

Introduction

The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) believes there is value in hearing directly from Early Childhood Educators about the issues affecting their work, in order to ensure the long-term quality, sustainability, and success of early learning child care across the province. As such, at the direction of the Minister, an Early Childhood Educators Working Group (ECEWG) was formed in November 2019.

The purpose of the ECEWG was to give Early Childhood Educators an opportunity to directly engage in discussions that are meaningful to them in relation to their work in regulated child care. The group's objectives were to identify the key areas impacting Early Childhood Educators working in regulated child care and to generate ideas that may help to advance those matters.

Ultimately, the vision of the Early Childhood Educators Working Group includes a collective and robust workforce, that is highly trained, sufficiently compensated, and well regarded for the important early learning and care they provide to young children during the critical years of their development. Following are the areas of focus identified by the working group and the ideas within each category proposed, based on their experiences, feedback from colleagues within the field, and the information gained during group meetings. The ideas represent and acknowledge the need for collaboration and shared responsibilities between government, employers, Early Childhood Educators, and other key stakeholders.

1. Wages and Benefits

Ideas:

To address the issue of wages, the ECEWG have suggested two possible options, the first being the replacement of the wage floor with a salary scale and the second being an adjustment to the current wage floor structure.

- Option 1: Consider the implementation of a salary scale that considers both education and experience and grows in increments up to a certain number of years worked, before stabilizing. The scale should align with leading current national wage averages and have a defined review schedule.
- Option 2: Consider increasing the minimum wage floor, with higher increments for levels 2 and 3. The wage increase should align with leading current national wage averages and have a defined review schedule.
- With option 2, consider providing a government incentive fund or grant to centres who already exceed the wage floor amounts. The grant should align with sector wage increases, where possible.

- Consider hiring a consultant to explore options and provide recommendations for all Early Childhood Educators to have access to basic and consistent benefits and a pension.
- Consider implementing a professional financial audit/review annually of regulated child care centres receiving government funding, to ensure accurate reporting and accountability that targeted wage funding is being appropriately utilized.

2. Classification Level Review

Ideas:

- Consider developing a mechanism that incorporates both education and years of experience in classification levels.
- Consider forming a committee or working group to review a more seamless transition for classification levels across provinces/territories and internationally.
- Consider issuing a level 3 classification to only those who have an early childhood education degree, or a 2-year diploma with an undergraduate degree related to early childhood education.
- Consider elevating the criteria for level 1 classification, requiring an increase in core courses that promote a deeper knowledge of early childhood education.
- Consider the implementation of ongoing and incremental incentives to encourage people to move along the continuum of learning toward level 2 and 3 classifications, with the eventual goal of eliminating untrained and entry levels for Early Childhood Educators.

3. Recruitment: Qualified and Trained Early Childhood Educators

Ideas:

- Consider facilitating a conversation with colleges and training institutions to review, standardize and elevate their entrance/ admission criteria for early childhood education, to ensure the selection of strong student candidates.
- Consider facilitating a conversation with colleges and training institutions to incorporate 'block' placements (full weeks), or a combination of a short block with intermittent days, into practicum requirements, for students to understand and experience the full scope of work in early childhood education environments.
- Consider supporting employers to implement an orientation and first-year mentorship initiative for newly graduated and hired Early Childhood Educators encourage coaching. This would include a 6-month performance review for new ECEs. This would be followed up with yearly reviews for experienced staff.

4. Retention: Healthy and Positive Working Environments

Ideas:

- Consider additional professional development opportunities in leadership for Directors and Managers, including modules in mentorship, coaching, interpersonal communication, cultural responsiveness, and relational approaches.
- Consider additional professional learning opportunities for all Early Childhood Educators in the areas of respectful workplace, cultural responsiveness, relational approaches, and interpersonal communication.
- Consider facilitating direct communication between government and Early Childhood Educators by creating a website portal for easy access to centralized information.

5. Collective Voice

Ideas:

- Consider hiring a consultant to assess the capacity of the current association, or the establishment of a new organization, to oversee multifaceted components related to the profession of Early Childhood Educators, with the eventual goal of establishing a governing body or sector council that has greater oversight.
- Consider the implementation of a public advertising campaign that focusses on the importance of quality learning and care in early childhood education, promotes the recruitment and retention of Early Childhood Educators, and encourages parent awareness and engagement.

Conclusion

The ideas generated by the working group build on previous sector consultations and apply to all partners in Early Childhood Education, including government, training institutions, owners/operators, and Early Childhood Educators. It is the role of Education and Early Childhood Education to consider these ideas and make decisions that fall within the scope and commitment of government, are research and evidenced based, are fiscally responsible, and consider the diverse needs of multiple partners. Our work is best accomplished through ongoing engagement and collaboration with all stakeholders, understanding that it will take all our efforts to bring about sustainable change.