



Workforce Solutions in Child Care

A YMCA Ontario White Paper

January 2023

Executive Summary

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) agreement represents the largest transformational shift in our approach to child care and early learning in a generation. If fully realized, this agreement will achieve marked gains towards a more progressive and equitable society – one where working women and families are able to freely choose to participate in the workforce knowing that they can access affordable, high-quality licensed child care where their children can learn and grow in safe, stimulating environments.

Yet the long-standing workforce shortages in licensed child care – exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic – have become too large to ignore. The Province, together with sectoral partners, should move quickly to capitalize on the momentum provided by the new agreement to develop a comprehensive workforce strategy modelled on promising approaches adopted by operators and across other Canadian jurisdictions. Failing to do so will negatively impact our collective ability to realize the goals of CWELCC, as fee reductions will significantly increase demand pressures, which the sector will fail to meet without a corresponding supply of qualified early childhood educators.

To ensure the aims of CWELCC can be fully realized, greater investments in the early childhood educator (ECE) workforce are needed. Specifically, the Province is urged to take the following actions:

- Invest in workforce compensation on par with school boards
- Exempt charities from Bill 124
- Fully fund benefits and pensions
- Offer incentives for split shifts and/or transition split shifts to full-time positions
- Offer incentives that recognize the stressful environment
- Invest in a public recruitment campaign
- Build a better career trajectory for educators
- Incentivize colleges and universities to develop different levels of credentials and/or specializations
- Improve coordination with school boards to minimize staffing disruptions/turnovers
- Recognize the impacts of inflation and the soaring cost of living
- Recruit new immigrants to the field and recognize home-country credentials

YMCA's have long enjoyed positive working relationships with government partners at all levels. Yet the reality is we cannot sustain our current levels of enrolment, nor contemplate expansion, without concerted and prioritized investments in the ECE workforce. We are standing at the ready to build solutions together with our partners across government and across the early childhood education sector, to ensure that more families can access a high-quality licensed child care system at an affordable cost.

Introduction to YMCA Child Care

YMCA in Ontario have been delivering high-quality licensed child care in Ontario for more than 55 years. With 76,000 licensed spaces, we collectively represent nearly 1/5th of all licensed child care in the province. The YMCA is a leader in promoting quality in child care, prioritizing better wages, benefits, and access to education for staff.

As a pioneer of research-based early learning curricula, YMCA are proudly committed to continuous quality improvement and professional development and have invested extensively in staff training and development.

As long-standing providers of child care in Ontario, the YMCA and its partners in the sector have long advocated for the necessity of government support to ensure every family has access to affordable and quality child care irrespective of individual circumstance, and applauds the Ontario government joining the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system as a critical step toward realizing this transformative commitment to families across the province.

Context – Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care (CWELCC)

The YMCA of Greater Toronto was pleased to host the signing of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreement in March 2022. After decades of work on the part of academics, researchers, operators, advocates and government partners, this agreement marks a transformational shift in Ontario's approach to licensed child care.

The historic agreement commits to building 86,000 new spaces while reducing fees for parents and promising improved pay and conditions for educators. In short, this agreement promises to be a generational investment in the future of communities across the province. Further, the agreement will deepen the positive impacts of accessible child care on the broader economy, not least of which includes bringing some much-needed stability to the wider labour market.⁽¹⁾ Reduced fees and additional licensed spaces will create strong incentives for parents who left the workforce to now contemplate returning.

In jointly pursuing this historic rollout with the federal government, Ontario has taken another momentous step toward recognizing the importance of early childhood education—and by extension early childhood educators—to a productive and more equitable society.

A strong child care workforce will realize the goals of CWELLC. When costs for high-quality child care go down, demand goes up and so too will the number of qualified educators the province will need to get the work done. To get there, Ontario should move quickly to develop a comprehensive workforce strategy modelled on promising approaches adopted elsewhere in Canada.

Impacts of the CWELCC Agreement on Child Care Workforce

The agreement commits to build 86,000 new spaces (71,000 new spaces on top of 15,000 previously announced spaces), paired with a progressive reduction of fees in accordance with the federal government's eventual goal of bringing down child care costs to an average of \$10 per day. As fees go down, demand will increase—experts believe as many as 300,000 additional spaces would be required in order to meet this growth in demand as a result of lower child care fees.⁽²⁾

While COVID-19 was particularly detrimental for child care in terms of staff turnover, the impact was blunted somewhat by a parallel decline in enrollment. But now as operators struggle with adequate staffing to meet recovering demand, the addition of new spaces and new demand will exacerbate the crisis in child care staffing—unless this historic commitment to expanding child care in Ontario is matched with a commensurate investment in a long-neglected workforce that is overwhelmingly women, racialized and precariously employed.

Current Workforce Shortages at YMCA Child Care Centres in Ontario

Presently, no YMCA is operating at licensed capacity, in large part due to persistent workforce shortages across the sector. Many have extensive wait lists, and all experience great difficulty attracting and retaining qualified staff long-term. The YMCA has not been passive in confronting these challenges, with leadership being quite creative in the strategies used to fill vacancies. For example, YMCAs have built and cultivated excellent working relationships with local post-secondary institutions delivering Early Childhood Education training. For example some child care directors teach courses in early childhood education at local colleges to better identify and build relationships with promising future educators. Some YMCAs have invested in a more compelling career ladder, creating mid-level roles for curriculum development, or working with children with special needs that can also help enhance quality and improve working conditions for front-line staff. A common approach to retaining staff involves combining roles to increase the number of employees with full-time hours, and by extension benefits like dental, vision, paid time off and a pension.

And while such efforts certainly make a difference, they alone cannot compensate for the present reality where low compensation, a demanding work environment and limited opportunities for advancement within the sector function to reinforce outdated, gendered connotations of child care as undeserving of a breadwinning wage.⁽³⁾

These factors contribute to licensed ECEs averaging only a handful of years before moving on to other kinds of work.⁽⁴⁾ For the YMCA, this has meant that the pool of potential qualified hires remains quite small. One challenge consistently identified by

operators is the scarcity of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) relative to the government's staffing requirements. While YMCAs have made considerable investments in their child care workforce with an eye to improving quality and stability, a recurrent stumbling block is the persistent scarcity of RECEs relative to demand. To reach the goal of 60% RECE staffing under the new agreement, considerable training and recruitment efforts will be needed. As noted by Linda Cottes, Senior Vice President of Child and Family Development at the YMCA of Greater Toronto, "The Y can offer unique training and development opportunities as an organization with a substantial service footprint, however a major bottleneck is the lack of candidates with RECE designations." Put differently, service providers like the YMCA can lead staff training and development to an extent, but it cannot award RECE designations. To meet the goal of 60% RECEs by 2026 in Ontario, a sectoral strategy is needed.

For a number of YMCAs which receive provincial funds to deliver other important programs like Employment Services, Bill 124 presents an additional obstacle not only to recruiting new staff but employee retention in particular. As one YMCA child care director told us during a recent survey, "Bill 124 is causing severe issues with addressing compensation for longer-tenured staff." During a period when operators across Ontario are under immense pressure to increase wages, YMCAs subject to Bill 124 are effectively prohibited from following suit and thereby at a disadvantage in competing with the municipal and private sectors to retain scarce ECEs.

A recent survey of YMCAs in Ontario found that all YMCAs, like other operators, are struggling to employ enough educators to keep current programs running – let alone consider expanding. In order to keep programs operational at current enrolment levels, an additional 419 educators are needed. To return to pre-COVID enrolment levels, an additional 1,427 staff are needed. To scale up to operate at licensed capacity, nearly 3,000 new hires would be required. And expanding programs by 20% would require nearly 3,450 new staff.

These significant workforce shortages are preventing child care operators from meeting current needs or planning for the future. Unless CWELCC's 86,000 new spaces are accompanied by further commitments to improve workforce compensation and charities like the YMCA are exempted from Bill 124, critical operators like the YMCA will struggle to realize the government's landmark commitment to make high-quality child care accessible for every family.

Workforce Vacancy Estimates at Ontario Ys

To meet current registrations	419
To return to pre-COVID operating capacity	1,427
To move to licensed capacity	2,869
To expand beyond licensed capacity by 20%	3,442

Estimated Shortages Across the Sector

"We're college educated, college regulated and what are we getting out of it?" – Alicia Winegarden, ECE(5)

According to the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Ontario will need another 9,000 ECEs to staff these newly created spaces.⁽²⁾ This is leaving aside existing labour shortages that have left the vast majority of operators unable to function at their licensed capacity.

According to estimates provided by the Child Care Resource and Research Unit, approximately 50% of ECEs leave the field within the first 5 years. Similarly, the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council found that 1 in 4 child care professionals plan to leave the sector within three years⁽⁶⁾, a number that has ballooned due to pandemic-related stresses and shutdowns intensifying burnout amongst frontline educators in licensed child care. And while the CWELCC agreement commits to improving compensation and working conditions, the months since its announcement in March have seen Ontario gripped by a cost-of-living crisis that makes swift action on a comprehensive workforce strategy especially urgent. It cannot be emphasized enough that the prevailing compensatory regime in licensed child care undermines workforce resilience in the face of socioeconomic shocks like COVID-19 and rising inflation. Whereas overall employment in Canada fell by 3% during the pandemic, the same period saw employment in child care plummet by 21%.⁽⁷⁾

"While wages have risen, maybe they haven't risen enough to compensate for the fact that when everyone's short-staffed, it means you have to do extra work." – Brian Bethune, Economist⁽⁸⁾

Another factor to consider is stiff competition for scarce ECEs with school boards, who offer higher wages, better hours (e.g., no split shifts) and more time off during summer months and school holiday periods that most licensed child care operators are hard-pressed to match due to year-round demand for licensed child care and other factors that will be discussed in this report. The growing private sector is a source of pressure as well: one child care manager we interviewed spoke of being aggressively headhunted for a supervisor role by one such operator, offering an hourly wage of \$37.

Causes of Ongoing Workforce Challenges

"I strongly believe that all RECEs/ECEs/EAs have been underpaid for a very, very long time, and this pandemic is a reminder that our services and care of the population's children is one that is very much required within our communities."⁽⁹⁾

Before addressing solutions to the workforce shortage—it is important to acknowledge some of the primary reasons why Ontario currently faces a shortage in the early childhood education sector:

- 1) **Low compensation** – makes it hard to recruit and impossible to retain, does not reflect the level of qualification required to become and remain an RECE.
 - a. Low compensation, particularly during periods of crisis like the pandemic, led to significant staffing shortages. One YMCA noted that programs requiring 100 staff would need to hire 150 educators – to account for how many educators were resigning and moving on to other professions.
 - b. As Terri Kendall of the YMCA at Stratford Perth told us, “COVID-related turnover placed significant strain on management’s ability to oversee day-to-day operations and effectively plan.” To cope, she (along with a few other YMCAs) hired a full-time recruiter.
 - i. This is an additional cost inflicted on operators by low wages compared to significant regulatory demands placed upon ECEs.
 - ii. High turnover reflects low morale and resilience as educators struggle to maintain positive working conditions environments and make ends meet during difficult periods – improving this should reap savings on recruitment-related costs
- 2) **Lack of benefits and pension** – individuals can’t build a life-long career and support themselves and their families on an ECE wage.
- 3) **Precarious work and/or split shifts** – precarious work and/or split shifts and lack of time off in summer (compared with teachers) can all lead to challenging working conditions and low morale.
- 4) **Stressful environment** – caring for children is often hands-on, challenging and stressful work with high levels of attention and engagement required at all times. COVID-related pressures and uncertainty has also had a negative impact on the mental health of educators. Even the most well-trained and resilient educators are at risk of burnout, which in turn can have a negative impact on the children in their care.
- 5) **Low recognition** – the public generally views child care as little more than babysitting, and doesn’t understand the critical nature of this developmental stage and the pedagogical role of trained educators.
- 6) **No obvious career trajectory** –
 - a. As large multi-service, multi-site organizations, YMCAs are uniquely positioned to nurture the career growth and development of ECEs. The sector as a whole however would benefit from establishing and/or building critical specialization roles including supervisory positions, special needs educators and leadership roles. Without a clear career ladder or promotional pathways, few trained ECEs are enticed to build a career in the sector. Greater consideration for career growth, areas of development and specialization would be beneficial.

- b. Wage compression, as increases for front-line staff have not been matched by a similar rate of increase for supervisors, makes leaving the sector a more attractive option for ECEs looking to advance their careers. Teachers' college and social work programs are two common options for continued education amongst those who exit licensed child care.
- c. There needs to be more options for mid-career ECEs to specialize, similar to those presented to teachers (e.g., curriculum development, special needs programs, athletics/arts-oriented specializations etc.). This could even include rotational/short-term (6-24 month) assignments to such roles to foster continued professional development and allow younger educators to begin "test driving" mid-level specialist roles.
- d. ECEs have a professional licensing body and yet when compared to other professional associations they appear to have a smaller footprint in public policy. Policy-making would benefit from greater engagement with ECEs and others working in child care who could serve as conduits between front-line experience and policy. This could involve creating additional streams or programs for early childhood education at post-secondary institutions, focusing on specialization and research/strategy.

7) **School Board Hiring** – When Full-day Kindergarten was introduced, a large portion of RECEs left licensed child care for positions at school boards.⁽¹⁰⁾

- a. For one operator we interviewed, this meant "an exodus of our more experienced and senior staff," years of institutional knowledge they have since struggled to renew due to lower wages and comparatively stressful conditions.
 - b. Full-day Kindergarten has also intensified competition for qualified staff between operators and school boards – the legacy of which is still very much in play today.
- 8) **Credential requirements amongst the most extensive in the country** – RECEs in Ontario are among the most well-trained and qualified across Canada, but their wages are not reflective of this. Comparatively, some qualified educators in other provinces where wages are higher (e.g., Levels 1, 2 and 3) hold lower credential requirements (i.e. 10 week training program with no professional designation).
- 9) **Soaring cost of living** – rising cost of necessities, and particularly housing, transportation, and food costs have created substantial financial pressure on operators seeking to recruit and retain staff – both in urban environments where cost of living is so high, and in rural environments where cost of transportation is high and commuting often requires covering large geographic distances. Inflation is no doubt contributing to an exodus of qualified educators out of the sector to other higher-paying fields.

- 10) **Greater need** – The pandemic demonstrated that child care is an essential service. By extension, this meant that skilled, well-resourced child care is more important to communities than ever. Child care centres are now seeing more children with special needs than ever before especially in the school-age cohort, due to massive disruptions in programs and services for at-risk children throughout the pandemic.
- 11) **Other sectors offer higher entry-level pay with similar or even fewer required qualifications** – Or similar pay with far less demanding working conditions, hours:
 - a. E.g., Hospital technicians, office administrators, paralegals
 - i. Paralegals are a useful reference because it is also a gendered profession⁽¹¹⁾ that in Ontario requires completion of a college-level paralegal program (only 1 year), a field placement, as well as accreditation by a professional licensing body. Paralegals are also more frequently engaged in “ground level” legal work. And yet despite roughly comparable qualifications, the median wage in Ontario is \$28.57⁽¹²⁾, versus a \$20 median for ECEs in Ontario.⁽¹³⁾

Promising Trends – Other Jurisdictions

By opting to increase the minimum wage for ECEs to \$30.11 last year, **Yukon became the highest paying jurisdiction in Canada.**⁽¹⁴⁾ They were not alone in taking steps to improve compensation: **Prince Edward Island announced a pension plan that will go into effect next year**⁽¹⁵⁾, while **Manitoba put in place a \$25.89 wage floor and \$27.77 ECE starting wage** (Ontario will have a \$22 minimum for ECEs in 2026).⁽²⁾ **Saskatchewan also announced a \$3 wage enhancement starting this year** that would serve as the basis for their forthcoming ECE wage grid.⁽¹⁶⁾ **British Columbia has similarly provided multiple rounds of wage enhancement since 2018** as a down payment on a formal wage grid, including most recently a \$4 bump for all ECEs working in licensed child care centres, including ECEs in specialist roles working with Indigenous children and those with special needs.⁽¹⁷⁾

In the case of British Columbia, these strong efforts to improve wages for ECEs across the board have been undertaken in parallel with new bursaries and programs that aim to eliminate barriers currently preventing non-ECEs working in the sector from pursuing certification. **New Brunswick is another model in this respect, with government support for training doubling the percentage of qualified staff to 50%.**⁽¹⁾ Such an incentive-based approach to education and skills upgrading is critical if Ontario is to achieve its expressed goal of having 60% ECEs comprising the child care workforce by 2026.

Promising Practices at YMCAs of Ontario

At a more intermediate level, YMCAs across the province have stepped up in various ways to address pressing need in the community, pursue workforce stability, and ensure quality of care is maintained.

The YMCA of Simcoe-Muskoka used federal funds acquired through their Employment Services portfolio for enhancing employment opportunities for young people (Youthquest) to train them as Early Childhood Educator Assistants (ECEAs), a critical medium-to-long-term investment in the region's early childhood education workforce that will also benefit other operators and school boards.

"Our initial goal was at least 10 ECEA participants in each of the first two sessions, for a total of twenty (20) participants. We recruited a total of 39 participants, almost doubling our goal....All of the 39 participants that started the 6 week ECEA focused training, completed it." – **Fiona Cascagnette, YMCA of Simcoe Muskoka**

The YMCA of Hamilton, Burlington and Brantford took this concept further, developing an internal training academy in a bid to improve staffing levels and quality of care, particularly in their school-age programs. It is worth highlighting their comment noting they faced considerable pushback from the Ministry of Education on the issuing of Director Approval (DA) for unqualified staff, despite their innovative efforts to develop the skills and long-term career prospects of educators presently employed under DA parameters.

Ontario YMCAs enjoy strong partnerships with regional colleges. In addition to hosting over a thousand ECE students on placements across the province, senior staff of YMCAs in Eastern Ontario (Kingston and Brockville) and Northeastern Ontario (Timmins, North Bay, Sudbury) are amongst a few who also teach in local ECE programs, while another YMCA described how they worked together with their local colleges to improve teaching practices during student placements. The YMCA of Niagara also had 15 of its educators participate in the first cohort of a pilot accelerated ECE program at Niagara College, which was for people already working in the sector and aimed to graduate new ECEs in just 12 months.

YMCAs have also forged fruitful partnerships with regional and municipal authorities, whether it was Hamilton, Brockville and Northumberland YMCAs making use of funding to pay wages to placement students, or the YMCA of the National Capital Region working with the local school board's adult learning program to find newcomers with a background in child care and helping them complete an Assistant Teacher Certificate (ATC).

And at the front-line level, Ontario YMCAs have employed a bevy of creative approaches to improving working conditions and creating opportunities for front-line educators' career development. The YMCA of Northeastern Ontario has experimented with a

four day work week, while the YMCA of Sault St. Marie and others pay the annual license fee for its ECEs as a gesture of appreciation, in addition to offering paid personal development days. The YMCA of the National Capital Region has created “staff designates” who are given opportunities to take on some additional managerial responsibilities, and the YMCA of Niagara seeks to ease pressure on front-line staff with a mobile inclusion and belonging team, who provide additional support for staff working with children with special needs. The broad scope and varied scale of these promising interventions are a reflection of how YMCAs are working tirelessly on multiple fronts to address converging challenges of recruitment, retention and quality.

Solutions for Workforce Shortages in Child Care: Recommendations to Government

1) Invest in Compensation on Par with School Boards

- a. If pay at school boards greatly exceeds wages paid in licensed child care, continued staff attrition will undermine the ability of operators to fill new openings and meet rising demand spurred by CWELCC’s stipulations around affordability
 - i. More than any other factor, improvements in compensation for ECEs in licensed child care will be the most important determinant of whether the transformational promise of CWELCC is realized.
- b. Increase wages to at least match ECE wages at school boards
 - i. Prior to the most recent Collective Agreement, average wage for ECEs employed by school boards in Ontario was \$27.87 ([CUPE](#))⁽¹⁸⁾. Under the new agreement, this will move to an average of \$31.12/hour.
 - ii. With a 35 hour work week, that means an annual pre-tax salary of \$57,474.
- c. Amend **Bill 124 – Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act (2019)** to allow impacted charities that deliver child care to improve compensation, including benefits, without being penalized.
- d. Invest in compensation for educators/other child care staff who are not RECEs – a large percentage of staff employed within the child care system are not RECEs and operators depend on them for successful program delivery.

2) Fund Benefits and/or Pension offerings

- a. The vast majority of child care educators do not have access to a pension. Practice has demonstrated that younger educators value a higher wage more than benefits/pensions. However higher wages, benefits and pensions are key to long-term retention. Dedicated funding to cover the true cost of benefits/pensions is needed in order to support long-term staffing sustainability.

3) Address split shifts – i.e., *create more full-time positions in the system – note costs involved*

- a. Create a lower threshold (25-30 hours) for access to full-time benefits for those working split-shifts. Many YMCAs are already doing this and are seeing positive results related to retention.
- b. Reimburse travel costs and/or offer a top-up for split shifts which require travel between sites.
- c. Recognize different qualifications for working with school-age children (e.g., social workers, teachers, child and youth workers) in order to expand pool of eligible educators and streamline DA approval process to reduce administrative burden.

4) Recognize the stressful environment

- a. Ensure the annual College registration fee (approx. \$160) is a recognized expense.
- b. Create positions dedicated to supporting and training educators in delivery of care to children with special needs, pedagogical support to front-line staff.
- c. Allow funding to cover part time educators paid days off/mental health days.
- d. Create and fund more coaching and mentorship opportunities for front-line staff.
- e. Recognize the cost of recruitment and onboarding. For example, for large multi-site operators, fund leadership positions related to recruitment and training to ease hiring-induced workload on managers and ensure qualified staff can be appropriately onboarded.

5) Deliver a public campaign to improve perception of ECEs

- a. Emphasize in public communications materials the critical role of early childhood education, including how individual needs of children have increased during the pandemic, and the important role of ECEs and other child care professionals in meeting these needs.
- b. Highlight the relevance of improving conditions and pay for all child care professionals to the federal government's efforts to combat the COVID-induced "she"cession, particularly as job quality continues to lag for women in the labour market.⁽¹⁹⁾
- c. Create Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) stream for early childhood education in high schools to increase the visibility of the profession amongst young people and parents.

6) Establish career trajectory possibilities, e.g., changes to the licensing system which would allow for supervisors, multi-site supervisors, administrative roles

- a. Ensure appropriate levels of funding are available to professionalize the sector and introduce more appealing career trajectories reflective of educators' education and specializations.
 - i. Resolve "the paradox of care and education" which underpins the low pay/fewer benefits when compared to other educators by **recognizing the role of care in education**, and vice versa⁽²⁰⁾

7) Incentivize colleges and universities to develop different levels of credentials

- a. Pay people while training/retraining/conducting placements to ensure their cost of living needs can be met.
- b. Adapt and scale similar models used in other jurisdictions and/or sectors.
 - i. *BC Early Childhood Education Dual-credit Programs For High School Students ([Link](#))*: will enable high school students with an interest in early childhood education to apply up to 30 high school credits toward the completion of a post-secondary ECE program. The cost of these credits will be covered by the government through funding allocated for this expansion. Ontario's recent announcement toward Dual Credits is a step in the right direction. This program should be fully funded and scaled.
 - ii. *Quebec Work-Study Program ([Link](#))* : program offers paid training for individuals who are already working (or recently hired) in early childhood education who wish to pursue their formal qualifications. Training takes place during working hours, and is combined with a certain number of hours of relevant experience in order to grant the participants their Attestation of College Studies in ECE.

- iii. *Niagara College Accelerated ECE Program* ([Link](#)): with support from the municipal government, implemented as a pilot project, this is an accelerated 1 year ECE program for people who were already working in child care and are interested in pursuing their qualifications. 95 participants were in the first cohort, with a dozen being from the local YMCA.
 - iv. *Ontario Accelerated PSW Training* ([Link](#)): the Ontario government invested \$115 million in order to eliminate tuition and accelerate training of up to 8,200 new personal support workers to rapidly address an acute lack of qualified staff in the province's long-term care homes. As an effective model of collaboration between the province and relevant stakeholders on workforce issues of critical importance, the YMCA believes a similar approach to early childhood education could ensure the success of Ontario's child care expansion. Though, finding ways to ensure staff could complete this training while remaining employed would ensure educators would not have to withdraw from employment in order to achieve their designation.

8) Coordinate with school boards on tackling local workforce challenges and minimize turnover-related disruptions in licensed child care (e.g., Setting up regional working groups, share info about impending layoffs)

- a. Regional working groups could be established to share information about staff vacancies, impending layoffs, and other staffing-related changes.
- b. The COVID-19 Learning Recovery Fund includes funds to hire ECEs as part of an additional 3,000 front-line staff to assist in post-COVID recovery of the education system. Investments like this should be scaled and annualized.
- c. Ontario's recent announcement of a Dual Credit Program for highschool students interested in pursuing College-level ECE courses is a favourable one that should be scaled.

9) Recognize that soaring cost of living is disproportionately affecting those working in early childhood education across the province

- a. Acknowledge that inflationary pressure is making the realization of a livable wage and viable career path for child care professionals increasingly costly.
- b. An addendum to this is acknowledging the value many child care professionals (and indeed educators more broadly) place on being able to work where they live.

10) Create streams for new immigrants to train as ECEs or recognize home-country credentials.

- a. Call on the Federal government to increase the points awarded toward Permanent Residency for individuals educated and/or working in early childhood education.
- b. Amend the regulations to streamline post-graduate employment in early childhood education for international students.
- c. Consider reducing or eliminating tuition fees for international students with child care experience in their home countries.
- d. Call on the Ontario government to make early childhood education (NOC 4214) an eligible occupation for the In-Demand Skills and/or International Student streams, so that early childhood education becomes more attractive/visible as a path to permanent residency for recent arrivals.

Conclusion

"I would ask our government to recognize RECEs for the professionals we are and pay us accordingly. Early Childhood Educator." (9)

For licensed operators like the YMCA, it cannot be emphasized enough how CWELCC represents a pinnacle achievement. After years of advocacy for the government to pay greater attention to the importance of early childhood education, the recently concluded agreement has created a framework for ensuring that quality and accessibility are principal values of the new system currently taking shape.

However, as this report makes clear, significant obstacles remain. Chief amongst them is the issue of compensation, which has long-plagued the sector and made it difficult for child care operators to recruit and retain qualified staff. The government correctly understands and prioritizes education and professional standards, but the flipside of greater requirements must be greater compensation. This parallel development has yet to take place. Additionally, this report makes clear that the success of CWELCC depends on taking operators' and educators' requests for better compensation and a compelling life-long career path seriously, spotlighting positive developments in this direction already underway while offering multiple strategies for helping Ontario follow suit.

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