

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE?



KERRY MCCUAIG
ATKINSON CENTRE FELLOW IN EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY

What's the problem with the early childhood workforce? Frankly, we don't know. The common buzz is educators are underpaid, overworked and dropping out. Officials respond with money for wages, tuition supports, workshops, etcetera, completely unaware of the impacts.

This is why a handful of children's services managers in Ontario decided to pool their resources and put some data into their decision-making. As managers of children's services including child care, EarlyON family centres, special needs resourcing and more, regional officials have contact with operators, not educators. If they are to develop policies for the workforce, they need to understand it better.

This was the genesis of Knowing Our Numbers, a collaboration between my colleagues, forty-three municipal and regional managers of children's services, and the College of Early Childhood Educators. The intention is to create the best possible picture of the province's workforce, including where they work, who they work for, who they serve, their working conditions, how happy they are doing what they do, and finally what can policy makers do to make their working lives better.

Each region has provided a detailed overview of their services. Dr. Emis Akbari from our team, traveled across the north meeting with regional officials, educators, and staff to get a better understanding of the unique challenges of delivering services in remote areas. All this information has gone into a series of surveys that will be landing in your inboxes next week. The College of ECEs is sending the online link to all its registered members and regional governments will distribute them through their networks. We are also relying on educators to spread the word. The hope is to go wide and deep, capturing educators working in Kindergarten, centre and home child care, family supports, special needs resourcing and Aboriginal Head Start.

We want to hear from you whether you work full-time, part-time or occasionally; work directly with children and families, as support staff or in management. The questionnaire is extensive – probably taking up to 25 minutes of your day. But, the more you share, the more we know about your work, and the better informed policy makers can be in responding your concerns.

The results will be accessible in a series of publicly-available reports so you can advocate for meaningful interventions. And because we respect your time, we are offering respondents a chance to win prizes worth up to \$1000.

Watch this space over the coming weeks for more information about the survey and the prize winners.