

The AECEO's 75th Anniversary

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75 years of Impact

1950s

On October 30th 1950, The Nursery Education Association of Ontario (NEAO) - which would later be renamed and become the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) - was established. The creation of our organization was in response to the absence of government regulation and formal facilities for training in early childhood studies for “day nursery” staff. Part of this work took the form of AECEO Branches - each with their own board of elected volunteers. These Branches supported advocacy initiatives, hosted local events and meetings, and contributed to the goals of the organization. Over the years since then new branches were added and branches were closed, and at their height there were 24 Branches across Ontario.

In the following years, NEAO/AECEO initiated the first university extension course and the first diploma course at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson Polytechnical Institute) for preschool teachers. We also established a voluntary Certification Process for preschool teachers. This process recognized and encouraged achievement both in training and preschool teaching. Certificates were awarded to applicants who achieved the required level of training, and whose work in the preschool field was evaluated over a required period of time by certified colleagues. Applicants with out-of-province and out-of-country credentials were required to undergo a “Pre-Certification” process to obtain an AECEO letter of

equivalency prior to applying for certification. This pre-certification equivalency was a large part of our work for many years.

1980s

In the 1980s, The AECEO launched “Week of the Child”. This was an annual public education campaign to raise awareness of the value of Early Childhood Education and early childhood educators. Several years later, the AECEO established a Legislative Recognition committee to advocate for the creation of a professional regulatory body for ECEs in Ontario. The hope was that the establishment of a regulatory body would raise ECEs status as a recognized profession, thereby improving working conditions and raising wages.

1990s

In 1992, the AECEO launched eceLINK, a publication for ECE students, frontline practitioners, administrators and supervisors, trainers, and policy makers, covering a wide variety of topics that impact the ELCC sector. In 1994, we revised our Code of Ethics. These were a set of values and principles by which ECEs were asked to adhere to in their practice. A grant was received from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to print and distribute copies of the Code of Ethics to all licensed programs across Ontario. This document continued to be used as the ethical standard in ECE training institutions and child care programs for many years. The following year, French services for the AECEO's Equivalency Process were transferred to l'AFESEO (L'Association francophone à l'éducation des services à l'enfance de l'Ontario) to deliver in the province of Ontario. Prior to this, the AECEO worked with both French and English ECEs in Ontario. In 1996, our name was officially changed to Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario. This change reflected our new role as the professional association and voluntary regulatory body for Early Childhood Educators in Ontario.

2000s

The 2000s ushered in a new era for the AECEO, as we published a position statement on universality, supporting the principle that expansion of early learning and child care services in Ontario should be confined to the non-profit sector. This was the first time we advocated for expansion in the non-profit sector and affirmed our position that child care is a social and public good. The Common Table for Childhood Development and Care was formed by the AECEO, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC), Ontario Association of Family Resource Programs (OAFRP), Home Child Care Association of Ontario (HCCAO), Ontario Early Years Centre Network (OEYCN) and Middle Years Matter Coalition (MYMC). This group was established to promote collaboration in advocacy and delivery of services to children and families in Ontario, the six founding partners established and formed the Steering Committee, and promoted a collaborative membership model. This common table started to shift the work of the AECEO to prioritize community and collaboration, centering advocacy and the voices of those working in the field.

In 2007, legislation establishing the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) was passed. This in turn changed the identity and purpose of the AECEO. Our work moved away from regulation and professionalization (which was now the role of CECE) and our new identity would emerge in the years to come. In 2009, CECE was granted permission to use the AECEO Code of Ethics in the development of their own document.

2010s

In the 2010s, the AECEO's equivalency and credential assessment process came to an end after almost half a century and this responsibility was transferred to the

CECE. The AECEO Letters of Equivalency certificates issued on or before February 23, 2014 continued to be recognized by the CECE.

The AECEO continued advocating for the best interest of our community by demanding that the province of Ontario keep its promise to provide seamless, full-day, full-year programs for 4 and 5 year olds, outlined by Dr. Charles Pascal, the Premier's Advisor on Early Learning. We supported and advocated for ECEs to be equal partners in the program, with our position stating that the program should, “recognize the specialized body of knowledge, training, and accountability of the Early Childhood Educator as a lead teacher or equal partner in a multi-disciplinary team environment”. In September 2010, the Full Day Kindergarten program was introduced and our community celebrated this key component of the blueprint for early learning in Ontario.

In 2013, the *Professional Pay for Professional Work* campaign to improve compensation for RECEs launched at the AECEO Provincial Conference in Toronto. The AECEO took the lead in addressing principles for continuous professional learning by publishing a discussion paper for member and sector-wide feedback. The AECEO and Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) launched a three year initiative to promote the value of licensed child care and the importance of Registered Early Childhood Educators to the delivery of a high quality program funded through the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The following year, an award was presented to the AECEO by George Brown College, School of Early Childhood, and the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education for its contribution to the profession. After many years of lobbying by the AECEO and other ECE sector stakeholders, the Ontario Government provided a two dollar per hour wage increase over two years, for child care centre staff and licensed home child care providers in 2015. The AECEO launched a petition calling on the provincial government to fund professional pay for all ECEs in Ontario regardless of where they

work. With the approval of our project, *Mobilizing the early childhood workforce in the movement for decent work* by the Atkinson Foundation one is able to see the birth of the work taken up by the AECEO presently in 2025 - a pivotal shift toward who the organization is today.

Following significant push back from the ECE community in 2016, the Ontario Government backed off on proposed changes to the Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA) ratios, group sizes, and age groupings through concerted ECE community efforts led by the AECEO and multiple ECE sector partners. The AECEO then began mobilization forums - a more concerted effort to go into communities to consult, collaborate, and create advocacy campaigns that reflect the voices of the workforce. These efforts continue today in person and have also been conducted on Zoom to bring together more people across the province.

The “*Decent Work*” project continued in 2017, with over 4,000 RECEs and early years staff responding to the AECEO's consultation survey that helped inform recommendations made by the AECEO's Decent Work Task Force to the Ministry of Education. The policy recommendations, *Transforming Work in Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Sector*, called for a provincial wage scale with a starting/minimum wage of \$25 per hour. This marked the beginning of the AECEO's focus on making wage recommendations to the governments as part of a push to improve compensation for early years professionals in Ontario.

Throughout this decade, through a series of workshops held in collaboration with the Institute for Change Leaders and the OCBCC, the AECEO developed 5 local Communities of Practice (CoPs) to work with the AECEO as decent work teams to organize and build capacity in their local communities. The AECEO made an active commitment to participate in and support the process of reconciliation with First Nation, Métis and Inuit People and communities in Ontario and across Canada. A

Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation was established in 2018 to share knowledge, traditions and teachings, and help to inform the AECEO's efforts.

In 2018, the Professional Pay petition reached & surpassed the goal of 10,000 signatures. This incredible participation affirmed the importance of raising the pay of early years professionals in order to support the sector. Responding to this significant advocacy, the Ontario Government released *Growing Together: Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy* that included a plan to implement a wage grid that reflects qualifications and experience for all program staff. This was sadly not realized.

We continued our work in collaboration with the eceLINK editorial committee and in 2017 developed a revamped and improved eceLINK that included peer reviewed articles. This publication continues today and brings together the work of academics, front line workers, and early years professionals from across the sector.

To close out the decade, the AECEO & OCBCC launched a successful joint campaign calling on the new Ontario Government to continue the Wage Enhancement Grant enacted by the previous government in 2015. This garnered 17,000 signatures on a hard copy petition that was presented in the Ontario Legislature 16 times.

2020s

In March 2020, we hosted a conference focusing on Full Day Kindergarten called, "Framing our Future Kindergarten Summit". Subsequent roundtables were part of an effort to follow up and address issues discussed at the summit. Later in 2020, the AECEO responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, providing frequently-updated resources for ECEs receiving the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and other financial support. We engaged the community with a Pandemic Pay Letter and campaign advocating that the Ontario government extend the \$4 per hour pandemic pay increase to apply to all staff in emergency child care. We launched the survey

Returning to Work: ECE and early years staff perspectives, garnering 4000 participants and prompting the writing of our joint report with the OCBCC, *From Reopening to Recovery* released in August. The Federal Speech from the Throne mentioned Early Childhood Educators and a universal child care system. Our #RisingUpForChildCare campaign launched, focusing on frontline ECEs and staff, parents and families experiencing the child care crisis. In November *An insult to educators, children and families: Child care community views on the Ontario government's proposed changes to the Child Care and Early Years Act* report was released by the AECEO and OCBCC. Ultimately, the proposed changes to the CCEYA that impacted the work of early years professionals on the floor were not moved forward.

The following year, we continued to support ECEs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and launched a survey called, *Covid Experiences*. The findings of this survey were released in a report called, *Forgotten on the Frontlines*. Soon after, ECEs won vaccine priority in Ontario.

We hosted a Kindergarten Roundtable and Kindergarten Conversations, bringing together and providing space for ECEs working in Ontario's Kindergarten program, resulting in the development and publication of specific resources for this group of ECEs. Also in 2021 the Federal Government invested \$30B into the creation of a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system. The AECEO joined a Federal Budget Watch party to celebrate this historic milestone. The AECEO and OCBCC published, *The Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario* (first edition) detailing policy recommendations for the successful implementation of CWELCC in Ontario. The AECEO and OCBCC organized Take Action Tuesdays, a summer campaign inviting educators to engage with *The Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario* through activities that are typically found in child care programs.

After pressure from the AECEO community, the Ontario government signed the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) agreement, indicating their commitment to work with the Federal government to begin system building. The provincial government implemented a “wage floor” of \$18 per hour for ECEs in Ontario. As a culmination to the ongoing Kindergarten Conversations, the AECEO hosted *Voices from the Classroom*, a roundtable with Kindergarten ECEs who shared their stories and experiences.

Throughout the pandemic, through the approval of a new project *Building Leadership and Learning Communities*, we hosted 11 Professional Learning Experiences and Conversations, welcoming 4,200+ participants. In 2022, the AECEO participated in the National Day of Action led by Child Care Now. This initiative included training sessions for community engagement, a resource toolkit of flyers, infographics, media scripts, an MPP breakfast, a Press Conference in the media gallery, and a large rally on the lawn at Queens Park. Local CoPs and child care programs held their own local events.

In 2023, we convened a Conference Committee of ECEs from across the province and various roles in the sector to plan the 2023 AECEO virtual conference. This was the AECEO’s first virtual conference, and first provincial conference since 2016. The 2023 AECEO virtual Provincial Conference, *We Raise Each Other Up: ECEs Building Leadership & Learning Communities of Joy, Curiosity, and Hope* welcomed more than 900 participants and 44 ECE presenters across 25 sessions. The conference included virtual networking and discussion lounges, an online gallery of digital posters, other creative formats, workshops, presentations, and small group conversations. The AECEO CoPs were rebranded and CARE Collectives were launched to better reflect the ethos of the groups and support continued expansion of membership.

After months of advocacy, the Ontario government announced the ECE wage floor would be increased to \$23.86 per hour as of January 1st, 2024.

The AECEO published Program Profiles and Policy Briefs connected to the *Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario*. In March, after decades of work by the AECEO community, Ontario saw a historic policy win. Bill C-35: *An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada* was adopted unanimously by the House of Commons. This enactment set out the Government of Canada's vision for a Canada-wide early learning and child care system. It also set out the Government of Canada's commitment to maintaining long-term funding relating to early learning and child care to be provided to the provinces and Indigenous peoples.

Current Work of the AECEO

As the professional association for ECE's in Ontario, we believe early learning and child care (ELCC) matters for more than any return on investment, or for the construction of a future neoliberal, efficient, and technocratic workforce. ELCC services matter because humans are interdependent and relational, and therefore we must work and care collectively in order to thrive. Caring for children is an ethical and social responsibility that we all share – it is not an individual parental concern from which the government can absolve itself, or a task that is naturalized to women and therefore undeserving of decent work and fair pay. We cannot have policy and funding mechanisms that continue to advance this perspective. In order to achieve our goals of decent work and pay for early years professionals, our key areas of focus include:

Decent Work Common Table	Roadmap to Universal Child Care Policy Briefs & Program Profiles	Listening and Storytelling Campaign
Government Relations	Campaigns	Decent Work CARE Collectives

Cross-sector care worker and movement engagement	Sectoral Strategy	Student and Community Activation
Parent Activation	Member Engagement, Communications, Grant Writing and more!	

We continue to work with our collaborators and project partners to ensure that we have a strong, united voice. These include:

- The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC)
- Atkinson Centre and George Brown College
- Child Care Now (CCN)
- Cross-sector allies (Decent Work & Health, Justice for Workers, Equal Pay Coalition, and more)

This current moment still calls on us to think, act, and do differently in the ELCC sector in order to advance goals of achieving decent work for ECEs and early years staff, who are the key to meaningful care and early learning experiences for children and a steadfast source of trust and dependency for families. We continue our efforts to build and strengthen relationships, solidarity, and allyship across the province and nationally. Further, we are committed to support the reconceptualizing of the discourses we employ to advance a system of public, affordable, and accessible ELCC – services that embrace educators, care, and decent work.

We will be present in this moment and continue to bring the voices of educators to the forefront. We remain committed to doing our work in a way that centers anti-racism, inclusivity, and Indigenous resurgence. This is not the time for disconnected action, it is not the time for individualism, it is not the time for

disconnected policy interventions. It is the time for the voices of educators and the ELCC community to be centered, valued, heard, and responded to in policy debate, dialogue, and development. You cannot build a caring system, a caring service, or a caring economy without *caring with* and *for* the caring workforce.

What's Next for the AECEO?

Looking ahead to the future, we remain committed to responding to the needs of our community and consulting with them to ensure that our work amplifies their voices and concerns. We will continue to grow our community, mobilize the workforce, and work collaboratively with others to build public support and people power working towards advancing a system of collective care and learning that centers decent work. We will continue to leverage the strengths of the early learning and child care workforce and build leadership and capacity in the Decent Work movement, fueled, and led by early childhood educators.

We will continue to resist policies, narratives, and ideologies that center economic efficiencies, autonomy, individualism, and austerity. We remain committed to strengthening our collective thinking and advocacy, community and knowledge mobilization to advancing a vision of Decent Work in the ELCC sector that embraces our human interdependence and therefore the societal value of care and care work.

Here's to another 75 years of community, solidarity, and connection with the AECEO!