

Examination of Recruitment and Retention Issues within the Regulated Early Learning and Child Care Workforce in Newfoundland and Labrador

Recommendations of the Report

Early Childhood Educators Human Resource Council

May 2019

Recommendations

The Early Childhood Educators Human Resource (ECEHR) Council has had the opportunity to study and report on the current status of regulated early learning and child care in the province. The Council commissioned Don Gallant and Associates to complete the study, *Examination of Recruitment and Retention Issues within the Regulated Early Learning and Child Care Workforce*. The study took place between June 2018 and March 2019 in order to inform the sector about the challenges faced in attracting new recruits to college programs, the realities of working and making a career as an early childhood educator (ECE), and the demand and need for post-secondary education and ongoing professional learning.

Stakeholders throughout the sector across the province shared their perspectives. We heard from ECEs working in centre-based care and family child care, licensees, former educators, college officials, government, AECENL, Family Child Care Connections, Aboriginal and Francophone communities and the Native Friendship Centre.

The report contains findings which the Council has responded to in the following set of recommendations which are paramount to bringing about change necessary to address the goals of achieving a qualified workforce with fair remuneration and benefits.

The timing is important for several reasons, one of which is to compare the gains or lack thereof in the sector workforce since 2007 as documented in the report *Recruitment and Retention Issues for the Child Care Workforce in Newfoundland and Labrador* (June 2007).

More importantly is determining the actions that will move the sector forward to become a qualified, recognized, viable and self-determining sector so that early childhood educators can realize career opportunities that result in a living income and maintain high standards of practice with children and families.

The whole notion of early learning and child care being a publicly funded system is a paradigm shift. It acknowledges that such a system is a service for the common good of all families, communities, children, and the economy of the province. The time is now.

The following recommendations arise from the research and are designed with goals and ways of reaching those goals.

Wages and Benefits

Stakeholders at all levels emphasized repeatedly that the low wage rate within the sector and the lack of available benefits to ECEs was a primary reason for continued challenges in both recruitment and retention. While the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement does have a positive impact on income levels it does not address the fundamental low wage structure of the sector. Low wages and benefits result in high staff-turnover disrupting relationships between children/families and ECEs. In order to stabilize and grow the sector and not increase parent fees:

Recommendation 1 – A provincial wage scale be implemented, applicable to Level 1 and Level 2 certified ECEs, and Administrators in centre based care.

It is further recommended that:

- additional and adequate funds be transferred via the Operating Grant Program (OGP) sufficient to enable a provincial wage of \$22 per hour (Level 1), \$25 per hour (Level 2), and \$30 per hour (Administrators),
- funds currently expended within the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Supplement program be used to partially offset this cost,
- funds be sufficient to cover the wage increase as well as the associated employer costs (i.e. MERCs),
- funds enable a cost of living increase on an annual basis, and
- exploration be undertaken as to availability and cost of group health care and pension plan coverage that could be extended to all child care centres.

Raising the sector profile

All stakeholders emphasized the need to raise the profile of the sector, and that such must be regarded as a foundational element to any strategy designed to address recruitment and retention. A paradigm shift is needed for the general public to understand the value of the work that ECEs engage in with young children. Parents and secondary school students are target audiences in helping to raise the sector profile.

Recommendation 2 – A promotional campaign (coordinated, ongoing, provincial, and adequately funded) be undertaken to raise the profile of the early learning and child care sector by highlighting key and positive messages regarding early childhood education such as the professionalism of ECEs, its value and impact for families and children, and career opportunities in the sector. It is further recommended that:

- leadership be provided by the provincial government and be conducted with the full involvement of regional officials and organizations such as ECEHR Council, AECENL and Family Child Care Connections,
- the campaign be directed to two primary outcomes – 1) creating additional interest in early learning and child care as a career choice, and 2) increasing the general public’s understanding of quality regulated child care, and the role played by ECEs, and
- the campaign include a particular focus on secondary school students as they make educational and career decisions. They require accurate and positive messages about the early learning and child care sector, including information about supplements and bursaries.

ECE Certificate / Diploma programs

Post-secondary educational institutions are critical partners with the early learning and child care sector. Through this partnership the federal government, provincial government and College of the North Atlantic worked jointly to develop a certification system to recognize qualifications, prior learning assessment to recognize the knowledge gained through work experience, and distance education to increase accessibility to education. This triad has worked to increase qualification levels throughout the province. However, data indicate that at least 100 practitioners leave the sector each year, yet there are approximately 50 or so ECE graduates. There are more than 200 waiting to get into courses, fewer students are being accepted into full-time programs and there are high attrition rates in the full-time program. If this trend continues it will be simply impossible for the sector to secure and maintain a qualified work force.

Recommendation 3 – Adequate resources be provided to the College of the North Atlantic to enable the elimination of the current waiting period for acceptance into the distance learning program and that courses be available to coincide with demand.

Recommendation 4 – A review be undertaken of the current course content and delivery for both the certificate and diploma ECE programs. It is further recommended that

- A Working Group be formed comprised of officials from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, College officials, and representatives of the early learning and child care community (e.g. ECEs, administrators, licensees, Family Child Care Connections, ECEHR Council and AECENL).
- course content be adapted to include relevance to family child care

Recommendation 5 – The program be expanded and flexible enough to accommodate more students as needed and that the attrition rate in the full time program, be reviewed and addressed.

Achieving a qualified early learning and child care work force

The Council considers being qualified as an ECE is to hold a Level 2 Child Care Services certification in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. In order to achieve Level 2 certification, in most cases individuals complete a two-year diploma in Early Childhood Education. The study demonstrated that 54.3% currently hold this qualification and this is an increase of 6.9% since 2007. In recognition of this standard government has eliminated Entry Level certification, and implemented Trainee certification which requires achievement of Level I certification within timelines. Approximately 50% of those currently employed must upgrade in order to meet the minimum required Level I standard. The Council regards this as unacceptable.

In order to achieve the goal of a qualified workforce also means having those educators with Level IV certification in leadership positions. At the same time as the bottom level is raised, so must be the top. This approach will result in a qualified workforce educated to work with children before formal schooling, and in 4 and 5-year old kindergarten.

Recommendation 6 – Immediate efforts be directed to undertaking necessary action(s) that will accelerate the attainment of a Level 1 designation for those practitioners who currently have no or only Trainee certification. It is further recommended that

- Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and Competency Based Assessment (CBA) processes be utilized to the fullest extent possible and appropriate.

Recommendation 7 – Expand educational offerings. Discussions occur as soon as possible with the college system to determine the viability of offering the ECE program at additional sites throughout the province. A workplace training model be reintroduced so that ECE students can work and attend school simultaneously while working to achieve an ECE diploma. In order to enable career laddering it is further recommended that the ECE diploma be articulated with a degree in Early Childhood Education at MUN.

Recommendation 8 – Deadlines be established to attain a fully qualified workforce and that certification standards be enforced.

Respectful Working Conditions

There was considerable emphasis given by informants and practitioners to the impact of respectful and positive workplaces as necessary in retention efforts. ECEs with diploma level qualifications are prepared as educators of young children, and not as administrators. Increasing job satisfaction occurs in respectful workplaces where leadership and management demonstrate positive human resource practices.

Recommendation 9 – All Administrators in regulated child care be required to complete the Human Resource Management training as developed by the ECEHR Council.

Recommendation 10 – College of the North Atlantic develop and deliver a post diploma course in Human Resource Management based on the ECEHR Council training series.

Recommendation 11 – Formal administrator networks for purposes of mentoring be created both provincially and on a regional basis.

Regulated Family Child Care

Family child care has been a regulated child care service in Newfoundland and Labrador since 1999 and has made a significant difference to both families and ECEs by offering home-based child care as an alternate service to centre-based child care. Often it is the preferred choice of environment and relationships by parents. Further research is needed to inform its

development and to understand its recruitment and retention challenges. Any provincial strategy to address current or future recruitment and retention issues should make provision for expansion of this model throughout the province.

Recommendation 12 – The Start-up grant for family child care providers be reinstated to offset the initial costs of meeting the standard for a regulated family child care home.

Recommendation 13 – The ELCC Supplement program as applicable to regulated family child care providers and Home Visitors continue as it is currently.

Recommendation 14 – A Working Group be formed and be mandated to further investigate / research the recruitment and retention issues specific to the family child care model, including the possible expansion of the agency model to all regions of the province. This Working Group to be led by Family Child Care Connections.

Early Learning and Child Care as a Public Service

Many informants indicated it was time for serious consideration to be given to the merits and implications of making early learning and child care a universal publicly funded system. The economy of the province relies on a stable workforce, and this can only exist when parents of young children can access and afford services that are designed to benefit their children in all aspects of their development and daily lives.

It is no longer acceptable to have a patchwork of services when it has been proven in Quebec and elsewhere that when early learning and child care is funded as a public service it is accessible and affordable for all. In Newfoundland and Labrador only 15% of children needing child care attend regulated early learning and child care services. The rest of the children are in make-do situations.

In a study, *A Living Wage in St. John's, NL* released this month by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Nova Scotia office, the living wage for someone in St. John's is reported as \$18.85 per hour in order to cover their costs. "If families had access to a universal \$10/day child care program the living wage could be as much as \$3.00 less per hour. A publicly funded universal child care program would help working people with young children to pursue training opportunities and re-enter the workforce more easily. Labour market participation rates, especially of women, could be boosted, which has been shown to ensure that this program pays for itself" (pg. 23 CCPA NS May 2019). The lack of such program will have a negative effect on increasing the birth rate and discouraging in-migration from Canada and abroad, both of which have long term serious economic disadvantages.

Recommendation 15 – **By June 2020, a plan be developed to deliver early learning and child care as a universal, publicly funded system, as is the case currently with other essential education and health services.**