

Growing Together Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy

2018



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Message from the Minister of Education and Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care

As Ontario's Minister of Education and Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care, I have seen first-hand the many ways that educators support families and give children the best possible start in life.

Educators in early years and child care are passionate, dedicated and professional. They bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to their work. Educators inspire children's curiosity by creating rich, stimulating environments, and build children's confidence by fostering warm, responsive relationships. They support parents and families through meaningful interactions, and work together to develop programs that ensure positive outcomes for all.

Educators are key to providing high-quality experiences for children. But conversations with the sector have also highlighted challenges – such as low compensation, difficult working conditions, and lack of professional development opportunities – that have made it difficult to recruit and retain educators in the sector.

Growing Together: Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy is our government's plan to address these challenges through concrete actions that reflect the value of the work educators do for children and families across Ontario. We developed *Growing Together* in consultation with our partners, and it would not have been possible without their help and thoughtful advice.

Growing Together will help recruit and retain more high-quality educators, at a time when we need them more than ever. As part of the 2018 Budget, we announced a historic investment of an additional \$2.2 billion over the next three years for child care, including providing free preschool, beginning in September 2020, for children aged 2.5 to 4 years; enhancing affordability across the system; supporting the workforce; and providing funding to expand child care on reserve. These commitments build on our expansion plan to help 100,000 more children aged 0 to 4 years access licensed child care. In total, it is estimated that we will need 25,000 additional educators to support the new commitments and expansion plan.

We know that this expansion of our early years and child care system will only be possible with a strong, stable workforce – and with enough educators to provide the meaningful experiences and supportive environments that children need to thrive.

In my previous role as Minister of the Status of Women, I often heard that access to affordable child care is a key contributing factor in parents' decisions to return to work, especially for women. These commitments for child care will help reduce the gender wage gap, by giving parents the opportunity to return to work when they choose. In addition, we know that low compensation in the early years and child care workforce – a predominately female sector – can contribute to educators themselves being caught in the gap. We are taking action to address this issue by creating a wage grid, first announced in the 2018 Budget, and will continue to work to reduce the gender wage gap for women across Ontario.

We know that supporting the early years and child care workforce will help children, families, and all of society. When educators have the opportunity to grow, children's development, enjoyment, and creativity will also grow. We will continue to work with educators, partners, and communities to support Ontario's educators – and to develop an early years and child care system that is high-quality, inclusive and child- and family-centred.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Indira Naidoo-Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Indira" being more prominent and the last name "Naidoo-Harris" following in a similar style.

Indira Naidoo-Harris
Minister

Contents

Introduction	5
Why Educators Matter	8
Understanding the Early Years and Child Care Sector	11
Progress to Date	13
Getting the Best Advice	16
The Way Forward: Five Action Areas	19
1. Establishing Fair Compensation	20
2. Improving Working Conditions	22
3. Enhancing Skills and Opportunities	24
4. Valuing Contributions	27
5. Increasing Recruitment	29
<i>Growing Together: Next Steps</i>	31
Notes	32

Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre suivant :
Grandir ensemble : La Stratégie ontarienne pour la main-d'œuvre du secteur de la petite enfance et de la garde d'enfants.

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education's website, at www.ontario.ca/edu.



Complementary Visions

Our Vision for the Early Years and Child Care Workforce

Educators in the early years and child care are recognized and valued as qualified professionals with specialized knowledge of young children, and have the supports they need to establish meaningful careers delivering high-quality, inclusive early years and child care programming that is child- and family-centred.

Our Vision for the Early Years and Child Care

“All children and families have access to a range of high-quality, inclusive and affordable early years and child care programs and services that are child- and family-centred and contribute to children’s learning, development and well-being.”

– Ontario’s Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework (2017)



Introduction

To provide the best early childhood education for Ontario's children, we must support the educators who care for them.

When a toddler arrives at her child care centre, one of the first things she sees is an educator's welcoming smile. When a father goes to an EarlyON Child and Family Centre with his infant, he can get expert advice from an educator with specialized knowledge of child development. And when a school-age child leaves her before- and after-school program, she takes with her the new skills and confidence she learned from an educator.

But despite everything educators do to support our children, there continues to be a lack of understanding of the value of their work, and they are often not recognized for their contributions. They also face challenging working conditions, such as low compensation and split shifts, which make it difficult for many to enter into and stay in the sector. Because of these issues, many communities and providers report difficulties in finding enough high-quality educators and registered early childhood educators (RECEs) for their program needs.

That is why [*Ontario's Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework \(2017\)*](#) included a commitment to develop an early years and child care workforce strategy to help recruit and retain more educators and RECEs. As an important part of the strategy, the 2018 Budget announced that the government will implement a wage grid for program staff working with children in licensed child care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres beginning in April 2020. The wage grid will align compensation rates with early childhood educators in full-day kindergarten. The grid will also help reduce the gender wage gap by

supporting the predominantly female workforce. These commitments build on the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, which sets out the provincial interest in having knowledgeable, self-reflective and qualified professionals in Ontario's early years and child care programs.

Supporting the workforce is an important part of the government's overall vision for the early years and child care, because helping more children access early years and child care programs and services is only possible when there are enough educators to support them and their families. With the government's commitment to help 100,000 more children aged 0 to 4 years access licensed child care, including the commitment to expand access to child care for First Nation families on reserve, and the introduction of free preschool, beginning in September 2020, for children aged 2.5 to 4 years, the need for more educators is only going to increase: as the system expands, the early years and child care workforce must also expand.

Growing Together: Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy is our plan to build a stronger, more robust workforce by recruiting and retaining more educators in the early years and child care sector. It is our plan to better care for the educators who care for our children.

The strategy includes the following five initiatives to support educators:

1. Establishing fair compensation
2. Improving working conditions
3. Enhancing skills and opportunities
4. Valuing contributions
5. Increasing recruitment

Taken together, these initiatives will help ensure that more people are drawn to careers in the early years and child care, and that those already working in the sector will want to *stay* in the sector – and that they will have the professional development opportunities they need to enhance their skills throughout their careers. These initiatives will also increase public awareness of the impact of educators, so that more people understand and value the meaningful work they do.

We all know that the first years of a child's life are important: those early experiences can lay the foundation for so much that comes afterward. For children in an early years or child care program, many of those early positive interactions and caring relationships will be with educators: educators who are passionate and dedicated, who inspire curiosity and enrich potential, and who – like us – want the very best for our children.

We have used the term “educator” throughout this document to refer to all staff who work with children and families in early years and child care programs.

In Ontario, the terms “registered early childhood educator” (RECE) and “early childhood educator” (ECE) are protected titles under the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007. These are trained professionals specializing in the early development and learning of children and are registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators.



Why Educators Matter

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. Educators are lifelong learners. They take responsibility for their own learning and make decisions about ways to integrate knowledge from theory, research, their own experience, and their understanding of the individual children and families they work with. Every educator should feel he or she belongs, is a valuable contributor, and deserves the opportunity to engage in meaningful work.

– *How Does Learning Happen?*
Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years (2014), p. 7

Educators are the key to high-quality early years and child care experiences. They are there for our children, every day. Creating environments that encourage a child's natural curiosity and creativity, providing individualized care for a child with special needs, or working with an Elder to plan Indigenous cultural programming are just some of the many examples of what educators do to make positive early years experiences possible for children.

We know just how important these experiences are: research has shown that high-quality early childhood education – delivered by positive, caring and knowledgeable educators – has a positive impact on children's learning, development, well-being and later achievement in school and beyond.

Educators Foster Positive Relationships

Educators foster positive relationships with children and families by observing, listening and empathizing. They are attuned to children's cues, and respond with sensitivity and care. This is important because children's experiences of responsive relationships and inclusive, engaging environments are associated with children who are happier, less anxious and more motivated to learn.¹ In addition, educators' responsive, nurturing and stable relationships with both children and families can also help those experiencing temporary or persistent stress.²

Educators Facilitate Play-Based Learning

Educators have a wealth of knowledge in pedagogy and child development, and know how to plan and deliver programming that is responsive to children's abilities and interests. They participate as co-learners with families, children, and teachers in full-day kindergarten, and with other educators in the early years and child care, and use their knowledge to extend children's learning. In Francophone communities, educators also develop French-language programming for children and families. Educators working in Indigenous-delivered programs collaborate with Elders, knowledge keepers and families to support culturally appropriate learning.

By creating environments and experiences that build on what children are curious about, educators help children explore ideas in increasingly complex ways. This exploration can have long-lasting effects, since it is "through play and inquiry [that] young children practise ways of learning and interacting with the world around them that they will apply throughout their lives – problem solving and critical thinking, communication and collaboration, creativity and imagination, initiative and citizenship are all capacities vital for success throughout school and beyond."³

Educators Collaborate and Reflect

Educators are thoughtful researchers, approaching their work with an attitude of curiosity. They critically reflect on their practice and try new ideas and test theories, in order to continuously improve and create contexts that are meaningful for children and families. When educators explore new ideas and adjust their practices, they achieve increased positive outcomes for children, families and themselves.⁴

Educators are aware of the importance of working collaboratively with others, listening to the unique perspectives and experiences of colleagues, families and the children in their care, and engaging in shared critical reflection. They are flexible in their thinking, and understand that the knowledge of others can inform their own ideas. Educators work together to share their theories and learning, and those who work in full-day kindergarten participate in educator teams with teachers. In Indigenous communities, educators may also work with Elders or knowledge keepers to support children to develop a strong linguistic and cultural identity. Through these collaborative processes, they discover multiple perspectives and deeper understandings.

Helping Educators Support Children

Creating environments and experiences to enhance young children's learning and generate positive outcomes for children and families depends on well-educated, experienced and competent staff.⁵

International research has shown that staff working conditions, qualifications and participation in ongoing professional development are essential components of quality in early childhood education and care, and that such components are linked to children's outcomes.⁶ Research shows that educators with higher levels of qualifications are more likely to nurture children's development by creating rich and stimulating environments; engaging in positive, responsive interactions; intentionally participating with children in sustained shared thinking and logical reasoning; and valuing children's initiatives to extend their learning.⁷ These educator approaches are associated with better scores for children on measures of the development of language, cognitive, and social skills.⁸

High-quality programs support well-trained educators by establishing positive working conditions⁹ and by providing ongoing professional development support, such as coaching and mentoring.¹⁰ The Harvard University Center on the Developing Child recommends that adequate staff compensation, professional development, and supervision is necessary to reduce staff turnover and maintain the stability and consistency that is essential for building supportive and trusting relationships and reducing risks for children experiencing toxic stress.¹¹

It is clear that a strong and equitable early years and child care workforce is essential to our early years system. Every educator should feel valued as a contributor to the development and delivery of high-quality early years and child care programs, and improved outcomes for all children across Ontario.



Understanding the Early Years and Child Care Sector

Educators in Ontario can work in a number of different settings and provide a range of services for children and families. These settings include, among others: licensed child care centres, licensed home child care, EarlyON Child and Family Centres, before- and after-school programs, and unlicensed child care. Educators can also work in the school system, delivering full-day kindergarten programs as part of educator teams.

There are many different roles for educators working in the early years and child care sector, including the following:

- **Registered early childhood educators (RECEs).** These are trained professionals specialized in the early development and learning of children and registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators (“the College”). Pursuant to the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007, only individuals who are members of the College can use the titles “early childhood educator” and “registered early childhood educator.” RECEs may work directly with children in licensed child care settings, full-day kindergarten classrooms, or EarlyON Child and Family Centres, and are responsible for the “planning and delivery of inclusive play-based learning and care programs for children in order to promote the well-being and holistic development of children.”¹²
- **Child care supervisors.** These supervisors play a key leadership role in licensed child care centres. In addition to having the role and duties of an RECE, supervisors are also required under the Child Care and Early Years Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, to be responsible for a wide range of other duties, including planning and directing the program of a child care centre, being in charge of children, and overseeing the staff employed within that centre.

- **Special needs resource consultants.** These consultants are typically RECEs who also have specialized training and/or qualifications in providing individualized supports for children with special needs. They support program staff, providers and parents in working with children with special needs who attend licensed child care.
- **Home child care visitors.** These visitors are RECEs who are employed by licensed home child care agencies. They check that homes are safe for children before children are enrolled in care and check in routinely to make sure that caregivers are following the provincial requirements and the home child care agency's policies and procedures.
- **Other program staff working directly with children.** These individuals work with children and families in licensed child care and in EarlyON Child and Family Centres, but are not registered members of the College of Early Childhood Educators. Titles in this role can include early childhood assistant, child care worker, day care worker, family support worker, and child care assistant. In addition, program staff can include program assistants or enhanced staff who work with children with special needs.

Statistics show that the early years and child care workforce is predominantly female. In Canada, the percentage of women working in the sector has been reported to be as high as 98 per cent. Research suggests that this high percentage is due to the commonly held view of early childhood education as “women’s work.”¹³ In a sector with a predominantly female workforce, low compensation rates contribute to the gender wage gap.

Low compensation has often been a challenge in the early years and child care sector. For example, in 2017, the median hourly wage of employees in child care centres, including supervisors, qualified staff (e.g., RECEs and program staff otherwise approved by a director¹⁴), and non-RECE staff, was approximately \$15 to \$20.¹⁵ Program supervisors tend to earn the highest wage, ranging from \$20 to \$26.68 per hour, followed by qualified program staff (\$15 to \$20 per hour) and non-RECE program staff (\$11.40 to \$15 per hour).

The sector also faces challenges relating to retention. Past surveys¹⁶ have found that child care providers work an average of 12 years in the sector, with a quarter of providers working fewer than 5 years. There is often movement vertically to supervisory roles, or horizontally to other programs or providers.



Progress to Date

We know that a strong, highly skilled early years and child care workforce is important. That is why the government has already taken steps to support educators in providing high-quality early years and child care programs for children and families.

Recognizing the crucial connection between skilled educators and program quality, the government passed the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, which sets out the provincial interest in having knowledgeable, self-reflective and qualified professionals in early years and child care programs. Earlier, the government passed and enacted the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007, which established the College of Early Childhood Educators (“the College”). The College helps maintain high standards for quality early childhood education by regulating registered early childhood educators (RECEs). It is the first professional self-regulatory college for early childhood educators in Canada.

The government has also made investments in programs designed to raise compensation levels for educators. In January 2015, the government implemented wage enhancement and home child care enhancement grants for educators who work in licensed child care centres and licensed home child care agencies. The wage enhancement supports a wage increase of up to \$2 per hour, plus 17.5 per cent benefits for eligible centre-based staff and home visitors. The home child care enhancement grant supports an increase of up to \$20 per day for eligible home child care providers. These grants have helped provide greater income security for educators, supported the sector’s ability to retain educators, and helped close the wage gap between registered early childhood educators in the child care sector and

those working in full-day kindergarten. In 2018, the government provided \$203 million to 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs)¹⁷ to support these grants. In addition, in 2017–18, more than \$2.9 million was allocated to First Nation communities with licensed child care on reserve for the wage enhancement and home child care enhancement grants.

In 2017, the government passed the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act to increase Ontario's general minimum wage from \$11.60 per hour to \$14 per hour on January 1, 2018, increasing to \$15 per hour on January 1, 2019. This wage increase will improve quality, recruitment and retention in the early years and child care workforce.

In order to support educators who would like to upgrade their skills, the government created the [Early Childhood Educators Qualifications Upgrade Program \(ECE QUP\)](#). The ECE QUP helps individuals working in the sector obtain an Early Childhood Education diploma and become eligible to apply for membership with the College of Early Childhood Educators. The ECE QUP includes a Francophone and First Nation, Métis and Inuit program component to support individuals from those communities where we know there is an even greater need for early childhood educators. The program also has a leadership grant stream to support professional development for RECEs in, or aspiring towards, leadership positions. As of March 31, 2017, more than \$22.5 million in grant funding has been awarded, enabling an estimated 1,821 full-time and 5,156 part-time grant recipients to successfully complete an early childhood education diploma program since the program's inception in 2007. The ECE QUP is an important part of the government's plan to support the ongoing professionalization of the sector. With federal support provided through the Early Learning and Child Care Framework, up to \$4.95 million in grants is available this year.

In addition, the government implemented full-day kindergarten, which is available to all Ontario's four- and five-year-olds in publicly funded schools and reaches approximately 260,000 students annually throughout the province. Full-day kindergarten provides the opportunity for early childhood educators to work in Ontario school boards alongside teachers in educator teams to help young students learn. Currently, there are approximately 9,700 early childhood educators working in full-day kindergarten.

The government has also recently introduced additional initiatives to support the early years and child care workforce, including Centres of Excellence that will connect practitioners, education institutions, and employers through innovative professional learning networks across Ontario. Recognizing the regional and geographic diversity across the province, the government has established a Provincial Centre of Excellence, a Francophone Centre of Excellence, and an Indigenous Centre of Excellence.

In addition, the government will launch a \$30 million Early Years and Child Care Innovation Fund in the fall of 2018. This application-based fund will support projects that propose unique and innovative solutions to complex issues in the early years and child care sector, which could include addressing challenges faced by the workforce.





Getting the Best Advice

Who We Talked To

To better understand the complexities of the early years and child care workforce, the Ministry of Education consulted a range of key stakeholders and sought expert advice through a variety of channels, including the following:

- Commissioned R.A. Malatest & Associates, Ltd. to develop a [Workforce Study for Early Years and Child Care Employees](#) with actionable recommendations to further support educators in areas relating to compensation, hiring, retention and professional development.
- Formed a [Workforce Strategy Technical Advisory Group](#), a subset of the Minister's Early Years Advisory Committee, with representation from groups across the sector to provide focused advice on the development of the strategy.
- Commissioned Dr. Gordon Cleveland to develop an affordability study, [Affordable for All: Making Licensed Child Care Affordable in Ontario](#), which looks at ways to build a child care system that makes child care more accessible and affordable to all Ontario families.
- Gathered feedback from First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous partners, as well as service system managers, through needs assessments conducted as part of the implementation of early years commitments in [The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples \(2016\)](#).

- Received advice through the [Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario \(AECEO\) Decent Work Task Force](#), which consists of researchers, academics, RECEs, employers and policy experts. In 2017, the task force released a document outlining recommendations for the early years and child care workforce strategy, [Transforming Work in Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Sector](#).
- Consulted with parents, families and with early years partners during engagement to develop [Ontario's Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework](#) in the fall and winter of 2016–17.

What We Heard

Experts consistently identified compensation as the biggest challenge facing the early years and child care workforce. Educators often earn lower wages than those working in other social sector occupations. These low wages make it difficult to recruit and retain staff because they can often earn more in a wide range of occupations beyond the early years and child care sector.

In addition, recruiting and retaining highly skilled educators is a challenge, especially in rural or remote areas, and in First Nation, Métis, Inuit and Francophone communities. As child care is made more affordable and the number of spaces increases, demand for qualified staff will also rise.

In spite of the proven benefits of high-quality early childhood education and care for children aged 0 to 4 years, the workforce continues to be undervalued, with early years and child care often seen as “child-minding” or “babysitting” before a child enters Kindergarten.

As well, access to formal professional learning opportunities continues to be limited, so it can be difficult for educators to enhance their skills and knowledge. There is little incentive for educators to pursue further education with a lack of a clear career path and future opportunities.

How We Can Help

Partners and experts told us that there are many opportunities to support educators, and provided a suite of recommendations to guide us in developing the early years and child care workforce strategy. They told us that developing a province-wide wage grid that recognizes educational qualifications, experience, and varied roles would create the possibility of career progression and

incentives for ongoing professional development. Compensation should match that of school boards and municipalities that directly operate child care centres. To attract capable, well-qualified individuals to the sector and retain them beyond a few years, it is important for us to identify the career options that exist in the sector.

Educating the public about the benefits of early childhood education would likely have a positive impact on how the early years and child care sector is perceived. Expanding professional standards to the entire sector rather than just to RECEs will help promote the professional identity of the sector and of those working in the sector. Improved oversight – through broadened scope of the College of Early Childhood Educators to include all employees in the sector – will ensure that all employees are accountable for adhering to standards and codes of conduct that are professionally overseen and regulated.

Enhancing education and improving access to ongoing professional learning would help improve public perception of the value of the workforce and its professional identity. This could be implemented through a learning framework that enables staff supports, such as paid time for professional learning, expanded opportunities for acquiring and upgrading qualifications, and minimum education requirements to obtain employment in the sector.



The Way Forward: Five Action Areas

The five action areas described in the pages that follow reflect the government's plan to strengthen and retain the workforce. By improving working conditions, establishing fair compensation, enhancing skills and opportunities, and valuing contributions, we are confident that professionals already working in the sector will want to stay in the sector. And by increasing recruitment, we are confident that more people will be drawn to careers in the sector.



Action Area 1: Establishing Fair Compensation

Goal: Educators in the early years and child care receive fair compensation that supports their ability to stay and grow in the profession for the long-term.

Challenge: Compensation is not adequate, and many people leave the profession due to low wages.

We know why educators matter for children, families and society. However, there is a clear disconnect between the value of educators and their compensation, which has led to significant recruitment and retention issues. Many qualified educators are leaving the sector due to low compensation, often taking years of experience and knowledge with them, and leaving children and families without the opportunity to interact with these highly skilled and passionate professionals.

Educators work long hours in physically demanding roles, often going above and beyond to provide the best possible experiences for the children and families in their care. A large number of these educators do not receive compensation that fairly represents their qualifications and the work they do in the sector.

We recognize the significant challenges that educators face, and we are implementing actions that will address these challenges. The 2018 Budget committed to the introduction of a wage grid for all program staff working in the early years and child care sector in April 2020 that will ensure their compensation is aligned with early childhood educators working in full-day kindergarten. The wage grid provides educators in the early years and child care with an incentive to stay in the sector, and the increase in compensation for a predominantly female workforce takes steps to address the gender wage gap.

Child care providers, educators and parents can feel confident that the implementation of a wage grid will not have a direct impact on child care fees. Until the wage grid is implemented, we will continue to provide the wage enhancement and home child care enhancement grants to ensure that eligible educators are supported throughout this transition.

However, we recognize that compensation does not end with wages. Many educators do not have access to total compensation packages, including medical benefits and vacation pay – packages that are often considered as

standard for employees in other sectors. We will explore ways to encourage employers to offer total compensation packages. The value that educators bring to the development, well-being and education of children cannot be underestimated. This value should be reflected in the way educators are compensated.

Action: Improve compensation for educators.

Immediate action

- ✓ Continue to provide wage enhancement and home child care grants until the introduction of the wage grid in April 2020.
- ✓ Work with partners to develop an implementation plan for the wage grid.

2019 and beyond

- ✓ Implement a wage grid for all program staff that reflects qualifications and experience, beginning in April 2020.
- ✓ Explore mechanisms or incentives to encourage employers to offer total compensation packages, including benefits.



How these actions will help children and families: Children and families will benefit from consistent education and care, delivered by educators with long-term experience in the early years and child care sector.



Action Area 2: Improving Working Conditions

Goal: Educators in the early years and child care experience positive, stable working conditions.

Challenge: Educators feel overworked, with many working long hours or in split shifts.

It can be challenging to retain highly skilled educators when their working conditions are often difficult to manage. Many educators working on a supply or casual basis may be asked to work in split shifts, moving during the day from one group of children to another, as required by staff-child ratios. The days can be long and stressful when educators cover an early morning shift and then move to an afternoon shift that does not end until the centre closes, or when they arrive early and stay late to prepare resources to ensure that the children in their care are provided with meaningful, high-quality experiences.

Reducing the burden on educators who work split shifts and long hours requires an innovative approach that will be developed in partnership with key stakeholders across the early years and child care sector. This could include encouraging licensees to establish shared supply lists: with one common access point to supply staff, providers can ease the pressure on educators who are required to adjust their schedules to accommodate different requests. A shared supply list also provides consistency for families and children, and can be a useful resource for providers to access high-quality educators.

Educators providing licensed home-based child care are often required to work alone for long periods of the day and have reported feeling isolated without the sense of community that can be found among educators working in centre-based child care. To address this issue, we intend to consult on an approach to a two-provider model for licensed home child care. Such a model could allow two licensed home child care providers to care for children in the same setting, and meaningfully collaborate, providing high-quality programming that encourages improved outcomes for the many children and families across Ontario who access licensed home child care.

Improving working conditions can often begin with an awareness of the experiences that educators face on an average day. Educators who feel valued, respected and heard will be motivated to provide the best possible education and care for children. By establishing the collection and sharing of

data on job satisfaction, safety and working conditions, employers can begin to understand how educators are affected by the experiences of their working conditions, and can begin to identify ways to address these factors and establish a safe, responsive and enjoyable working environment for educators. This will support retention in the early years and child care sector.

Action: Foster innovative approaches to improving working conditions.

Immediate action

- ✓ Work with partners to establish data collection on job satisfaction, safety and working conditions to improve employers' understanding of the factors that affect job satisfaction.
- ✓ Consult on an approach to a two-provider model in licensed home child care, and post for regulatory consultation in the fall of 2018.

2019 and beyond

- ✓ Work with partners to investigate opportunities to reduce split shifts, such as pooling resources and establishing shared supply lists.
- ✓ Work with partners and employers to access and share up-to-date data collected on working conditions, to support decision-making at the program level.



How these actions will help children and families: Children and families will benefit from stable, high-quality education and care from educators who are motivated and have high levels of job satisfaction.

Action Area 3: Enhancing Skills and Opportunities

Goal: Educators in the early years and child care have access to professional learning and mentorship opportunities to develop their skills.

Challenge: There are few opportunities and incentives to increase education and training.

Educators are lifelong learners. However, consultations with stakeholders have shown us that there are limited opportunities for educators to access formal professional learning, and few incentives. The cost of attending formal sessions, along with an inability to take time off work, are the most common reasons why educators do not participate in professional learning. In addition, educators who work with children with special needs may feel that they do not have the training to provide these children with the best possible education and care.

Research findings show that educators who have higher levels of qualifications are more likely to nurture children's development by creating rich and stimulating environments; engaging in positive, responsive interactions; and intentionally engaging with children in sustained shared thinking and logical reasoning.¹⁸ We recognize that educators will benefit from incentives that encourage the next step in their professional careers. That is why we will be reviewing the Early Childhood Educators Qualifications Upgrade Program including looking at ways to align it with the wage grid. In addition, we will work with partners to develop a career map so that educators are aware of the breadth of opportunities available to them in the early years and child care sector.

When we provide access to up-to-date training on topics in the early years and child care sector, educators, children and families all benefit. In *Ontario's Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework*, the government committed to supporting ongoing professional learning opportunities for educators, including provincially funded professional learning events. We will move forward with a plan to implement these events, starting in the fall of 2018, with a series of events co-hosted with regional partners. We will also work with our partners, including service system managers, to implement the standardization of professional development, including a review of how capacity funding is distributed and used across the province. It is important

to recognize that professional learning can also happen informally, and be fostered by the interactions and relationships educators have with one another. With this in mind, we plan to work with the College of ECEs and other partners to establish an approach to a mentorship program that encourages peer-to-peer learning.

Our work to enhance the skills and opportunities of educators will be most effective when we capitalize on expertise from across the sector and beyond. We plan to consult with the College of Early Childhood Educators on further regulation of the sector, including of non-RECEs and staff working under director approvals. We will also work with the College and other partners to develop an approach to minimum training requirements for unqualified staff and supervisors, and with the Centres of Excellence to connect practitioners, education institutions, and employers through innovative professional learning networks across Ontario.

Action: Improve access to, and incentives for, individualized and workplace-based professional learning opportunities.

Immediate action

- ✓ Work with the College of Early Childhood Educators to develop options for further regulation of the sector and work with the College and other partners, including postsecondary institutions, to develop minimum training requirements for unqualified staff and supervisors – for example, non-RECEs and program staff otherwise approved by a director.
- ✓ Review the Early Childhood Educators Qualifications Upgrade Program.
- ✓ Work with partners to develop and promote a career map to showcase all the opportunities in the early years and child care sector.
- ✓ Introduce the first provincial professional learning event in the fall of 2018, consisting of a series of regional events with local partners.
- ✓ Work with service system managers and other partners to improve the standardization of professional development province-wide, including to better target existing capacity funding for professional development.
- ✓ Increase access to up-to-date training, including Indigenous cultural competency training, supporting children with special needs training, gender-based violence training, and training on other issues and topics relevant to educators.

2019 and beyond

- ✓ Explore opportunities to work with the College of Early Childhood Educators and other partners to establish a mentorship program to facilitate peer- to-peer learning and professional development.
- ✓ Work with Centres of Excellence to develop and deliver professional learning opportunities for the sector.



How these actions will help children and families: Children and families will benefit from inclusive, evidence-based programming that reflects up-to-date pedagogical approaches delivered by highly trained educators.



Action Area 4: Valuing Contributions

Goal: Educators in the early years and child care feel respected and valued.

Challenge: There is a lack of understanding of the value of work in early years and child care, especially when compared to other regulated professions (e.g., teachers, nurses, social workers).

Educators are highly skilled and use their experience and specialized knowledge in child development and pedagogy to create a responsive environment that encourages all children to learn, explore and create. However, the public perception of the early childhood profession is often that educators are “babysitting” or “child-minding.” The perceived value of work in the early years and child care sector is frequently lower than that in other regulated professions, including the teaching profession. Educators who go above and beyond to provide exceptional care for children often go unrecognized.

Educators are motivated and inspired to provide the best possible education and care when they feel valued and respected. This can occur when we celebrate the great work educators do that positively impacts children, families and society as a whole. We will work with our partners in the early years and child care sector to increase public awareness of the skills, knowledge and experience that educators provide, and demonstrate how their contributions are linked to improved outcomes for children.

Identifying and recognizing the significant efforts of innovative leaders in the early years and child care sector is an effective way to show educators that their contributions are valued. When other educators become more aware of those leading the way in the planning and delivery of high-quality, evidence-based programming, including those delivering Indigenous and Francophone programs, they will be inspired to strive for innovation and excellence in their own practices.

Action: Improve recognition of the importance of educators in the early years and child care sector.

Immediate action

- ✓ Work with partners to raise awareness of the impact of educators and the professionalization of the early years and child care sector, including considering options for supporting local awareness campaigns.
- ✓ Empower educators to recognize the value they provide for children and families across Ontario.

2019 and beyond

- ✓ Develop an approach for recognizing and celebrating leaders in early years and child care settings, including exploring ways to highlight the achievements of Indigenous and Francophone educators.
- ✓ Work with the Centres of Excellence to highlight promising practices and success stories in the early years and child care.



How these actions will help children and families: Children and families will benefit from interactions with educators who feel valued and motivated, and view educators as experts in providing the best education and care.



Action Area 5: Increasing Recruitment

Goal: More people pursue careers in early years and child care.

Challenge: Many communities struggle to recruit and retain high quality staff.

It can be challenging to recruit and retain educators in the early years and child care sector, especially in rural or remote areas and in programs tailored to the unique needs of Indigenous or Francophone children. Students and young adults are often unaware of the rewarding experiences and positive relationships with children, families and peers that they can experience when working in early childhood education. Those considering a career in this sector may also be unaware of opportunities for growth within the sector. Working with partners to expand student interest in the early years and child care, including developing information and a career map for use in high school guidance offices and career fairs, can enhance recruitment and encourage those looking for the worthwhile experiences that come with working closely with children and their families.

It is also important to note the challenges in recruitment and retention that may occur after a student chooses to pursue a career in early childhood education. Students in early childhood education programs often struggle to find a suitable early childhood setting to complete their practicum requirements, or face challenges during their practicum and decide to leave the sector. Experiences can be inconsistent, and students often feel unprepared for the complexities of working in an early childhood setting. We will work with our partners in the postsecondary education sector to examine standards for the practica that are offered in early childhood education programs, and explore other pathways to learning, including apprenticeship models. Students who are working towards their passion for children, education and care deserve experiential learning opportunities that reflect this interest, and suitably prepare them for the journey ahead in their careers.

RECEs bring a wealth of experience, skills and knowledge to the sector. As members of the College of Early Childhood Educators, RECEs are held accountable for their conduct, follow a common Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, and participate in continuous professional learning. We will ensure that EarlyON Child and Family Centres benefit from increased recruitment of RECEs in their programs. We will also extend the requirement for each EarlyON Child and Family Centre to have an RECE on staff from within three years to

within five years. Educators who are required to register with the College will have more time to transition to this new requirement.

Action: Support the applicant pool for early childhood education programs.

Immediate action

- ✓ Work with partners (e.g., the College of Early Childhood Educators, Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, postsecondary institutions and school boards) to address immediate staffing needs, enhance recruitment, and expand interest in early childhood education careers, including in First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities, Francophone communities, and rural or remote communities.
- ✓ Develop recruitment and marketing materials for distribution at school guidance offices and career fairs, including exploring opportunities to increase the diversity of applicants.
- ✓ Continue to support an increase in the number of early childhood educators working at EarlyON Child and Family Centres while extending the ECE requirement from three years to five years.

2019 and beyond

- ✓ Work with partners, including postsecondary institutions and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD), to examine best practices for experiential learning and practica in early childhood education college programs, including exploring other pathways to learning.
- ✓ Work with partners to develop an approach to data gathering, information sharing, and monitoring related to graduation rates and recruitment and retention in early childhood education to support the child care expansion strategy.



How these actions will help children and families: Children and families will benefit from increased access to early years and child care staffed by qualified educators who have equitable opportunities to access training and education.



Growing Together: Next Steps

Together with our partners, we have already made great progress on our goal of supporting more children and families to access high-quality, inclusive and affordable child care, delivered by knowledgeable, resourceful and caring educators. This is an exciting time for early years and child care in Ontario, as we continue to collaborate across the sector and deliver on our commitments to transform the early years and child care system and grow the early years and child care workforce.

We look forward to continued work with our partners as we deliver on the key commitments in this strategy to ensure educators feel valued, supported and celebrated. Our commitment in the 2018 Budget to the implementation of a province-wide wage grid in April 2020 has signalled the start of our action, but our work is just beginning.

We will continue to support the educators who enter and stay in the sector. We will continue to provide high-quality early childhood education and care as part of our commitments to help 100,000 more children aged 0 to 4 years access licensed child care, as well as introduce free preschool for children aged 2.5 to 4 years, and expand child care on reserve.

To stay engaged with us as we develop an approach towards implementing these commitments, please see the [ministry's website](#) for further updates. The action items we will address to support the early years and child care workforce are significant and ambitious, but we know that we must follow through on them to ensure that our educators can continue to provide the best possible education and care for children and families across Ontario. Together, we will achieve our goals. Together, we will grow.



Notes

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