

# Survey Outcomes: Early Learning and Care & Strong Start Centre Research



**ECEBC** | early childhood  
educators of BC

Board members of the Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia (ECEBC) developed and disseminated a survey to early childhood educators throughout the province in 2008. The purpose of the survey was centered on gathering current and relevant information, specifically regarding wages and working conditions, and general information regarding philosophical approaches in providing care and early learning to young children and their families.

The survey was designed to be thorough yet brief, containing 50 questions with either a “yes” or “no” response, and opportunities for comments midpoint and at the end. Developed on SurveyMonkey.com, the survey was disseminated through numerous methods: it was made available through the ECEBC website, through ECEBE branch chairs, and, with the assistance of other organizations, it was distributed to various e-mail lists. The survey was open for a period of one month.

The survey identified the province by its five health regions: Vancouver Coastal, Vancouver Island, Fraser, Interior, and Northern. The responses received were evenly divided throughout three of the regions and with an overall response in excess of 800 professionals.

The responses illustrated the commitment and desire of early childhood educators to continue to work towards increasing awareness and recognition of their profession. The responses reflected educators’ dedication to and acknowledgment of the importance of their work and the care of young children. Further, the responses clearly indicate that Early Childhood Educators feel undervalued and that longevity in the field is significantly impacted by low wages and lack of employment benefits.

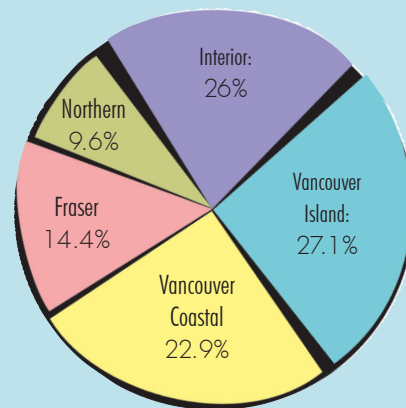
*“Professionals do professional work with professional results. Children deserve the best we have to offer.”*

*“As early childhood educators, we realize and value ‘the wonderment of working with and caring for young children’ (Vi-Anne Zernbelt, 2008), some have longevity in this profession despite an inadequate living wage.”*

*“It would be wonderful to be paid according to experience. I have been in the field for 24 years and have just now doubled my wage from that time. I could not even consider owning a home, braces, etc. If I didn’t have a partner who makes three times what I make!”*

## Locations of Survey Respondents

A total of 827 individuals completed the survey. 785 respondents indicated to which Provincial Health Region they belonged:



## BC Provincial Health Regions



*“I have been in the ECE field for over 30 years. We have all been waiting for early childhood educators to be recognized by the general public as professionals and for our wages to reflect this.”*

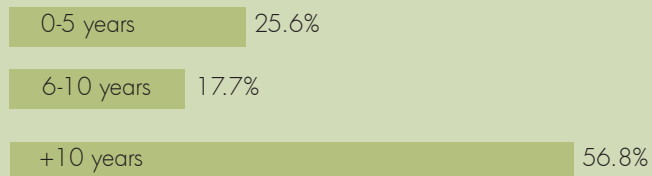
*“After 29 years in the ECE field and a diploma in Early Child Care Education, I am finally near a \$20.00 mark, and am currently looking for work in a higher paying and more respected area of child care. I’ve had enough...”*

*“[It is] very difficult to hire and keep well trained people in the field and impossible to get substitutes.”*

## SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The following questions were designed to assist in building a profile of the survey respondents. The vast majority are licensed practitioners. Most have 10 or more years of experience and are employed at licensed, group child care facilities. Very few are owner/operators, and just over half of the respondents hold a contract with their employer.

### How long have you worked in the field?



### Do you hold a license to practice in British Columbia?

Yes	88.1%
No	11.9%

### Are you employed by a group child care facility?

Yes	63.4%
No	36.6%

### Are you employed by a licensed preschool?

Yes	35.4%
No	64.6%

### Are you employed by a Strong Start facility?

Yes	4.1%
No	95.9%

### Are you the owner/operator of a group child care facility?

Yes	13.6%
No	86.4%

### Are you the owner/operator of a licensed preschool?

Yes	8.3%
No	91.7%

### Are you a different early learning program?

Yes	25.2%
No	74.8%

### Do you have a contract?

Yes	52.9%
No	47.1%

## A LIVING WAGE

The Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia recognizes the recent implementation of a new provincial program and wages that accompany this program. We acknowledge the provincial recognition through the wages and wish to parallel these “living wages” to all early childhood educators of British Columbia.

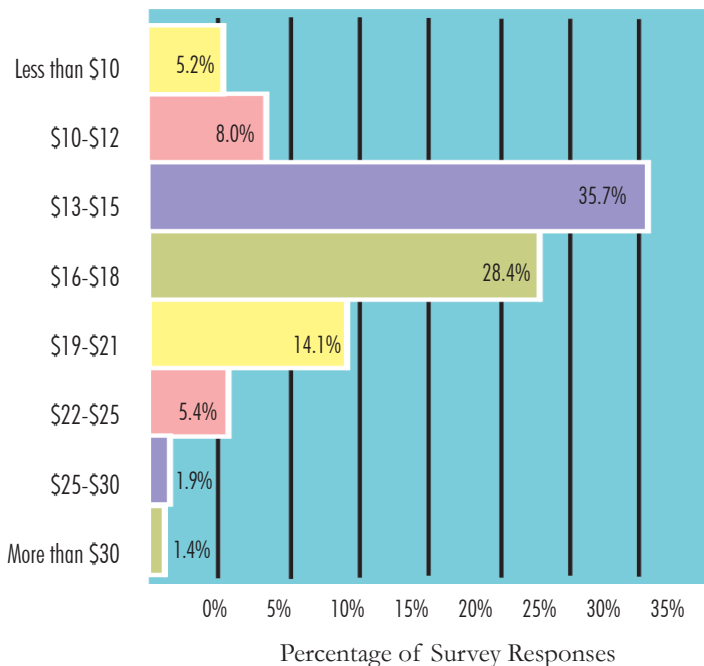
Repeated research shows a correlation between a living wage for early childhood educators and the quality of service provided to children and their families. Bringing qualified early childhood educators to the field and retaining them over the long term is important because the longevity of well-qualified staff supports positive outcomes for young children. Additionally, the availability of consistent, quality child care for all Canadian parents is a stabilizing factor for the Canadian economy as a whole.

The graph (below) illustrates the wage ranges earned by survey respondents. Nearly half of the respondents (48.9%) make \$15 or less per hour. A 2008 study completed for the Economic Security Project states that in the metro Vancouver area, a living wage is calculated to be \$16.74 per hour (*Working for a Living Wage*, 2008, p. 3, available on the BC Centre for Policy Alternatives website: [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)).

*“Just wanted to let you know how important this initiative means to me. After 20 years working in ECE I have come to the realization that I am no longer able to stay in this field. I have had to admit that this field that I love will no longer be able to financially support me. I have been happy to live at the poverty level because I have had a job that I love. But now I need to start looking after myself and so I will start nursing. It is not a choice I have made easily but one I have to do. So thank you so much for doing this. It is by far the most important issue facing ECE today.”*

*“While my wages are liveable and I work in a very supportive environment (Board, manager), I do know that many others in my field do not.”*

### HOURLY WAGES EARNED



## ABSENCE OF BENEFITS

In addition to a living wage being identified as a current deterrent to longevity in the field, the absence of benefits was identified by more than 50% of the respondents (see graphs, below).

“Wages and working conditions are identified as an enabling condition which influences training strategies and the direction and length of the training.” (People, Programs and Practices, 2008, p 15).

We are aware of the crippling factors which impede potential commitment to a chosen profession. “ECEs are moving in droves to the education system, in part for better wages, shorter hours and school vacations.” (People, Programs and Practices, 2008, p 24).

*“Although we receive benefits, dental and life insurance, we pay more than 50% into it ourselves. As a manager of a program I work part-time and only receive \$17.12 an hour; it is an incredibly low income to support a family on. Not to mention I am still paying off the student loans I had to take out in order to go to school and receive my ECE. It’s unfortunate that we are unable to be compensated appropriately when we play such an important role in the future of these children.”*

*“I view it as extremely important to raise wages and provide good extended health packages to attract and retain skilful professionals to the child care field. I know quite a few young people, who disregard child care as a career because wages are too low, the work is too hard (too many hours, not enough staff, etc.) and there is virtually no chance of advancement. It is viewed as being for people who don’t have the abilities to do anything else!”*

*“As an owner operator, I have made it policy to treat and pay staff the highest wage possible and to give as many affordable benefits as possible. Often this means that staff is paid at an equal or higher hourly wage than myself. Why?...because finding quality staff has become harder and harder over the years and retention of staff has become even more important. The years of people choosing ECE because of commitment to children without a liveable wage are over. Something has change quickly or QUALITY will disappear.”*

*“My first year teaching [as an ECE], I only made \$15 an hour and worked 2½ days a week. It was impossible to cover my cost of living... Luckily I have a roommate and worked two other jobs to pick up more income. I love [the program] because I am supported by the parents, they put in all the extra work that is not covered in other Preschool Programs. I spent five years working in [another program ], I struggled greatly. I put in a lot of my own (unpaid) time and will never do it again. I feel the government needs to take a closer look at the state of child care in BC. Passionate people working in the ECE are struggling to hold together quality programs, but for how much longer?”*

*“Thank you for allowing us to participate in an important survey. We as ECEs are in a crucial time in our field of work. The government is not taking us seriously and it really breaks my heart to see so many programs being planned for the school systems and the ECE teachers are being paid \$20 an hour but will not recognize us within our own childcare programs!”*

*“I, along with several other ECE peers, am leaving the field permanently because of the lack of benefits, low wage, and disrespect. When parents realize there is no one to take care of their children and the economy crumbles because people have to stop working, it will be too late. No one will work in this field because even waiters make more money.”*

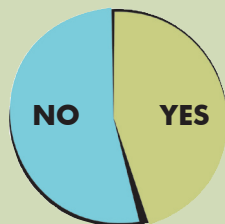
*“I am a single parent and had to take out a student loan to complete my training so I now have a \$15,000 debt to pay back and try to raise my two children. I feel like a volunteer. The board of directors expects us to volunteer time and shovel sidewalks on our own time! Do teachers shovel the school sidewalk?”*

*“I find that many of my fellow ECEs often leave their loved jobs of educating children solely because of financial reasons. They would stay in their preferred profession (ECE) if they were paid what they deserve to be paid! Cost of living is quite high and the pay scale for ECE teachers does not reflect the hard work and effort that they put into the children and families. The years 0-6 are the most formative years of a child’s life and who better to help a family raise a child than an ECE who has studied and has great knowledge of child development!?”*

### EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

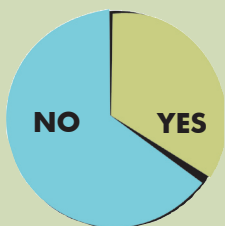
**Do you receive Group Benefits?**

Yes: 45.5%  
No: 54.5%



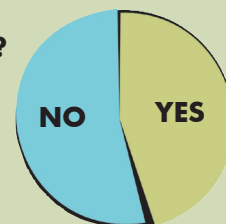
**Do you receive Medical Services Plan coverage?**

Yes: 33.3%  
No: 66.7%



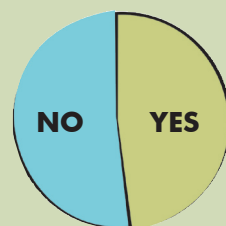
**Do you have the option of receiving Extended Health?**

Yes: 47.7%  
No: 52.3%



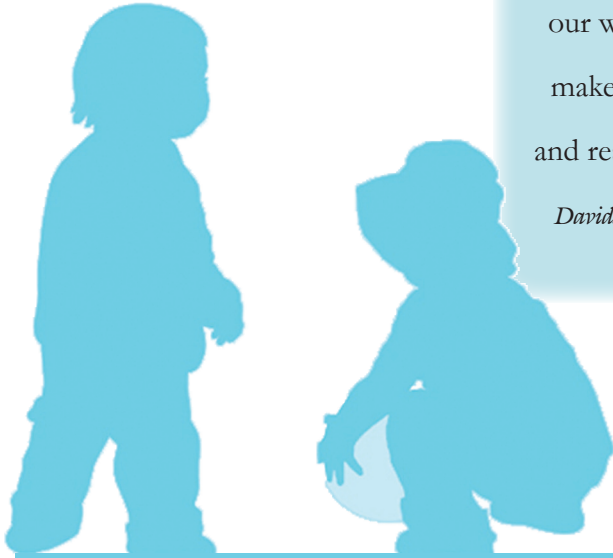
**Do you have the option of receiving Dental Benefits**

Yes: 48.1%  
No: 51.9%



*"I'm thankful for the wonderful rewards of working with children but have recently come to a point where I may have to leave the field to properly support my growing family. I came from .... and was upset to learn that BC's ECE wage is so low and the benefits I receive are less than what I had. I find the recognition and support given to ECE teachers is never enough and if we were properly paid, supported, and given ongoing professional development, there would be less of a turn over in staff, and more respect given to the field from the community. We raise children to be our future leaders and we makes less than people who collect garbage. What does this say to the public about this wonderful important field? I have been considering going back to school to go into another field due to these issues but I can't imagine my future without the children who I have been so fortunate to touch the lives of."*

*"I pray that I would see the day when Early Childhood EDUCATORS are treated as professionals, respected by society with decent wages (at par with school teachers). After all, we build the foundation. Schools will have tough times if the foundation is weak."*



*"I believe in change and hope to see some for the future of this field it is so important to give the proper respect and support to all the teachers on the front line. It's hard for a teacher to stay and build a future in this field when they can't support themselves."*

*"Early Childhood Educators are educated, trained and dedicated to their work. We know that quality early childhood experiences make a life long difference on the healthy development of young children. We also know that the most important ingredient in quality is the early childhood educator. We deserve to be valued for our work and we deserve to be paid a living wage for our work. It is time for policy makers to recognize this issue and respond accordingly."*—Sheila

*Davidson, Executive Director, ECEBC*

*"Because of inadequate wages I am working for three employers and experiencing health challenges. Help!"*

*"We will remain steadfast with our passionate beliefs about children and our passionate beliefs about the work and care we do with children and families. We will remain passionate and committed to the critical acknowledgement and to a fair remuneration for our profession."*

*"I am very proud of our program and association. It would be nice if we were paid adequately for our skills and responsibility."*

*"We work with the future leaders of our country. The government does not put value on the children of our society and their needs. If they did they would pay to have good quality care and support the people who are dedicating their lives to these young children."*

*"I feel that ECEs are under paid dramatically for what they provide for children and their families. I believe what we provide as ECEs brings huge success to children! I think it's time we were heard and paid what we deserve!"*

*"I am a young professional entering into the field, I came into this field because I have a passion for it. It will be unfortunate if I have to leave it because of financial reasons."*

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