

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SUPPORTING THE WOMEN WHO WORK IN EARLY CHILDHOOD



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International Women's Day gives us a moment of reflection on the status of women recognizing that achieving decent work conditions and gender equality in the workplace remain a challenge. The United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace declared on March 8th – this year's theme is Invest in women: Accelerate progress. Early Learning and Child Care will see further progress if we invest more in the educators.

On this International Women's Day, we turn our lens to the [working conditions](#) of educators in early learning and child care recognizing that educators still earn less than the provincial average with extremely low rates of unionization. Progress is being made in the working conditions with the introduction of publicly funded [pension plans](#) in some early learning programs. The addition of over 80,000 new spaces under Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements (CWELCC) has created \$ 10.00 per day affordable spaces for families. With a central focus on affordability and expansion of access, CWELCC has largely ignored the growing workforce crisis. With cursory attention to the working conditions of educators in some jurisdictions, many increases in licensed spaces are not operational due staff shortages.

Economist Beth Dhuey shared her analysis of workforce shortages across Canada, expecting it to worsen as more families seek programs for their young children as spaces become more affordable. We need more active participation across the labour market and the recognition that child care is an economic stimulus. With limited political will to expand resources to address educator shortages, Canada's goal of expanding child care by 250,000 spaces by 2026 is not attainable.

Growing the early learning and child care sector requires a multi-pronged approach including expanding public understanding of the value and benefits of early education. Significant benefits to children and families are seen when early learning and child care are part of the public education system ensuring a continuum of learning and access within neighbourhoods. Schools also offer strong governance, staff enjoy the benefits of unionization and political accountability. Similarly, early learning and child care offered directly by municipalities in Ontario and the post-secondary sector across Canada, offer high quality child care to families. They also offer improved wages and working conditions for educators.

Organizing and mobilizing educators is not without challenges. However, there are examples of improved working conditions driven by inclusion within labour organizations. The roll out of Full Day Kindergarten in Ontario led to the organization of over 3,500 early childhood educators and professional support staff who now benefit from unionization. The integration of early childhood educators in an integrated educator team has led to interprofessional practice. Staff in municipal and college-based programs are protected by their collective agreements. The early learning and child care sector may benefit from a public campaign for broad based sector bargaining. This approach has the potential to address workforce shortages – educators deserve improved wages and working conditions. International Women's Day is perfect time to shift our gaze to a workforce who are by and large women.