



**ASSOCIATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS
NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR**

Position Paper

Operating Grant Program

In the press release on the Operating Grant Program (OGP), AECENL was pleased that Minister Sullivan publicly acknowledges that early childhood education is “. . . a component of the complete continuum of learning from infancy to high school . . .”. As programs from kindergarten to high school are affordable, accessible and require teachers to hold degrees, AECENL anticipates that similar provisions will be put in place for children in the years prior to school.

AECENL agrees with the pillars of government’s ten year plan; that child care should be high quality, affordable and accessible. It is the position of AECENL that the OGP is a small step towards making child care affordable to some families by requiring participating centres to lower their rates to current subsidy rates and providing participating licensees with an operating grant to compensate for lost revenue. AECENL supports that the OGP is voluntary and that licensees can choose whether or not to participate. The more centres that participate, the more affordable spaces that are created. It is the position of AECENL that new centres be required to participate in the OGP to increase the number of affordable spaces on an on-going basis.

While in support of the intent and direction of the OGP, AECENL has some concerns and some recommendations to make the plan more effective.

It is of concern to AECENL that family child care is not included and parents accessing this service do not have the same opportunity for a reduction in fees. It is the position of AECENL that the review of family child care be given priority to allow this to occur in the 2015-16 fiscal year.

The OGP focuses entirely on affordability and there seems to have been little consideration of its potential negative effect on quality.

AECENL believes that the potential for the majority of licensees to participate in the OGP would increase significantly if instead of a “one size fits all” approach, a purchase of service agreement was to be used. There are many benefits and a purchase of service approach would ameliorate some of the concerns of AECENL. It would increase the workload of staff of the department and it is the position of AECENL that adequate staffing is necessary to manage an expanded program.

- The quality of programming provided to children depends largely on having fully qualified staff in centres. Level II ECEs have the knowledge to deliver quality programs.

Wages and working conditions are the two major elements in the recruitment and retention of Level II ECEs. The low salaries of ECEs has not been addressed and the wages of ECEs at \$14.00 and \$12.00 does not reflect the level of education required to hold Level II Child Care Services Certification. This is an opportunity for government to establish salaries for ECEs that are based on job analysis, education required and a comparison to jobs of equal value.

A purchase of service agreement would ensure that ECEs currently making more than this would be in no danger of having their wages reduced. Although licensees may decide to maintain higher salaries, they are not required to do so.

It is the position of AECENL that, in the absence of purchase of service agreements, current salaries be maintained if they are in excess of \$14 and \$12 and increments be included in annual reviews of each program's budget. Further that a review of the wages of others in the education system with similar required levels of education be undertaken to allow for equity within the department and across “. . . the complete continuum of learning from infancy to high school . . .” as stated by the Minister.

- The staff-child ratio as required by the regulations is set as a minimum. To increase the quality of their programs, some licensees employ more than the minimum number of ECEs. A purchase of service agreement would support that higher standard of care.

It is the position of AECENL that, if a licensee currently employs more than the minimum number of ECEs that additional cost be taken into account when determining the amount of the grant.

- Licensees have a wide range of costs when operating a centre and in the absence of a purchase of service agreement, no allowances can be made for the wide range of costs that licensees have e.g. rents, business taxes and access to “big box” stores. Lack of a purchase of service agreement makes the program unaffordable for some licensees.
- Some centres have historically required parents to provide snacks and lunches for their children. This is not desirable and AECENL supports that the OGP requires licensees to provide snacks and lunches. This will necessitate some licensees installing kitchens or other means to provide food. The cost may be prohibitive and make the OGP unaffordable for some licensees. It is the position of AECENL that where necessary, one-time funding be provided to licensees who wish to participate in the OGP but require funding to meet the requirement for the provision of food to the children.

The three pillars of the Ten Year Plan, quality, affordability and sufficiency, are closely interwoven and changes to one invariably affect the others. Government has made an attempt to have fees that are affordable to families. However, more consideration needs to be given to how the OGP will affect quality and sufficiency.

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