

Next Step

A Competitive, Publicly Funded
Provincial Wage Grid is the Solution
to BC's ECE Shortage



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NEXT STEP: A Competitive, Publicly Funded Provincial Wage Grid is the Solution to BC's ECE Shortage
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Executive summary

BRITISH COLUMBIA will require an additional 12,000 early childhood educators (ECEs) to achieve government's commitment to universal child care. Higher wages are required to retain qualified staff, recruit qualified staff into new programs, and encourage people to enter the field.

To support these goals, this project considered the design and implementation of a wage grid for certified educators working in centre-based child care programs. The project team conducted a literature review, interviewed key informants, and evaluated wage grids and ECE wage policies across Canada. We analyzed the results to determine the current state of ECE wages in Canada, including efforts to increase ECE wages, and the best practices in developing an ECE wage grid. Based on these results, we made specific recommendations for BC.

Key observations, analysis, and findings

- **Child care quality depends upon qualified and well-compensated ECEs.** Evidence shows that educators with higher pay and higher qualifications are more likely to interact with children in a stimulating and sensitive way, and that poor compensation can lead to high staff turnover, making it more difficult for staff and children to develop nurturing relationships.
- **ECEs in Canada generally earn low wages.** The most recent national study of educator wages and working conditions, conducted in 2012, found that the median wage for child care program staff in Canada was \$16.50/hour, or 69% of the average wage for all employees. One quarter earned below \$14/hour, and almost 25% reported working at a second job, mainly because they need additional income. In BC, median wages were \$17/hour, or 68% of those of all employees in the province. Between 2012 and 2017, ECE wages in BC declined relative to all wages.
- **Competitive, publicly funded ECE wage grids are key to solving the ECE shortage.** Most Canadian provinces have introduced public funding to increase ECE compensation. In 2019, for example, BC joined Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador in providing wage enhancements for educators, applied on top of existing wages. While important, these wage policies have not solved the problem. ECE wages remain largely uncompetitive and qualified staff continue to leave for higher-paid positions elsewhere — often in the education sector. To address these concerns, experts consistently recommend competitive, publicly funded wage grids.



Effective ECE wage grids:

- **Incorporate best practices.** An ECE wage grid should be founded in a compensation philosophy that describes the compensation objectives and values. An ECE compensation philosophy for BC should affirm that recruiting and retaining a well-qualified, fairly compensated ECE workforce is essential to meeting government's child care goals, and advancing a range of related social and economic objectives.
- **Integrate policy and funding to create a child care system.** Appropriate ECE wages cannot be addressed in isolation. It's critical that the cost of implementing a wage grid does not lead to increased parent fees or compromised quality. An ECE wage grid needs to be part of comprehensive child care policy, including public funding to pay for increased wage costs, standard or capped affordable parent fees, and a human resource strategy that addresses not only compensation, but also working conditions, professional development, and ECE education.
- **Recognize staff qualifications and experience.** Wage grids reward qualified and experienced staff with higher wages. They incorporate different levels for different qualifications as well as steps within each level for years of service. This increase in pay between levels should be an incentive for ECEs to pursue additional education in order to achieve international benchmarks for quality.
- **Set and maintain competitive wages.** Wages need to be competitive with other positions with similar education, experience, and responsibilities. Further, since the overwhelming majority of ECEs are women, wages must promote gender equity and reduce the gender pay gap. Competitive and equitable wages can be achieved by: benchmarking against positions in other sectors where child care competes for staff; basing wages on the qualifications, skills, and responsibilities required for a position (and not on the job title or gender of the person in the role); and updating wage rates regularly to reflect changes in inflation and other factors.

The BC government should act now to implement an ECE wage grid. ECE wage grids used in Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec provide examples to learn from. They have levels based on qualifications, with increased wages for higher qualifications. They also have steps within each level based on years of experience. Child care programs in both Quebec and Prince Edward Island receive funding to pay required wages while charging parent fees established by the province.

Implementing an ECE wage grid in BC would provide multiple benefits—for educators and child care providers, for children who benefit from high quality early care and learning, and for our economy as universal child care unfolds. Government can address some existing challenges with an implementation plan that strengthens human resource practices across the sector and keeps educators and child care providers well-informed and engaged.

Recommendations for an ECE wage grid for BC

We recommend that the BC government develop and implement a province-wide, publicly funded, competitive ECE wage grid.

Implementing an ECE wage grid in BC would provide multiple benefits—for educators and child care providers, for children who benefit from high quality early care and learning, and for our economy as universal child care unfolds.

Existing provincial wage grids in the health, education, and community social service sectors provide useful benchmarks in developing ECE wages. These grids apply to some ECEs in BC, as well as to comparable positions. Along with the wage grids under development for child care programs in Indigenous communities, they provide a base from which we can expand to include all ECEs working in licensed child care.

Government must first affirm its ECE compensation philosophy. This should focus on the need and urgency faced in recruiting and retaining qualified ECEs.

ECE wages should be at or above a living wage, comparable to positions in other sectors with similar credentials and competitive with the \$26/hour median wage of StrongStart facilitators and education assistants in BC public schools.

Coupled with accessible, affordable ECE education, the pay levels encourage educators to upgrade their certifications.

We recommend the following step 1 wages in a BC ECE wage grid (in 2020 dollars):

- **ECEA** (ECE Assistant): \$20/hour;
- **ECE** (one-year college certificate): \$26/hour; and
- **ECE+** (two-year college diploma): \$29/hour.

A systemic approach is essential to implement a province-wide ECE wage grid. This can be supported by the community social services and education sectors. These sectors are aligned with child care and have had publicly funded wage grids in place for over 20 years.

Government should establish an ECE task force with the mandate and funding to implement the ECE wage grid.

We recommend that the provincial government work with the ECE task force to:

1. **Fund and implement the step 1 wages promptly**, as part of an overall strategy that includes public funding to lower parent fees, welcome all children, and offer programs consistent with recognized early learning frameworks.
2. **Fully implement a publicly funded, equitable ECE wage grid within five years**, starting with the recommended step 1 wages, followed by determining wages for the bachelor degree level. The grid will include additional steps for each level except ECE Assistant, to encourage assistants to obtain their ECE certificate quickly.

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
ECE bachelor degree	TBD		
ECE+ (diploma)	\$29.00		
ECE (certificate)	\$26.00		
ECE assistant	\$20.00		

3. **Resolve barriers to system building.** Given the substantial public investment a wage grid will require, barriers that may prevent systemic action must be resolved. One potential barrier relates to program facilities, and whether they are privately or publicly owned. Before more public funds are provided to programs in privately owned facilities, the implications of taxpayer dollars supporting the acquisition of private assets must be addressed.

Conclusion

Inadequate wages have led to the challenge we now face recruiting and retaining qualified ECEs. Current wage enhancements have not significantly or equitably increased wages. Further, the federal government and most provincial governments, including BC, are committed to expanding access to child care — which will require even more qualified ECEs. Clearly we need a different approach.

A competitive, publicly funded provincial wage grid not only raises wages, but provides consistency and recognition of the essential and valuable work of ECEs. We have foundations in place to help us build this ECE wage grid in BC. And our recommended wages provide an immediate next step since higher wages are needed now. Our ECEs and the families and children they serve cannot wait.

Foreword

Message from the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC

For over 40 years, our two organizations have advanced the development of a well-educated, fairly compensated, and highly respected early childhood educator workforce, which is essential to achieving quality, affordable child care for all who choose it.

By 2007, the failure of BC's (and much of Canada's) longstanding market approach to child care was abundantly clear to us. Without public funding, parent fees were too high for most families but too low to compensate early childhood educators fairly. The inextricable, problematic link between parent fees and educator wages made expansion of quality child care difficult. As few could afford to access or work in child care, there were licensed spaces for less than 20 per cent of young children.

So, we began to develop concrete solutions. CCCABC detailed the estimated costs and benefits of a publicly funded system. ECEBC initiated the \$20/hour wage strategy based, in part, on the wages paid to early childhood educators working in BC's StrongStart programs. These publicly funded early learning programs are delivered through the Ministry of Education and provided at no cost to parents, who attend the programs with their children.

In 2011 we jointly published the first edition of the *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning*. This plan is grounded in research, informed by policy lessons from other jurisdictions, and strengthened through extensive and ongoing consultation across BC. Incorporating additional research led by UBC's Dr. Paul Kershaw, our plan is now popularly known as the \$10aDay Plan. It is consistent with the national *Affordable Child Care For All Plan* and is an example of how a national approach can be implemented at the provincial level. The Plan also supports the rights of Indigenous peoples to Indigenous-led child care.

The \$10aDay Plan called for public funding and accountability to achieve an average ECE wage of \$25/hour (adjusted for inflation over time) and maximum parent fees of \$10/day.

Since 2011 we have refined and updated the Plan to incorporate new research and input from communities. The Plan now clearly calls for a provincial wage grid. The Plan has broad public support, with endorsements from 64 local governments, 34 school districts, 20,000 individuals, and hundreds of community organizations, businesses, labour groups, and academics.



This broad base of public support made child care a key issue in the 2017 provincial election. BC's newly elected minority government committed to building a quality, universal child care system based on the \$10aDay Plan. In 2018, government began to fund the first steps of implementation by reducing parent fees, creating new licensed spaces, and introducing wage enhancements for early childhood educators. By 2019 a province-wide poll confirmed significant support for these actions, across all regions, ages, and political affiliations. In fact, most British Columbians (76 per cent) said they thought government should move more quickly to achieve the \$10aDay Plan goals.

However, ongoing challenges with ECE recruitment and retention — largely attributed to low wages — make the goal of expanding access to quality child care difficult to achieve. While wage enhancements were a helpful first step, BC needs to implement a systemic, province-wide, and equitable approach to ECE compensation.

The current pandemic highlights the importance of prompt action. BC's Provincial Health Officer confirmed what our sector has long known — child care is an essential service for families and our economy. Our province needs and relies on early childhood educators to support families to work and, most importantly, to provide high quality, responsive, and caring environments for young children, especially during times of uncertainty.

The recommendations in this report build on our BC context — a government commitment to build a public system, unprecedented levels of public support, and a new recognition of the essential work done by early childhood educators. While this report demonstrates that all jurisdictions across Canada could benefit from an effective ECE wage grid, the path forward will similarly need to respond to the context in each province and territory. Of course, both provincial and federal funding will be required to make the goal of a respected, well-educated, and fairly compensated workforce a reality.

Ongoing challenges with ECE recruitment and retention — largely attributed to low wages — make the goal of expanding access to quality child care difficult to achieve. While wage enhancements were a helpful first step, BC needs to implement a systemic, province-wide, and equitable approach to ECE compensation.

TERMINOLOGY

This project focuses on staff working directly with children in centre-based child care programs that operate in various facilities. The majority of centre-based child care programs in Canada are provided by non-profit organizations with some public delivery (often by schools, municipalities, universities, and colleges), along with significant for-profit provision in some provinces. Centre-based programs represent a large component of the child care sector, which also includes home-based, regulated family child care, Aboriginal Head Start, resource and referral, inclusion supports, and other programs.

We use the term:

- **Educator** to describe, in general terms, program staff working directly with children;
- **Early childhood educator (ECE)** to describe qualified educators who have obtained the education and experience required to be certified as ECEs in their jurisdiction; and
- **Early childhood educator assistant (ECEA)** to describe educators who are not qualified ECEs, but meet provincial requirements which allow them to work directly with children. ECEAs are generally required to have at least one orientation course, and often between one and three relevant post-secondary courses.

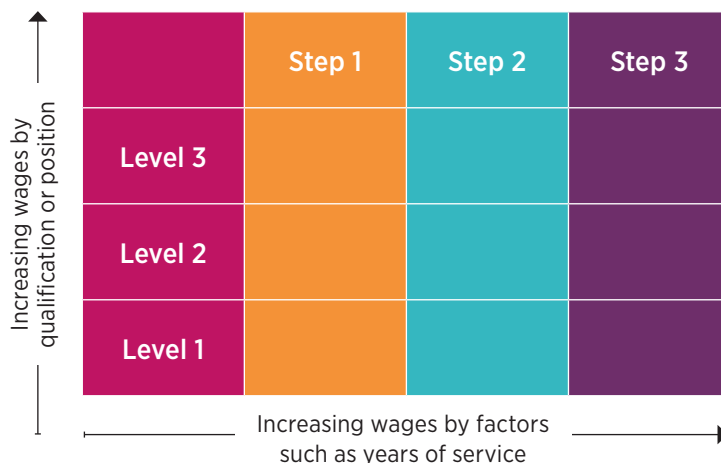
Educator titles and qualifications (also referred to as credentials or certifications) vary between provinces, but ECEs generally have at least a one-year college certificate. ECEs in Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec are required to have at least a two-year college diploma. When specifically referring to ECEs with at least a two-year diploma, we use the term **ECE+**. These general descriptions of qualifications are consistent with the three current levels of educator certification in BC: ECEA, ECE, and ECE+. In Appendix III we list educator titles for each province and categorize them in relation to the three credential categories in BC, to support the comparative analyses prepared for this report.

An ECE wage grid sets out the required wages and pay levels for educators. We define a wage grid as a system that determines how much an employee is paid, usually based on factors such as qualifications and years of service. Various terms are used synonymously with wage grids, including wage/pay guidelines, and wage/pay scales.

Wage grids are often published in two dimensional tables, with rows for one factor and columns for another. The rows are called **levels**, and there are typically different levels for different qualifications or job positions. The columns are called **steps**, and typically indicate the number of years of service. Wages increase with each level and step, with specific wage rates shown for each cell (intersection of an individual row and column).

We use the term **benchmark** to describe a wage from a comparable position that is used as a standard by which to measure progress.

Wage grids that are subject to regular **indexing** incorporate annual adjustments that reflect changes to inflation, so that wages aren't effectively reduced because of increases in the cost of living.



Introduction

In 2018, the BC government introduced the first three years of a 10-year plan to achieve a high-quality universal child care system. The plan, named Childcare BC, recognizes the importance of well-educated, fairly paid ECEs in the delivery of high-quality services, and includes steps to recruit, develop, and sustain the child care workforce. As part of this plan, the government introduced new public funding for ECE wage enhancements to improve recruitment and retention.

While these wage enhancements are important first steps, they are not sufficient to solve the current ECE shortage. Educator remuneration must be substantially improved in order to grow the workforce needed to deliver universal child care. A systematic, publicly funded approach is required.

This project explored how a province-wide, publicly funded ECE wage grid can support appropriate remuneration of a qualified ECE workforce. We aimed to find out:

1. Where and how have wage grids been used to advance appropriate remuneration?
2. How are wage grids structured? How do they recognize qualifications, encourage and reward additional education, and consider specific challenges such as recruiting qualified staff in rural and remote settings?
3. What are the relevant comparatives to consider in building an ECE wage grid (e.g., other jurisdictions, sectors, or positions)? How do we ensure we do not perpetuate gender pay differences by benchmarking only against other “female” dominated professions?
4. What are effective vehicles for supporting a systemic increase in ECE wages? Are other options more effective than wage grids?

To this end, the project team:

- Reviewed literature on ECE wages and wage grids;
- Interviewed key informants with subject expertise and experience;
- Analyzed existing provincial ECE wage grids and related policies in Canadian provinces¹; and
- Considered how wage grids have been designed and implemented in other relevant professions in BC.

1 Primarily due to time constraints, we did not include the territories in our review.

We focused our project on wages for educators working directly with children in group centres, and were guided by the following assumptions and limitations:

1. While acknowledging that ECE recruitment and retention is impacted by various factors, including benefits and working conditions, this project **focused on wages**, as they are a significant contributor to the current shortage of qualified educators.
2. The project considered the design and implementation of an educator-specific wage grid consistent with the **current three levels of certification** in BC: ECEA (Assistant); ECE (Certificate), ECE+ (Diploma).²
3. The child care sector includes those with additional and/or **different qualifications or responsibilities** (e.g., program supervisors/managers) and those working within different operating models (e.g., family child care providers). While consideration of their wages is also important, it is beyond the scope of this project.
4. In BC, both ECE credentials and the number of ECEs required in a licensed program are lower than in several other Canadian provinces, and much lower than the international benchmarks which require a percentage of staff to have at least three years of post-secondary ECE education (Bennett 2008; Friendly et al. 2018). While it will be important to increase overall educational requirements in BC, this project prioritized achieving **equitable compensation** for all existing educators, with incentives for ECEAs to obtain their certificate and ECEs to obtain their diploma so that in the near term all staff working directly with children are qualified.
5. Given the evidence confirming that public funding is required to achieve appropriate ECE remuneration, we focused our review on existing **publicly funded** ECE wage grids and ECE compensation in Canada. We also considered wage grids in relevant public sector groups in BC.
6. We prioritized **input from those with expertise and experience** in researching, developing, and implementing provincial or broad-based wage grids, and those with expertise in child care policy and financing in Canada and other countries. We note that international jurisdictions with universal child care have policy and funding in place to support wage grids, standardized fees, and infrastructure. However, a detailed examination of the international literature was beyond the scope of this project.

The project supports and advances the BC government's commitment to developing and implementing an appropriate ECE compensation strategy. The project report begins with a summary of the BC government's current compensation commitments, then moves to a summary of the project methodology. The findings, analysis, and recommendations follow, and are organized in three parts:

- **Part 1** explores the rationale and support for provincial, publicly funded, equitable ECE wage grids in Canada.
- **Part 2** explores and summarizes the elements and benefits of effective wage grids.
- **Part 3** applies what we've learned about ECE wages and wage grids to BC. We present BC-specific recommendations for prompt implementation.

2 For more information, see Appendix III: Summary of educator position titles by credentials in Canadian provinces.

BC government's current ECE compensation commitments

“Early Childhood Educators are the heart of quality child care and the government of B.C. is committed to investing in their future.” (British Columbia, n.d.)

The BC government's commitment to investing in a well-educated, fairly paid, and respected ECE workforce forms a foundation for this project. This commitment is highlighted in the 2018 Childcare BC plan (British Columbia 2018) and detailed in *Investing in our Early Childhood Educators: Early Care and Learning Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (n.d.). Supported by a \$136 million investment over three years, and supplemented by \$16.3 million in federal funding, the strategy incorporates widely accepted research about the importance of recruiting and retaining qualified educators to achieve consistently high-quality child care.

Specifically related to ECE compensation, government's strategy acknowledges that:

- Low ECE wages are the main reason why providers struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff;
- Without public funding, the cost of higher ECE wages are typically passed on to parents through fee increases;
- BC's strong labour market is attracting experienced ECEs to other sectors and career paths; and
- The planned expansion of child care spaces will increase demand for qualified ECEs.

Thus, investing in ECEs is essential in order to achieve the Childcare BC plan for universally available, high-quality child care.

The goals of government's recruitment and retention strategy include:

- An adequate and stable workforce, comprised of qualified and skilled early care and learning professionals;
- Acknowledging early care and learning as a viable, sustainable, and valued career; and
- Appropriate compensation plans and human resource strategies.

Government recently introduced wage enhancements for ECEs working with children: \$1/hour retroactive to September 1, 2018 and \$1/hour effective April 1, 2020, for a total of \$2/hour.

Government also stated that the predominantly female ECE workforce deserves to be compensated appropriately for its work, and confirmed that its recruitment and retention strategy is the first step in a long-term commitment to improve supports for ECEs and recognize them for their passion and dedication.

Our project advances this strategy by providing recommendations for government to consider as it develops the next phase of its recruitment and retention strategy, specifically related to compensation.

Methodology

We employed three methods to explore how wage grids can promote fair compensation for educators:

1. Literature review;
2. Key informant interviews; and
3. Wage grid and wage policy analysis.

Literature review

Our literature review gathered information on how educator wages are currently determined and on what has been done to increase the rate and improve equity of educator wages. We also searched for literature on the use of wage grids in child care and comparable sectors with substantial public funding.

We searched for research, reports, and policy documents. Searches were conducted in the Childcare Resource and Research Unit database, EBSCO academic and business databases, and Google Scholar. Project stakeholders and key informants also provided relevant documents. Our search terms related to early care and learning, wages, wage grids, and wage grid implementation.

We reviewed 33 documents, including reports of surveys and consultation with the child care sector, provincial expert reports on the child care workforce, and analyses of public sector wage policy and child care policy.

From the relevant literature, we gathered information on wages and wage grids, and how they relate to education, experience, credentials, and human resource practices. We also examined efforts to standardize, increase, or improve equity of wages, and any facilitators and barriers to implementation of these efforts.

There was little literature specifically on wage grids, both generally and in the context of child care. Much of the information was gathered from documents on the child care workforce in a variety of jurisdictions.

Key informant interviews

The project team interviewed a range of key informants (see Appendix I) and shared a project overview with and invited input from various experts.

Key informants were child care and related public sector experts, as well as human resources specialists. They were selected based on their experience and expertise in researching, developing and/or implementing provincial or broad-based wage grids and related public wage policies, as well as on their knowledge of child care policy across Canada and internationally. The 60-minute interviews were conducted by project members, either in person or by telephone. Interviews were guided by a standardized questionnaire (see Appendix II). Key informants were asked about:

- Where and how wage grids are in use and recommended factors to consider in the development and implementation of a provincial ECE wage grid;
- Wage harmonization efforts in child care and other sectors;
- Best practices and principles for developing a wage grid; and
- Recommendations for other resources or experts for us to consult.

From the relevant literature, we gathered information on wages and wage grids, and how they relate to education, experience, credentials, and human resource practices. We also examined efforts to standardize, increase, or improve equity of wages, and any facilitators and barriers to implementation of these efforts.

We analyzed the interview notes for trends and recommendations that were consistent amongst a number of key informant interviews and these form part of our overall findings and recommendations for the development and implementation of a provincial ECE wage grid.

Wage grid and ECE wage policy analysis

We analyzed existing or recommended wage grids and related practices and policies in three categories:

1. Province-wide ECE wage grids in Canada: Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Manitoba.
2. BC wage grids in comparable sectors such as education and health, with a primary focus on positions with comparable qualifications (StrongStart facilitators,³ education assistants, and licensed practical nurses). While not directly comparable to BC's current ECE classifications, we also conducted a high-level review of other public sector wage grids, including those for teachers.
3. Provincial wage grids in community social services, health, and K-12 education applicable to portions of the child care sector in BC.

We summarized key attributes of each wage grid, including number of wage levels, number of steps, percent difference between levels and steps, incorporation of qualification differences, and analysis of strengths and weaknesses.

We compared wage rates for the grids that include early childhood educators, education assistants, StrongStart facilitators, and licensed practical nurses. We also reviewed public policies and related agreements to further understand the pay inequities in the community social services sector, relative to other sectors, and the processes used to address those inequities.

Finally, we examined ECE wage enhancement or similar programs in other provinces. Although these are not wage grids, they do incorporate elements of recommended ECE compensation policies and can be considered building blocks for ECE wage grids.

We organized the findings of the literature review, key informant interviews, and wage policy analysis under two topics: 1) the current state of ECE wages in Canada, including efforts to increase ECE wages; and 2) principles and best practices in developing an ECE wage grid. Based on these findings and building on the existing wage grids we analyzed, we make recommendations for an ECE wage grid for British Columbia.

3 A range of titles are used for StrongStart facilitators, including coordinators and educators.

ECE wages

Why they are important, current state, and efforts to increase wages across Canada

Relationship between ECE wages and qualifications and child care quality

Early childhood educators' ability to do their jobs well is influenced by their education and training, work environment, salary, and benefits. Working conditions, including ECE wages, are recognized as indicators of quality in child care programs by national and international experts (Atkinson Centre 2017; ESDC 2019; Sim et al. 2019).

While research on direct links between ECE pay and program quality are limited, some studies have shown that higher pay for ECEs is associated with higher quality of care. This has been found both on scales that measure the program environment and in terms of interactions between staff and children (Goelman et al. 2000; OECD 2018). Positive interactions between staff and children are in turn associated with literacy and numeracy skills and may also have a positive impact on social skills (ESDC 2019; OECD 2018).

Better working conditions, including competitive salaries, can help to attract and retain ECE staff. On the other hand, poor compensation can lead to high staff turnover (ESDC 2019; OECD 2012; Sim et al. 2019). Staff turnover has been found to have a negative effect on program quality. When staff members regularly change, staff and children can't develop nurturing and stimulating relationships (OECD 2018). Turnover can also be disruptive to continuity of care and professional development efforts (OECD 2019). Stability of staff contributes to more attentive staff interactions with children and to positive effects on children's social-emotional development (Engel et al. 2015; OECD 2012).

A study of 234 child care centres across Canada found that staff with higher wages showed greater sensitivity toward children. Where staff had higher wages, there were better scores on environmental rating scales (Goelman et al. 2000).

A literature review and meta-analysis carried out by the OECD (2018) found that "emerging evidence indicates that centres where staff reported higher well-being (including job satisfaction and lack of depressive symptoms), higher salaries and more team collaboration show better staff-child interactions across all age groups" (p. 110-111).



ECEs' educational qualifications are similarly recognized as a key predictor of program quality (Engel et al. 2015; Flanagan & Beach 2016). Where staff have higher levels of ECE training, staff-child interactions are of higher quality (OECD 2018). Higher levels of staff qualifications are also associated with better emotional support for infants and toddlers (OECD 2018).

The importance of qualifications is reflected in the regulated staffing requirements in place in provinces and territories. Across Canada, ECEs are required to have diplomas, certificates, or degrees in early childhood education and assistants are required to complete courses in ECE (Flanagan & Beach 2016; Friendly et al. 2018).

ECE wages in Canada

ECEs in Canada generally earn low wages, which is a primary reason why recruitment and retention of well-qualified staff is a serious concern across the sector. This concern is compounded by the fact that the federal and most provincial and territorial governments have established child care expansion goals, with targets for creating new licensed spaces.

The most recent national study of educator wages and working conditions, conducted in 2012, found that program staff in this predominantly female workforce earned a median hourly wage of \$16.50, or 69% of the average wage for all employees (Flanagan et al. 2013). Qualified ECEs earned a median wage of \$16.88/hour.

ECEs in Canada generally earn low wages, which is a primary reason why recruitment and retention of well-qualified staff is a serious concern across the sector.

One quarter of program staff earned below \$14/hour, and almost 25% reported working at a second job, mainly because they need additional income. The study examined several aspects of job satisfaction, including career opportunities, leadership in the centre, workload and hours of work, and found that compensation is the least satisfying aspect.

We know that BC's educators remain dissatisfied with their wages, but there is little provincial data to quantify this. To assess how BC's ECEs have fared over time, we analyzed available ECE wage data and compared it to the average wage for all BC employees.

In BC, the 2012 median wage reported for all child care program staff was \$17.00/hour (Flanagan et al. 2013). For qualified ECEs, we estimate that the median wage was \$17.39/hour, or 68% of the average wage for all BC employees.⁴ In 2016/17, the median wage for ECEs working in licensed group care was \$18/hour, based on data reported by child care providers to the BC government (it is not clear whether the data was from 2016 or 2017) (British Columbia n.d.A). With wage enhancements, we estimate that the median wage for ECEs in BC will be at least \$19/hour in 2019 and \$20/hour in 2020.⁵

In Table 1, we show the wages that would be required to maintain ECE wages at 68% of that of all employees from 2012 onward and compare them to the ECE median wages from 2016/17, 2019, and 2020 (reported or estimated).

TABLE 1: ANALYSIS OF BC ECE WAGES, RELATIVE TO ALL BC EMPLOYEES, 2012-2020⁶

Year	All Employees, average wage	ECE median wage, (\$/hour) reported/ estimated	ECE wage as % of all employees	ECE median wage required to maintain at 68% of all employees
October 2012	25.66	17.39	68%	17.39
December 2016	27.66	18.00	65%	18.75
December 2017	28.83		62%	19.54
December 2019	30.38	19.00	63%	20.59
March 2020	31.48	20.00	64%	21.34

Source: Table: 14-10-0065-01 (formerly CANSIM 282-0073), Employee wages by job permanency and union coverage, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality, British Columbia, both sexes, current dollars.

In 2012, ECE wages were only 68% of those of all employees in BC. Our analysis shows that between 2012 and 2016/17, ECE wages have not kept up with even that low level as they dropped to 65% or 62% of all wages. This is not surprising, as public funding for child care operating expenses did not increase

4 We estimate the ECE wage by assuming that the percent difference between wages for all program staff and qualified ECEs in BC is the same as that for Canada, at 2.3%.

5 The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed payment of the second installment of the wage enhancement for programs that closed.

6 The data source and methodology used for the calculations in Table 1 is consistent with the approach used for the 2012 study. We also carried out the calculations using median wages for all employees, rather than average, which resulted in even higher ECE wages required to maintain the 2012 percentage of ECE wages to all employees over time. We selected the 25-54 age group of all employees because it most closely matches the median age of 38 years for program staff reported in the 2012 study (Flanagan et al. 2013). We chose end-of-year dates in all cases, except in 2012 (as the Flanagan study also used October 2012) and 2020 (March is the most recent data available).

during this time period (Anderson 2017). The significance of increasing public funding for ECE wages is clear. Without the wage enhancements in 2019 and 2020, ECE wages would likely fall even further behind (unless parent fees were increased). Yet, these wage enhancements only lift ECE wages back to 64% of all wages. Additional wage increases are required simply to maintain ECE wages at the same low level of 2012, relative to all employees. Again, the only other way to increase ECE wages is to raise parent fees. BC has been grappling with this challenge since the province introduced fee reductions in 2018. While helpful, the wage enhancements are not sufficient and recruitment and retention challenges continue to put pressure on parent fees.

Not only are wage levels important in recruiting and retaining ECEs, so are incentives for educators to become qualified. The 2012 survey and more recent research in Vancouver and Manitoba indicate that wages increase slightly with higher education (Flanagan et al. 2013; Forer 2018; MCCA 2018). The median hourly wages in the 2012 national study were \$13.00 for those with no post-secondary ECE, compared to \$16.88 for those with an ECE certificate or diploma.

Nonetheless, educators in BC report that there is little financial incentive for ECEAs to pursue full certification, or for ECEs with a certificate to pursue further education to obtain their diploma (Watters Consulting 2018), which demonstrates that child care wages do not adequately recognize ECE certification or specialization.

Also, ECE wages are not competitive with comparable occupations (Cleveland 2018; Flanagan 2019; Flanagan & Beach 2016; McDonell 2014). Flanagan and Beach observe that “historically, low wages have been a characteristic of the child care sector and have resulted in ongoing challenges in recruitment and retention of qualified staff. The challenge has been compounded by increased opportunities for ECEs in the education sector at higher wages, increased benefits and shorter working hours” (2016, p. 70).

These recruitment and retention concerns have multiple impacts. When there is a shortage of qualified staff, employers are sometimes forced to hire staff with lower qualifications, compromising the quality of care delivered (Siggner 2008). At the same time, the significant unmet demand for child care puts pressure on governments to expand provision, which exacerbates the problem of recruitment and retention. Recently, provincial and territorial governments published child care action plans, most of which incorporate expansion targets (Child Care Now 2019).

The BC government estimates that an additional 12,000 ECEs will be required as universal child care is implemented over 10 years, and the *Child Care BC* plan affirms that increasing wages is required in order to retain qualified staff in existing programs, recruit qualified staff into the new programs, and encourage people to enter the field. This is consistent with findings from other provinces (Cleveland 2018; Flanagan 2019; Flanagan & Beach 2016; Saulnier & Frank 2019), and summarized well by Cleveland: “it will be very difficult to recruit and keep staff who can do better in a wide range of occupations outside child care. Compensation levels will need to increase in child care if expansion is going to be possible. In particular, compensation levels need to rise so that the staff that are recruited will be capable, well-qualified staff who will decide to stay in the sector” (2018, p. 226).

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Raising ECE wages through public funding and policy

Recognizing the challenge of recruiting and retaining ECEs, Canadian provinces and territories have taken steps to increase ECE compensation and recognize higher qualifications (Friendly et al. 2018).

BC recently joined the majority of provinces with public funding programs in place specifically for educator wages. Governments have recognized that public funding is required in order to raise wages without raising parent fees and making child care even less affordable for families (Macdonald & Friendly 2017).

While some provinces provide funding for child care program operating expenses, including wages, others use public funding to achieve specific wage objectives. These approaches include wage enhancements or top-ups, which are paid as a supplement to an educator's hourly wage, wage floors, which are an educator-specific minimum wage, and wage grids, which set out required wages for educators.

BC, Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador have introduced publicly funded wage enhancements on top of existing wages for educators. BC and Ontario both provide \$2/hour to qualified ECEs, and Ontario also provides the same enhancement to other staff (British Columbia, n.d.A; Toronto Children's Services 2019). Wage enhancements in New Brunswick and Alberta vary by level of certification, ranging from \$2.75 to \$5.75 in New Brunswick and from \$2.14 to \$6.62 in Alberta (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2020; Friendly et al. 2018).

Recognizing the challenge of recruiting and retaining ECEs, Canadian provinces and territories have taken steps to increase ECE compensation and recognize higher qualifications.

Newfoundland and Labrador also pay a wage supplement directly to eligible staff, based on certification and job responsibilities. The supplement is paid on a quarterly basis as a lump sum, rather than an hourly rate, with annual totals ranging from \$11,600 to \$14,100 per staff (Newfoundland Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2018).

In 2016, Nova Scotia introduced a program requiring that centres receiving provincial grants pay educators a wage floor—a minimum wage that increases from \$15/hour to \$19/hour based on levels of training (Friendly et al. 2018).

Both Quebec and Prince Edward Island have introduced province-wide wage grids for publicly funded programs, with funding in place to allow programs to pay the required wages while charging parent fees established by the province. Quebec's wage grid is based on education and experience (Famille Quebec 2013) and Prince Edward Island's wage grid is based on a combination of education, experience, and job position (PEI 2019).

Other provinces have proposed, but not yet implemented, similar measures. In 2018, the government of Alberta planned to add voluntary wage floors to its \$25/day prototype sites; the wage floors would be based on level of educator certification (Alberta 2017). Ontario committed to creating a wage grid in 2020 (Ontario 2018). Governments in both provinces have since changed, so it's not clear whether these plans will be implemented.



Governments have recognized that public funding is required in order to raise wages without raising parent fees and making child care even less affordable for families

Wage enhancements, wage floors and wage grids are important steps on the road to appropriate ECE compensation as they contain key elements of effective public policy: they are publicly funded, include accountability requirements to ensure the wage conditions are met, and make wages higher than they otherwise would be.

Effectively, these wage policies create a minimum wage for ECEs. Table 2 shows what the minimum ECE wage should be in provinces that have comparable public funding dedicated to wages.⁷ The minimum ECE wage is either:

- The total of the provincial (legal) minimum hourly wage plus the hourly wage enhancement paid by the province; or
- The minimum hourly wage created through a wage floor; or
- The minimum hourly wage paid through a wage grid.

The minimum hourly ECE wage indicates that eligible ECEs working in eligible, approved programs do not earn less than this hourly wage. The minimum wage for ECEs working outside of these programs, and outside of collective agreements, remains at the provincial minimum wage.

The minimum ECE wage supports planning and costing for increasing ECE compensation. This figure establishes the maximum gap between current ECE wages and goal wages.

⁷ The quarterly wage supplement in Newfoundland and Labrador is not calculated on an hourly rate, so is not directly comparable to the other wage enhancement programs.

Table 2 calculates the minimum hourly wage paid to qualified ECEs and, building on the 2012 study discussed above, compares this wage to the average hourly wage earned by all employees in each province. This comparison helps us assess the progress achieved by each type of compensation approach.

While Table 2 focuses on qualified ECEs, several provinces also include other staff (e.g., ECEAs, supervisors/managers) in their wage programs. Typically, ECEA positions receive a lower level of public funding.

TABLE 2: ESTIMATED MINIMUM ECE HOURLY WAGE IN PROVINCES WITH COMPARABLE WAGE PROGRAMS, RELATIVE TO AVERAGE WAGES FOR ALL EMPLOYEES

	Provincial minimum wage	Funded wage enhancement		Minimum ECE wage		Comparison to all employees	
		ECE	ECE+	ECE	ECE+	Average hourly wage — all employees	Minimum ECE+ wage as % of all employees
British Columbia	\$13.85	2.00	2.00	15.85	15.85	30.68	52%
Alberta	\$15.00	4.05	6.62	19.05	21.62	33.73	64%
Ontario	\$14.00	n/a	2.00	n/a	16.00	31.42	51%
New Brunswick	\$11.70	5.75	5.75	17.45	17.45	25.55	68%
		Funded wage floor					
Nova Scotia	\$12.55	15.00	17.00	15.00	17.00	25.64	66%
		Funded wage grid					
Quebec	\$12.50	n/a	18.98	n/a	18.98	29.53	64%
PEI	\$12.85	16.05	18.61	16.05	18.61	25.84	72%
Quebec, highest step					25.15	29.53	85%
PEI, highest step					20.56	25.84	80%

Notes: The minimum ECE wage calculations are current as of April 1, 2020, with the exception of Quebec, which is current as of March 31, 2020. Hourly rates do not include job-related benefits or pension contributions. The average wages for all employees are for the period January 2020. As in the 2012 national study of wages discussed above, the source for this wage data is Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0065-01 (formerly CANSIM 282-0073).

Even with the April 1, 2020 wage enhancement increase, BC is at or near the lowest minimum ECE wage. The June 1, 2020 increase to BC's provincial minimum wage (from \$13.85 to \$14.60) does not substantially change this finding. This confirms the urgency of addressing ECE wages in BC. Nonetheless, ECEs in BC have shared that they were previously earning the legal minimum wage, so the new minimum ECE wage is important to the sector.

Moreover, the cost of living and overall wages vary between provinces, so it is important to put the minimum ECE+ wages in a provincial context — i.e., to compare the minimum ECE+ wage to the average wage for all employees. Because Alberta also has the highest wages overall, the minimum ECE+ wage in Alberta is only 64% of the average wage for all employees. By contrast, while PEI's ECE+ wage of \$18.61/hour is lower than Alberta's, it is 72% of the wage for all employees.

Our analysis of different wage policies highlights that wage floors, wage enhancements, and wage grids are simply vehicles. For them to be effective, they need to be set at levels that provide appropriate compensation within a reasonable time period. Both the highest and the lowest minimum ECE+ wages are realized through wage enhancement programs. The second and third highest minimum ECE+ wages are achieved through wage grids in Quebec (\$18.98) and PEI (\$18.61).

While Quebec's wage grid achieves 85% of the wage for all employees, 10 steps are required to reach this level and the step 1 hourly wage is only 64% of the wage for all employees. PEI shows the potential for a wage grid to achieve fair wages relatively quickly. While recent reports acknowledge there is more to do to make it competitive (Flanagan 2019), the current grid provides a minimum ECE+ wage that is the closest to the average wage for all employees (72%). Furthermore, after five years of service the PEI position that is comparable to BC's ECE+ classification earns 80% of the wage for all PEI employees.

While important, these wage policies have not solved the problem. Government's child care quality and expansion goals are hampered by the fact that ECE wages remain largely uncompetitive and qualified staff continue to leave for higher-paid positions elsewhere — often in the education sector. Experts consistently recommend the development and implementation of a publicly funded, competitive ECE wage grid as a key component of the solution.

Minimum ECE wages remain low relative to living wages and other jobs requiring similar education and experience (Cleveland 2018; McDonell 2014; Saulnier et al. 2019). In BC, living wages range from \$14/hour to almost \$20/hour (Living Wage for Families 2019).⁸ In the K-12 public education sector, median wages for education assistants and StrongStart facilitators are approximately \$26/hour. Licensed practical nurses, with two-year college diplomas, earn \$28-\$32/hour.

Even if wage enhancements or wage floors were increased to a competitive level, there remain problems with these approaches relative to wage grids.

Wage enhancements are typically paid to all employees of the eligible group irrespective of their current wage rate.⁹ This maintains the existing, and often significant, wage inequities between organizations and communities. These inequities are driven by factors largely outside of an ECE's control, such as parent fees, other program funding sources, and facility costs. With a set wage within a wage grid, ECEs with equivalent education and responsibilities would receive similar compensation no matter where they work (Bird & Halfon 2015).

Further, wage enhancements and wage floors do not consistently and adequately recognize ECE qualifications or years of experience. In Ontario, the same wage enhancement is provided to both ECEs with two-year diplomas and assistants (AECEO 2015). In BC and New Brunswick, funding does

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8 "The living wage is the hourly amount that each of two working parents with two young children must earn to meet their basic expenses..." Living wage calculations for communities across BC decreased significantly this year because the "recent investments in child care are reducing out-of-pocket costs for BC families..." (Living Wage for Families 2019).

9 Ontario's wage enhancement is applied to a maximum total hourly wage of \$27.75.

not increase for qualified ECEs with additional credentials. Lack of recognition of higher educational attainment causes ECEs to feel devalued (Saulnier et al. 2019) and also fails to encourage ECEs and ECEAs to increase their qualifications and remain in the child care sector (Flanagan 2018). Given the interdependence of quality care and ECE credentials (Flanagan 2019), compensation policies must ensure higher wages for those with higher qualifications (with parallel policies that make ECE education broadly accessible).

While wage grids typically do better in terms of recognizing qualifications and experience, they must remain competitive in order to attract ECEs to the child care field. If wage grids are not indexed sufficiently over time, wages actually stagnate or decline relative to other sectors. This is the experience in Prince Edward Island, where its provincially mandated ECE wage grid was introduced for Early Years Centres in 2010. While the grid resulted in significant ECE wage increases at that time, it quickly became uncompetitive and remained so for several years (although it has been recently updated) (Flanagan 2019). In a recent report on PEI's child care sector, Flanagan notes that “for many years, the education sector has been a significant draw on qualified early childhood educators, particularly for positions as education assistants. Current wage scales according to the collective agreement for education assistants are significantly higher than the wages outlined in the wage scale for early childhood educators” (2018, p. 40).

Clearly, ECE recruitment and retention is problematic across the country. In BC, the government's current recruitment and retention strategy acknowledges the need to address ECE compensation, although it doesn't provide details on how that will be accomplished. Yet, our analysis highlights the urgency of developing and implementing an effective ECE wage grid in BC that moves the sector significantly beyond the current \$2/hour wage enhancement because:

- ECE wages have been relatively stagnant for almost two decades, and in real decline relative to all wages since 2012;
- BC's minimum ECE wages are at or near the lowest among seven comparable provinces;
- Median wages for comparable positions in the K-12 education sector are \$26/hour — 30% higher than the median ECE wage of approximately \$20/hour in licensed child care; and
- Rapid expansion of licensed spaces is underway, and ECEs must be attracted to the sector to staff the new programs.

As Canadian child care policy expert Kathleen Flanagan observes (2019a):

1. Expansion is impossible without enough qualified ECEs;
2. Quality is impossible without qualified ECEs; and
3. The ECE sector is competing with all other occupations for qualified employees.

Effective wage grids — with competitive wages, regular indexing, and reward for increased credentials — are widely supported by experts across the country as part of the solution (AECEO 2015; AECEO Decent Work Task Force 2017; Cleveland 2018; Flanagan 2019; Flanagan & Beach 2016; MCCA 2018; McDonnell 2014; Whitty & Haché 2016).

ECE wage grids

How we can use a wage grid to pay ECEs fairly and expand access to high quality child care

Our research confirms that provincial ECE wage grids can be used to achieve appropriate ECE compensation and support governments' goals of expanding access to high-quality child care. No other approaches were recommended, either from key informants or through our literature review. However, simply establishing wage grids does not ensure success. For wage grids to be effective in meeting these goals, they must:

- Be grounded in a compensation philosophy;
- Be integrated with overall child care policy, which recognizes and funds child care as a system;
- Recognize staff qualifications, experience, and job descriptions; and
- Set competitive wages, which are regularly evaluated and indexed.

Compensation philosophy

A compensation philosophy describes an organization's compensation objectives, values, and principles, and how they link to the organization's goals. This philosophy guides organizations in developing a compensation structure that attracts and retains employees with the skills required to achieve its goals (Hay Group 2013). Key informants with human resource expertise said that a compensation philosophy must be in place to guide the design of an ECE wage grid. A wage grid that reflects this compensation philosophy will be more likely to meet BC's child care goals.

An ECE compensation philosophy for BC would affirm that recruiting and retaining a well-qualified, fairly compensated ECE workforce is essential to achieving high-quality universal child care. The philosophy could also highlight the expected outcomes: promoting healthy child development, making family life more affordable across the province, strengthening the economy, and advancing gender equality — all key goals of the BC government. An ECE compensation philosophy for BC would also commit to:

- Setting wages that are competitive and that encourage ECEs to achieve higher qualifications;
- Applying wages equitably (i.e., province-wide, without discrimination, and based on gender-neutral job evaluations); and
- Ensuring that ECEs have access to information about compensation-related policies and opportunities.

Compensation philosophy examples from BC

A compensation philosophy typically highlights an organization's objectives regarding:

- Recruiting and retaining qualified staff;
- Providing compensation that is competitive with comparable positions; and
- Ensuring all employees are treated equitably, and have transparent access to compensation information.

Two examples of compensation philosophies from BC organizations considered part of the overall public sector follow.

- The compensation philosophy of **Partnerships British Columbia**, a company owned by the Province of BC, states that "... to achieve [its] business and operational objectives, it must rely on the contribution of its employees. Partnerships BC's compensation program plays a key role in the organization's ability to attract, motivate and retain quality employees [and] maintain a meaningful degree of competitiveness with the relevant external labour market" (2010, p. 1).
- **Simon Fraser University's** compensation philosophy notes that "... it is the objective of the University to pay its employees' salaries that are sufficiently competitive in the job market to attract and retain a high caliber of personnel and recognize the progression of employees as they assume the full scope and responsibility of their positions. An important principle underlying the compensation philosophy is that there is one standard job evaluation system and salary structure ... that will be administered in a way which is fair and consistent and without regard to sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, religious beliefs or ethnic origin." (n.d.)

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Integrating a wage grid into the child care system

Appropriate ECE wages are one aspect of high quality universal child care. All factors linked to quality are part of a system and cannot be addressed in isolation (ESDC 2019). Since increasing ECE wages will increase the cost of delivering child care, measures must be in place to ensure this cost does not lead to increased parent fees or compromise other aspects of quality. Thus, effective wage grids are integrated with comprehensive child care policy that recognizes child care as a system. Quality at the system level depends on coordinated leadership and adequate funding (ESDC 2019). The child care researchers we interviewed noted that internationally, successful early childhood education and care¹⁰ systems provide public funding directly to programs, with measures to ensure:

- High quality (such as well-educated, fairly paid educators supported by evidence-based early care and learning tools and frameworks);
- A universal approach, making the system available and affordable for all (for example, through capped and reduced parent fees); and
- Substantial public delivery (with accountability for services delivered privately).

In Canada, public education reflects these system attributes in all provinces and territories. Many, including BC, have also recently expanded their universal education systems to introduce and expand early years programs, including full-day and junior kindergarten and, in BC, StrongStart programs.¹¹ Typically, these programs are publicly funded, have no parent fees and are staffed by qualified educators who are fairly compensated (relative to the child care sector).

By contrast, no Canadian provinces have yet achieved substantial public delivery in child care, with the exception of school-aged care in Quebec, and none provide universal access with no parent fees. Furthermore, none have achieved a province-wide, publicly funded workforce of well-qualified and competitively compensated educators. Child care in Canada is treated as a market commodity, resulting in inequitable access, inadequate availability, and lower quality (Beach & Ferns 2015).

Child care in Canada is treated as a market commodity, resulting in inequitable access, inadequate availability, and lower quality. However, more recently – and with new federal funding – provinces have begun to implement plans that move closer to integrated, systemic child care policy and funding.

However, more recently – and with new federal funding – provinces have begun to implement plans that move closer to integrated, systemic child care policy and funding. For example, several have introduced direct funding to eligible child care programs with accountability for a range of quality, affordability, and access requirements (Child Care Now 2019). These plans may be a good structure within which to introduce an ECE wage grid. We review how provinces are integrating funding for wages and parent fees in the following section.

10 The term often used internationally to describe both child care and kindergarten.

11 Provided through the BC Ministry of Education, at no cost to parents, who attend these early learning programs with their children. For further information see <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/support/programs/strongstart-bc>.

Child care system integration: Linking wages and parent fees

One essential aspect of system integration is linking funding for increasing ECE wages to funding that simultaneously caps and reduces parent fees. This linkage is particularly important because, historically, without public funding, the only way to increase ECE wages was by increasing parent fees.

As public funding for wages increases, parent fees should be required to at least stabilize and, with additional funding, reduce over time. Table 3 shows how provinces are currently providing direct funding to programs to support wages and limits on parent fees on a broad scale (i.e., for many or most licensed/regulating programs, province-wide).

TABLE 3: PUBLIC FUNDING FOR WAGES AND FEES IN CANADIAN PROVINCES

Province	Direct public funding broadly available to support:	
	ECE wages (yes/no)	Parent fees (yes/no)
BC	Y — wage enhancement	Y — reduce, limit increases
Alberta	Y — wage enhancement	N
Saskatchewan	N	N
Manitoba	N — not directly, but supported by operating funding	Y — set fees
Ontario	Y — wage enhancement	N
Quebec	Y — wage grid	Y — set fees
New Brunswick	Y — wage enhancement	Y — limit maximum fees and increases
Nova Scotia	Y — wage floors	Y — limit increases
PEI	Y — wage grid	Y — set fees
Newfoundland & Labrador	Y — wage enhancement	Y — set fees in process

Alberta and Ontario fund ECE wage enhancements, but they do not have broad-based funding in place to reduce parent fees. Manitoba provides operating funding to enable capped parent fees, but has no specific requirements for ECE wages. Saskatchewan is alone in having no public funding tied to specific ECE wage or parent fee requirements.

Provinces have taken different approaches to addressing parent fees. British Columbia has reduced fees and limited future increases by requiring programs to seek approval from the province for fee increases. This has had mixed results: while in some BC cities fees decreased between 2017 and 2019, in others fees have stayed the same or even increased, particularly in cities with higher proportions of for-profit programs (Macdonald & Friendly 2019). Nova Scotia and New Brunswick limit parent fee increases, and New Brunswick has established maximum parent fees (New Brunswick 2018; Nova

Scotia 2019). Quebec, Manitoba, PEI and more recently Newfoundland and Labrador have capped¹² parent fees at various levels and provide operational funding to support programs to maintain these fees; Quebec, Manitoba, and PEI also consistently have the lowest parent fees in the country (Macdonald & Friendly 2019). However, only Quebec and PEI have broad-based ECE wage grids and capped parent fees, with operating funding to support both (Flanagan 2019).¹³

Some provinces have also implemented smaller-scale set-fee programs, such as Alberta's \$25/day Early Learning and Child Care Centres and BC's \$10/day Prototype Sites. In both examples, increased public funding is linked to expectations for quality and access that exceed baseline licensing requirements; however, they have not yet included requirements to set specific wages.

Taken together, the above analyses show that the two provinces with ECE wage grids and set parent fees are both the most affordable for parents and provide among the highest minimum ECE wages.

One essential aspect of system integration is linking funding for increasing ECE wages to funding that simultaneously caps and reduces parent fees. This linkage is particularly important because, historically, without public funding, the only way to increase ECE wages was by increasing parent fees.



12 Various terms are used to describe provincially established maximum parent fees such as capped, set, or standard.

13 Newfoundland & Labrador provides funding to child care programs to enable set parent fees, but this funding is separate from wage enhancements, which are paid directly to early childhood educators.

To support a high quality universal child care system, an ECE wage grid needs to be integrated with:

- Public funding to pay for increased wage costs (AECEO 2015; McDonell 2014; Whitty & Haché 2016);
- Standard or capped program fees, which guide programs in what to charge in order to meet wage requirements (McDonell 2014); and
- A human resource strategy that addresses not only compensation, but also working conditions, professional development, and educational upgrading (AECEO 2015; Cleveland 2018; Engel et al. 2015).

The importance of sustained political commitment and sufficient public funding cannot be overstated.

Recognition of staff qualifications and experience

In order to promote and retain a qualified workforce, effective wage grids reward qualified and experienced staff with increasing wages. Grids generally incorporate different levels for different qualifications as well as a minimum number of steps for years of service. Wages increase with each level and step.

The concept of higher pay for higher qualifications was broadly supported by informants, and in the literature, particularly given the evidence showing that educators with higher qualifications are better able to support stimulating, sensitive, and sustained interactions with young children.

Thus, levels in an ECE wage grid should reflect educational credentials. The increase in pay between levels should provide incentive and reward for ECEs to stay in their role and pursue additional training and education (AECEO 2015; Cleveland 2018; Engel et al. 2015; McDonell 2014). In PEI, Flanagan (2019) recommends four levels of qualification for ECEs:

1. Level 1 (ECE course work);
2. Level 2 (One-year post-secondary ECE certificate);
3. Level 3 (Two-year post-secondary ECE diploma); and
4. Level 4 (ECE bachelor degree and/or Level 3 plus a post-diploma certificate).

The first three levels are consistent with BC's existing ECE qualifications (ECEA = Level 1, ECE = Level 2, ECE+ = Level 3), and the fourth level is consistent with the \$10aDay Plan recommendation that a Bachelor of ECE degree¹⁴ becomes the educational standard over time. In the near term, the \$10aDay Plan recommends that a diploma (ECE+) becomes the minimum credential for educators (ECEBC & CCABC 2019). Both of these recommendations reflect the Plan's commitment to support increased education for the child care workforce, recognizing that licensing requirements in several other provinces require a higher number of educators with higher credentials than in BC, and international benchmarks are even higher (Bennett 2008; Friendly et al. 2018).

14 Or a bachelor's degree with an early years specialization from a closely related field (ECEBC & CCCABC 2019, p. 18).

The concept of higher pay for higher qualifications was broadly supported by informants, and in the literature, particularly given the evidence showing that educators with higher qualifications are better able to support stimulating, sensitive, and sustained interactions with young children.

Importantly, each level of qualification must also have a corresponding job description and scope of practice (Flanagan 2019). Some provinces have already created ECE job titles and descriptions linked to levels of qualification (Cleveland 2018).

Some informants suggested that all educators should be paid the same wage if they are doing the same work, regardless of their qualifications. This minority perspective particularly reflects current conditions: when it is not possible to recruit and retain qualified staff and where ECE education is not accessible, less qualified staff are more likely to be doing the same work as qualified staff. This reality led informants to suggest various solutions, including:

- Developing a standard educator wage, with a premium paid for additional qualifications;
- Conducting job evaluations and updating job descriptions to reflect actual variations in roles and responsibilities at different levels of qualifications; and
- Ensuring that advanced education is both accessible and affordable for educators.

Nonetheless, the majority of this project's informants recommended higher pay for higher credentials as a way for ECEs to see a career path for themselves in the child care sector. Reports on child care in Ontario similarly note that a wage scale would communicate potential career growth (AECEO 2017; Cleveland 2018).

Informants also confirmed broad support for wage grids to incorporate steps within each level, and most of the wage grids we reviewed included steps. Steps based on years of service can encourage ECEs to stay in their role (AECEO 2015; McDonell 2014). Informants consistently recommended limiting the number of steps to three to five because it generally doesn't take longer than three to five years to become fully competent in a role.

To be relevant in diverse settings, a provincial wage grid might also need to address special circumstances such as differences in the workforce, the population served, and cost of living across regions. One criticism of provincial wage grids in the education and health sectors is that they do not allow wages to be adjusted to respond to local needs or priorities (Buchan et al. 2014; Maharaj 2014).

In BC, recognition of exceptional recruitment and retention concerns in rural and remote communities was frequently mentioned by informants and noted in the literature (McDonell 2014). Some wage grids add premiums to wages as a result. Another suggestion was to improve access to education locally, so residents are supported to study and work as ECEs in their own communities. An Ontario report recommended provincial requirements for minimum ECE wages, accompanied by regional wage grids. A regional approach was recommended because of variations across the province in cost of living, type of child care available, and workforce characteristics (AECEO 2015). It's also consistent with the structure of child care in Ontario, where municipalities play a key role.

Setting and maintaining competitive wages

Competitive wages are essential in an ECE wage grid. This was highlighted repeatedly by informants and in the literature. Wages need to be competitive with other positions with similar education, experience, and responsibilities in order to attract workers (AECEO 2015; Cleveland 2018; Hay Group 2013; MCCA 2018).

In order to determine competitive and equitable wages, an effective ECE wage grid would:

- Benchmark wages against positions where the child care sector competes for staff, such as K-12 education;
- Set wages based on required qualifications, experience, and responsibilities to promote gender neutrality; and
- Index wage grids regularly and ensure job evaluations are current, so that wages remain competitive over time.

Informants recommended analyzing where ECEs leaving the child care sector are going and then, at a minimum, benchmarking ECE wages to the wages for those positions. Some informants recommended setting the wages higher than the competition, to ensure recruitment and retention success. If the wage grid is being implemented over time, informants recommended reaching the target wage relatively quickly. A recent PEI report recommends making their ECE wage grid competitive within five years (Flanagan 2019).

There are several potential benchmarks for educator wages, including wages for similar positions in other sectors (e.g., child and youth care workers, education assistants, licensed practical nurses) or wages for early childhood educators working for school boards, municipalities, colleges and universities, or as members of unions (since these ECEs tend to earn more and are less likely to leave their positions); other possibilities include a living wage or 60% of primary teacher pay (AECEO 2015; Atkinson Centre 2017; Cleveland 2018; McDonnell 2014; Saulnier & Frank 2019).

Across Canada, one benchmark to consider is the wages for comparable positions in the K-12 education system, as these positions are consistently identified as the main competition for ECEs. In BC, this suggests benchmarking to the median wage for education assistants and StrongStart facilitators of approximately \$26/hour as of April 1, 2020, and indexed annually thereafter.

Since the overwhelming majority of ECEs are women (Flanagan et al. 2013), it is particularly important that we do not perpetuate gender pay differences by benchmarking only against other female dominated professions. A common method to achieve gender pay equity is job evaluation. This entails assessing the skill, effort, responsibilities, and working conditions associated with different jobs, and basing compensation on these factors instead of on the job title or individual in the role (Ontario Nonprofit Network 2019). Thus, in order to promote gender equity, ECE jobs should be evaluated in a process that includes male-dominated positions in addition to investigating wage parity with similar professions that are also female-dominated.

Informants suggested that in determining ECE wages, we also consider existing or proposed pay equity commitments and a review of the literature on valuing the care economy. Further, the principle of equitable wages should apply to all staff and types of programs, regardless of size, location, culture, or language (Flanagan 2019).



Informants recommended analyzing where ECEs leaving the child care sector are going and then, at a minimum, benchmarking ECE wages to the wages for those positions. Some informants recommended setting the wages higher than the competition, to ensure recruitment and retention success.

Finally, it is imperative that the wage grid remains competitive over time. In addition to regularly evaluating job descriptions, the most effective way to ensure this is to build in annual indexing. This includes allowing for cost of living increases (Hay Group 2013; MCCA 2018; McDonell 2014) plus any other increments required to achieve the goals set out in the compensation philosophy.

Provincial ECE wage grid comparison

ECE wage grids are currently in use in three provinces: Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec. The wage grids in PEI and Quebec are set by the provincial government; they determine required wages for ECEs working in specified centres.¹⁵ Manitoba's grid is a guideline for market competitive ECE wages developed by the Manitoba Child Care Association. Table 4 summarizes the common elements of these grids.

All three grids have levels based on qualifications, with increased wages for higher qualifications. This is consistent with providing an incentive for child care staff to attain ECE credentials. Manitoba is unique in including a level for child care assistants who are currently pursuing an ECE classification.

¹⁵ In PEI, the wage grid is required for designated Early Years Centres, which are centres that comply with specified quality criteria and parent fees. In Quebec, the wage grid is required for non-profit child care centres, family child care, and subsidized daycare centres.

None of the grids have a level for ECEs with bachelor degrees¹⁶; however, adding this level has been recommended in Manitoba and PEI (Flanagan 2019; Flanagan & Beach 2016).

Wage steps based on years of experience in the Quebec and PEI grids provide a predictable path for ECE staff as well as predictable budgeting for operators. The steps in Manitoba's grid are more flexible based on length of service, job performance, or both, depending on the operator's policies.

The wages set in Quebec and Manitoba are based on job evaluations, where the education, skills, and abilities required for each position were analyzed and compared to other jobs (the method to set wages in PEI was not specified). This sets out specific roles for ECE staff based on their credentials.

Both Quebec and Manitoba include annual increases (although Manitoba's wage grid is not required or funded). This is in contrast to PEI, where there are no automatic annual increases or indexing. As a result, PEI's wage grid has actually fallen behind relative to minimum wage and in wages for other competitive professions such as education assistants in schools (Flanagan 2019).

TABLE 4: PROVINCIAL ECE WAGE GRID COMPARISON

Province	Number of levels and qualifications at each level	Increase between levels	Number of steps and criteria at each step	Increase between steps	Determination of wages and increases
Manitoba	FOUR LEVELS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 1: 40 hour course Level 2: 40 hour course + actively pursuing ECE qualification Level 3: Two year ECE diploma Level 4: Two year ECE diploma + specialization 	15-25%	FIVE STEPS: Length of service and/or performance as set out in each centre's policies	5-6%	Based on job evaluation and competitiveness with other jobs requiring similar training and responsibility; indexed annually
PEI	THREE LEVELS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 1: Three 30-hour ECE courses Level 2: One year ECE certificate Level 3: Two year ECE diploma 	11-16%	FIVE STEPS: One step for each year of experience	2-3%	None indicated
Quebec	TWO LEVELS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 1: No qualifications specified Level 2: Diploma in ECE/ recognized equivalent OR college or university certificate + three years experience 	13%	14 STEPS FOR LEVEL 1 AND 10 FOR LEVEL 2: One step for each year of experience	3%	Specified wages each year for five years reflecting annual salary increases, and adjustments for GDP and pay equity

¹⁶ PEI's grid has a level for Directors which requires completion of an ECE degree.

Wage grid implementation: Benefits and challenges

Implementing a wage grid has a number of benefits for staff, child care operators, and governments. Wage grids provide consistency, clarity, and predictability in what wages an educator can expect and what that will cost a program.

For staff, a competitive wage grid would (AECEO 2015; Buchan et al. 2014; MCCA 2018; McDonell 2014):

- Attract ECEs to the sector, and to pursue additional education;
- Create equitable ECE compensation across the sector;
- Provide clarity to ECEs about their salary growth; and
- Inspire ECEs with a vision of their career growth.

For child care operators, a wage grid would encourage ECEs to apply for and remain in their positions, supporting stability and quality of programs (AECEO 2015). Wage grids also help programs to budget, plan, and manage human resources (AECEO 2015; Maharaj 2014; MCCA 2018; McDonell 2014).

Governments benefit from the certainty provided by wage grids, as they prepare their annual operating budgets (Buchan et al. 2014). This is important because wages and benefits are typically the largest component of child care operating costs (Cleveland 2018). Competitive wage grids also advance governments' commitment to gender equality, and to expanding access to high quality child care. Research consistently demonstrates that increased access to high quality, affordable child care provides multiple benefits for children, families and the economy.

While wage grids provide many benefits, implementing a wage grid in BC will bring challenges, largely because of the fragmented nature of the sector. The licensed, centre-based child care sector in BC is comprised of thousands of individual organizations—large and small, non-profit and for-profit—along with some publicly delivered programs typically provided by universities, municipalities, and school boards. Some organizations provide child care services exclusively, while others provide a range of services in addition to child care.

There is little harmony in how wages are determined across these organizations. The majority of ECE wages are paid by parent fees, with some help from the current provincially funded wage enhancement. For much of the sector, wages are established by individual employers, in negotiation with the employee's union where applicable. While most ECEs are not members of a union, there are several unions representing groups of ECEs (Flanagan et al. 2013). Child care providers and ECEs can choose to join a range of organizations in BC, but none currently have the mandate, experience, and authority to implement a province-wide, publicly funded wage grid for all educators. In order to get to an effective wage grid, multiple stakeholders must work together and develop some consistency across child care providers.

Governments benefit from the certainty provided by wage grids, as they prepare their annual operating budgets. This is important because wages and benefits are typically the largest component of child care operating costs. Competitive wage grids also advance governments' commitment to gender equality, and to expanding access to high quality child care.

Each level of the wage grid needs to be defined, with associated qualifications, job descriptions, and scopes of practice. These will likely be complex to standardize. Equivalency between different types of experience or education will need to be addressed. For example, how will we include staff with cultural expertise, which is so important in Indigenous programs, but without an ECE certificate? Will staff who have a lot of experience, but no ECE qualifications, be grandparented into the wage grid? (Cleveland 2018; McDonell 2014). Finally, the Canada Free Trade Agreement (formerly the Agreement on Internal Trade) requires certification from other provinces to be recognized, even if those credentials would not be recognized in BC (Flanagan 2019).

In order to integrate child care staff into the appropriate level of the wage grid, human resource practices need to be strengthened across the sector. Defining job roles and responsibilities, related qualifications, and relevant experience is not carried out consistently today. Positions are not regularly evaluated using a standardized approach in the sector. Across Canada, it has been found that only about 70% of child care staff have written job descriptions (Flanagan et al. 2013). Employers will require resources and support in order to develop consistent human resource practices.

Finally, wage grid implementation needs to be seen as equitable for both educators and providers. While prompt implementation is essential, everyone involved will have to understand that this won't happen overnight. To gain staff support across programs, ECEs will need to see their education and experience reflected in a fair wage grid that provides prompt benefits.

Government can anticipate and address some of these challenges by developing an ECE wage grid implementation plan that:

- Highlights the benefits of a wage grid for ECEs, child care providers, and governments;
- Shares project goals and timelines;
- Manages multiple stakeholders and interests;
- Strengthens human resource practices across the sector; and
- Addresses potential perceived inequities during implementation.

A comprehensive, clear communication plan is essential. Educators and child care providers must be well-informed and engaged in solution-finding regarding the implementation process and challenges. Communicating the goals and timelines to the sector is also important, so that stakeholders can see how and when they will benefit from the introduction of a wage grid.

Moving to a province-wide ECE wage grid is a key component of the system change required to achieve universal child care in BC. And, as the broadly supported \$10aDay Child Care Plan notes:

Change is never easy — perhaps least of all for [those] who have faced years of instability, low wages, and broken promises. Yet, in Year 1 of implementing the new system, the child care sector came on board with 90 per cent of eligible providers voluntarily applying to opt in to the new Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative. This demonstrates an openness to learn and a generosity of spirit: all values at the core of quality early care and learning programs. We are confident that with these values early childhood educators will continue to help change the world for children, their families and the workforce as the new system evolves. (ECEBC & CCCABC 2019, p. 5)

Developing an ECE wage grid for BC

OUR ANALYSIS of Canadian research, ECE wage policy, and the input of our key informants demonstrates there is broad support for ECE wage grids, as well as specific characteristics required for these wage grids to be effective. Thus, we recommend that the BC government develop and implement a province-wide, publicly funded, competitive ECE wage grid, confirming the same recommendation of the \$10aDay Child Care Plan.

Specifically, developing an ECE wage grid for BC will entail:

- Establishing a compensation philosophy;
- Designing a competitive wage grid with levels for each ECE qualification; and
- Implementing with a system-building approach.

To develop wage grid recommendations for our province, it is important to consider examples from BC's workforce. We researched several established wage grids that apply to some ECEs in BC, as well as grids for comparable positions in related sectors. The wage grids and positions we analyzed are set out in Table 5.

TABLE 5: SAMPLE WAGE GRIDS THAT APPLY TO SOME ECES IN BC

Sector	Wage grid under collective agreement between	Comparator positions
Community social services	Community Social Services Employers' Association of BC (CSSEA) and Community Social Services Bargaining Association (CSSBA), General Services (CSSEA 2018)	ECEA and ECE/ECE+
Health	Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC) and Community Health Bargaining Association (HEABC & CBA 2019)	Supported Child Care Worker (equivalent to ECEA)
	HEABC and Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association (HSABC n.d.)	ECE and ECE+
Education (K-12)	BC Public Schools Employers' Association (BCPSEA), individual school districts and various unions (majority are locals of Canadian Union of Public Employees) (BCPSEA 2014-2019)	StrongStart Facilitator (ECEs) and Education Assistant

Action on wages in BC Indigenous communities: Examples to learn from

In BC, two recent funding initiatives for child care in indigenous communities are taking action on ECE wages:

- Growing **Aboriginal Head Start** (AHS) in BC is funding new AHS licensed child care spaces in urban areas¹⁷ (AHSABC 2018). The funding will go toward programs that are “offered to families at no cost, support children with extra support needs, and commit to providing a respectful working wage for the Early Childhood profession.” Similar to the \$10aDay Plan wage recommendations, the new AHS child care programs commit to paying ECEs at least \$25/hour.
- The **First Nations Wage Enhancement** (FNWE), through the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Initiative, is increasing wages for ECEs in First Nations and other Indigenous communities (BCACCS 2019 & 2020). Administered by BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, it is part of a broader plan to increase capacity of the sector, quality of services, and access for families. FNWE brings the wages of certified ECEs in line with benchmarks based on the median wages of educators in First Nations. Four benchmarks (or levels) have been established: ECEA, ECE, ECE+ and Manager.

These initiatives demonstrate key aspects required in an ECE wage grid. They provide increased, fair wages and are publicly funded (through the federal government). In the case of FNWE, the wage increase is applied across the sector and is differentiated based on qualifications. And both funding streams are integrated with funding to improve access and quality, without impacting parent fees.

The experience gained from these initiatives can inform the implementation of BC’s provincial ECE wage grid.

Aboriginal Head Start funding will go toward programs that are “offered to families at no cost, support children with extra support needs, and commit to providing a respectful working wage for the Early Childhood profession.”



17 AHSABC notes that “this is an urban or OFF-reserve initiative; however, First Nations Health Authority will also be expanding their AHS On Reserve (AHSOR) programs.”

Community social services is the sector traditionally considered the ‘home’ for licensed child care. Its wage grid includes ECEA and ECE/ECE+ positions.¹⁸ The two health sector wage grids include ECEA, ECE, and ECE+ positions. The education wage grids include ECEs who work as StrongStart facilitators, as well as education assistants. The latter typically require a one-year college certificate, which is comparable to ECEs in BC. Based on the information gathered through this project, we summarized the wage grids for each of these positions in Table 6 and prepared a preliminary assessment of their alignment with our definition of ECEA, ECE and ECE+.

The positions in the health and education wage grids are publicly funded. In the community social services wage grid, ECE positions are often not publicly funded. Child care programs covered by the community social service agreement are challenged to pay for wage increases while trying to limit parent fees (as is the case across the child care sector).

TABLE 6: BC PROVINCIAL WAGE GRID COMPARATORS, TO INFORM BENCHMARK ECE WAGE RECOMMENDATIONS

Sector, position, and wage grid level	Wage range and number of steps, April 2020 ^a		
	ECEA	ECE	ECE+
Community social services			
ECEA (Level 6) & ECE/ECE+ (Level 10)	\$18.22–\$21.22	\$20.52–\$23.90	
Steps	4 steps		
Community health			
Supported Child Care Worker, Level 20	\$22.39–\$24.47		
Steps	4 steps		
Health sciences professionals			
ECE, 85% of Level 2. ECE+, 95% of Level 2		\$21.32–\$26.59	\$23.83–\$29.72
Steps		6 steps	
Education			
Estimated average and median across school districts. Varying job descriptions and qualifications.			
Education assistants		\$26.00	
StrongStart facilitators		\$26.00	
Steps		1 step	
^a All wage rates are published or calculated as of April 1, 2020.			

We recommend that the ECE wage grid builds from these existing grids. While they apply to only a portion of the ECE workforce, they are grounded in structures and policies that could be applied to the entire sector:

- They were developed with multiple stakeholders (including government, employers, and employees);
- They are generally supported by long-term public funding and policy commitments approved by successive BC governments; and

¹⁸ We assume that the early childhood educator position (level 10) applies to both ECEs and ECE+s. The early childhood educator, senior position is not included in this analysis, as it includes supervisory responsibilities.

- They reflect the characteristics of effective ECE wage grids, or are actively working toward achieving those characteristics (i.e., they are regularly indexed, based on gender-neutral job evaluations, increasing recognition of qualifications and experience, and are being updated to address inequities across sectors).

With this groundwork in place, BC is well-positioned to expand to include all ECEs working in licensed child care.

Compensation philosophy for BC ECEs

We have already outlined some elements of a compensation philosophy for ECEs in BC, focusing on recruiting and retaining a well-qualified ECE workforce in order to achieve high-quality universal child care. Compensation policies in the provincial social services and community health sectors can also inform an ECE compensation philosophy.

Child care clearly has existing, chronic labour market challenges that are making it difficult for employers — and government — to meet service delivery commitments. Therefore we recommend that BC’s compensation philosophy for ECEs includes a similar mandate to target funds for wages to drive service improvements in licensed child care.

Under the provincial wage grids presented above, the provincial government has committed to general wage increases of 2% per year for three years (2019-2021). In addition, the public sector compensation mandate includes (emphasis added) “... funding that can be used to drive **tangible service improvements** for British Columbians. An example would be **targeted funds to address existing, chronic labour market challenges where employers need to meet service delivery commitments...**” (British Columbia 2019). With these targeted funds, the province is currently raising wages of community social services staff to achieve equity with the health sector¹⁹; however, many ECEs have been excluded from this funding because they are not in publicly funded positions.

Child care clearly has existing, chronic labour market challenges that are making it difficult for employers — and government — to meet service delivery commitments. Therefore we recommend that BC’s compensation philosophy for ECEs includes a similar mandate to target funds for wages to drive service improvements in licensed child care. This funding will need to be applied quickly in order to realize the government’s commitment to achieving universal child care by 2028.

¹⁹ The additional funding is part of longstanding work to achieve pay equity between community social services and community health. In 1999 mediator Don Munroe recommended a job evaluation process to achieve: “1. Wage parity with Community Health Workers; 2. Standardization of wages in the Social Services Sector; and 3. Elimination of gender-based wage discrimination. Recognizing that wage inequities currently exist within the Social Services Sector and that parties are committed to implementing equity changes as quickly as possible to eliminate the inequities ...” (CSSEA 2018, p. 78). Low wage redress funding was provided through subsequent collective agreements, and wage parity is expected to be achieved in 2021 (CSSEA 2019, p. 9).

Given the strong support for encouraging increased qualifications, we recommend three wage grid levels corresponding with the current qualifications for child care workers in BC: ECEA, ECE, and ECE+.

Wage grid levels and step 1 wages

Given the strong support for encouraging increased qualifications, we recommend three wage grid levels corresponding with the current qualifications for educators in BC: ECEA, ECE, and ECE+. Distinct job descriptions and scopes of practice will have to be developed for each. Once these are in place, it will be important to add a fourth wage grid level for the Bachelor of ECE (or equivalent).

We recommend setting wages that will attract ECEs to the field. We also know that job evaluations of the positions at each level will be important to achieve consistency, gender neutrality and pay equity. Since job evaluations are either underway or regularly conducted for positions in the wage grids in Table 6, the wages set in these grids are a good benchmark to determine competitive wages.

As in other provinces, ECEs in BC leave the child care sector to take positions in the K-12 education sector. It is imperative that an ECE wage is competitive with comparable positions such as StrongStart facilitators and education assistants, which have an average/median wage of \$26/hour. StrongStart facilitator positions are staffed by qualified ECEs, and a certificate is a typical requirement for education assistants.

1. We recommend a step 1 wage of \$26/hour (in 2020\$) for ECEs working in licensed child care.

This wage is competitive with comparable positions in the K-12 education sector and is 30% higher than the current median ECE wage of approximately \$20/hour. It also establishes a new minimum ECE wage for BC at 83% of the average BC wage for all employees.

The wages currently paid in the community social service sector and health sector are not adequate as benchmarks. The starting wages in the community social services sector are relatively high compared to the provincial minimum ECE wage (Table 2, p. 22), but they are not yet competitive. In the community health sector, the top wage for the supported child care worker is \$24.47/hour, and at this point it does not require an ECE or comparable certificate.

For the classification ECE+, the step 1 wage must be sufficiently higher than that of ECE in order to encourage ECEs to upgrade their credentials and to ensure that ECE+ positions can be filled in infant/toddler programs, as required by licensing regulation. The current wage range for the ECE+ position in the Health Sciences Professionals grid is \$23.83-\$29.72/hour, and is projected to increase in the near term. Another provincially funded position with comparable qualifications are licensed practical nurses, who earn \$28.15-\$32.02/hour under the current HEABC/Nurses Bargaining Association agreement (BCNU 2019).

2. We recommend a step 1 wage of \$29/hour (in 2020\$) for ECE+’s working in licensed child care.

This wage falls within the existing wage ranges for licensed practical nurses and ECE+’s in the Health Sciences Professionals agreement. It is 12% higher than the step 1 ECE wage, providing incentive for ECEs to increase their qualifications. This wage establishes a minimum ECE+ wage at 92% of the average for all employees.

For the classification ECEA, the step 1 wage must support the livelihood of individuals working in the position. At the same time, given the importance and urgency of recruiting qualified ECEs, the wage difference between ECEA and ECE levels must be an incentive for ECEAs to become certified (and must be coupled with accessible, affordable ECE education).

3. We recommend a step 1 wage of \$20/hour (in 2020\$) for ECEAs working in licensed child care, along with expanding access to affordable ECE education.

This wage is approximately equal to the living wage in BC’s most populous areas, and is higher than the starting rate in the community social services grid (\$18.22/hour, and projected to increase as part of the targeted funding for community social services). With this benchmark, an ECEA who becomes certified as an ECE will gain a 30% increase in their hourly wage, placing the new minimum ECEA wage at 64% of the average for all employees.

Going forward, the wages at each level should be assessed against the goals outlined in the compensation philosophy (e.g., Are they competitive with other sectors? Are they encouraging increased qualifications?) and regular job evaluations, and be adjusted as needed.

Governance for systemic change

A system-building — or systemic — approach to implementing an ECE wage grid is essential to achieving a universal system. Yet, the current method of provincial child care funding maintains fragmentation in the sector as it continues — and in fact expands — the provincial governments’ historical one-off approach. Individual organizations are required to submit separate applications for fee reductions, new spaces, and ECE wage enhancements, which governments then must adjudicate, fund, and monitor. This approach is not consistent with the evidence regarding effective universal child care systems. It is administratively burdensome and reinforces existing inequities in access, quality, and affordability.

On the other hand, the selected wage grids we reviewed incorporate system-building elements. They were developed with input from multiple stakeholders including government, employers, and employees. The three employers’ associations (CSSEA, HEABC, BCPSEA) represent a range of employers in their sectors and have governance models in place to facilitate input from members. The employers’ associations also have direct links to government through, for example, representation on their boards. The employees are represented by unions with democratic governance structures, and multiple unions work together as bargaining associations. These consensus-based systems have largely been in place for over 20 years, through successive governments, with ongoing public funding.

To date, the licensed child care sector has had limited access to these systems. The K-12 public education sector wage grids include only a small proportion of the province’s ECEs, comprising approximately 300 ECEs who are StrongStart facilitators (Government of BC n.d.B) plus ECEs staffing

a small but likely growing number of child care pilot programs and demonstration projects. Historically, child care has been most closely aligned with community social services. But the eligibility criteria for full membership in CSSEA excludes much of the child care sector.

Still, there is potential for these systems to support the child care sector to implement the ECE wage grid. The K-12 public education sector is naturally aligned with and increasingly involved in child care, which will be further enabled with the passage of new legislation permitting school districts to operate school-age child care programs. There is strong community support for moving child care into this sector over time. The existing infrastructure provides a foundation for expansion of licensed child care in K-12 public education. Similarly, the community social services sector is well positioned to support existing child care providers in the short term with, for example, expansion of CSSEA's membership criteria.

Thus, to ensure the wage grid is implemented with a systemic approach, we recommend that government promptly establish a task force, and authorize it with the mandate and funding to develop and oversee the implementation of the ECE wage grid. The task force should include, but not be limited to, senior representatives from government as well as the employer and employee groups representing the education, health, and social services sectors.

A note about unionization

The ECE wage grids we examined in this project include both unionized and non-unionized educators.

Still, as we grapple with the ECE staff shortage and ECE wages that have stagnated or declined in BC in recent years, we note there are multiple studies showing that unionized educators earn higher wages and have more benefits than their non-union counterparts. In the most recent studies, the wage differential nationally was 30% and in Vancouver, approximately 10% (Flanagan et al. 2013; Forer 2018).

The labour movement in Canada has a long history of supporting advocacy for social programs like child care.²⁰ They know that unionization, on its own, does not solve the problem of low ECE wages. Without adequate public funding, higher wages lead to higher parent fees, and that's unfair to both educators and parents.

²⁰ The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC has received funding from labour groups to support child care research, education, and advocacy activities.

We recommend that the provincial government work with the ECE task force to:

1. **Fund and implement all three step 1 wages promptly**, as part of an overall system-building strategy that includes public funding to cap and reduce parent fees. The step 1 wages are as follows:
 - ECEA: \$20/hour;
 - ECE: \$26/hour; and
 - ECE+: \$29/hour.

Participation of licensed child care providers in the ECE wage grid is voluntary, but no new child care funding will be available to those who do not participate.

Licensed child care providers who participate in implementing the ECE wage grid will be accountable for using new public funding to raise ECE wages, lower parent fees, welcome all children, and offer programs that are consistent with recognized early learning frameworks.²¹

2. **Fully implement a publicly funded, equitable ECE wage grid within five years.** The wage grid will include four levels, starting with the step 1 wages of \$20/hour for ECEAs, \$26/hour for ECEs, and \$29/hour for ECE+s, followed by establishing wages for the fourth level (bachelor degree). The grid will include additional steps for each level except for ECEA, to encourage assistants to obtain their one-year ECE certificate promptly. The step 1 wages are shown in 2020 dollars, and the grid will be indexed annually. It must also be evaluated against benchmark wages of comparable positions every few years to ensure it continues to attract ECEs to the field. The grid will also be subject to regular review using a gender-neutral job evaluation process that recognizes and values the important work of educators, and their credentials.

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
ECE bachelor degree	TBD		
ECE+ (diploma)	\$29.00		
ECE (certificate)	\$26.00		
ECE assistant	\$20.00		

21 Consistent with the accountability requirements in the \$10aDay Child Care Plan, p. 14.

3. **Resolve barriers to system-building.** While a full costing of our recommendations is beyond the scope of this project, preliminary estimates confirm that they represent a substantial public investment. A simple extrapolation of MCFD's publicly reported cost of the current wage enhancement makes that clear — even though it moved only median, not minimum, ECE wages from \$18/hour to approximately \$20/hour. In addition, our literature review and key informant interviews emphasized the importance of a system-building public policy and funding framework that integrates higher ECE wages and lower parent fees.

Given the financial significance and the importance of ensuring accountability for these public funds, barriers that may prevent systemic action must be resolved in order to successfully implement the ECE wage grid recommendations. One significant potential barrier is facility ownership and the related costs charged to child care programs.

Facility costs vary widely in child care operating budgets, often depending on whether the program is covering mortgage costs or generating rental revenue for the facility owner. As BC moves toward a publicly funded system, government can (and should) manage ECE wages and parent fees, but government's ability to manage facility costs can be challenging when the facilities are privately owned rather than publicly owned.

In publicly owned facilities like schools, for example, government can mandate that child care programs are charged, at most, only for facility operating costs (such as janitorial expenses). This is currently the case in some school districts. With this policy in place province-wide, it is relatively straightforward to move these child care programs into the new system as the majority of public funds can be allocated to raising educator wages and lowering parent fees.

However, in child care facilities owned by individuals or companies, typically the child care program operating budget covers the full mortgage or rental cost of the facility over time. Thus, in order to increase ECE wages and reduce parent fees to the same levels as other programs, additional public funding is required to cover the capital costs of the facilities. That means BC taxpayers would be contributing to the purchase of privately owned facilities. In fact, they already do, as the provincial government (unique in Canada) provides capital grants to for-profit child care organizations to build, expand, or purchase new, privately owned facilities. Before more public funds are provided to programs in privately owned facilities, the implications of taxpayer dollars supporting the acquisition of private assets must be addressed.

The BC government is currently funding more than 50 \$10/day prototype sites across BC. These sites provide examples of various operating models, including those described above. A detailed evaluation of the prototype sites is underway, and will hopefully inform the resolution to the issue of facility ownership, and others associated with our fragmented sector.

Conclusion

Fair wages are an important part of an accessible, high quality child care system. In BC and across Canada, inadequate wages have led to the challenge we now face recruiting and retaining qualified ECEs. In our fragmented child care sector, wage enhancements maintain inequitable wages across regions and centres and do not address unaffordable parent fees. We need a different approach.

A competitive, publicly funded provincial wage grid would not only raise wages, but do so systematically. A wage grid can provide consistency, fair wages, and recognition of the essential and valuable work of ECEs. Creating a provincial ECE wage grid should be part of a broader effort to build a child care system — one that ensures high quality, universal accessibility, and affordability.

We have strong foundations in place to help us build this ECE wage grid in BC. Existing wage grids offer models and policies we can build on to include all educators. And our recommended wages provide an immediate next step since higher wages are needed now. Our ECEs and the families and children they serve cannot wait.

APPENDIX I

List of key informants, reviewers and other contributors

Many thanks to:

Key Informants

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- **Debbie Nagle** HR Consultant
- **Kevin Reimer** BC Principals and Vice Principals Association
- **Derek Wong** Health Sciences Association

Those providing additional information:

- **Kirsten Bevelander** BC Aboriginal Child Care Society
- **Elizabeth Blackwood and Anusha Balram** CUPE
- **Lucie Champagne** AQCPE
- **Andrea Duncan** BCGEU
- **Barry Forer** Human Early Learning Partnership, UBC
- **Don Giesbrecht** Canadian Child Care Federation
- **Diane Lutes** Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Government of New Brunswick

Reviewers:

- **Jane Beach, Rita Chudnovsky, Martha Friendly, Emily Gawlick, Charlene Gray, Sharon Gregson, Violet Jessen, Amy Juschka, Christopher Smith, Mab Oloman, Carol Ann Young.**

Key informant interview guide

Wage Grid Definition

A wage grid is simply defined as a system that determines how much an employee is paid, based on one or more factors such as level of education and years of service. Wage grids are often published in two dimensional tables, with rows for one factor and columns for another. Specific wage rates are shown for each cell (intersection of an individual row and column).

General

1. Can you start off telling me what your experience has been with wage grids?
2. Where and how have wage grids been used to try to help advance appropriate remuneration?
3. The goal of building a wage grid is to achieve an appropriately remunerated ECE workforce across the province. What factors do we need to consider to achieve this goal (union negotiations, geographic differences)?
4. What successes have been achieved and what barriers have arisen?
5. *For child care people only*
 - » How do you currently set wages for ECE staff?
 - » Do you have a policy or internal wage grid? Could you please share it?

Development of Wage Grid

6. As we start to think about developing a provincial wage grid, what factors should we take into consideration:
 - » qualifications,
 - » years of service,
 - » performance
 - » experience
 - » anything else?
7. In developing a wage grid, we want to recommend a wage range for each position or certification. Do you have any recommendations on how we should establish the:
 - » range minimum?
 - » range maximum?
 - » the % spread be between the minimum and maximum?
8. Are there any other types of wage grids that we should consider?

9. To encourage and reward people to obtain higher ECE certification, what is recommended for the differences in pay between certifications?
10. Are there any sub-groups or circumstances that warrant special consideration, such as staff in rural and remote settings?
11. What are the relevant comparatives that should be considered in building the 'goal' ECE wage grid (e.g., other jurisdictions, sectors, positions)?
12. How can we ensure that we are not only benchmarking against other "female" dominated professions so that we are not perpetuating the gender pay differences?
13. How do we maintain the wage grid, to ensure that it stays current with the external market and inflation?

Implementation of the Wage Grid

14. How, specifically, has improved remuneration been phased in using wage grids? What is the most important starting place?
15. Currently, there are significant differences between different organizations' wage rates — what recommendations do you have to bring everyone to a universal wage grid?
16. Given the significant (assumed) difference between current and goal wage rates, it will take time and substantial public funding to close the gap. What is a reasonable implementation period?
17. What success measures best support continuous program evaluation throughout implementation?
18. How do we allow for changes in the external context, that may affect the wage goals, as implementation proceeds?
19. Are there other, more effective vehicles for supporting a phased-in, systematic approach to achieving the ECE wage goals? If so, what are those options and why they are more effective?
20. In the event that we cannot get support for a wholesale provincial wage grid, where should we prioritize our implementation efforts (e.g., establishing a standardized minimum pay for each certification)?

Closing

21. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
22. Would you recommend anyone else for us to talk to regarding a provincial wage grid?
23. Do you have any additional resources that you can recommend to us?

Summary of educator position titles by credentials in Canadian provinces

To support comparison and analysis of ECE wage policy across provinces, we identified the educator position titles used in each province, and categorized them to align as closely as possible with the qualifications specified for BC's three existing credentials: ECEA, ECE, and ECE+. This is summarized in the table below.

While credentials vary across provinces, generally we observed four categories of credentials, listed below using BC position titles where applicable:

1. **ECE Assistant** — ranging from a short orientation course to up to three relevant post-secondary courses;
2. **ECE** — one-year college certificate;
3. **ECE+** — two-year college diploma; and
4. Some provinces have an additional category that recognizes education beyond the two-year diploma, up to and including a bachelor's degree.

We did not include the fourth category in our analysis because it is not yet widely used by most provinces. Also, this category often relates to the qualifications for the program manager, and this position is not included in our project analysis.

EDUCATOR POSITION TITLES BY CREDENTIALS IN CANADIAN PROVINCES

Province	ECEA	ECE	ECE+
	Ranges from orientation to three post-secondary courses	One year college certificate	Minimum of two-year college diploma
BC	Early Childhood Educator Assistant	Early Childhood Educator	Early Childhood Educator, Special Needs Educator/ Infant and Toddler Educator
Alberta	Child Development Assistant/Level 1	Child Development Worker/ Level 2	Child Development Supervisor/ Level 3
Saskatchewan	ECE Level I	ECE Level II	ECE Level III
Manitoba	Child Care Assistant	n/a	ECE II
Ontario	n/a	n/a	Registered ECE
Quebec	n/a	n/a	ECE
New Brunswick	n/a	ECE	n/a
Nova Scotia	Entry	Level 1	Level 2
PEI	ECE Level 1	ECE Level 2	ECE Level 3
Nfld & Lab	Trainee Certification	Level 1	Level 2 or 3

We compiled this information from several sources, beginning with the Certification Equivalency tables published by several provinces in relation to the Federal Provincial Agreement on Internal Trade. While these publications are helpful in that they list educator titles and categorize them by credentials, some provinces are not included in these documents. Further, in several cases the educator credentials were not categorized consistently by the provinces. We cross-checked this information by referring to various national reports and relevant sections of provincial government web sites (Friendly et al. 2018; National Network on ELCC Human Resources Innovation and Decent Work 2020).

We note that these are summarized credentials. Many provinces also allow for consideration of equivalent credentials.

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