

## **Proposed changes to Ontario child care regulations will harm quality**

### **New regulation for child care will reduce quality programs and conflicts with stated intention of proposed legislation**

- The Ontario government has tabled new child care legislation that makes many changes including new limitations on unregulated child care.
- At the same time, they have proposed significant changes to child care regulations that are closely linked to quality for young children and working conditions for staff. These proposed regulations aren't necessary.

### **What's the problem?**

It's primarily the regulation changes that are of concern. The direction Bill-143 is generally welcomed.

Quality for the youngest children—infants and toddlers—is the main concern. The proposal is to substantially increase both the number of children cared for by one adult (ratio) and the size of the group with whom the children spend most of their day with (group size).

Research shows that high staff-to-child ratios and low group sizes are key to high quality in child care, especially for infants and toddlers. Research also shows that the ratios and group sizes now proposed by the Ontario government are substantially below acceptable minimum levels that benefit children and provide environments that support and value staff.

#### **Proposed ratios and group sizes**

0-1 yrs = 1:3 ratio; max. 10  
1-2 yrs = 1:5 ratio; max. 15  
2-4 yrs = 1:8 ratio; max. 16 or 24  
4-6 yrs = 1:13 ratio; max. 26  
6-8 yrs = 1:15 ratio; max. 30  
9-12 yrs = 1:20 ratio; max. 20

Another concern is that loosening child care regulations in Ontario may act as a magnet for corporate big box child care operators to set up, as has occurred in other low-regulation countries.

### **The Ontario government's commitment to quality**

One of five Guiding Principles: "Commitment to quality programs for all children. Program quality must be a priority across service settings" (*Modernizing child care in Ontario: Sharing conversations, strengthening partnerships, working together*, Ministry of Education, 2012).

### **Proposed changes to key regulations linked to quality in centres**

Ratios will be significantly reduced and group size substantially increased:

- For 1 – 1 ½ year olds, ratios will increase from 1:3 to 1:5; group size will increase from 10 to 15.
- For 2 – 2 ½ year olds, ratios will increase from 1:5 to 1:8; an increased group size of 24 will be an option.
- No increases in required numbers of ECE-trained staff are proposed.
- Operators will be able to choose from two different ratio/group size models (the existing option and the new option).

## **Proposed changes to key regulations linked to quality in regulated home child care**

- The legislation will increase the total number of children per caregiver from 5 to 6.
- Regulatory proposal to remove the limitation to 3 children under 3 years.
- There is currently no ECE training requirement in home child care and none is proposed.

## **Introduction of multi-age groupings**

- Regulation changes propose two new multi-age grouping options, one of which would allow a maximum group size of 20 for a group including children from 0-4 years.

## **Elimination of requirement of ECE for School Aged programs**

- Early childhood educators have at least a two-year diploma that qualifies them to work with age groups from 0-12. Eliminating the requirement of having at least one ECE for the 9-12 age-group will reduce the quality of these programs.

## **What this means for ECEs?**

Quality is the central of the Province's vision for the early years. The government intends to provide guidance to educators in providing quality early learning experiences based on the latest research about what has the greatest positive impact on children and families. This proposed regulation will reduce quality and put an incredible strain on the ECE's in the sector.

Under the proposed regulation there can be a room of 15 1-2 year olds. One-year olds do not necessarily walk and if they do they are just starting. There could be a room of 15 non-walkers that would create an impossible environment to address the developmental needs of children. Conversely a room of 15 mixed walkers and non-walkers is a recipe for serious health and safety concerns. Self-help skills for 12 month olds don't exist and they are low level for two year olds. Young children experiencing their first introduction to a centre need extra attention to gain even the most rudimentary skills such as holding a spoon and sitting up in a chair. The proposed ratio of 1-5 for the 1-2 year-old age group will be too difficult for diapering and supervising toilet training.

The ratios for 2-4 year olds at a 1:8 ratio in groupings as large as 24 will be stressful and will not enhance the quality of any program.

None of these suggestions take into consideration a positive inclusive learning environment. There is no room in these recommendations for children with identified special needs and more importantly unidentified special needs which are more taxing on the educators because there are no outside resources set up to support them.

## **Ratio choice illusionary**

Parent, advocates and the government are concerned about fees. However reducing fees at the expense of quality is no solution. The sector requires a deep investment of funding to enhance quality. The regulation proposes a choice in ratios. If the goal is quality, then the ratios must be maintained.

There could be a cap in the near future so when they talk about choice with ratios will there really be choice in the future?

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For more detailed information, see the Childcare Resource and Research Unit Briefing Note [Proposed changes to child care regulations - Ontario 2014](#) and the Ontario government's [backgrounder on the proposed regulation changes](#).