

AECEA supports the vision of Canada’s Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.

The framework “envisions First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families as happy and safe, imbued with a strong cultural identity. It sees children and families supported by a comprehensive and coordinated system of...[early learning and child care] policies, programs and services that are led by Indigenous peoples, rooted in Indigenous knowledges, cultures and languages, and supported by strong partnerships of holistic, accessible and flexible programming that is inclusive of the needs aspirations of Indigenous children and families” (Government of Canada 2018).

The Case for Workforce-Related Legislative Change

AECEA’s position is that Alberta’s current Child Care Licensing Act and regulations do not adequately support early childhood educators, who are the heart of a high-quality early learning and child care system. The consequence is that we are failing our children. Legislative change is needed.

Words Matter

Research over the past decade has shown that quality child care and quality early childhood development programs play a key role in helping children grow into healthy, well-adjusted, self-reliant adults who have the skills they need to succeed at school, at work and in life.

Quality child care is not babysitting. It is not custodial caretaking. And it is not simple supervision that keeps children safe, fed and protected from danger or physical harm. Quality child care uses research-based early childhood education approaches that support children’s well-being and address children’s physical, social, emotional, cognitive and developmental needs.

There is a growing consensus that quality “child care” and “education” are inseparable concepts (Doherty, Friendly and Beach 2001, 14). They require a holistic, multisectoral approach that places strong emphasis on developing “the whole child” through the various ages and stages of that child’s life (Marope and Kaga 2015, 17).

Child Care and Education Are a Package Deal

“ ‘Care’ includes health, nutrition and hygiene in a warm, secure and nurturing environment; and ‘education’ includes stimulation, socialization, guidance, participation, learning and developmental activities.” (Marope and Kaga 2015, 17).

The interconnection between children’s “education” and “care” needs is reflected in current terminology. The University of Toronto–based Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development notes that “more than a dozen terms are used to describe programs designed for children before they begin formal schooling” (Akbari and McCuaig 2017, 2). The majority of these terms link the concepts of “child care” with “early learning” or “education.”

Table 1. Variant names for “early learning and child care.” The terms listed in the table are sometimes used interchangeably—both in the research literature and in this paper.

Term	Organization or Jurisdiction
early childhood education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development – College of Early Childhood Educators (Ontario)
early childhood education and care (ECEC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – European Commission Working Group – New Zealand Ministry of Education – Nutbrown Review (U.K.) – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
early childhood education and child care (ECEC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ChildCare 2020 national policy conference – Childcare Resource and Research Unit
early childhood care and education (ECCE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – UNESCO Publishing
early learning and child care (ELCC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta – Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Employment and Social Development Canada – federal/provincial <i>Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework</i> – Statistics Canada
early learning and care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Muttart Foundation

UPDATE THE OUTDATED CHILD-CARE-RELATED TERMINOLOGY IN ALBERTA'S LEGISLATION

AECEA's Recommendation

1. **Change the name of the Child Care Licensing Act to the *Early Learning and Child Care Licensing Act*. Throughout the act and regulation, replace all references to “child care” with “early learning and child care.”**

Children's early learning and care needs are interdependent and intertwined. Alberta should follow the lead of other jurisdictions in using terminology that reflects this interconnection. The term “early learning and child care” is widely used in Canada.

In 2018, Nova Scotia changed the name of its Day Care Act to the Early Learning and Child Care Act in order to remove and revise outdated language (Atkinson 2019b).

AECEA's Recommendation

2. **Change the term “day care program” to “centre-based early learning and child care program.”**

The term “day care” dates to the era of day nurseries that provided custodial daytime child care for children of poor families whose mothers had to work (Varga 1997). The care offered in day nurseries was limited to providing a safe, healthy physical environment. Today Alberta's licensed centres provide early learning and child care programs that also focus on children's social, intellectual and developmental needs. In addition, families today need flexible child care services that suit a variety of work schedules beyond the traditional Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 (Doherty et al. 2003). The term “day care” no longer reflects today's realities.

AECEA’s recommendation related to the term “day care program,” reflects the structure of the current Child Care Licensing Regulation, which has different requirements and different schedules for different types of licensed programs. If legislative requirements were standardized across programs, the term “early learning and child care program”^{*} could apply across program types. There would be no need to differentiate centre-based from non-centre-based programs.

Early Childhood Educators Are Not Babysitters

“It takes much greater professional education and preparation to develop an ability to be self-reflective and able to mobilize children’s curiosity, exploration, questioning and problem solving than to provide good custodial care” (Muttart 2012, 32).

Research shows that well-educated early childhood educators are the foundation of a high-quality early learning and child care system. They are not babysitters. Like teachers in the K-to-12 school system, early childhood educators bring a wealth of specialized knowledge and experience to their profession. They deserve to be acknowledged as educators—not just child care “workers” or “assistants.”

In AECEA’s 2018–2019 survey of the early learning and child care workforce (Buschmann and Partridge 2019), 91% of respondents felt they were valued and respected by parents, yet only 58% felt they were valued and respected by the public. Interestingly, respondents were less likely to feel respected by the public if they had more early learning and child care experience or more education, if they were born in Canada, if they were a program director, or if they worked in a centre-based or out-of-school care program.

The authors of the survey report suggest that early childhood educators with more experience might have “accumulated more experiences of

^{*} The Child Care Licensing Act defines a child as being under the age of 13 or as being 13 or 14 and having special needs. AECEA’s proposed definition of “early childhood” refers to children as defined under the act, and hence encompasses children in out-of-school care programs.

being demeaned by members of the public (for example, being called a ‘babysitter’)” (p. 11). Whatever the reason, respondents’ reports of feeling disrespected “may be some indication that there is still a long way to go in promoting the importance of the ELCC [early learning and child care] profession in Alberta” (p. 12).

The lack of respect and recognition for the value of child care work is directly linked to the low wages and poor working conditions that characterize much of the early learning and child care sector. The “devaluation” of child care work reflects the “underlying ideas and values that we ascribe to women and children in society...[T]his devaluation is perpetuated by the idea that childcare work is women’s ‘natural’ work.... Gendered assumptions de-skill the work and implicitly justify the lack of compensation, particularly when this work is replacing the unpaid (and unappreciated) caring labour of women in their private homes” (Halfon 2014).

Lack of respect and low wages both contribute to the ongoing recruitment and retention challenges in the early learning and child care sector.

GIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS THE RESPECT THEY DESERVE

AECEA's Recommendation

- 3. Adopt the term “early childhood educators” to replace the current classifications of “child development supervisor,” “child development worker” and “child development assistant.”***

The term “early childhood educators” acknowledges the specialized education, skills and important role this workforce plays in nurturing healthy children and building a healthy society.

* The term “early childhood educator” should also be used for family day home providers, who are not regulated through legislation. Alberta’s *Family Day Home Standards Manual* should be updated accordingly.

New Brunswick's 2018 Licensing regulation under the Early Childhood Services Act uses the term "educator."

Ontario has a College of Early Childhood Educators.

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WELL-QUALIFIED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF A HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE SYSTEM

AECEA's Recommendations

4. Recognize the importance of well-qualified early childhood educators in the preamble to the act.

Current Child Care Licensing Act

[There is no recognition of the critical importance of early childhood educators.]

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes the importance of ensuring the safety, well-being and development of children receiving [early learning and] child care;

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta is committed to facilitating choice for families who require [early learning and] child care; and

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes and values the role of parents in the provision of quality [early learning and] child care;

*Recommended Additions to Preamble**

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes and values early childhood educators for their role in providing high-quality early learning and child care;

* This is one of several recommendations for additions to the preamble of the Child Care Licensing Act. For an at-a-glance view of all of AECEA's preamble-related recommendations, please see Appendix 2 on p. 127.

LEGISLATE NEW CERTIFICATION CLASSIFICATIONS

AECEA's Recommendation

5. **Replace the current three-level certification system (child development assistants, child development workers, child development supervisors) with the following classifications.***
 - early childhood educator I (ECE I)
 - This is a temporary classification that requires a one-year certificate in early childhood education. It is intended to help workforce members transition to the proposed new minimum standard, which requires a two-year diploma in early childhood education.
 - early childhood educator II (ECE II)
 - This classification requires a two-year diploma in early childhood education. ECE II is the proposed new minimum standard for all early childhood educators in the regulated system.
 - early childhood educator III (ECE III)
 - This classification requires a two-year diploma in early childhood education plus a post-diploma certificate in management or pedagogical leadership. ECE III is the new minimum standard for early childhood educators who work as program directors and pedagogical leaders.
 - early childhood educator IV (ECE IV)
 - This classification is for educators who have an undergraduate degree in early learning and child care. An additional classification category (ECE V) may be needed for early childhood educators who have higher levels of education,

* Please see p. 69 for details and recommendations for new minimum education standards for the new certification classes.

including master's and doctoral degrees. Further research is required.

Early learning and child care is not babysitting. The new classifications recognize that early childhood educators need a minimum level of specialized education for the important work they do.

AECEA believes that all individuals who work within the early learning and child care sector should be certified early childhood educators. This includes post-secondary teaching faculty, pedagogical mentors and program consultants.

Upgrading Timelines

AECEA proposes that, by 2027, all early childhood educators in Alberta's regulated child care system will be certified at an ECE II level or higher. To facilitate the transition, early childhood educators will need to develop and complete an educational upgrading plan as a condition of certification.

- **Currently certified "child development assistants" will need to upgrade to an "early childhood educator I (transitional)" level by 2024, and to an "early childhood educator II" level by 2027.**
- **Currently certified "child development workers" will need to upgrade to an "early childhood educator II" level by 2027.**
- **Child development supervisors who were certified on the basis of equivalencies will need to upgrade to an "early childhood educator II" level by 2027.**

Early Learning and Child Care Matters

“The foundation for strong and healthy children is set in early childhood, starting even before they are born. Clear scientific evidence tells us that brain development is influenced by early childhood experiences. Brain development is optimal when children grow up with safe and healthy environments, loving and supportive relationships and opportunities to learn.”

—Government of Alberta (2013a), *Together We Raise Tomorrow: An Alberta Approach to Early Childhood Development*, p. 6

High-quality early learning and child care helps children establish the foundation they need for all future learning and for success in life.

Together We Raise Tomorrow—Alberta’s 2013 framework for early childhood development—acknowledges that “a healthy start means a healthy future.” Providing children with “a healthy start, safe and healthy environments, nurturing and supportive relationships and opportunities to learn” makes it possible for them to “fulfill their potential and benefit from our thriving social, economic, and cultural life” (Government of Alberta 2013a, 7).

RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

AECEA's Recommendations

6. Recognize the importance of quality early learning and child care in the preamble to the act.

Current Child Care Licensing Act

[There is no recognition of the critical importance of quality early learning and child care.]

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes the importance of ensuring the safety, well-being and development of children receiving [early learning and] child care;

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta is committed to facilitating choice for families who require [early learning and] child care; and

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes and values the role of parents in the provision of quality [early learning and] child care;

Recommended Additions to Preamble

WHEREAS the well-being, safety, security, education and health of children are priorities for Albertans;*

WHEREAS ensuring that every child has the opportunity to become a successful adult benefits society as a whole;*

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes that quality early learning and child care is in the best interest of the child;

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta acknowledges Indigenous families as partners in developing early learning and child care programs that are rooted in Indigenous traditions, languages and ways of knowing;

“The early years from birth to compulsory school age are the most formative in children's lives and set the foundations for children's lifelong development and patterns for their lives” (European Commission 2014, 4).

Alberta's Children First Act, which focuses on child protection and intervention, acknowledges the importance of children's education and well-being. Although early learning is such a critical component of children's education, the current Child Care Licensing Act does not acknowledge its importance.

* From Alberta's Children First Act.

New Brunswick's 2010 Early Childhood Services Act recognizes the importance of the early years and the value of high-quality early learning and child care in its preamble:

"WHEREAS the Government of New Brunswick recognizes the importance of ensuring the safety, well-being and healthy development of all young children enrolled in early childhood services;

WHEREAS the Government of New Brunswick is committed to supporting the early learning and childcare sector in its efforts to build a network of high-quality, accessible, inclusive and affordable early childhood services;

WHEREAS the Government of New Brunswick recognizes that high-quality early childhood services serve the dual roles of fostering the early development of young children so they become healthy, self-sufficient and productive adults and supporting the labour force attachment and training efforts of parents..."

7. Enshrine Alberta's goals for high-quality early learning and child care that

- **helps children reach their potential and fully develop their talents and abilities**
- **helps children develop the resilience, determination, confidence, creativity and critical thinking skills that prepare them for school, work and life**
- **helps children develop strong communication and social skills**
- **helps children develop into responsible citizens who value democratic rights and freedoms and make a positive contribution to society**
- **teaches children the importance of peace, equality, friendship among all peoples and inclusion within society of people who are different**

- **instills respect for nature, for the environment, and for social and cultural diversity***

All children have a right to high-quality early learning and child care that supports their development and well-being and prepares them for citizenship in a democratic society.

Children Have Rights

“Every young child has an undeniable right to holistic development and a strong start in life. Evidence suggests that quality...[early learning and child care]...can actualize this right.”

—Mmantsetsa Marope and Yoshie Kaga (2015), *Investing against Evidence: The Global State of Early Childhood Care and Education*, p. 30.

*“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, **the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.**”*

—Article 3.2 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child[†]

Children have the right to enjoy an adequate standard of living. They have the right to health, safety and security—including the right to protection from violence, abuse and neglect. They have the right to play and to participate in cultural life and the arts. They have the right to be heard. They have the right to express their views freely and the right to have their opinions considered. They have the right to education—including early childhood education—that develops their “personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” and

* These recommendation draw from New Zealand’s 1989 Education Act, which is internationally recognized as a model for early learning and child care legislation and policy excellence.

† The Convention entered into force on September 2, 1990. It was ratified by Canada in 1991.

prepares them for “responsible life in a free society” (United Nations 1979, Article 29).

Children are citizens in their own right. They are capable, creative, resourceful and active participants in their own learning. They have the right to be valued and respected for who they are and for the unique strengths, histories, cultural practices and traditions they bring to their communities. They have the right to be treated with respect and to participate in the daily decisions that affect them.

The recognition that children are citizens with social, economic, cultural, political and civil rights is enshrined in the United Nations 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the 1990 World Declaration of Education for All, which was sponsored by UNESCO, UNICEF and other international partners. The Canadian Child Care Federation, the Canadian Council on Social Development, the ChildCare 2020 national policy conference and AECEA are among the hundreds of Canadian and international organizations and jurisdictions that support these articulations of children’s rights.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that parents and families are responsible for the upbringing and development of their children. At the same time, the convention makes it clear that communities and governments share this responsibility, and that governments must “ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities” (Article 18.3). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women defines child care as an *essential* right for both women and children.

The current Child Care Licensing Act does not recognize the rights of children or the right of children and families to high-quality early learning

and child care. These rights should be formally recognized in the preamble to the act.

LEGISLATE PROTECTION FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

AECEA's Recommendation

8. **Recognize the rights of children in the preamble to the act.**
Recognize that high-quality early learning and child care is a critical component of the education to which every child has a right.

Current Child Care Licensing Act

[There is no recognition of children's rights, and there is no recognition of early learning and child care as a critical component of children's education.]

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes the importance of ensuring the safety, well-being and development of children receiving [early learning and] child care;

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta is committed to facilitating choice for families who require [early learning and] child care; and

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes and values the role of parents in the provision of quality [early learning and] child care;

Recommended Additions to Preamble

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes that children are citizens in their own right;

WHEREAS children have the right to play and to experience nature and the outdoors;

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta acknowledges Indigenous families as partners in developing early learning and child care programs that are rooted in Indigenous traditions, languages and ways of knowing;

WHEREAS education is a right enjoyed by all citizens;

WHEREAS children's education and development begins at birth;

WHEREAS early learning and child care is an important part of children's early education;

WHEREAS the Government of Alberta recognizes that all children and their families deserve and have a right to accessible, affordable, high-quality early learning and child care;

Early learning and child care is a legislated right in 80 countries (Marope and Kaga 2015), and some countries go so far as to legislate

guaranteed access to child care. In Norway, for example, children have a statutory right to an early learning and child care space from the time they are one year old (Slinde 2019). Alberta and Canada must join the ranks of progressive countries that have enshrined children’s rights through legislation.

Every child has a right to education. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that education support the following objectives:

- *“the full development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities*
- *the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms*
- *the development of respect for the child’s parents, cultural identity, language and values, as well as respect for the values of the child’s country and other civilizations*
- *the development of the child’s responsibilities in a free society, including understanding, peace, tolerance, equality and friendship among all persons and groups*
- *the development of respect for the natural environment” (UNICEF 2018, 42)*

LEGISLATE PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO PLAY OUTDOORS AND ENJOY NATURE

AECEA’s Recommendation

9. Amend the Child Care Licensing Regulation to incorporate the Get Outside and Play organization’s recommendations for outdoor play. These include

- **increasing the amount of outdoor space required for children in licensed early learning and child care programs**
- **instituting minimum daily outdoor playtime requirements**

“Children learn best through play, and the best place for play is outdoors, where children connect with nature, explore their physical abilities, spark their curiosity and develop a sense of place and belonging in the world” (Pickles 2019, 3).

Research suggests that outdoor play and play in nature are important components of children’s development. The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta supports the outdoor play recommendations proposed by Get Outside and Play. (See Pickles 2019.)

Children’s right to play is internationally recognized and enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“Play is integral to every aspect of development and lays the foundation for formal learning and success in school. It underlies everything from motor development to social competence, emotional self-control, confidence, creativity, scientific reasoning and abstract thinking. Child’s play is a serious business.”

—Dr. Jane Hewes discussing the power of play in the November 2011 ECMap newsletter, *Steps*

The redlined companion documents to this paper set out the details of the Get Outside and Play organization’s recommendations. *AECEA’s Redlined Changes to the Child Care Licensing Act* and *AECEA’s Redlined Changes to the Child Care Licensing Regulation* can be downloaded from the association’s website.

All Children Matter

All Children Need Well-Qualified Early Childhood Educators

In Alberta, family-based early learning and child care services are provided through an agency model. As a result, family day home standards are set through policy rather than legislation.

In 2018, 2,156 family day home providers delivered early learning and child care services on behalf of 67 approved family day home agencies

that had contracts with the Alberta government (Alberta Children’s Services 2019c). Early childhood educators providing family day home services constituted 13% of Alberta’s early learning and child care workforce and cared for approximately 10% of the children in Alberta’s regulated child care system.

Family day homes provide Alberta parents with choices in child care. Some parents prefer a home setting to centre-based early learning and child care. Raising minimum education standards for *all* early childhood educators ensures that children receive quality care regardless of the setting.

In Alberta, legislation sets minimum education standards for early childhood educators in licensed early learning and child care programs. But there is no requirement—either in legislation or in policy—for family day home providers to have *any* formal education. Alberta’s approach is consistent with that of other Canadian provinces and territories. Many jurisdictions do not even have training requirements for family day home providers.

Across Canada, education standards for family day home providers lag far behind those for other early childhood educators. In 2016 (Friendly et al. 2018, 157), eight of 13 Canadian jurisdictions required that family day home providers be licensed. Four jurisdictions—Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario and Alberta—used an agency model. Newfoundland and Labrador used both an agency model and licensing.

In 2016, most Canadian jurisdictions required 20 to 60 hours of training for family day home providers. Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Ontario and New Brunswick required no training at all.

In Alberta, current policy standards require family day home agencies to provide some training to their contracted providers, but the training plans mandated in the government’s *Family Day Home Standards Manual* only address topics such as hand washing, poison control, child development and child guidance. In spite of its minimal focus on education or training, the *Standards Manual* nonetheless expects family day home providers to deliver an age-appropriate child care program

“that meets children’s emotional, physical, intellectual, creative and social needs” (Government of Alberta 2019d, 30).

For licensed early learning and child care programs, the requirement to “provide a program that is in keeping with the physical, social, intellectual, creative and emotional needs of children in the program” is specified in schedules to the Child Care Licensing Regulation. Like their colleagues in approved family day homes, early childhood educators in licensed programs often lack the education and support they need to do their work.

The situation is not fair—either to Alberta’s early childhood educators or to the children they care for.

Alberta’s children deserve better. Our children deserve the same high quality of early learning and child care no matter where they live and no matter who cares for them.

Alberta’s early childhood educators deserve better too.

The lack of appropriate educational standards and funding support excludes much of the early learning and child care workforce from a host of workforce benefits. Early childhood educators who work in preschools, family day homes, group or innovative programs, or First Nations or Métis Settlements programs are not eligible for professional development funding support, nor do they qualify for wage enhancements.

Revised legislation is needed to make things fair.

Table 2. Minimum education requirements for regulated early learning and child care services in Alberta. The 54-hour* and 45-hour courses listed in this table comply with Section 17(1) of the Child Care Licensing Regulation, which requires “a course in child care that is approved by the director” as a condition of child development assistant certification.

Type of Program	Minimum Staff Education Requirements
Centre-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 54-hour Child Care Orientation course or 45-hour post-secondary course in child development for all staff – 1 in 3 staff require a one-year early childhood education certificate or equivalent[†] – Program directors require a two -year early childhood diploma or equivalent
Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 54-hour Child Care Orientation course or 45-hour post-secondary course in child development for all staff, including the licence holder
Innovative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No minimum requirement
Out-of-school care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 54-hour Child Care Orientation course or 45-hour post-secondary course in child development for all staff – 1 in 4 staff require a one-year early childhood education certificate or equivalent – Requires a program supervisor (no credential specified)
Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 54-hour Child Care Orientation course or 45-hour post-secondary course in child development for all staff – 1 in 4 staff require a one-year early childhood education certificate or equivalent
Family day home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No minimum legislated requirement for providers[‡] – Agency staff who monitor family day homes must have one-year early childhood education certificate or equivalent

* The 54-hour Child Care Orientation course is a free online, non-credit offering developed by Alberta Children’s Services.

† Prior to a September 2012 amendment to the Child Care Licensing Regulation, 1 in 4 centre-based staff were required to have a one-year early childhood education certificate or equivalent.

‡ As a matter of policy, the Children’s Services *Child Care Staff Certification Guide* requires family day home providers to complete the Step Ahead Family Day Home Training or Family Child Care Training Program through an approved family day home agency.

PHASE IN AND ENFORCE NEW MINIMUM EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS ACROSS THE SYSTEM

AECEA's Recommendation

10. Legislate new minimum requirements for higher educational qualifications for early childhood educators in all parts of the regulated system.

Alberta's children deserve the same high quality of early learning and child care no matter where they live and no matter who cares for them. Family day home providers and providers of group family child care programs are currently exempt from Alberta's requirements for certification.

Alberta needs to raise education standards and legislate appropriate education requirements for all early childhood educators in all licensed and approved early learning and child care programs. As discussed on p. 69, AECEA believes that the minimum standard should be a two-year diploma in early childhood education.

To avoid system stress and shortages of qualified staff, raising educational requirements for early childhood educators must go hand in hand with increased funding and support for the sector.

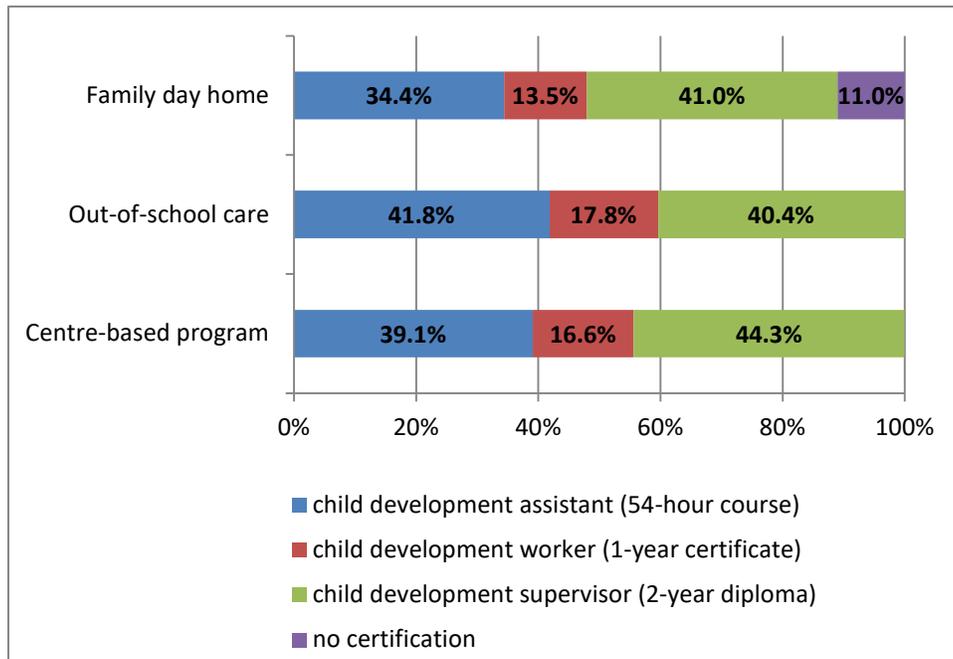


Figure 3. A comparison of education and certification levels within Alberta's regulated early learning and child care system (Alberta Children's Services 2018a). Eleven per cent of Alberta's family day home providers (237 individuals) are not certified; more than 34% (742 individuals) have only completed a 54-hour course.

Unlicensed Child Care Can Be Harmful for Children

In 2016, Alberta had regulated early learning and child care spaces for approximately 16% of children under the age of 13 (Friendly et al. 2018). This means that the majority of children whose parents work were cared for in other settings, including private babysitting arrangements.

A Children's Services web page (2019a) explains that private babysitters can care for up to six children, not including their own, at any given time. There are no health, safety, security or quality standards for the care provided by private babysitters. There is no government oversight, no government monitoring and no accountability for the quality of care that is provided. Private babysitters do not require a licence and they do not have to comply with provincial guidelines.

Research shows a strong relationship between child care quality and regulatory status. "The single best indicator of quality in family child care is the provider's regulatory status" (Ferns and Friendly 2015, citing Kontos et al. 1995).

The Child Care Licensing Act deals with private babysitters in a rather round-about way. In fact, the legislation is so ambiguous that it is difficult to determine when private babysitters require a licence and when they can operate without one.

The act stipulates that anyone who operates a “child care program” must have a licence; it defines a “child care program” as a program that provides child care to seven or more children. But providing “child care” does not necessarily entail providing a “child care program.” If private babysitters are—by their own definitions—only providing “care” and not a “program,” does this mean they can care for an unlimited number of children? On the Children’s Services web page (2019a), is the proviso that “private babysitters can care for up to six children, not including their own” meant to be interpreted literally? If a private babysitter has six children of her own, might she be allowed to care for a total of 10 or even 12 children at any one time (her own six children plus four to six others)?

Section 25(1) of the Child Care Licensing Act clearly specifies that family day home providers—who operate under contract to approved family day home agencies and comply with provincial standards—are only permitted to care for up to six children. For family day home providers, it is implicit that the six-child maximum includes the providers’ own children. Permitting unlicensed private babysitters to care for more children than approved, regulated providers is not logical. It is also not logical to regulate family day home providers yet have no standards for private babysitters, who also provide home-based child care.

Researchers have found that the absence of regulation for some, but not all, home-based child care providers creates a two-tiered system. It also creates inconsistent policy related to nurturing and protecting children. The lack of standards that apply to *all* non-relative caregivers “can lead to

inadequate and sometimes harmful care” (Kyle 2000, 88, cited in Fern and Friendly 2015, 16).

The recent tragedy of 22-month-old Mackenzy Woolfsmith, who died in the care of an unlicensed private babysitter, is one example of the harm that can result from unregulated child care.

The judge who led the Woolfsmith fatality inquiry recommended a comprehensive review of the legislative framework governing the provision of child care in Alberta, with a specific view toward “shifting the focus from solely regulating the size of unlicensed daycare to a focus on reducing risk and increasing protective factors in all forms of child care” (Bouwsema to Fuchinsky September 2019). The judge noted that legislative change alone is ineffective: it must be accompanied by appropriate oversight, enforcement, remedial powers and sanctions. The judge also acknowledged the stress and demands of providing child care without support from other adults, and recommended that private babysitters should be provided with support and tools for self-assessment.

Regulated family day home providers receive support from the agencies that contract and monitor them. Private babysitters could access such support if they became part of the regulated system.

The Woolfsmith tragedy makes it clear that parents do not have a clear understanding of the differences between regulated and unregulated child care. In fact, as the Ontario government has found, “given consumer protection in other areas of the economy, parents may have misconceptions about the lack of safeguards in unregulated care” (Ferns and Friendly 2015, 17).

The Alberta government needs to undertake a public awareness campaign to help families differentiate between regulated and unregulated child care and to keep their children safe.

Family day homes are required to display an official “Alberta Approved Family Day Homes” logo sticker to indicate they are regulated by a government-approved agency.

UPDATE AND CLARIFY THE LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS FOR PRIVATE BABYSITTERS

AECEA's Recommendations

11. Legislate appropriate minimum standards for private babysitters.

These should include a requirement for private babysitters to post, at the entrance to their premises, a notice informing parents that they are not regulated and not monitored by government.

All children need quality early learning experiences and protection from abuse and harm—no matter who cares for them. Child care provided by private babysitters should comply with legislated minimum standards. Developing minimum standards requires consultation and an approach that balances children’s need for protection with providers’ need for autonomy (Doherty et al. 2000b). Parents must also be a part of the process.

Support for private babysitters must not be at the expense of Alberta’s regulated early learning and child care system. Private babysitters must be encouraged to become a part of this system.

12. Legislate clear and appropriate maximums for the number of children that private babysitters can care for at any one time.

Alberta’s “six children plus their own” maximum for private babysitters is much higher than what is allowed in other parts of Canada. In seven Canadian jurisdictions, the maximum number of children that can be cared for by an unregulated private babysitter ranges from two to five, including the babysitter’s own children. Quebec, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia allow a maximum of six children including the babysitter’s own. Only Saskatchewan and New Brunswick have a higher maximum than Alberta, allowing*

* Nova Scotia allows up to nine children if they are all school-aged.

private babysitters to care for up to eight children including their own (Friendly et al. 2018).

AECEA recommends that private babysitters in Alberta should be permitted to care for a maximum of five children, including their own preschoolers. No more than two children should be under the age of two.

Babysitters who wish to care for more than five children should be regulated through an approved family day home agency.

The *You Bet I Care!* study (Doherty et al. 2000b) recommends that unregulated private babysitters should be allowed to care for a maximum of four children (including their own preschoolers) and that no more than two children should be under the age of two. The study cautions that placing limits on the number of children a babysitter can legally care for might simply force private babysitters to go underground. In order to avoid this situation, limits must be accompanied by two complementary strategies:

- the removal of policies and practices that act as disincentives to join the regulated system (Disincentives include costs related to meeting regulatory standards, including the cost of home upgrading and buying equipment.)
- the provision of incentives to make regulation attractive (Access to fee subsidies and opportunities for training and professional development are incentives to join the regulated system.)

Early Childhood Educators Matter

Early Childhood Educators Need Appropriate Education

“Early childhood educators are the key to high quality services.”

—OECD (2006), *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care* 2006, p. 157.

Well-qualified early childhood educators are the foundation of high-quality early learning and child care programs. Quality programs—and an effective, high-quality system—depend on well-educated, well-qualified staff to provide good developmental outcomes for children.

The OECD’s 2001 *Starting Strong* report established a link between “strong training and support of staff”—including appropriate pay and working conditions—and the quality of early learning and child care programs. The report also noted that staff with more formal education and more specialized training in early childhood development provided “more stimulating, warm, and supportive interactions with children” (OECD 2006, 158). Subsequent OECD reports (2018b) noted a strong correlation between high-quality child–staff interactions and children’s literacy, numeracy, behavioural and social skills. The OECD’s 2012 *Starting Strong* report noted that higher qualifications and more specialized training were closely correlated with better child development outcomes.

The importance of well-educated staff with specialized training has been corroborated in a number of Canadian studies. The *You Bet I Care!* studies (Doherty et al. 2000) found that the quality ratings of centre-based programs were predicted by whether or not at least some staff had *at least two years of early learning and child care training* (Friendly, Doherty and Beach 2006, 12).

“Staff with higher qualifications can create a more stimulating environment and use more appropriate pedagogical practices, which boost children’s well-being and learning outcomes” (Schleicher 2019, 27).

The link between higher standards of education and higher quality early learning and child care is well established. Although training requirements vary widely, many European countries require early childhood educators to have specialized bachelor’s or even master’s degrees (Schleicher 2019).

In a 2017 study of 22 OECD countries, more than 75% of early childhood educators who worked with children over three had a bachelor’s degree. For this age group, 88% of early childhood educators in Poland and Portugal had at least a master’s degree, as did 51% of early childhood educators in the United States.

The 2019 OECD *Good Practice for Good Jobs* study notes that many OECD countries have raised their minimum qualification standards in recent decades. Some countries now require master’s level qualifications for early childhood educators who work with children over three.

International Requirements for Early Childhood Educators

The University of Toronto's Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development (2019a) recently reported on early childhood education requirements for seven OECD countries. These countries had the following minimum educational requirement for early childhood educators:

- a three-year diploma in early learning and child care for all staff and a four-year degree for program leaders (in Norway)
- a two-year diploma in early learning and child care for all staff (in Denmark, Sweden and New Zealand)
 - Denmark also required a three- to five-year degree for supervisors.
 - Sweden also required a four-year degree for leaders.
- a one- or two-year certificate in early learning and child care (in Australia)
 - Australia also required a four-year degree for pre-primary teachers of children up to the age of eight.
- high-school-level early years training for all staff (in Italy)
 - Italy also required a specialized three-year degree for program leaders and a specialized five-year degree for program managers.
- in France's municipal child care system for children under three, a 120-hour child minder course; 40% of staff in this system had a four-year degree
- in France's school system for children aged three to six, a four-year degree

Although some countries did not require all their early childhood educators to be highly educated, all seven countries had degree requirements for at least some program staff.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN CANADA

Canada's minimum education requirements are well below international standards. For centre-based early learning and child care programs, Manitoba is the only Canadian jurisdiction that requires early childhood educators to have a degree—and that requirement only applies to program directors (Friendly et al. 2018).

No Canadian province or territory requires *all* early childhood educators in centre-based programs to have post-secondary credentials, but with the exception of Nunavut, all jurisdictions require that at least some staff are qualified (Akbari and McCuaig 2017). One year of specialized training is the minimum requirement in most Canadian jurisdictions, but not necessarily for all staff. In centre-based programs in New Brunswick, only one in every four early childhood educators requires a one-year credential, which means that 75% of the staff who care for children could have no education. In Yukon and Saskatchewan, 50% of centre-based staff who care for children could have *no* education (Friendly et al. 2018).

Although Canada's minimum education requirements lag behind other countries' (Halfon 2014; Friendly et al. 2018; Muttart 2019), minimum requirements have increased in some provinces. One example is Newfoundland and Labrador, where the new Child Care Act (2017) includes a requirement for early childhood "trainee" educators to upgrade and complete a one-year early learning and child care certificate within five years. Another is Nova Scotia, which is investing funds from the federal/provincial bilateral agreement on early learning and child care into a workplace training model that will help early childhood educators upgrade their education.* By 2021, all staff "required for ratio" will have or be working toward a minimum two-year diploma in early learning and child care (Pasolli 2019).

* Nova Scotia is also investing in leadership development training for centre directors and in and professional development for family day home providers and other early childhood educators.

Minimum educational attainment levels of Canadian early childhood educators have also increased, at least in some parts of the early learning and child care sector. The 2013 *You Bet We Still Care!* study reported that 89.6% of centre-based program staff had at least a one-year early learning and child certificate, compared to 81.7% in 1998; 59.1% of centre-based program staff had at least a two-year early learning and child diploma, compared to 48.2% in 1998 (Halfon 2014; Flanagan et al., 2014).

ALBERTA'S STANDARDS

“By comparison to other jurisdictions, the educational preparation of early childhood educators in Canada remains modest. The educational requirements for the early learning and care workforce in Alberta are no exception.”

—The Muttart Foundation (2019), *Advancing the Educational Preparation and Professional Development of Alberta's Early Learning and Care Workforce*, p. 6

While some countries require specialized master's degrees, the highest standard of education Alberta requires is a two-year diploma—and it doesn't necessarily have to be related to early childhood education. (See Table 4 on p. 79.) As shown in Table 3, 17% of the province's early childhood educators have only a one-year certificate, and 40% have only a 54-hour orientation course. Close to 60% of Alberta's early childhood educators have less than two years of post-secondary education.

This is not enough.

By comparison, kindergarten teachers in all Canadian jurisdictions except the Northwest Territories require at least a degree, and in Prince Edward Island and Quebec, kindergarten teachers must also have a specialization in early childhood education. The requirement for higher qualifications for kindergarten teachers is reflected in the higher wages they earn (Friendly et al. 2018).

The work society expects from early childhood educators is just as important and valuable as the work expected from teachers. Early childhood educators need to be as well educated as teachers—and as well paid. (See p. 116 for a discussion of wages in the sector.)

“Holding lower educational expectations for early childhood educators than for elementary school educators perpetuates the perception that educating children before kindergarten requires less expertise than educating K–3 students, which helps to justify policies that make it difficult to maximize the potential of young children and the early learning programs that serve them.”

—National Research Council (2015b), *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8*, pp. 513–514

Table 3. Certification levels (March 2018) and wages (September 2019) for early childhood educators in Alberta’s regulated child care system.* The dollar figures in parentheses are hourly wage enhancement top-ups provided by the provincial government.

Position	Training Requirement	Workforce at this Level	Average Employer-Paid Wage	Pre-accredited Program Wage Top-Up	Accredited Program Wage Top-Up
Child Development Assistant	54-hour child care orientation course or equivalent	6,495 (40%)	\$15.90	\$17.34 (\$1.44)	\$18.04 (\$2.14)
Child Development Worker	one-year post-secondary certificate in early learning and child care or equivalent	2,732 (17%)	\$16.91	\$19.61 (\$2.70)	\$20.96 (\$4.05)
Child Development Supervisor	two-year post-secondary diploma in early learning and child care or equivalent	7,103 (43%)	\$18.51	\$22.93 (\$4.42)	\$25.13 (\$6.62)

* The March 2018 workforce numbers are from the Alberta Children’s Services 2017–2018 annual report. The workforce also includes 238 “Not Certified (Unassigned)” child care educators, which brings the total number to 16,568.

The wage-related data for 2019 is from the Government of Alberta, “Incentives to Work in Child Care.”

The caregivers of Alberta’s children often have less education than the caregivers of Alberta’s pets.

Many entry-level dog groomers have completed a 160-hour course (Alberta School of Dog Grooming), and animal health technologists need at least a two-year diploma (ALIS careers website). By comparison, many early childhood educators in Alberta have only 54 hours of training.

HOW MUCH EDUCATION IS ENOUGH?

“There is some consensus that early childhood caregivers... should be trained to the bachelor’s degree level and should have credentials in courses that are specific to early childhood” (Melhuish et al. 2015, 70.) In the United States, the National Research Council (2015b, 513) recommends a minimum of a bachelor’s degree “with specialized knowledge and competencies” for all lead educators. As discussed earlier in this paper, many countries have significantly higher requirements.

In a series of province-wide consultations sponsored by the Muttart Foundation between 2012 and 2019, stakeholders identified a two-year diploma in early childhood education as an acceptable minimum standard.

Raising minimum education standards for early childhood educators has benefits for child care quality on many levels. Not only does it provide children with a richer learning experience, but it provides early childhood educators with tangible and intangible benefits. Studies have shown a direct link between higher training and higher job satisfaction, which in turn leads to lower staff turnover (Halfon 2014). And better-educated staff can command better wages.

The fact is that requirements for higher qualification standards cannot be viewed in isolation from wages and working conditions. Simply put, better-qualified early childhood educators deserve better pay. Low salaries are a major contributor to high staff turnover, which studies have

found to be a predictor of low quality in early learning and child care programs (Friendly, Doherty and Beach 2006, 12).

New educational standards for early childhood educators must be part of a comprehensive workforce strategy. (See p. 109.)

LEGISLATE AND PHASE IN NEW MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

AECEA's Recommendations

13. Legislate and phase in a two-year diploma in early childhood education* as the new minimum standard for early childhood educators in all parts of the regulated system.†

If educators of infants, toddlers and preschoolers are to merit the same respect and wages as educators of school-aged children, they must also have comparable levels of professional post-secondary education. A 54-hour course does not make someone a professional.

AECEA proposes that all early childhood educators in the regulated system should have met an interim minimum standard—early childhood educator I (transitional) and attained at least a one-year certificate in early childhood education by 2024. All early childhood educators in the regulated system should have met the new minimum standard—early childhood educator II—and attained at least a two-year diploma in early childhood education by 2027.

Early childhood educators will need flexible education programs, funding and workplace support to help them meet the new minimum standard.

* The importance of specialized early childhood education training is explained on p. 76.

† The Get Outside and Play organization has formally endorsed AECEA's recommendation of a specialized two-year diploma as the minimum standard for early childhood educators.

14. Legislate a requirement for early childhood educators to develop personalized educational upgrading plans that outline the pathways they will take to meet the new minimum standards.

What gets planned gets done. Both early childhood educators and their employers need to prepare for the future. Early childhood educators need to work with their employers to plan a reasonable, realizable course of action for upgrading their education.

Educational upgrading plans must show how an early childhood educator will move from the interim minimum standard—ECE I (transitional) certification—to the new, system-wide ECE II requirement. Once early childhood educators have met the new minimum requirements, they will require annual professional learning plans as a condition of credential maintenance. (See p. 84 for a discussion of professional learning and p. 89 for a related recommendation.)

LEGISLATE CREDENTIAL MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS

AECEA's Recommendation

15. Legislate a requirement for ongoing credential maintenance. Include ongoing professional learning as one requirement for certification renewal.

Professionals in any field are required to keep their qualifications current. Early childhood educators who are respected as professionals should be expected to do the same.

AECEA proposes that early childhood educators should be required to renew their certification every three years. Approvals for renewal should include a requirement for 40 hours of continuing education or professional learning completed during each three-year certification period. (See p. 75 for AECEA's position on ongoing professional learning.) They should also include a requirement for early childhood educators to maintain professional competence, comply with

professional standards and codes of ethics and self-report any circumstances that might affect their professional practice.

CREDENTIAL MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS IN OTHER PROVINCES

Prince Edward Island licenses early childhood educators and requires credential renewal every three years (Government of Prince Edward Island 2017)

In British Columbia, early childhood educators are certified for a five-year period. Credential maintenance requires compliance with the professional code of ethics prescribed by the Early Child Educators of BC, verification of work experience, a character reference letter and completion of 40 hours of professional development during the certification period.

In Ontario early childhood educators are required to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators. Members of the college must renew their membership every year and pay an annual membership fee. Early childhood educators who wish to renew their registration with the college must verify their employment information and their eligibility to work in Canada. They must also verify their compliance with the college's mandatory Continuous Professional Learning program and self-report any circumstances that might affect their practice in the profession. Circumstances that require self-reporting include the following:

- current investigations for professional misconduct, incompetence or incapacity, or resignation from any regulatory or licensing organization while being the subject of a complaint, investigation or proceeding related to these matters
- charges or findings of guilt for professional misconduct, incompetence or incapacity in the practice of early childhood education
- charges or findings of guilt for a criminal offence

- physical or mental conditions or disorders that might affect professional practice
- charges of misconduct while attending a post-secondary institution
- verified allegations or concerns by a child protection agency

Early Childhood Educators Need Top-Quality Programs

Early childhood educators are professionals. They need professional education from public post-secondary institutions that have well-established inter-institutional course and program transfer protocols. Going forward, they will need access to specialized high-quality programs and standardized curricula that include a focus on *Flight*—Alberta’s curriculum framework for early learning and child care.

This type of specialized education cannot be provided by vocational colleges. Going forward, it must be delivered by public post-secondary institutions that have highly qualified academic staff and that provide a standard of education that complies with national and international quality benchmarks. Vocational colleges often cannot meet these standards of excellence. As a result, the credentials students earn at vocational colleges are often not recognized by public post-secondary institutions. This leaves students unable to upgrade their education without an additional investment of time and money to repeat coursework that *is* recognized.

The qualifications of academic teaching staff are a benchmark of program excellence. Alberta’s vocational colleges typically require instructors in their early learning and child care programs to hold a bachelor’s degree. By comparison, the faculty at Mount Royal University and MacEwan University all have master’s degrees or PhDs. Most faculty in Alberta’s public-college-based early learning and child care programs have at least a master’s degree (Muttart 2019).

In Alberta, 10 public post-secondary institutions currently offer a two-year diploma in early learning and child care; 13 offer one-year certificate programs. Calgary’s Mount Royal University offers a bachelor’s degree;

Edmonton's MacEwan University will also offer a bachelor's degree as of September 2020.* The University of Alberta offers a 15-credit online certificate program, but Children's Services does not recognize this credential as a qualification for early childhood educator certification.

Few programs for more-advanced education in early learning and child care are available in Alberta, except through distance learning.† As a result, early childhood educators who wish to pursue post-diploma education often opt for related disciplines such as Education or Human Ecology. Alternatively, they enroll in early learning and child care graduate programs offered at universities outside the province.

As early childhood educators upgrade their qualifications and as new students enter the field, public post-secondary institutions will need to plan and expand their capacity. They will also need to address the issue of program transferability. Currently, not all programs are transferable to other institutions.

AECEA proposes that credentials from vocational colleges should be grandfathered in as Alberta transitions from the current certification categories to the proposed new ones.

WHY AN APPRENTICESHIP MODEL IS NOT APPROPRIATE

Early learning and child care is a profession, not a trade.

Professionals require education that develops their knowledge, understanding and ability to analyze and synthesize information—both within and beyond the workplace. Education builds competencies, capacities and soft skills that enable people to work more effectively.

Training typically focuses on developing skills that improve job performance. It gives people the specific tools they need to perform

* The University of Calgary offers a Bachelor of Education with a specialization in early childhood education.

† The University of Alberta's Department of Elementary Education periodically runs an Early Learning cohort as part of its Master of Education in Curriculum and Pedagogy.

specific tasks. Training-focused programs are best suited for trades that require the step-by-step performance of job-specific tasks.

Professionals need training as well as education, but training for professionals is development centred rather than skills based. It focuses on personal and organizational growth and integrates education with activities such as coaching, mentoring and experiential learning.

Training-focused job preparation often involves apprenticeship. AECEA's 2009 research on this subject found that an apprenticeship model is not appropriate for the early learning and child care sector.

Early childhood educators need to be critical thinkers, researchers, creative problem-solvers, organizers of opportunities and reflective professionals who embrace multiple perspectives and use pedagogical documentation tools to evaluate their work (Moss 2007). Apprenticeship-based training cannot offer the depth or breadth of professional knowledge that early childhood educators need to provide high-quality programs within a high-quality early learning and child care system.

AECEA's research study concluded that apprenticeship may exacerbate stress "in an already fractionalized and stressed child care community" (2009, 12). Apprenticeship will not address recruitment and retention issues in the sector, nor will it strengthen practice or improve outcomes for children and families. It cannot provide early childhood educators with the broad and deep educational preparation they need as professionals.

PROVIDE EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE EDUCATION THROUGH PUBLIC POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

AECEA's Recommendation

16. Provide early learning and child care education through public post-secondary institutions and recognized Indigenous colleges and universities.

Public post-secondary institutions offer educational programs whose content meets national and international standards. Indigenous colleges and universities provide early learning and child care programs that are grounded in Indigenous languages, culture and ways of knowing.

*Alberta's post-secondary institutions and Indigenous colleges and universities will need appropriate funding and support if they are to develop the capacity to provide high-quality education for the province's early childhood educators. Capacity includes facilities, equipment, resources and qualified teaching staff. **Post-secondary institutions cannot build the capacity they will need without proper funding.***

Alberta Needs a Post-Secondary Plan

Alberta Children's Services maintains a list of post-secondary institutions that offer early learning and child care education. However, not all programs are equivalent and inter-institutional course and transfer protocols have not been established. Early childhood educators must have the option of beginning their studies at one institution and completing them at another, should circumstances require, without having to make up courses.

Alberta needs to develop a list of approved institutions that offer well-respected, high-quality programs with appropriate transfer protocols. Alberta also needs to explore ways of integrating the province's Indigenous post-secondary institutions into the list.

Early Childhood Educators Need to Specialize

Researchers have identified seven broad areas required for professional competence (Muttart 2014):

- caring ethically
- applying an early years pedagogy based on knowledge of how children learn and develop
- working with curricular resources
- working with families
- supporting children with disabilities
- linking research to policy and practice
- communicating within a “democratic” community in which children, early childhood educators, parents and other stakeholders are valued and have a voice

Within these broad areas, early childhood educators must demonstrate mastery of a wide range of knowledge and skills:*

- They must be able to nurture children’s learning through “thoughtful and intentional pedagogy.”
- They must have deep and broad knowledge about children’s learning and development and be able to identify children’s varied abilities, strengths, interests and learning pathways.
- They must be able to identify and work with children with developmental delays and disabilities in an inclusive environment.
- They must understand the theories that underpin effective early learning pedagogy.

* This list of competencies was adapted from *New Zealand’s Te Whāriki: Early Childhood Curriculum* (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2018, 59).

- They must be experts in play-based curriculum and be able to plan and enact activities that are accessible, motivating and fun for all children.
- They must be able to integrate specific subject-matter knowledge (for example, literacy, science or arithmetic) into the curriculum.
- They must be able to support the cultural and linguistic diversity of all children and to create an inclusive learning environment in which all children can learn alongside their peers.
- They must know how to communicate with parents in a way that engages them in their children’s learning.
- They must recognize children’s rights and children’s agency as resourceful, capable learners.
- They must be attentive to children’s learning. They must be knowledgeable about and able to try alternative ways to support children’s learning and development.
- They must be role models for lifelong learning and for practices that support their own health and well-being and that of others.
- They must be able to work as part of a team and know how to establish and maintain collaborative professional relationships.
- They must be thoughtful and reflective about what they do.
- They must use evidence, critical inquiry and problem-solving to shape their practice.
- They must be committed to ongoing professional development.

Early childhood educators require specialized education to help them develop the sophisticated competencies they need. Research shows that staff with a degree specializing in early childhood education have the greatest impact in creating high-quality early learning environments.

“These staff are better able both to provide pedagogical leadership and to demonstrate the professional competencies linked to effective early learning and care practice” (Muttart 2014, 24). than staff with lower-level qualifications and non-specialized education.

REQUIRE SPECIALIZATION IN EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

AECEA's Recommendation

17. Legislate a requirement for all early childhood educators who work in licensed and regulated child care programs to have specialized early learning and child care education.

Research shows that having knowledge and skills specifically related to early childhood education is associated with better outcomes for children (Flanagan and Beach, 2016).

ELIMINATE EQUIVALENCIES

A significant portion of Alberta’s early learning and child care workforce is undereducated. But even when early childhood educators have post-secondary education, this may be in an area completely unrelated to early learning and child care.

Part 3 of the Child Care Licensing Regulation sets out standards for the certification of early childhood educators. These standards have always allowed for the recognition of competencies or coursework considered equivalent to the early childhood education–related education specified in the legislation. Over time, the list of approved equivalencies became excessively broad. Although it has narrowed in the last few years, some credentials still recognized as equivalents do not require any competencies in early-years child development, play-based learning or early learning pedagogy.

In 2009, the Government of Alberta announced funding to create close to 9,500 new child care spaces and recruit 1,100 new early childhood

educators. To support this effort, the government broadened its definition of allowable equivalents for child care certification. The change was intended to make it easier for program operators to recruit staff to fill newly funded spaces. Unfortunately, studies in the disciplines that are recognized as equivalents have no requirement for any type of early learning and child care–related content. (See Table 4.)

Recognizing such studies as equivalents makes no more sense than recognizing a journeyman plumber’s credential as equivalent to a journeyman electrician’s.

Table 4. The Child Care Staff Certification Guide (Alberta Children’s Services 2018b) recognizes the following credentials as equivalent to one-year certificates and two-year diplomas in early learning and child care.

Certification and Educational Requirement	Recognized Equivalent
Child Development Worker <i>one-year certificate in early learning and child care (30 post-secondary credits)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Disability Studies diploma – Educational Assistant diploma – Bachelor of Science in Human Ecology with a family ecology major – Bachelor of Kinesiology or Kinesiology diploma – Community Rehabilitation degree or Rehabilitation Assistant diploma – Therapeutic Recreation diploma or degree – Social Work diploma
Child Development Supervisor <i>two-year diploma in early learning and child care (60 post-secondary credits)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Alberta Teaching Certificate – Bachelor of Child Studies degree – Bachelor of Education degree or two-year after-degree – Child and Youth Care degree or diploma – Bachelor of Social Work degree

The practice of recognizing equivalencies is one indicator of the difficulty child care programs have in finding qualified staff who are willing to work for the low wages that programs can afford. Even with the current low educational standards and over-broad recognition of educational equivalencies, child care licensing staff are often forced to authorize exemptions to legislative requirements in order to keep programs open.

Some centre-based early learning and child care programs have been unable to find directors with the required two-year diploma; some programs have no staff with two-year diplomas.

AECEA's Recommendation

- 18. Remove the provision for educational equivalencies from the Child Care Licensing Regulation. Implement a bridging plan to help child care providers whose certification is based on an educational equivalency to upgrade to the new standard.**

A combination of early childhood specialization and higher education is considered essential for high-quality programs (Flanagan and Beach 2016; Muttart 2010). “Teachers who have specific preparation, knowledge, and skills in child development and early childhood education are more likely to engage in warm, positive interactions with children, offer richer language experiences, and create more high-quality learning environments” (Flanagan and Beach 2016, 62).

In Alberta, persistent recruitment and retention issues have led to the recognition of equivalency qualifications. This is misguided. Recruitment and retention must be addressed by raising wages and providing adequate system supports, not by lowering standards.

Equivalencies are not qualifications.

Early Childhood Educators Need Management Skills and Pedagogical Leadership Education

Early childhood educators play a variety of roles within Alberta's early learning and child care system. They develop and administer programs, recruit staff, manage finances and human resources, set standards for quality improvement and evaluate progress. They are leaders and mentors who provide guidance for their staff. They are communicators and relationship-builders who engage with children, families and the broader community. They help connect families to community supports and sometimes advocate on their behalf.

The different roles played by early childhood educators need different types of education and training.

Research shows that, in addition to specialized early childhood development education, program managers and supervisors need additional specialization in management and administration, preferably at the bachelor's or master's degree level (Muttart 2014, 16, citing Goffin 2013; OECD 2006; Peeters and Vandebroek 2011; Urban, Vandebroek, Lazzari, Peeters and Van Laere 2011; and Whitebook and Ryan, 2011). Such specialized education gives managers the skills they need to deal with issues such as budgets, finances, strategic planning and human resources management, including staff performance, motivation and development. Management education helps program administrators develop the leadership, communication and policy development skills they need to work with government bodies, licensing offers, accreditation agencies and other stakeholders.

In addition to management education, program administrators need advanced-level early learning and child care education to prepare them as pedagogical leaders who can deal with issues related to teaching approaches, curriculum and quality of learning (Muttart 2014, 16). As pedagogical leaders, program managers provide guidance, support and

formalized mentorship for their staff and for practicum students looking to enter the field. They use data to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of their programs. They foster continuous quality improvement and inspire organizational change.

As pedagogical leaders, program managers build a culture of reflective practice that engages staff intellectually and emotionally. Reflective practice is interactive. It continually questions “how theory informs practice and practice informs theory” and encourages educators to think critically about their curriculum practice.

Pedagogical leaders must know how to facilitate high-quality interactions with children. They must also know how to engage parents as partners in children’s learning.

Pedagogical leaders must be well-grounded in the values, guiding principles and concepts of Alberta’s early learning and child care curriculum framework, *Flight*. They must be capable of leading and supporting their staff as they incorporate *Flight* in their work.

Pedagogical leaders must have a deep understanding of child development and be on top of the latest research literature. They must be able to facilitate professional learning that shows their staff and their practicum students how to create high-quality environments for children. Perhaps most importantly, they must be able to share what they know—with their staff, with parents, with other professionals and with the broader community.

The role of a pedagogical leader is to raise up other leaders—building leadership capacity throughout the early learning and child care system.

In Canada, there is growing recognition that management and pedagogical leadership are critical skills for early learning and child care program administrators. Three Ontario colleges have recently launched a common applied degree in early childhood leadership and administration (Muttart 2014).

In Alberta, MacEwan University offers a post-diploma applied human services administration degree that is open to early childhood educators.

Mount Royal University's Bachelor of Child Studies (early learning and child care major) and MacEwan University's new Bachelor of Early Childhood Curriculum Studies both have a pedagogical leadership emphasis.

REQUIRE ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT OR PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP EDUCATION FOR ALL PROGRAM DIRECTORS AND MANAGERS

AECEA's Recommendation

- 19. Legislate and phase in a requirement for all early childhood educators who work as program directors to be certified as ECE IIIs, a classification that requires a post-diploma certificate in management or pedagogical leadership in addition to a two-year diploma specializing in early learning and child care.**

Researchers agree that early learning and child care program managers need specialized education in leadership and administration, preferably at the degree level. This education should address topics such as pedagogy, learning quality, curriculum, staff performance, motivation and child development (Muttart 2014).

AECEA proposes that the post-diploma certificate for ECE IIIs should require six to eight credit courses in organizational management or pedagogical leadership. Ideally, ECE IIIs should have education in both disciplines.

Early Childhood Educators Need Ongoing Professional Learning and Support

The work of early childhood educators requires specialized knowledge and pedagogical practices that can only be acquired through formal education and ongoing professional learning.

Early childhood educators need different types of professional learning and support at different stages of their careers. Like nurses, teachers, dental assistants and other professionals, they need mentorship and encouragement when they first begin practice. They also need education and training to broaden their knowledge, refine their skills and keep pace with new research and developments (Nutbrown 2012).

Professional learning can take a variety of forms, ranging from post-secondary education to workshops and conferences to participation in professional learning communities. It can include courses, workshops, staff meetings, subject-specific training, supervised practices and mentoring (OECD 2019). It can also be field-based training in which staff receive feedback on their practices.

To be most effective, “professional learning needs to be tailored to the needs of specific staff and offered on a long-term basis. The key is to provide courses that help staff to stay abreast of the latest developments, and the training that provides staff with the tools needed to apply this knowledge in their work” (OECD 2019, 39).

Ongoing professional learning makes it possible for early childhood educators to stay abreast of the latest advances in pedagogy, curriculum and care practice. It helps weaker staff become more effective. It may also improve sector-wide staff retention by improving career satisfaction, opening new career paths and reinforcing early childhood educators’ identity as professionals (OECD 2019).

Most importantly, ongoing professional learning supports pedagogical quality and better outcomes for children and families (OECD 2011). In fact, research suggests that relevant professional learning “is one of the most effective levers for process quality and for supporting children’s development, learning, and well-being” (OECD 2019, 38).

“Research shows that relevant, well-planned professional learning can be inspiring and motivating. Early childhood educators who participate in ongoing professional learning tend to stay in the field and are better equipped to deal with the demanding, complex work they do each day” (AECEA 2018, 76).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE CANADIAN SCENE

There is growing recognition of the importance of professional learning—both across Canada and internationally. Ongoing professional learning is mandatory in some OECD countries, including Slovenia, Austria, Luxembourg.

In Canada, Ontario’s Child Care and Early Years Act is supported by a regulation that requires “written policies and procedures with respect to staff training and development” (Government of Ontario 2019, section 58). A requirement for professional development is also part of BC’s Community Care and Assisted Living Act. BC requires forty hours of professional development for certification.

Many of the provincial/federal bilateral agreements signed as part of Canada’s Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework (see p. 131, Appendix 4) focus on professional learning and development. Here are a few examples (Pasolli 2019; Dublenko):

- BC will provide targeted grants for approved professional development, including grants related to the province’s early learning framework.
- Manitoba will fund a variety of online training programs and pilot a mentorship program to support licensed home-based providers.

- New Brunswick will develop workshops and mentorship programs.
- Northwest Territories will invest in online professional development and on-the-job training.
- Yukon will fund an annual professional development training event.
- Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Nunavut will make investments to support professional development and training.

In 2017–2018, funding allocated through federal/provincial bilateral agreements helped 1,780 Canadian early childhood educators access professional development opportunities (Employment and Social Development Canada 2019b).

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN ALBERTA

Although the value of ongoing professional learning is clear, this important area is often neglected.

A 2016 survey conducted by Public Interest Alberta found that 11% of child care operators offered no professional development for their staff—even in the form of reading material. Only three in 10 operators supported their staff in taking post-secondary courses, and only four in 10 provided paid time off for professional development. Seven in 10 operators provided on-site workshops or funding for staff to attend educational events.

In spite of limited workplace support, early childhood educators themselves are keen to improve their professional learning and skills. In AECEA's 2018–2019 workforce survey (Buschmann and Partridge 2019), more than 71% of respondents said they were interested in continuing their education. Interestingly, this percentage was constant across subgroups: early childhood educators with four-year degrees were just as likely to be interested in further education as early childhood educators with high school diplomas.

Although they were eager to learn, AECEA’s survey respondents identified time and money as major challenges. Additional challenges included the availability of appropriate specialized programs, access to these programs and cost (both training cost and the cost of covering staff while they are away for training).

WHAT KIND OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IS NEEDED?

For the past 12 years, since 2008, AECEA has held a Children’s Services grant to provide professional development funding for child development supervisors.* The association administered the grant on the ministry’s behalf. Between 2014 and January 28, 2020, AECEA made 6,816 professional development grants to help child development supervisors improve their knowledge and skills. Although this represents an investment of more than \$1.2 million, funding shortfalls meant that hundreds of qualified applicants were turned away each year.

Table 5. Number of professional development grants that AECEA awarded to child development supervisors between 2014 and 2020. The grants were available to child development supervisors in contracted family day home agencies or in licensed day care or out-of-school care programs. Supervisors who worked in preschools, as family day home providers or on reserve were not eligible.

Year	PD grants	
2014–2015	1,395	\$215,557
2015–2016	782	\$149,972
2016–2017	827	\$152,127
2017–2018	1,169	\$211,282
2018–2019	1,522	\$287,432
2019–January 28, 2020	1,121	\$225,199

Over the course of administering its grant program, AECEA has collected data on what types of education and training supervisors are looking for to advance their own professional development.

* Alberta Children’s Services will take over the administration of grant funding for child development supervisors as of March 31, 2020. This will provide a single funding-application point of access for early childhood educators at all certification levels.

AECEA's analysis of 2019 data related to foundational early learning and child care education found the following:

- 34% of child development supervisors indicated that they needed information found in certificate-level courses.
 - Within this group, the two top educational priorities were guiding behaviour (41%) and development through play (16%). Both of these topics are directly related to Alberta's early learning and child care curriculum framework, *Flight*.

Alberta's post-secondary early learning and child care programs now include instruction about *Flight*.

- 35% of child development supervisors indicated that they needed information found in diploma-level courses.
 - Within this group, the four top educational priorities were leadership and management (22%), development and inclusive care (16%), training about Alberta's early learning and child care curriculum framework (14%) and creative play (13%).
- 13% of child development supervisors indicated that they needed degree-level courses.
 - Within this group, the two top educational priorities were leadership and collaboration (46%) and mental health and trauma (28%).
- 18% of child development supervisors indicated that they needed other types of professional development

Early childhood educators need to understand the content, recommendations and implications of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. AECEA and its Indigenous partners will discover ways of working together in defining appropriate strategies and approaches for this work.

REQUIRE MANDATORY ONGOING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

AECEA's Recommendation

- 20. Legislate a requirement for ongoing professional learning for all early childhood educators in all sectors of the regulated system.**

Ongoing professional learning should be a requirement for credential maintenance. See Recommendation 15 on p. 70.

“There is growing evidence that a comprehensive and well-delivered, high-quality program of ongoing professional learning, at an institutional or program level, provides positive benefits for staff and program quality” (Muttart 2014, 27).

All early childhood educators—including preschool teachers, early childhood educators in approved family child care programs and early childhood educators who work in licensed and approved First Nations and Métis Settlements child care programs—need support for professional learning. This part of the workforce is excluded from current grant programs.

The importance of ongoing professional learning is clear, and legislating a requirement is a good start. However, early childhood educators and their employers need support to make the legislation work. Staff need incentives to enroll, including financial assistance and time off. Workplaces also need funding support to allow their staff to pursue ongoing professional learning.

- 21. Legislate a requirement for early childhood educators to develop annual professional learning plans that show what education, training, skills development or pedagogical development activities the individuals will undertake each year to improve their qualifications and maintain their certification status.**

Ongoing professional learning linked to a formal learning plan is an important component of quality early learning and child care. Ongoing professional learning helps early childhood educators strengthen their knowledge, skills and competencies in areas such as

child development, management and leadership. It also helps them to build on specialized topics such as outdoor and nature play, nutrition, cultural diversity, inclusion, children’s rights and Indigenous studies.

In Canada, the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (2010) has identified participation in life-long professional development and continuous learning as an occupational standard for early childhood educators. This standard requires early childhood educators to

- *develop professional learning plans*
- *engage in ongoing professional learning activities that enhance their skills, knowledge and experience*
- *network with peers and encourage collaboration by sharing ideas with their professional colleagues*

A Curriculum Framework Provides a Foundation

“The growing practice of creating and using a curriculum framework recognizes...the complementary and complex nature of care, learning and development; that child care is much more than custodial work; and, that early learning is much more than the ‘pushing down’ of school subjects upon very young children—or ‘schoolification’ as this practice is termed” (Muttart 2012, 37–38).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012) identifies the design and implementation of curriculum and learning standards as one of five “policy levers” for creating a well-functioning, high-quality early learning and child care system.*

Curriculum frameworks (Muttart 2012, OECD 2012, European Commission 2014) set out the values and guiding principles that guide early childhood educators’ approach to children’s learning and care. They establish learning standards that ensure consistent quality across different program settings. They guide staff in adopting pedagogical approaches that support children’s learning and well-being. They keep parents engaged in and informed about their children’s early learning and

* The five OECD policy levers are listed on p. 29 of this document,

child care programs. They help parents understand child development and support parents' role in early learning in the home. Finally, they help to connect community-based, school-based and early childhood program-based services and they serve as a resource for all staff who provide services for children and families.

Different countries take different approaches to framing their early learning and child care curricula. Some focus on staff expectations; others focus on expected child outcomes (OECD 2012, 11). In Canada, some provinces' curriculum frameworks take a child development approach; others—including Alberta's—"emphasize children as active, engaged learners" (Muttart 2012, 38).

In spite of such variations in approach, effective early learning and child care curriculum frameworks include a number of standard elements (Muttart 2012; McCuaig 2014; Bennett 2004; European Commission 2014; OECD 2011c; New Zealand 2017): Effective frameworks

- establish a learning and care philosophy, guiding principles and standards
- reflect the best available knowledge, evidence and best practices related to early learning and child care
- set out pedagogical approaches and care practices that recognize children's care, learning and socialization as an inseparable whole
- articulate broadly based, open-ended learning goals that contribute to children's overall development
- support inclusion for all children

"Inclusion encompasses gender and ethnicity, diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socio-economic status and religion" (New Zealand 2017, 13).

- celebrate the diverse social, linguistic and cultural experiences of individual children and their families
- recognize children’s right to be heard and to have their opinions considered
- recognize that parents are children’s first and most influential teachers, acknowledge parents’ aspirations for their children and involve parents in decision-making concerning their children
- embed everyday, local knowledge and resources within the context of early learning and child care and embrace parents, families and communities as partners in children’s learning and development

Effective early learning and child care curriculum frameworks are child centred.

They recognize the rights of children as confident, curious, capable, creative and resourceful learners and citizens. They respect children’s diverse abilities, interests, personalities and preferences and involve them in decisions about their learning experiences.

A child-centred approach acknowledges children as learners who are engaged with their learning environments (New Zealand 2017). It emphasizes children’s potential and recognizes that the “strengths, interests and passions” of children are the “focus of care, learning and growth” (Muttart 2012, 40).

Effective early learning and child care curriculum frameworks promote good health, nurture children’s well-being and foster a sense of identity and belonging.

They establish children’s connections to “family, community, culture and place”—including their place in the wider world—and prepare children for life and citizenship in their society. They support “the right of each

child to be confident in their own culture” and encourage “children to understand and respect other cultures” (New Zealand 2017, 10).

“All children need to know that they are accepted for who they are and that they can make a difference. Feeling that they belong contributes to their wellbeing and gives them the confidence to try new experiences” (New Zealand 2017, 31).

Effective early learning and child care curriculum frameworks are age appropriate and development focused (Muttart 2012; Bennett 2004; European Commission 2014; New Zealand 2017).

They recognize that “learning leads development” and that learning and development take place at the child’s own pace, through active play. They respond to the “strengths, interests, abilities and needs of each child and, at times, provide them with additional support in relation to learning, behaviour, development or communication” (New Zealand 2017, 13). They also support “children’s developing social competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour” (10).

The best development-focused curriculum frameworks define explicit goals that allow children to learn in their own way. They “address the holistic development of children across broad developmental domains,” including cognitive, emotional, physical and social development (European Commission 2014, 39).

Development-focus goal-setting within early learning and child care curriculum frameworks does not match a traditional subject-focused approach. Rather, it focuses on “meaning-making” as children explore and learn about themselves and about their place in the world. It includes movement, creative expression, language and communication—including learning how to interact with people, how to make friends, and how to communicate desires and needs (European Commission 2014, 42, citing Bennett 2013).

Effective early learning and child care curriculum frameworks are relationship based.

They recognize the importance of the “quality of interactions and relationships between adults and children, children and children, and adults and adults” (Muttart 2012, 38). They respect the “capacities, passions, knowledge, and creativity” (40) of every party in the relationship—children, families, early childhood educators and community partners.

Relationship-based curriculum frameworks facilitate communication and cooperation between early childhood educators, parents and children. They also facilitate liaison with other services. This supports the creation of interdisciplinary teams that can respond to children’s particular learning and development needs: early identification and intervention to address children’s learning and development challenges can prevent more serious problems down the road.

Relationship-based curriculum frameworks encourage collegiality and support reflective practice (European Commission 2014). Reflective practice requires early childhood educators to observe and document children’s learning experiences so they can respond to new challenges and changing needs. This deepens educators’ understanding of children’s learning and development.

Effective early learning and child care curriculum frameworks are play based.

“Play is how children experience, engage with and make sense of their world; it helps children develop the skills necessary to build strong bodies and brains” (Pickles 2019, 7).

Children learn through play (European Commission 2014; New Zealand 2017; Australian Government 2018).

Play allows children to explore every aspect of their environment— “natural, social, physical, spiritual and human-made” (New Zealand 2017, 46). Play empowers children. It sparks their curiosity and fosters their well-being, learning and growth. Through play, children learn to respect and make sense of their world. They learn to cope with uncertainty and imagine alternatives. They learn to make connections between prior experiences and new ones.

Play gives children opportunities to ask questions, figure out how things work, choose the materials they need to solve problems, take risks and develop independence. It nurtures children’s creativity, curiosity, reasoning skills, confidence and resilience. All these things are important foundations for learning. Through play, children begin to develop the skills, attitudes and expectations that will continue to influence their learning in school and throughout life (New Zealand 2017, 46).

Children’s right to play is internationally recognized and enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Alberta’s Curriculum Framework

AECEA supports Alberta’s early learning and child care curriculum framework, *Flight* (Makovichuk et al. 2014). *Flight* was developed specifically for Alberta’s children with funding from Alberta Children’s Services. It is intended to guide the practice of early childhood educators working in centre-based child care and family day homes in the province. The *Flight* framework supports staff in working with all children and families, including those with diverse abilities and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Flight is founded on evidence-based practice that centres on children’s physical and emotional well-being and creates a sense of belonging. It includes play-based learning, healthy nutrition, physical activity and meaningful routines.

Following the *Flight* curriculum framework requires sound knowledge and understanding of child development and family dynamics. This means that educators view all children as competent and capable beings. They plan and deliver well-designed learning experiences that reflect the uniqueness of each child and family. Their curriculum-related decisions are based on observation, reflection, documentation and critical thinking as well as on interactions with children and families.

Introducing the *Flight* framework into all of Alberta’s early learning and child care programs will substantially improve the quality of these programs. However, using the framework effectively requires a well-educated and well-supported workforce. *Flight* is a comprehensive and complex document designed to be used by early childhood educators with diploma-level qualifications. “Staff with modest educational qualifications will not have the capacity to follow the framework without additional foundational education and ongoing pedagogical support” (AECEA 2018, 79).

“Most successful curricula are closely linked to an educator’s training and implementation of pedagogical practices. They are characterized by intensive professional development that often involves coaching...and assessments...to inform educators...[about children’s] progress and provide children with individualized instruction.” (Garon-Carrier 2019, 6).

BUILD A QUALITY SYSTEM FOUNDED ON EVIDENCE-BASED CURRICULUM

AECEA’s Recommendations

22. Adopt Alberta’s early learning and child care curriculum framework, *Flight*, in all licensed and approved early learning and child care programs in the province.

Alberta’s early learning and child care curriculum framework, Flight, was published in 2014 (Makovichuk et al.). Like other province’s frameworks, Flight draws on research about how children learn, how development shapes learning and how families and communities

support children's early learning (Muttart 2012). Like other province's frameworks, Flight includes a vision, values and guiding principles. Its open-ended approach defines broad-based learning goals and supports a variety of pedagogical approaches.

Research shows that three operational conditions must be in place for curriculum frameworks to succeed (Muttart 2012, 41):

- *appropriate infrastructure, including staffing, learning materials and physical site resources*
- *appropriate systems to provide information on quality and service delivery*
- *well-educated staff who have the training they need to understand the framework and the support they need to implement it in their day-to-day work*

In order for Flight to be successfully implemented across Alberta's early learning and child care system, it must be embedded in all the province's post-secondary early learning and child care education programs.

Appropriate review, monitoring and updating processes must be developed to ensure that Flight stays current with emerging research and best practices