



THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

Registered Early Childhood Educator Workforce

POSITION PAPER

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Prepared by:

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board

Prepared for:

Hon. Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education

Brief

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) requests that the Minister of Education create a long-term, enhanced workforce funding program and immediately increase the wage floor to \$30 an hour to attract and retain more people for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce.

Summary

TBDSSAB appreciates the recently announced wage floor increase to \$23.86 per hour by 2026, however, maintains that more is needed to attract and retain a qualified workforce as the revised wage floor still does not align with other professions with the same educational and regulatory requirements in Ontario. Workforce funding incentives are assisting with increased enrollment but need increased ongoing funding in order to bolster skills development and sustain child care system expansion.

Background

As part of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) agreement, the Ontario Government has committed to the addition of 86,000 new licensed child care spaces and \$10 per day child care fees. There has also been a commitment to increase the wage of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE) by \$1 per year, starting at a wage floor of \$18 per hour in 2022. This wage floor will rise \$1 per hour each year to a cap of \$25 by 2026. On November 16, the province committed to raising RECE wages to \$23.86 for 2024, with an additional dollar per year to \$25.86 per hour in 2026. TBDSSAB thanks Minister Lecce for this increase and appreciates the impacts it will have for RECEs currently in the field.

The largest impediment to meeting the expansion goals for licensed child care spaces is the lack of a qualified workforce. TBDSSAB estimates an additional 130 RECEs are needed to fill the current licensed capacity in the District of Thunder Bay. The announcement of the wage floor beginning at \$18 per hour for 2022 further discouraged people from entering the RECE field and the low wages are detrimental to retention of this important workforce. According to preliminary findings from the Knowing Our Numbers Early Childhood Workforce study, only 37% of survey participants are sure they will stay in the field for the next 5 years.¹ Even with the increases into 2026, TBDSSAB maintains that the wage floors are too low for such an important profession.

In order to attract and retain qualified educators to the child care and early years system and promote the profession of RECE as an essential service, wages and funding must be immediately increased, as the current wage floor is lower than a living wage in many areas of Ontario, and not comparable to other regulated professions with similar educational requirements.

According to the Ontario Living Wage Network, “a living wage is the hourly wage a worker needs to earn to cover their basic expenses and participate in their community.”² The calculations use community specific data to determine the actual costs of living in the community. The living wage in Thunder Bay for 2023 is calculated at \$19.80 per hour. The 2023 RECE wage floor is \$0.80 per hour lower than the living wage, causing an annual difference of \$1,664 in income for 40 hours per week. In the Greater Toronto area, the living wage is \$25.05 per hour, leaving those RECEs at the wage floor earning \$14,269 less annually than a living wage.³ With the boost to \$23.86 in 2024, ECEs in Toronto will still be earning less than a living wage for their area.

Local schoolboards have a median ECE wage of \$25.78 per hour,⁴ while TBDSSAB CWELCC child care programs have a median wage of \$22.66 per hour.⁵

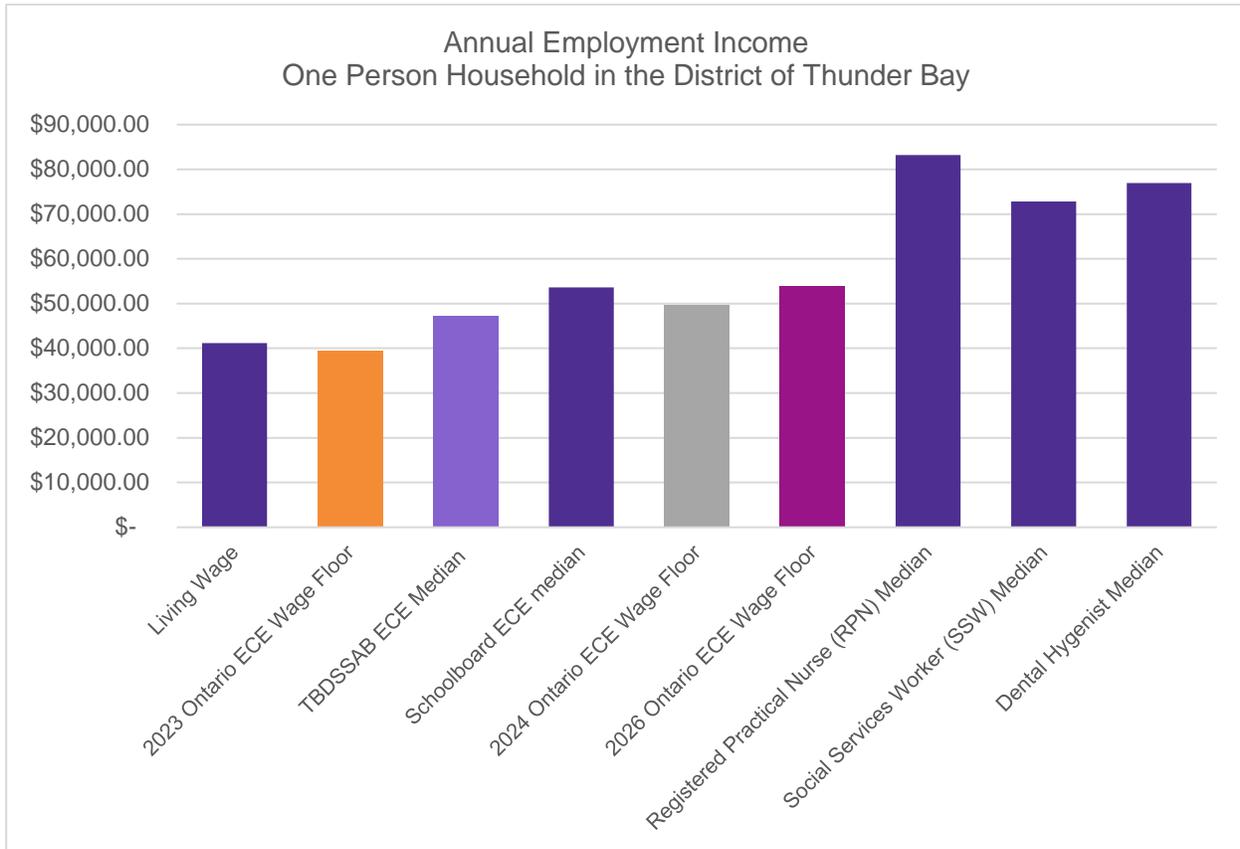
¹ Knowing Our Numbers. “Preliminary Findings: Workforce.” October 2023.

² Coleman, Anne. “Calculating Ontario’s Living Wages: November 2023.” Ontario Living Wage Network. November 2023. <https://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/rates>

³ Ibid.

⁴ From local collective agreements available on the Collective Agreements e-Library <https://www.lr.labour.gov.on.ca/en-CA/Collective-Agreements/>

⁵ Not-for-profit and for-profit child care centres; excludes municipal run centres.



Registered Practical Nurses (RPN), Dental Hygienists, and Social Service Workers (SSW) all have similar educational requirements and mandatory registration with a professional regulatory body as RECEs, and it is assumed wages would be comparable across these professions. RPNs have the highest median wage in the District of Thunder Bay, at \$40 per hour, while Dental Hygienists are at \$37 per hour, and SSWs at \$35 per hour.⁶ The lowest advertised job posting for an RPN was at \$30 per hour. A RECE earning the current wage floor will make \$43,680 less annually than an RPN making median wage, and \$22,880 less than an RPN making \$30 per hour. Even with the increase to \$23.86 in 2024, an RECE will make \$12,771 less than an RPN making \$30 per hour.

To align RECE wages with professions with similar responsibility, education, and regulatory body requirements, TBDSSAB recommends the Ministry of Education

⁶ Indeed job listings for each profession in Thunder Bay. November 2023.

increase the wage floor for RECEs to \$30 per hour. This will work to legitimize the profession and compensate for their status as an essential service.

In Ontario, it has been estimated that for every \$1 spent on early learning programs, the return is \$2.42.⁷ The impact on the economy was illustrated with the introduction of low-cost child care in Quebec led to a 7% increase in the employment rate of women with children in 2015. Not only did the program increase jobs in child care, but also in all other sectors. This increase in hours worked led to an extra \$2.8 billion injected into the economy.⁸

TBDSSAB has seen some success in supporting new students to enter the local ECE program at Confederation College by offering 102 bursaries and partnering to start a new Fast-Track Early Childhood Education Diploma program to offer free upgrading to people working in the field through the one-time 2022 Child Care and Early Years Workforce Funding. The Fast-Track program enrolled 12 people in the fall 2023 semester. Enrollment in the College ECE program has increased 27.7% in the 2023/2024 school year. More incentives focused on skills development for new and current RECEs are required to allow for continued growth of the early years workforce to accommodate more child care spaces. This work requires increased, consistent funding to support recruitment and retention for the RECE workforce, with advanced notice for Service Managers to facilitate planning and preparation of initiatives.

An immediate increase in wages coupled with long-term, enhanced funding for workforce retention and recruitment will help grow a sustainable and affordable child care system in Ontario.

Therefore, TBDSSAB requests that the Minister create a long-term, enhanced workforce funding program and immediately increase the wage floor to \$30 an hour to attract and retain more people for the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce.

⁷ Fairholm, R. Economic Impacts of Early Learning and Care. Early Education Economic Forum, Atkinson Centre, OISE/University of Toronto . June 22, 2011. Toronto, Ontario: The Centre for Spatial Economics.

http://mwmccain.ca/media/cms_page_media/2014/3/7/EarlyLearningEconomicForum_Fairholm.pdf

⁸ Gu, Wulong. "The value of unpaid childcare and paid employment by gender: What are the impacts of the low-fee universal childcare program?" Statistics Canada. July 27, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202200700003-eng>