introducing a wage framework that establishes a wage floor of \$18.00 per hour for registered educators and \$20.00 per hour for ECE trained supervisors through wage enhancements (increasing by \$1 per year until the cap of \$25 is reached). Beyond improvements in wages, only PEI plans to investigate a pension plan for ECEs while the Yukon and the Northwest Territories plan to make comprehensive benefits available to staff in 25 programs by 2023.

### Access to Post Secondary ECE Programs

In the Canada-wide early learning and child care agreements, provinces and territories indicate a range of initiatives to increase access to post-secondary ECE programs. In some provinces, funding for these initiatives will be tied to the proportion of increased child care spaces suggesting a delicate balance between the need for more child care spaces, the need for new educators and the need for partnerships with post-secondary institutions. Three provinces are increasing opportunities to enroll in a level 1 ECE course (Alberta), or in a two-year diploma program (Ontario, Nova Scotia with specific emphasis and/or community focus e.g. In-Person French ECE Diploma) through free tuition. In Alberta, the enrolment capacity for the free level 1 on-line child care orientation course (18 sessions or 54 hours covering a range

of topics such as observations, providing for play, and guiding) is being more than doubled from 4,000 to 10,000 spaces. The assumption here is that easier and less expensive access to post-secondary education will result in greater student application rates and, as a consequence, more graduates will be entering the sector.

While opening up access to post-secondary education is important, examining the motivation for increasing access should be questioned. In reference to the Alberta 2030 economic recovery report, the language of 'reskilling and upskilling' speaks to an apprenticeship and technician focus rather than a focus on the education and profession of early childhood educators. Further, how is quality care and the education of young children by experienced and educated professionals being considered and situated within the complex matrix of government and institutional requirements related to the post pandemic recovery of the economy? Overall, these initiatives signal that the focus is on training in applied skill development rather than on education that examines the complexities of pedagogical practices articulated in the province's early learning framework.

Student bursaries ranging from \$500 to \$1500 are being offered in many provinces to generate new applicants in post-secondary ECE programs. In Alberta, BC, Newfoundland and Labrador, students registered in ECE programs can access government funding for coursework and books. The BC Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreement states that "bursaries [\$500 per course for books] are a key tool to support the Province's ECE Recruitment and Retention Strategy" (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2022). Manitoba plans to reimburse the tuition of ECE students by up to \$5,000 per school year. Unique to Newfoundland and Labrador, a graduate bursary program will be available if the recipient works in regulated child care for a minimum of three years.

To recruit more high school students into ECE post-secondary programs, two approaches are apparent. First, as in New Brunswick, high school students can take an on-line course, *Introduction to ECE*, which, it is hoped, will motivate them to seek an ECE post-secondary program. Second, through a dual credit program such as the one in BC and Alberta, students in grades 11 and 12 can earn by taking courses related to ECE both high school and post-secondary credits. The apparent intention of this approach is to fast-track the completion of an ECE assistant qualification, emphasizing the rapid production of more workers to address a supply and demand problem in the sector. These approaches highlight governments' view of early childhood education as an industry that requires workers with particular technical training rather than a profession that requires dedicated early childhood educators with caring and pedagogical commitments.

Two provinces have initiatives that target particular post-secondary applicants. In Newfoundland and Labrador, “equity seeking populations” will be targeted (CRRU, 2023, p. 27). In Nova Scotia, Mi’kmaq/Indigenous, Black/African Nova Scotians and Francophone/Acadian individuals working in regulated child care and pre-primary have been prioritized to receive training to meet a level 1 classification (e.g., Level 1 in Alberta requires an orientation course, in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador it requires an ECE certificate). Saskatchewan has partnered with Collège Mathieu, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) and Saskatchewan Polytechnic to make ECE training opportunities available at no charge. In New Brunswick, the plan is to recruit new immigrants by fast tracking individuals who want to work in the early childhood education field. As noted earlier, Mount Royal University in Alberta has received provincial government funding to develop an ECE bridging program through their Continuing Education department to provide immigrants and individuals with English as an Additional Language training. Participants in the program will obtain a level 1 government credential and English language instruction. Bow Valley College in Calgary has announced a \$1.4 million pilot program to train immigrant women for a level 1 or level 2 credential in partnership with the Calgary Immigration Women’s Association (Bow Valley College, 2023).

### Initiatives to Increase Qualified Staff and the Level of Qualifications Required for ECEs

Provinces and territories have different requirements for the amount of education staff have and the ratio of staff with various levels of education and certification required in a program. For example, Ontario, Quebec and NWT (and Nunavut which has no educational requirements for staff) have no requirements for any amount of education/training for those outside the number of required ECEs with a certificate and/or diploma, while others require something – varying from 40 hours – 120 hours as a minimum. In response to this greater variation in educational requirements for ECEs across Canada, governments have intensified initiatives to increase qualified staff and the level of qualification required to be a designated early childhood educator. Nunavut is at a preliminary stage of conducting a study to determine the expansion of post-secondary training and on-the-job training to increase qualifications.

One assumption underlying these initiatives is that ECE staff will be motivated to increase their qualifications (i.e., from a level 1 assistant to a diploma qualified ECE) because they will be rewarded with a higher salary potentially based on a wage grid. Furthermore, it is assumed that these educators will be more likely to invest and stay in the field if they are more qualified. Most provinces and territories have varied initiatives to increase the qualifications of early childhood educators. In BC, bursaries are

available (\$5,000 per semester) for staff employed in child care to upgrade their qualifications. ECE staff working in regulated child care in Newfoundland and Labrador can access through an accelerated workplace ECE training program on-line to upgrade to a Level 1 certification. In New Brunswick, five hundred educators will be able to complete a one-year certificate through micro credentialing and work-study integrated programs. Ontario plans to grow a qualified workforce by 3% by sponsoring two professional development days and covering tuition costs and registration fees to the College of Early Childhood Educators. Other jurisdictions have identified targets to increase the percentage of ECEs who meet certification requirements, for example, Yukon 60% by 2023; Northwest Territories 30% by 2025-2026; Manitoba 15% by 2026; and Saskatchewan 15% by 2026.

## Discussion

In the next section, we consider some potential implications of provincial and territorial government recruitment and retention initiatives outlined in the previous section.

### Improving ECE wages

Chart 1 (Appendix 1) shows that most provinces and territories continue to rely on wage enhancements to improve ECE wages. The chart indicates that some governments are focused on using wage enhancements to establish a wage floor or median wage (BC) or maximum wage through yearly one-dollar increases (Ontario). For example, Ontario has introduced a wage floor of \$18.00 per hour for College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) registered educators and Alberta's wage enhancement will bring an educator with Level 3 qualifications to a minimum wage of \$21.62 (the wages of level 1 and 2 educators are therefore lower). One Alberta educator describes the situation:

The low pay, no coverage, no sick days, no benefits. Why would we stick around when we can go to the schools and start at \$19.50 rather than minimum wage. At our worksite 85 percent of us have second jobs. We have to make ends meet."(Grande Prairie focus group participant) (Muttart Foundation, 2023, p. 13).

Based on the quote above, it is clear that wage enhancements do not significantly stem the flow of early childhood educators from the field. Furthermore, wage enhancements grants do not attract high school students to ECE post-secondary programs; they know that ECE wages are very low particularly when compared to public school teacher salaries. Once in an ECE program, students are told repeatedly by their instructors and textbooks that even if wages are low, they "can make a difference" in the lives of children and their families (Langford, 2008). However, this moral call is clearly not persuasive enough for a

significant number of graduates to enter and remain in the ECE field. Indeed, unlike other professions populated by women (e.g., nurses, teachers, midwives), only the ECE profession must rely on government wage enhancements to begin to offer professional compensation for a professional workforce. What early childhood professionals want is a good professional job with decent wages based on a wage grid, benefits, and a pension plan just like other professionals in Canada. This is what will motivate more applicants to join post-secondary ECE programs and remain in the profession upon graduation. Decent wages will ensure the sustainability of government recruitment and retention initiatives through post-secondary ECE programs.

To a certain extent, some provincial and territorial governments recognize that wage enhancements are not sustainable. Most early learning and child care agreements indicate that an ECE wage grid is under consideration or projected to be in place by a certain date, in some provinces by 2023. This is certainly an important policy development since surveys consistently report that ECEs do not enter or stay in the field because of low wages. A wage grid that represents better wages that incrementally rise with years of experience and higher levels of education will begin to seriously address the recruitment and retention problem that has plagued the field. Failure to properly address wages and working conditions means that provinces and territories are becoming increasingly dependent on recruiting their way out of the problem creating a cyclical issue if the retention problem is not addressed. It is also noted that with the exception of PEI, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Manitoba, the issues of benefits and pensions remain unaddressed, compromising the sustainability of improvements in ECE wages.

### Meeting new ECE targets through access to post-secondary ECE programs

Data collected by governments will tell us if there has been an actual increase in applications to post-secondary ECE programs as a result of their recruitment initiatives. In Ontario, College of ECE data (2021) shows that enrollment in postsecondary programs has increased but entry to the profession is declining 7% annually. This data suggests that enrollment in ECE post-secondary programs is less of an issue than entry to practice. Further, the number of new educators joining the field versus the number leaving the field will need to be determined by governments to arrive at a net increase in new educators. Other factors will also be important to consider. Will the language about an ECE career shift in high schools and job fairs to communicate that this career is well-paying? This shift is unlikely until an ECE wage grid and decent wages are in place. Furthermore, while free tuition and/or funding for textbooks may attract new applicants to ECE programs, it is likely that a significant number of students upon graduation will continue to apply to teacher education programs with the promise of a well-respected and compensated profession. Does this mean that governments are attempting to sustain the profession by

relying on hopes that unqualified staff will undertake post-secondary education through tuition supports to acquire a credential? Is this a band-aid approach to profound systemic issues of recruitment and retention that requires addressing the core of the problem?

It is essential that recruited ECEs represent the diversity of citizens in our country. However, initiatives to increase this representation through new immigration programs and partnerships must carefully consider the following questions. Will these individuals have an opportunity to complete diploma and degree ECE programs or will they be marginalized into fast-tracked programs that prepare them to work as assistants with a minimal credential? Will provinces and territories perpetuate the extraction of labor from immigrants who are predominantly women of colour by offering quick-fix and short-term educational programs? Will the initiatives result in a double-jeopardy of lower wages that these individuals may experience as both women and as women of colour? We know that the Live in Caregiver program created exploitive conditions for foreign workers in Canada (e.g., tied to their workplace for permanent residency; Contributes to the international care drain) and there is a risk of repeating these conditions for foreign ECEs in their workplaces (Adamson, 2017). As Land and Kummen (2023) remark in the online publication, *The Conversation*, “Such initiatives ... sees early childhood education as a numbers game, easily and inexpensively creating educators who can quickly fill positions.” Moreover, the curriculum of minimal credentials needs to be carefully considered for its breadth and depth so that participants are not limited or restricted in their ability to successfully continue their education. In addition, distinctions between levels of education must be evident in wage grids to motivate ECEs to strive for further education. Overall, government initiatives to recruit more applicants to post-secondary ECE programs reveal a heightened tension between the expediency of fast-track programs and the mandate of postsecondary institutions to educate students through sustained engagement in courses at the introductory, developmental and proficiency levels.

### Educating ECEs for Contemporary Times

Who is the early childhood educator that federal, provincial and territorial governments envision will be produced through ECE post-secondary programs? Certainly, governments believe that trained “early childhood educators (ECEs) play a vital role in supporting the growth and potential of our youngest learners” (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2022). However, characteristics of this training in current provincial and territorial initiatives include free tuition, bursaries, a fast-tracked career, and possible permanent residency status in Canada. These characteristics may contribute to an understanding of post-secondary programs as competitive commodities and students as consumers seeking the fastest

and cheapest way to get training. In some provinces/territories, students in accelerated programs will be able to even take up responsibilities and roles of a certified early childhood educator before they graduate. This then is a vision of the early childhood educator as a technical worker who through a fast-track post-secondary program learns basic skills and knowledge to be applied universally to all children (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Moss 2014). Thus, students may enter and exit from fast-track programs without fully recognizing the intensity and complexities of the relational work that is being demanded from a contemporary early childhood educator. Indeed, this lack of recognition will result in new educators becoming disillusioned and demoralized so that staff turnover and retention problems persist.

In contrast, we see our students as critical thinkers working with multiple perspectives on purposes of education, teaching, learning, growth and development. Further, we are committed to cultivating and elevating an image of an early childhood educator who is engaged ethically and politically in many social issues such as gender inequities, anti-Black racism and the decolonization of European-based pedagogies. We envision the roles and responsibilities of the early childhood educator as more than making sure children are safe and healthy. We are concerned that fast-track programs perpetuate an image of the educator as a service and care provider who is completely separated from the education of young children. Yet we know that care and education are inseparable. We maintain that in order for early childhood educators to thoughtfully respond to and work with the complex needs of the children and their families, they need an in-depth, relevant and comprehensive education. Finally, we want students to leave our program excited to be entering a well-paid and well-respected profession.

Our images of the early childhood educator are inspired by our provinces' early learning frameworks which powerfully describe the kind of early childhood educator needed for contemporary times. The following examples taken from three provincial frameworks capture these images:

#### British Columbia

Educators collaborate with children and their families as partners in research. This means educators are continually observing, listening, and experimenting with an openness to the unexpected. The role of the educator has shifted away from being a transmitter of knowledge toward being a collaborator who creates conditions so that children can invent, investigate, build theories, and learn. Educators work in relationship with children, and strive to ensure children feel safe, confident, motivated, and listened to. (Government of British Columbia. 2019, p.18).

## Alberta

[Educators] work in relationships with colleagues to share information and to collaborate on planning for care routines and children, play, learning, and development. [Educators] also work in relationships with government officials to ensure policies and standards are established and maintained. At times [educators] work in relationships with individuals who provide specialized services to families and children. [Educators] seek and build relationships with community members to enhance and extend children's learning experiences. As well, [educators] seek relationships with the broader early childhood community for [their] own professional growth. This network of relationships supports [their] complex, dynamic, and multifaceted role as an educator. We describe [educators'] work within this network as a practice of relationships." (Makovichuk et al, 2014, pp. 51-52)

## Ontario

Educators are competent and capable, curious, and rich in experience. They are knowledgeable, caring, reflective, and resourceful professionals. They bring diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. They collaborate with others to create engaging environments and experiences to foster children's learning and development. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 7)

The quotes above show that technical fast-track post-secondary ECE programs will not offer students sufficient time and space to critically, thoughtfully and sensitively examine, analyze and reflect on the complex work of early childhood education. It is particularly striking in the quotes above the high degree of respectful collaboration for complex situations required of early childhood educators. In contrast, fast-track programs by their very nature strip curriculum of complexity thereby contributing to lowering rather than enhancing the education of early childhood educators. In addition, they show that there is a strong disconnect between the provinces' early learning frameworks and the kind of ECE that will be educated through the recruitment and retention initiatives. This perspective is also evident in the recent Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia (ECEBC)'s, evaluation of the Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy in British Columbia. The report suggests that "nearly half of British Columbians surveyed were unsure of whether ECL professionals were well trained or fairly compensated" (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. 2021).

In Alberta, government funding and program development initiatives to recruit more early childhood educators may be advantageous in terms of building capacity and increasing job opportunities. However, the development of fast-tracked applied ECE programs with a sharp focus on training and basic skill development shifts attention away from programs focused on education founded on theoretical and

philosophical perspectives. Professional organizations in Alberta (i.e., AECEA) have worked diligently in past years to increase public awareness and promote a professional image of the early childhood educator who is skilled and knowledgeable about child development, diversity, play, working with families and the ECE profession. With the exception of one college offering a micro credential intended for post ECE diploma students, the recent development of micro credential programs in post-secondary institutions raises questions about the impacts of training and efficiency models on the quality of the care and education of young children. A fast-paced efficiency model might increase the ECE workforce and support economic recovery following the Covid pandemic, but at what cost? How will increasing skills-based training programs affect early childhood education degree level programs with a focus on theoretical, philosophical, and practical teaching and learning? What considerations are being given to sustainable funding, supports and the continuity of quality ECE post-secondary programs in the future?

## Recommendations

In this section, we offer for discussion broad recommendations indicating the need for language and conceptual shifts in how we think and talk about early childhood educators and their professional preparation. We recognize that current federal investment and provincial and territories ECE recruitment and retention initiatives express that ECE in Canada is being recognized as a public benefit rather than a private concern left for the families and educators to navigate through. This gives the ECE profession a space for further dialogue and value-based envisioning on the role of post-secondary ECE programs in addressing recruitment and retention workforce issues. Our summary and analysis of the initiatives calls into question their viability and sustainability. We have also suggested that the kind of early childhood educator produced through these initiatives will be a technician armed with basic skills to be applied universally in an early childhood program. We have proposed alternative kinds of early childhood educators who, as a recent ECEBC's position paper (2022) states, are:

...leaders and hopeful for a better future, without knowing the shape of that future. Educators are emboldened to disrupt the legacies of the past in order to activate transformative change for the future. In relationship with children, families, communities, materials and places, educators engage in intentional pedagogical work in response to the complexity of our current conditions. (p. 2)

The recommendations therefore are:

- Create the conditions that will inspire early childhood educators to commit to a comprehensive and in-depth education and want to stay in the profession. Research is clear that the key

conditions are decent wages, benefits and pensions. Therefore, a wage grid establishing decent wages and benefit and pension plans for early childhood educators must be key priorities for provincial and territorial governments under federal government leadership. In some provinces, governments need to collaborate with community groups and organizations who are undertaking the development of a wage grid. Joint commitment to the outcomes of this collaboration is necessary. Public funding for the implementation of wage grids is required.

- A wage grid that honours education levels and years of experience must be put in place by the government in every province and territory within the next two years. Distinctions between roles and responsibilities for different positions within the workplace must be evident in the wage grid. Such a wage grid will publicly signal that early childhood educators are professionals, and well respected for the important work they do.
- Data on post-secondary ECE program applications and graduate retention in the sector (i.e., net number of new educators) will be collected by provincial and territorial governments.
- Governments in collaboration with the ECE sector to work toward addressing the disparity between the image of the educators presented through their early learning frameworks as opposed to the technical image of the educator that is being projected through some recruitment and retention strategies. Governments need to be aware of how language such as “training” versus “education” reflects different understandings of who the early childhood educator is or can be. In addition, any Ministry work on a competency framework for early childhood educators must be attentive to this disparity.
- Provincial and territorial governments to provide sufficient and sustained financial supports (i.e., bursaries) for students who wish to continue their education beyond different types of level 1 certification. Assess through program applications information about who continues their education and the relationship between continuation and students’ racial and cultural backgrounds to assess if educational equity is evident in government initiatives.
- Governments in collaboration with the sector reevaluate the purposes and outcomes of short-term initiatives such as the dual credit program and one-time only incentives to stay in the field and consider how funding for these initiatives could be redirected to viable and sustainable initiatives such as the development of a wage grid.

To conclude, as faculty in post-secondary ECE programs we envision a time in which recruitment and retention issues in our profession and barriers to a satisfying ECE career have been significantly addressed. We imagine high school students talking to their counsellors and attending job fairs to find out more about this well-paid and respected profession. Guidance counsellors provide contact information of

advisors working for ECE professional organizations/associations and post-secondary programs and encourage the students to further explore and discuss their interests with them. Friends and family members support the high school students' goals to pursue a career in early childhood education and care *and* make a difference in the lives of children, families and communities. Soon the students are enrolled in a 2-year ECE post-secondary diploma or in 4-year degree programs confident that sufficient government resources and support for their studies are in place. From their placement experiences, they learn about decent working conditions, professional wages, and health benefits so that they can map out an employment pathway and future education goals. They feel assured that these improved working conditions will motivate them to stay within the profession and provide responsive and consistent care and education to children and families. Throughout their program, students know that one day they will be working in an early childhood program where they are guaranteed professional wages based on their educational credentials. After graduation, they gain work experience as early childhood educators in a range of community not-for-profit early childhood programs that offer comparable fair compensation based on a wage grid supported by public funding. New ECEs are mentored and inspired by their colleagues who are constantly seeking to further their education, qualifications and professional development opportunities, supported by different types of government funding. They are excited about future career prospects and confident in their abilities to work with children and families within well supported community settings and sustainable workforce systems.

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**Appendix 1-Chart 1: Provincial and Territorial Recruitment and Retention Strategies/Initiatives:**

Provinces/ Territories	Ministry	ECE Recruitment and Retention Strategy Plans	Projection of number of new ECEs needed
Alberta	Ministry of Children’s Services	<p><b>Wages/Health Benefits/Pension Plan</b>                      As of Oct. 1/22 - expanded paid hours for existing wage top ups to include all paid time worked during operational hours (up to 181 hours/month) and employer paid vacation time (up to 3 weeks). Wage top up model used as a salary grid. Wage top ups are not paid for all hours (e.g., sick days, statutory holidays). It is a flat rate with no steps or financial recognition for a degree.</p> <p>As of Jan 1, 2023-existing wage tops for all paid work will increase by up to 2 dollars per hour. The current wage supplement of \$8.62an hour brings an educator with Level 3 qualifications to a minimum wage of \$21.62.</p> <p>All employed ECEs who worked an average 30 hours-plus per will be eligible to receive a one-time payment of \$900. Those averaging fewer than 30 hours per week will be eligible for a \$450 payment.</p> <p><b>Access to Post-Secondary ECE Programs</b>                      Increased opportunities for people to enroll in the Child Care Orientation course (level 1) at no cost. The enrolment capacity doubled from 4,000 to 10,000 spaces. The course is available to any Albertan, regardless of whether or not they are currently working in a child care program.</p> <p>Create new education pathways for ECEs (i.e., free on-line portal) and incentives (e.g., free non-line portal, bursaries) to increase enrolment in ECE post-secondary programs.</p> <p>Launch pilot programs with diverse communities to promote entry into the child-care field.</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b>                      Release time for ECEs to take Flight curriculum training at no cost.</p> <p>Additional investments to PD grant to enable Level 3 ECEs access to funding to increase leadership and management skills development.</p> <p>Increase the number of ECEs certified at levels 2 and 3 by 15%</p>	By 2026, 9,000

<p><b>British Columbia</b></p>	<p>Ministry of Education and Child Care</p>	<p><b>Access to Post-Secondary ECE Programs</b>          \$1.15 million for the dual credit program so high school students can more quickly get their ECE certification (with the province contributing an additional \$575,000 in 2021-22); students in grades 11 and 12 able to earn both high school and post-secondary credits toward careers in early childhood education with the introduction of 30 new dual-credit programs at school districts throughout B.C.          Bursaries are available for 8,400 ECE students providing \$500 per course for books.</p> <p><b>Wages</b>          Enhance ECE compensation by \$4 per hour, bringing the median wage to \$25 per hour.          Commit to developing a wage grid but no target date or further details are provided.</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b>          Bursaries are available (\$5000 per semester) for staff employed in child care to upgrade qualifications.</p> <p>\$2.3 million toward a work-integrated approach that gives ECE students the opportunity to become certified while maintaining employment as a child care professional.</p>	<p>8,600 more early childhood educators over the next decade</p>
<p><b>Manitoba</b></p>	<p>Ministry of Education and Early Childhood Learning</p>	<p><b>Wages</b>          A minimum voluntary guide developed bringing the average ECE minimum wage to \$25.89 per hour, and average wage to \$27.77 an hour up from the current \$19.71 hourly average for a Level 2 ECE with a diploma. A <a href="#">Wage Grid Operating Supplement of \$34.7M</a> came into effect July 2022 which is expected to impact 3,400 ECEs and CCAs. This initiative is not a wage grid as there are no steps although it does recognize position as well as classification.          voluntary <a href="https://www.gov.mb.ca/education/childcare/students_workforce/wage_grid.html">https://www.gov.mb.ca/education/childcare/students_workforce/wage_grid.html</a></p> <p>Retention incentive based on years of service.</p> <p><b>Access to Post-Secondary ECE programs</b>          The governments of Canada and Manitoba are investing more than \$4 million to reimburse the tuition of early childhood educator students by up to \$5,000 per school year to help cover tuition-related costs of recognized programs.</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b>          The province also commits to increasing the percentage of fully qualified educators by 15% by 2026.</p>	<p>4,600 to 5,750 ECE and ECE assistant jobs over the next five years</p>
<p><b>New Brunswick</b></p>	<p>Department of Education and Early Childhood Development</p>	<p><b>Access to Post-Secondary ECE programs</b>          Facilitate recruitment of new Canadians ensuring that they can fully benefit from the wage supports and contribute to the ECE workforce gap. fast track immigration for individuals wanting to work in the early learning and child care sector.</p>	<p>Reduce the turnover rate by 2.9% (107 ECE) (from 37.9% to 35%)</p>

		<p>Expanding the access to more high school students to the Introduction to Early Childhood Education online course offered as part of the Experiential Learning Program in anglophone and francophone public high schools as a method to recruit ECEs.</p> <p><b>Wages</b> an ECE wage grid is in place.</p> <p>Increasing operational funding to assist with the daily costs associated with running an early learning child care facility and increasing the wages of ECEs in facilities participating in the Designation Program.</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b> By the end of 2023, EECD will support 500 educators in their completion of their one-year Early Childhood Education Certificate through the micro credentialling program and the work-study integrated program.</p> <p>By 2025-2026 increase by 60% of staff who fully meet training requirements.</p>	
Newfoundl and & Labrador	Department of Education	<p><b>Access to ECE Post-Secondary Programs</b> Temporary certification for regulated child care summer employment for post-secondary students</p> <p>Increase available post-secondary seats and provide a graduate bursary program to reduce student debt in exchange for working in regulated child care in New Brunswick for a minimum of three years after graduation.</p> <p>Provide \$250 per course for Trainee Level staff; and, up to \$2500 for students required to attend an on-campus field placement.</p> <p>Plans to increase the percentage of ECEs who fully meet legislated certification requirements to 60%.</p> <p><b>Wages</b> As of October 22, an Early Childhood Education Human Resource Council to recommend a comprehensive compensation model. A wage grid to reflect the education, training, and years of experience-for implementation by April 1, 2023.</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b> The ECE Trainee Bursary to support early childhood educators who are working in a licensed child care centre or regulated family child care and are taking Early Childhood Education courses online from a provincially recognized college/university to upgrade their valid Trainee Level Certification to Level One Certification.</p>	
Nova Scotia	Ministry of Education and	<p><b>Access to Post-Secondary ECE programs</b> Bursaries are available for full-time students.</p>	Approx 9,000

	Early Childhood Development	<p>New seats to be added to ELCC diploma programs to eliminate waitlists. Mi'kmaq/Indigenous, Black/African Nova Scotians and Francophone/Acadian individuals working in regulated child care and pre-primary are prioritized to receive training to meet the level 1 classification. Specific diploma programs are designed for these students to support early learning within these communities (i.e., Mi'kmaq Early Childhood Education Diploma program)</p> <p><b>Wages</b> A compensation framework and wage scale reflecting ECE education, specialty training, and experience completed. Wage increases began in the fall 2022 and retroactive to July 2022. Additional 3% increase beginning April 1, 2023</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b></p> <p>Upskilling fully funded initiative for immigrants (through an ECE immigration pilot) working to obtain their diploma. Accelerated ECE Diploma (with PLAR) - fully funded by EECD. Applicants must be working and have their Level 1. ECE Link Diploma Program - students earn both high school diploma and ECE diploma; funding availability and prioritization to Black/African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq/Indigenous students. Continuing Education Program funding available (\$1,000-5,000) for upskilling for those employed and working to obtain Level 2 or 3 classification.</p> <p>All regulated child care centres and Pre-Primary Programs led by educators with, at minimum, a diploma in Early Childhood Education by 2025-26. Currently 35% of all those working in ELCC are untrained.</p>	
<b>Ontario</b>	Ministry of Education	<p><b>Access to Post-Secondary ECE Programs</b> Tuition-free compressed Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs at post-secondary institutions</p> <p><b>Wages</b> Will introduce a wage floor of \$18 per hour for registered educators and \$20 per hour for ECE trained supervisors in 2022,  Increase by \$1 per hour each year from 2023 to 2025 to a maximum of \$25 per hour.</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b> Plans to grow the qualified workforce by 3% by sponsoring two professional development days and covering tuition costs and registration fees to the College of ECEs or ECE graduates.</p>	14,700 new RECEs will be needed by 2025-26
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	Department of Education and Lifelong Learning	<p><b>Wages/ Health Benefits/Pension Plans</b> The wage scale is public and mandatory in early years centres. Increase ECE compensation by an unspecified amount for staff employed in Early Years Centres (EYCs), preschool centres and for Special Needs Assistants and Autism Assistants. Degree holders recognized on wage scale.</p>	

		<p>A pension plan for ECEs to be investigated.</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b> provide training grants to increase the number of trained educators and to support EYC directors to increase their qualifications and fund float staff to cover off staff taking training.</p>	
<b>Quebec</b>	Ministry of Education	An asymmetrical agreement. Commits to increasing the number of qualified ECEs.	
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	Ministry of Education	<p><b>Access to Post-Secondary Programs</b> The province partnered with Collège Mathieu, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) and Saskatchewan Polytechnic (Sask Polytech) to make on-line certificate and diploma training opportunities available at no charge. To begin in the 2022-23 academic year.</p> <p><b>Wages</b> Invest \$5.4 million to provide up to a \$5 an hour increase for ECEs. Committed to increasing centre operating funding to enhance ECE compensation while working to develop a wage grid in 2023.</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b> Increase the percentage of staff meeting certification requirements by 15 % by 2026.</p>	
<b>Northwest Territories</b>	Ministry of Education, Culture and Employment	<p><b>Wages/Health Benefits/Pension Plans</b> Establish a wage grid ready for implementation by 2026. A retention incentive offered until the wage grid is in place to encourage existing staff to remain in the sector. Comprehensive benefits available to ECEs in 25 programs by 2023.</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b> Development of a certification process and increase the percentage of ECEs meeting requirements to 30% by 2030-31.</p>	300 licensed early learning and child care spaces by 2025-2026
<b>Nunavut</b>	Department of Education	<p><b>Wages/Health Benefits/Pension Plans</b> A labour force adjustment analysis will be conducted to inform the setting of educator compensation levels. In the interim, funding is available to support the retention of educators in licensed child care centres.</p> <p><b>Access to Post-Secondary ECE Programs</b> A study to inform the expansion of post-secondary training, and on-the-job-training courses is in progress.</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b> Expand ELCC certification program.</p>	Will fund the creation of at least 238 new licensed spaces by 2026. Increase demand for ECEs and assistants in the territory.

<p><b>Yukon</b></p>	<p>Department of Education</p>	<p><b>Wages/Health Benefits/Pension Plans</b>  A wage enhancement grant in April 2021 providing \$15.31 per hour for fully trained educators in Whitehorse and \$17.11 for staff in rural areas.</p> <p>Committed to developing a wage grid.  Comprehensive benefits available to ECEs in 25 programs by 2023</p> <p><b>Initiatives to Increase ECE Qualifications</b>  Training supports and expansion of ELCC courses in post-secondary institutions being funded with a goal of having at least 60% of the workforce fully meeting certification requirements by 2026.</p>	<p>20 new educators attracted to work in Yukon by 2023</p>
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