



NOVA SCOTIA EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION **ACTION GROUP**

Children's first navigators on their education journey



WHAT'S THE COST?

The NSECEAG's response to the Nova Scotia Government's
2016 *"Affordable, Quality Child Care: A Great Place to Grow!"*

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WHO WE ARE

The Nova Scotia Early Childhood Education Action Group (NSECEAG) brings together key stakeholders who touch the lives of children in Nova Scotia - Early Childhood Educators, parents/guardians, owners/directors. Our goal is to ensure long-term, sustainable, high-quality childcare programs.

INTRODUCTION

In June 2016, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development released a plan *"Affordable, Quality Child Care: A Great Place to Grow!"* that consisted of 27 action items to be implemented over a five-year span. Implementation began on October 1 with a wage floor increase for early childhood educators. This was a positive step towards paying early childhood educators a worthy wage. Other actions in the government's plan were also viewed favorably but came with some challenges.

The following document is the NSECEAG's response to *"Affordable, Quality Child Care: A Great Place to Grow!"*. It highlights where the NSECEAG is aligned with the government's approach and outlines issues; how those issues will affect childcare in Nova Scotia, and proposed action to mitigate concerns. We urge early childhood educators, parents/guardians and owners/directors to stand up for child care in Nova Scotia and join us to voice our proposed changes to the government's plan. If this action plan remains unchanged, the negative affect on child care in the province will be significant. Ninety-two licensed child care centers have closed in the last five years¹. If the plan is left unaltered, centres will face closures at an alarming rate.

"We are already struggling to make ends meet and the new action plan will put us out of business in the next six months."

– survey response from a child care operator

¹ FOIPOP Application EDU-15-52

ACTION 1

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Increase the daily subsidy for parents so that eligible families pay less, and the gap between the subsidy and cost of care narrows.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

School age programs (for example before and after school programs) were not considered for increased subsidy.

IMPACT

Difficult for low income parents to afford school age programs.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

School age programs should be considered in subsidy increases.

ACTION 2

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Change subsidy eligibility criteria to enable hundreds more families to qualify.

COMMENT

NSECEAG supports this action and believes this will help more families in Nova Scotia.

ACTION 3

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Limit fee increases for regulated child care programs receiving government funding from the department.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

1. Expenses are outpacing fee increase caps. For example, food increased 4.5% in 2015¹. Food is a major portion of expense for all child care centres.
2. The qualification for 1% or 3% cap was based on current average provincial childcare rates and not appropriate for all areas including those where expenses are significantly higher.
3. No guidelines were established on how to determine the % cap in the future.
4. Many centres have not raised fees in years and have been put in a difficult position.
5. Licensed school age fees were capped despite there being no subsidy increases for school age parents.

Reference: ¹ Statistics Canada (www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/perecon156d-eng.htm)



“This is not a sustainable system for our children. There is no evidence this plan will ensure quality to the children across this province”.

– survey response from a child care operator

IMPACT

1. Operators cannot afford to pay their bills and the risk of closing is high.
2. There are no extra funds or reserve to cover unexpected expenses.
3. Operators are forced to reduce program enhancements, employee benefits and other items to survive.
4. There are no funds to hire staff to provide enhanced programs. Many of these programs will be cancelled. Examples include music, French, physical fitness.
5. Classrooms will no longer have the support provided through enhanced ratio staffing.
6. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development receives reviewed financial statements every year from operators. They know budget restraints and have put further burden on struggling operators.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

1. Government commits to a “6-3-2-1” process for rolling out new funding as follows;
 - a) Six (6) months prior to implementation – Centres notified of any existing or new funding changes [on or before October 1].
 - b) Three (3) month review period – Government consults and gets feedback from industry [between October 1 and December 31].
 - c) Two (2) months following the consultation period – All changes delivered to operators [on or before February 28].
 - d) One (1) month following the completion of the process – Changes are implemented [March 31].
2. Not for profit currently receives 50% of their HST rebate. Private operators receive 0% and HST is a 100% expense. This is a 15% extra expense on all supplies, programming materials, transportation, furniture, maintenance, etc. Treat all operators equally and fairly and allow the recovery of HST to lessen the financial expense burden.
3. Schools and private schools do not pay municipal property tax. Exclude all daycares from paying municipal property tax to lower expenses.
4. Remove fee caps and allow continued self-regulation. The child care industry is self-regulating and operators remain competitive with other surrounding operators.

ACTION 4

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Simplify the application process. Review and evaluate the subsidy program annually to track the needs of families.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

Subsidy claims must be submitted via mail and paper copies only.

IMPACT

It is inefficient not be able to submit electronic claims.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

Form a committee that includes directors and solicit feedback on how to improve and simplify reporting.

Simplify claim process and allow for electronic or scanned submissions.

ACTION 5

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Develop and implement an early learning curriculum for child care centres and regulated family home day care providers, including key components that support healthy child development outcomes and successful transitions into grade primary.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

Currently no curriculum for school age.

IMPACT

Operators have no idea what the curriculum will be or how it will affect programs positively or negatively.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

1. Create separate curriculums for daycare and school age programs.
2. Form a committee that includes directors, ECEs, parents, and school age teachers to develop an effective curriculum.

ACTION 6

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Develop and implement a quality improvement model for regulated child care, including standards for program quality and evaluation.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

The EXCEL program is an unlicensed fee-for-service recreational program run by the municipal school board. These school board run programs compete with licensed school age programs. The EXCEL program does not meet minimum standards of licensed school age programs,



specifically not providing subsidy for low income families, staff training, child to staff ratios, snacks, opening on storm days/PD days/ march break/ summer camps, and inclusion for special needs children.

IMPACT

The title of Minister Casey's action plan is "Affordable, Quality Child Care: A Great Place to Grow!". Minister Casey ignored the EXCEL program and did not address any of its deficiencies.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

Review the EXCEL program and implement the same standards and requirements of licensed school age programs.

ACTION 7

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Implement new criteria for funding approvals that drive quality.

COMMENT

NSECEAG supports this action and requests more information.

ACTION 8

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Enhance licensing and consultation supports to regulated child care programs.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

Industry is not involved enough or given enough notice to adjust programs to new or changed regulations.

IMPACT

Difficult for operators to ensure compliance without reasonable time to adjust programs.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

1. Government commits to a "6-3-2-1" process for rolling out new and/or updated regulations as follows;
 - a) Six (6) months prior to implementation – Centres notified of any existing or new regulations [on or before October 1].
 - b) Three (3) month review period – Government consults and gets feedback from industry [between October 1 and December 31].

c) Two (2) months following the consultation period – All changes in the licensing preparation checklist delivered to operators [on or before February 28].

d) One (1) month following the completion of the process – Change are implemented [March 31].

2. Develop a standard and training to ensure standards for review are consistent.

ACTION 9

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Bring the provincial average wage for trained early childhood educators in Nova Scotia from \$12.84 to the national average* wage.

“I am a level 2 who chose to open my own child care centre and bring quality child care to my community. I do this job because I love it and I believe in what I do.”

– survey response from a child care operator

NSECEAG RESPONSE

1. The wage floor doesn't consider any early childhood educator's experience.
2. Experienced and level staff are leaving the business because they receive no compensation for many years of experience.
3. Government wage top up amounts received from the interim contract (Wage Support Funding) were insufficient. The amounts were based on last year's enrollment and financial submissions to the government. Many centres have grown in staff and/or staff have improved the educational level.
4. Government wage top up amounts received from the interim contract (Wage Support Funding) did not consider CPP, EI, vacation, sick days, etc. adding significant financial burden to centres.
5. Government wage top up amounts received from the interim contract (Wage Support Funding) were based on 2080 hours at exact ratio, assuming centres open for 8 hours per day. Centre open hours are almost always 11+ hours per day equalling 2860 hours per year. For every full ratio staff position per year the gap in funding is 780 hours equalling \$14,820 per year for a Level 3.
6. When Minister Casey announced the strategic plan the department specifically stated “This is not about penalizing anyone. It is about stabilizing current spaces in Nova Scotia because it was loud and clear we need them. It is not about removing money, but accountability to use the money to the maximum. This efficiency is to be used to make life better for licensees, staff and families.” Unfortunately, this statement is not a reality as many centres are already experiencing the negative financial effects of the plan.
7. The Wage Support Funding did not take into consideration centres that are still ramping up in numbers of filled spaces and new staff. Their gap funding is based on initial start up numbers.
8. Excluding grandfathered early childhood educators (before May 2012), a Level 2 or Level 3 must be responsible for opening and closing of centres.

“Why are the people who create jobs for ECE’s and who create quality spaces for children in Nova Scotia being punished?”

– survey response from a child care operator



9. School Age Training Approval designation is planned to be eliminated.
10. There is no Wage Support Grant for new staff or staff that have improved their education.

IMPACT

1. Centres have no funding to hire new staff.
2. Experienced staff have lost seniority. This has created significant morale issues.
3. Entry and untrained staff are looking for alternative employment options as they have too much uncertainty with their future.
4. Experienced staff are leaving the business and hiring options are rapidly decreasing for operators.
5. An alarming number of centres are closing or at risk of closing because of lack of top up funds (Wage Support Funding).
6. Program enhancements above the minimum standard are being cut. Centres are not investing back into programs.
7. Centres are being forced to decrease staff benefit programs to cut costs.
8. Centres have a disincentive to add any extra staff or staff hours to: maintain enhanced ratio, cover breaks, and support extra programs as they are financially penalized.
9. Centres are no longer hiring the most experienced, most qualified staff. They are hiring solely on the lowest wage floor to be paid. This has a negative impact on quality of programming.
10. Early childhood education students are dropping out of degree programs and switching to Level 1/2 programs because the pay is similar and cost of education is significantly less.
11. In future, child care jobs for Level 3’s will not exist as centres cannot afford to hire them and they will appear over qualified.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

1. Increase the top up amounts (Wage Support Funding) so there is no negative financial burden on operators including considerations for 2860 hours, CPP, EI, vacation, sick days, etc.
2. Change the grant calculations to be based on current staffing level and not 12-month-old staffing data. Submissions to be made every month rather than beginning of the year to support appropriate and current grant calculation amounts.
3. One full time staff above ratio should be included in funding to allow for breaks, vacation and sick days. Currently if one child needs travel outside of the classroom, they need to take 5 -7 others with them to

“Operating a child care facility is not a high-profit endeavor.”

– survey response from a child care operator

maintain ratio. If they want centres to support best practice, then they need to support it financially.

4. Create a school age classification. Follow the established Alberta model which has level 1, 2, and 3 for early years and level a, b and c for school age.
5. Include funding support for professional development above wage support grant.

ACTION 10

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Raise training standards to require all early childhood educators entering the regulated child care profession to have a degree, diploma, certificate, or paraprofessional recognition through a competency-based assessment.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

1. Currently there is a large deficit of qualified ECE's at a 2/3rd trained ratio (66% of all ECE's must be formally trained).
2. What is “Paraprofessional” defined as?
3. What is “leadership/management training” defined as?
4. Upgrading to a Level 1 ECE, for currently employed staff, is a confusing and long process (1+ years).
5. The training institutes are currently not producing enough trained staff to meet demand.
6. The continuing education program has a waiting list and cannot meet demand.
7. Licensed school age programs have difficulties hiring ECEs because typically the work day is reduced to 6 hrs. Traditionally these positions were staffed by school age approval designation. The action plan is removing school age approval designation.

IMPACT

1. Standards will decrease and directors are forced to hire lower classification staff.
2. Centres will have to close classrooms as they cannot meet ratio.
3. Competitiveness for staff will increase which will drive up benefits and compensation that operators cannot afford. This will contribute to closures.
4. It is going to be even more difficult to staff school age programs (for example before and after school programs).

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

1. Change the requirements for out of province and out of country education acceptance so more early childhood educators can work in Nova Scotia.



“Funding is based on last years staffing, not the current staff compliment. The additional funding we are receiving does not cover the cost of bringing all of my teachers up to the wage floor.”

– survey response from a child care operator

2. Accept other equivalent degrees and designations.
3. Significantly increase the capacity for ECE level 1, 2 and 3 educational programs.
4. Decrease the time required to obtain level 1.
5. Add more online computer based training options to receive level 1.
6. Define and implement “Paraprofessional” recognition.
7. Do not completely eliminate untrained staff. Untrained attracts many staff that end up with long term careers in early childhood and continue with higher education. One hundred percent trained will eliminate many care providers entering the industry.
8. Ensure the funding model can support raised training standards. One hundred percent trained drives up expenses and funding must come from parents or the government.
9. Allow one third untrained and create a mentorship/ apprenticeship program to provide a path for untrained staff to enhance their knowledge.
10. Do not remove school age approval designation and their ability to work in school age programs (for example before and after school programs).

ACTION 11

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Support current staff who do not have an early childhood credential by granting funds for training and by recognizing previous experience and training.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

1. Level 1 currently takes up to 18 months to obtain.
2. Current untrained staff do not know if they are going to continue to receive their Early Childhood Enhancement Grant amounts after March 31, 2017.

IMPACT

1. Almost impossible for existing experienced entry level staff to obtain Level 1. It is unclear if current untrained/ entry level staff will receive the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant after March 31, 2017.
2. Untrained staff are considering leaving the industry.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

1. Provide definitive funding for untrained staff during the transition period up to 2021.
2. Grandfather existing untrained staff based on defined criteria.

ACTION 12

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Require all providers in regulated family homes to successfully complete all Family Home Day Care Providers training course modules with the goal of enhancing the quality of care.

COMMENT

NSECEAG supports this action plan and believes this will enhance the quality of care.

ACTION 13

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Increase and coordinate professional development opportunities for early childhood educators, directors, and regulated family home day care providers in Nova Scotia in priority areas for development.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

Professional development for licensed school age programs were not considered.

IMPACT

Currently there is almost no professional development opportunities for staff in licensed school age programs.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

Professional develop should be developed for staff in school age programs.

ACTION 14

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Introduce new standards and competency-based assessment to assess and recognize professionals with relevant post-secondary training to work in regulated child care.

COMMENT

NSECEAG requests more information.



ACTION 15

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Expand the mandate for the Early Childhood Development Support Sites to provide leadership at the community level in the areas of building partnerships, as well as information and resource sharing for early childhood educators and other early years professionals.

COMMENT

NSECEAG requests more information.

ACTION 16

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Introduce an online portal for child care staff to engage in ongoing communication and information sharing regarding departmental initiatives.

COMMENT

NSECEAG requests more information.

ACTION 17

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Increase the number of child care spaces in communities that need them most.

COMMENT

NSECEAG supports this action and requests more information.

ACTION 18

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Increase the number of infant spaces in child care centres. Infant care will also be a focus for regulated family home programs.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

1. In 2016¹ Nova Scotia had 21,766 infants, 13,112 toddlers, 17,517 preschoolers and 71,517 school age children in the province. The government has stated need and demand is highest in infant, but failed to recognize very high demands for school age programs (for example before and after school programs).
2. Many operators had plans and made application for creating new spaces to their existing programs in areas



of high of need and demand, especially licensed school age programs (for example before and after school programs). These applications were denied government funding and not approved.

IMPACT

There is significant need and wait lists for many school age programs (for example before and after school programs).

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

Approve the funding of more space in areas of high of need, review licensed school age programs (for example before and after school programs) and current available spaces versus demand.

¹ 2016 Stats Canada Table 52-0001

ACTION 19

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Increase options and flexibility for child care by expanding the number of regulated family home day care programs.

COMMENT

NSECEAG supports this action; more information how this expansion will happen will be required.

ACTION 20

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Expand the number of centres offering inclusive programming for children with special and complex needs.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

1. Current Supportive Child Care Grant (SCCG) is significantly underfunded.
2. No accountability of quality of care.
3. Directors are discouraged from hiring the most qualified staff. The Wage Support Funding (WSF) does not cover the new wage floor.
4. Centres paid through the Supportive Child Care Grant (SCCG) must pay care givers (non ECE's) the new wage floor even though they are not included in the centres' ratios and receive no Wage Support Funding.
5. No direction has been provided as to what educational level will be required for these care givers.

IMPACT

1. Current employees are fearful they will lose their jobs.
2. Fewer centres will be offering inclusive programs.
3. More children with special needs will be turned away.
4. Children with complex needs will not have adequate care.

"I have 16 years experience and this plan makes me feel undervalued."

- survey response from an early childhood educator

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

1. Create a funding model that considers not only the number of children in need but also their degree of required care. Base a new inclusive model on the following;
 - a) Points based system for level of care required (5-severe, 3-moderate, 1-mild).
 - b) Adjust levels (5-severe, 3-moderate, 1-mild) as required based on an application and department approval.
 - c) Create accountability for quality of care.

ACTION 21

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Improve the online directory of regulated child care centres to make it easier for families to find the quality child care they need.

COMMENT

NSECEAG supports this action and believes this will help more families in Nova Scotia.

ACTION 22

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Implement new funding criteria that will require existing child care centres to

- cap parent fee increases
- pay wages to early childhood educators, based on the wage floor
- deliver the new provincial early learning curriculum
- provide inclusive programming to support children with special needs
- meet quality standards and comply with the *Day Care Act* and Regulations

NSECEAG RESPONSE

NSECEAG supports a new funding model provided it does not negatively impact centres financially.

IMPACT

Minister Casey has stated that a new funding model will not negatively impact centres financially but the Wage Support Funding (WSF) caused all centres to be in a negative financial position.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

1. Government commit to a "6-3-2-1" process for rolling out new funding as follows;
 - a) Six (6) months prior to implementation – Centres notified of any existing or new funding changes [on or before October 1].
 - b) Three (3) month review period – Government consults and gets feedback from industry [between October 1 and December 31].

- c) Two (2) months following the consultation period – All changes delivered to operators [on or before February 28].
- d) One (1) month following the completion of the process – Changes are implemented [March 31].

ACTION 23

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Implement new reporting requirements, accountability measures, and random audits to ensure grants are utilized as required by policy and criteria.

COMMENT

NSECEAG supports this action and believes this will help more families in Nova Scotia.

ACTION 24

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Work with community networks to identify which communities need child care most, based on existing data and available resources. Direct new funding to these communities.

COMMENT

NSECEAG supports this action and requests more information.

ACTION 25

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Support a non-profit network to provide leadership and support for capacity building in the non-profit child care sector.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

Private and non-profit are now being treated differently.

IMPACT

This will continue to create a greater division between private and non-profit centres.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

The government should be promoting a unified child care system that treats all centres equally and fairly.

ACTION 26

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Create opportunities for early childhood educators, early elementary teachers, and other early years professionals to collaborate on issues related to complex needs and school transition, and to participate in joint professional learning opportunities.

COMMENT

NSECEAG supports this action and requests more information.

ACTION 27

GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ITEM

Launch a public awareness campaign that highlights the importance of high quality regulated child care for child development and families.

NSECEAG RESPONSE

The department has stated it does not have a surplus of funding.

IMPACT

Spending educational money on public relations campaigns will not improve the quality of individual programming.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

Spend the money on funding and improving the existing child care plan.

"I will now have an equal wage as a student just out of school with a diploma but no experience or work history."

- survey response from an early childhood educator





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ACTION GROUP
Children's first navigators on their education journey

CONTACT US:



www.facebook.com/groups/NSECEAG



[@nseceag](https://twitter.com/nseceag)

EMAIL: contact@nseceag.com