

The purpose of this letter is to express our disappointment with the Government of Prince Edward Island's decision to reduce Pedagogical Support staff positions at early learning centres across the province. UPSE had the opportunity to meet with members and representatives from the Morell Early Learning Centre and the Holland College Early Learning Centre to discuss the impact of the government's cuts to the early learning sector. It is disappointing that the government did not consult with the sector or with operators before reducing funding and leaving operators to figure out how to continue meeting the needs of families and communities. The government responded that "operators are resilient." This is unacceptable and disrespectful to operators who expanded services to meet demand, only to have funding pulled away.

So, what role do Pedagogical Support staff play in early learning? They support educators, strengthen programming, and help ensure responsive care for children. They mentor and coach staff, especially new educators, by providing feedback, guidance, and problem-solving support. They also help educators plan programs, document children's learning, and prepare family communications, allowing educators time away from the floor for meaningful programming work. Pedagogical Support staff also provide direct support to children. This includes helping children who need extra support, building relationships, and fostering a sense of belonging and security within the centre. In addition, they play a critical operational role. When staffing is short, or substitute staff are unavailable, they step into classrooms to maintain safe staffing ratios and ensure centres can remain open without disruption to families. Overall, Pedagogical Support staff strengthen both the quality of care and the stability of early learning environments. Cutting these positions or significantly reducing their hours is a disservice to early learning centres and to families. The early learning sector is already facing recruitment and retention challenges, and these cuts will only make the situation worse.

The reality is that if early learning centres cannot absorb these reductions and lose these staff positions, families will have fewer childcare options. This could result in one parent leaving the workforce, leading to further labour shortages and reduced tax revenue for the province. This decision appears to be financially motivated and reflects poor fiscal management at the expense of one of our most vulnerable populations, our children. For example, this government has spent significantly above budget estimates on the senior Health PEI executive team, and \$202,998.81 in relocation expenses for the former CEO. These expenses included \$135,833.34 for real estate commission fees, \$27,826.05 for moving costs, and \$30,000 for flights and hotels, due to a Health PEI policy that was not enforced at the time of hiring. The cuts to the early learning sector are another example of fiscal mismanagement that has led the government to search for cost savings in a sector that needs more support, not less. This reflects the government's priorities.

UPSE represents members at both the Morell Centre and Holland College and is advocating not only for its members, but for all Early Childhood Educators on Prince Edward Island. The government needs to reinstate funding for Pedagogical Support staff and properly fund the early learning sector. Investment in early learning is critical for child development and should not be

negatively impacted because of poor fiscal management by this government. I encourage members, families, and communities to speak out and support the reinstatement of this funding.

Karen Jackson,
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