

The 2018-2019 AECEA Survey of the Alberta Early Childhood Education Workforce: Results and Analysis

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AECEA
Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta



Community-University Partnership
for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families

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Audience

This report was prepared for AECEA and is intended for distribution to individuals and organizations interested in the early learning and care workforce.

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Introduction

The mission of the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA) is to transform Alberta's early learning and child care workforce into a recognized profession. AECEA advocates for higher education standards, better wages and working conditions, and comprehensive system supports for early childhood educators. AECEA believes that these changes will form the foundation for a high-quality child care system in Alberta.¹

To better understand the early learning and child care (ELCC) workforce in Alberta, AECEA conducted a survey in late 2018 and early 2019. This survey is part of a larger ongoing engagement with the workforce that AECEA is conducting province-wide that includes face-to-face conversations, focus groups, and webinars. The results of this survey, presented below, will be used in concert with these other engagement strategies to guide AECEA's construction of a framework for professionalizing the ELCC workforce.

The core questions that this survey was intended to address were:

1. What is the profile of the current ELCC workforce in Alberta?
2. What is the capacity of the current ELCC workforce to advance their education?

It should be noted that this survey included only 1,228 of the approximately 15,500 people working in early childhood education in Alberta. Respondents were not chosen randomly, and so are not necessarily representative of the larger ELCC workforce in the province. However, the information in this survey can be combined with data from AECEA's other engagement efforts, as well as other sources, to gain a better picture of both the profile of the current ELCC workforce in Alberta and the workforce's capacity to increase their training and education.

This report contains four sections: (1) this Introduction; (2) Survey Results, which provides basic descriptive results for the survey as a whole; (3) Deeper Dives, which hones in on two respondent groups of specific interest to AECEA; and (4) a short Conclusion. An appendix at the end provides additional details on survey methods.

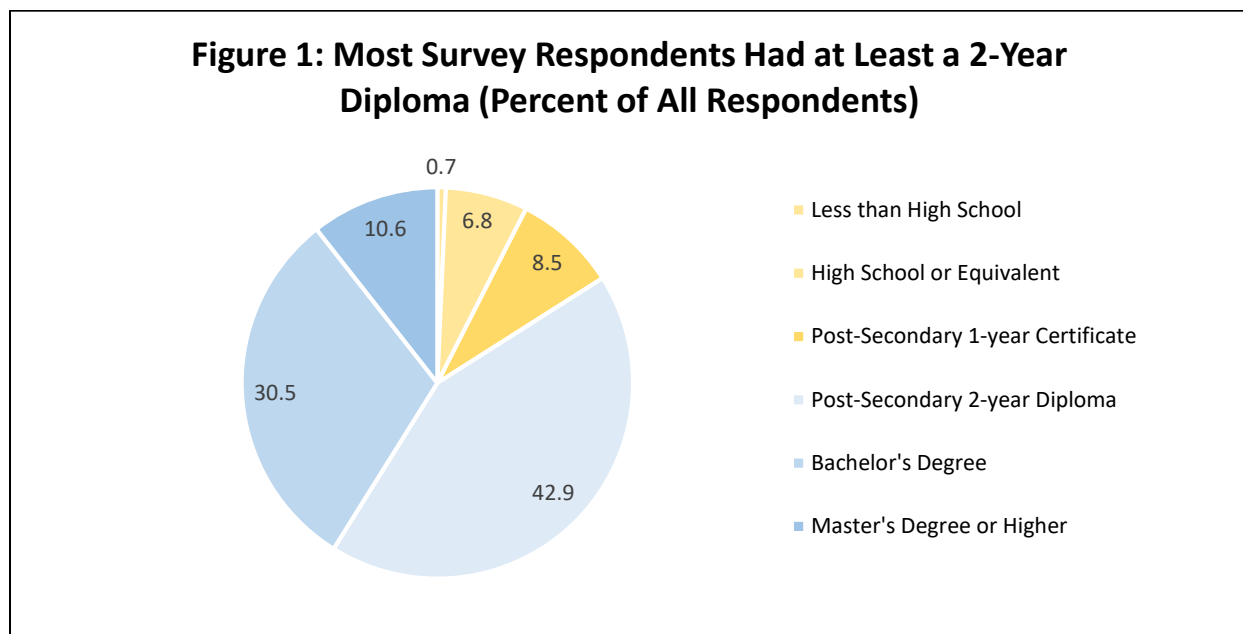
¹ For more information, please see AECEA's Mandate Document, available at <https://aecea.ca/qualified-educators-quality-care-aeceas-mandate-document>.

Survey Results

Basic Demographics

Of the 1,228 respondents to this survey, almost all were female (96.7%). Respondents ranged in age from 16-76 years old, with a median age of 40. Most respondents were from urban areas: 58.9% lived in either the city of Calgary or the city of Edmonton, with another 16.5% from Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, or Red Deer. Nearly three in four (70.5%) lived in the Children's Services regions of either Edmonton (32%) or Calgary (38.5%).

The highest level of education (in any field) completed by survey respondents is shown in Figure 1.² In general, this was a highly educated group, with 84.1% having achieved a 2-year diploma or higher. Most respondents completed their highest level of education in Canada (70.0%), with the next most common countries being the Philippines (9.6%), and India (5.2%); in total, 59 countries were mentioned. Of those who completed their education in Canada, most (79.8%) completed their education in Alberta.



Respondents came from diverse backgrounds. Six of ten (59.7%) were born in Canada, and of those, 10% identified as Canadian Aboriginal.³ Of those who were not born in Canada, 38% immigrated within the last decade, 38.2% immigrated from 2000-2009, and 23.8% immigrated prior to 2000. Regardless of the length of time they have been here, the vast majority (96.2%) of those who came to Canada from elsewhere have now made Canada their permanent home (64.8% are Canadian citizens and 32.2% are permanent residents). The primary language spoken in their childhood home for most respondents was English (64.7%), with the second most common being Tagalog (8.0%). In all, 57 different languages were mentioned by respondents.

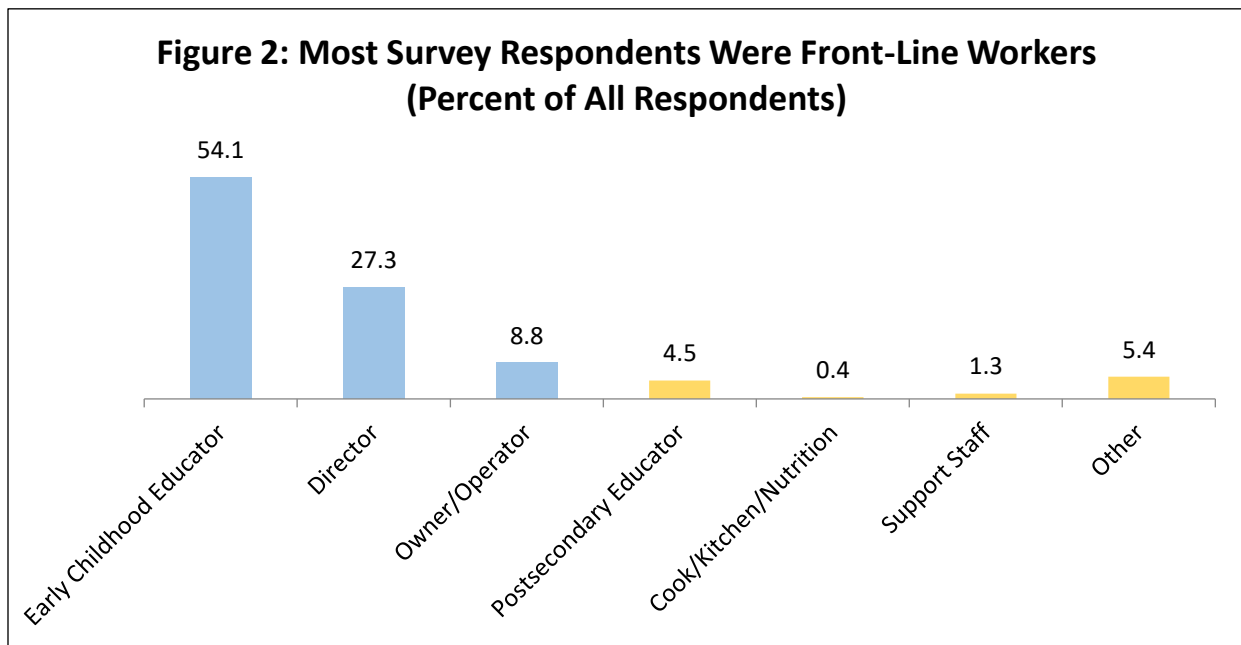
² The general education numbers in this discussion do not include three individuals who responded "other" to education and who could not be placed in any of the categories in Figure 1.

³ Analysis of these Indigenous respondents (n=73) found that in almost every respect measured in this survey, they were similar to non-Indigenous respondents.

Employment

All respondents were currently working in early learning and child care, with most (88.4%) working full-time and the remainder (11.6%) working part-time. In general, respondents were experienced in ELCC, with 30.9% having worked 15 or more years, 42.8% having worked 5-14 years, and only 26.3% having less than 5 years of experience in the field.

The vast majority (90.2%) of respondents had ongoing day-to-day experience on the “front lines” of early learning and child care, as can be seen in Figure 2, which shows the primary positions reported by respondents. Of those who selected “other” on the survey, 63.6% (42 out of 66) said that they were day home consultants, indicating that most of this category was also heavily involved with the daily operations of early learning and care programs.



The programs where respondents worked reflected a wide range of settings, including child care centres (55.0%), out-of-school cares (15.2%), preschools (9.2%), day home agencies (8.2%), day home providers (6.9%), Early Childhood Services (2.9%), with a smaller number working in other settings (2.6%). Some of those other settings included postsecondary educational programs, professional development education services, or Parent Link centres.

About one in seven (14.3%) of respondents said they worked outside ELCC in the past year. In this group, by far the most common reason given for doing so was to supplement their income (64.6%; note that respondents were able to give more than one reason). This is particularly notable given the high levels of ELCC-specific education and experience of respondents to this survey. Other reasons given included a desire to use some of their other existing skills (28.0%) or to learn new skills (23.4%), or because the hours in ELCC were unsuitable (17.1%). A very small number (4.0%, seven respondents) indicated that they were working outside ELCC as a way to transition out of the field. About 10 respondents (5.7%) added their own original responses to this question; some had issues with feeling valued (i.e. “I felt unsupported/disappointed with the field, the pay low and the demand very high. Lots of work done at my own time”; “there were no positive work atmospheres in child care in my area”), while others brought up the issue of burnout (i.e. “I burnt out. I was feeling unsupported by my director and frequently disrespected by parents. I needed a change”, “I let myself get really tired

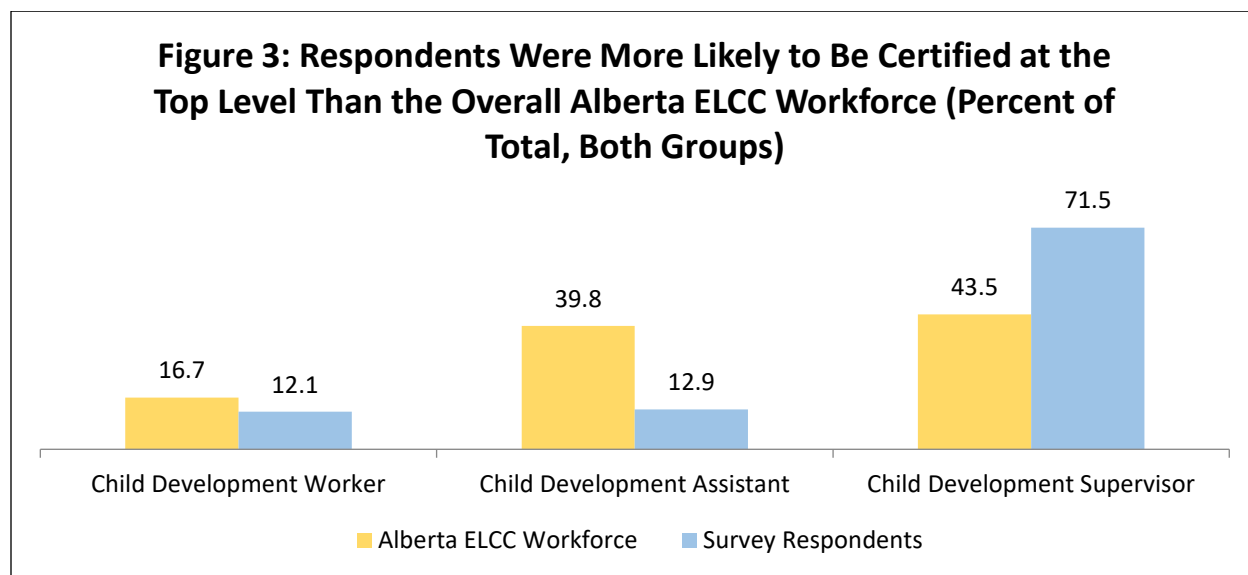
working in a day care setting. I thought leaving the profession would allow me to start fresh.”). Still others brought up a lack of job availability (i.e. “because the company was restructuring and too many lay-offs”, “no positions available in the town I resided in”, “recently moved to Alberta and took the first job offered as it took a long time for my certification to be transferred”).

ELCC-Specific Education and Certification

Most respondents (83.8%) had completed at least one ELCC-specific certificate, diploma, or degree. Of this group, 23.0% had a 1-year post-secondary certificate, 60.2% had a 2-year postsecondary diploma, 25.7% had a bachelor’s degree, and 4.5% had a master’s degree or doctorate.⁴

Of the 16.2% of respondents who had not completed a certificate, diploma, or degree, some had completed other training programs (9.6%), while others had completed some coursework (6.6%). Of those completing training programs, approximately three out of four (73.7%) had completed the Government of Alberta’s Child Care Orientation Course, either alone or in combination with other training programs. Of those respondents who had completed some coursework but had not received a credential, about a third (35.8%) were in the midst of a postsecondary degree program. Of those who were not current students in such a program, their coursework experience was quite varied, including courses in high school and various departments of postsecondary institutions. (More on current ELCC students is found below.)

Nearly every respondent to this survey (96.5%) had some level of ELCC certification in Alberta. Of those, 13.4% were certified as a Child Development Assistant, 12.5% as a Child Development Worker, and 74.1% as a Child Development Supervisor. Figure 3 shows the certification levels of survey respondents compared to the certification levels of staff in day care programs, family day homes, and out of school care programs in Alberta as a whole.⁵



⁴ These percentages add to more than 100 because respondents were able to select more than one answer to this question. About 10 percent of respondents had multiple ELCC-specific certificates, diplomas, or degrees.

⁵ Figures for Alberta ELCC workers are taken from the Alberta Children’s Services Annual Report 2017-2018, available at <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/2371-9168/resource/4954b31c-add8-429f-91d5-57462c148cf9>.

Current and Future ELCC Students: General

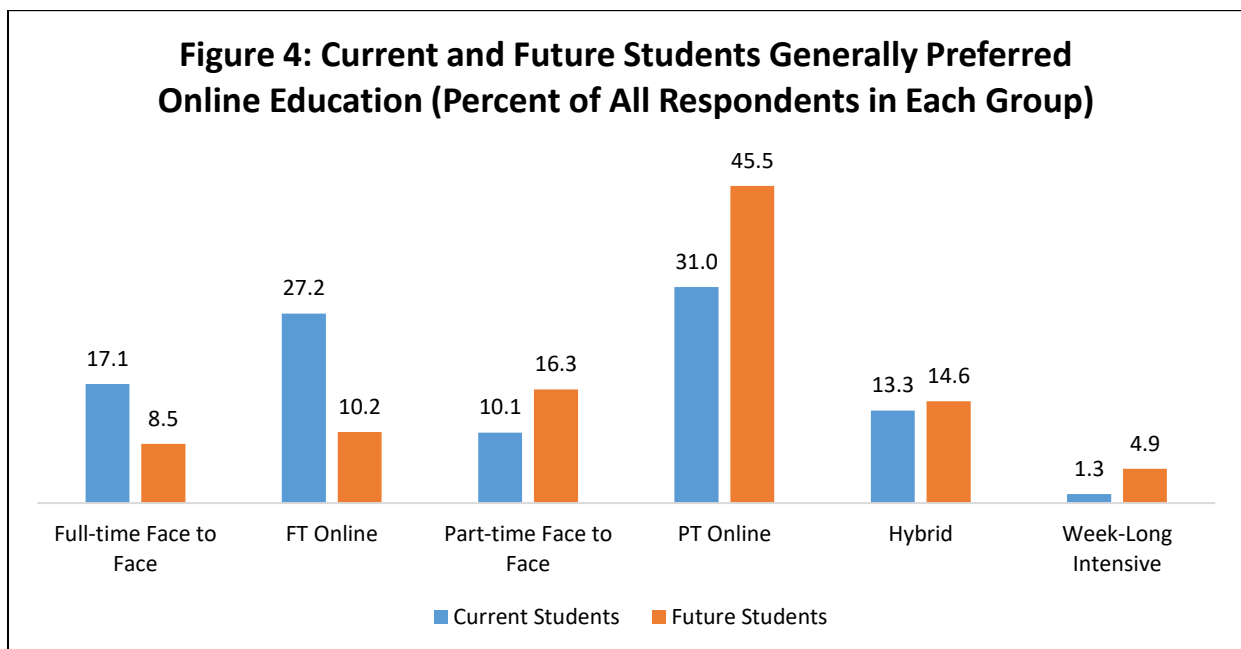
158 (12.9%) of survey respondents were enrolled in post-secondary early learning and child care programs, with slightly less than half of this group going full time (47.5%) and the remainder attending part-time (52.5%). The top five institutions where students were enrolled were Bow Valley College (17.1%), Grande Prairie Regional College (12%), MacEwan University (10.8%), Mount Royal University (9.5%), and Red Deer College (9.5%).

Most current students either had as an end goal of their studies a diploma (43.7%) or certificate (19.0%). Smaller numbers were working toward a bachelor's degree of child studies at Mount Royal University (11.4%) or a graduate degree in ELCC (7.0%). A fairly large percentage (19.0%) did not fit into any of these categories, and gave responses that revealed a wide range of educational goals in a variety of programs ("Bachelors of Social Work", "Children's Mental Health Certificate", "Master's in Business", etc.).

Of those who were not current students, 71.2% indicated that they were interested in eventually continuing their ELCC education. It is worth noting that this number did not vary according to the amount of general education that these respondents already had—that is, those with a high school diploma were just as likely to say they wanted to continue their education as those with a four-year bachelor's degree. These "future students" were asked, along with current students, about their preferred delivery methods for postsecondary education along with any barriers that they could see to continuing their education. Answers to these two critical questions are described in separate sections below.

Current and Future ELCC Students: Preferred Delivery Methods for Education

Figure 4 describes the preferred delivery methods for postsecondary education for both current and potential future students.

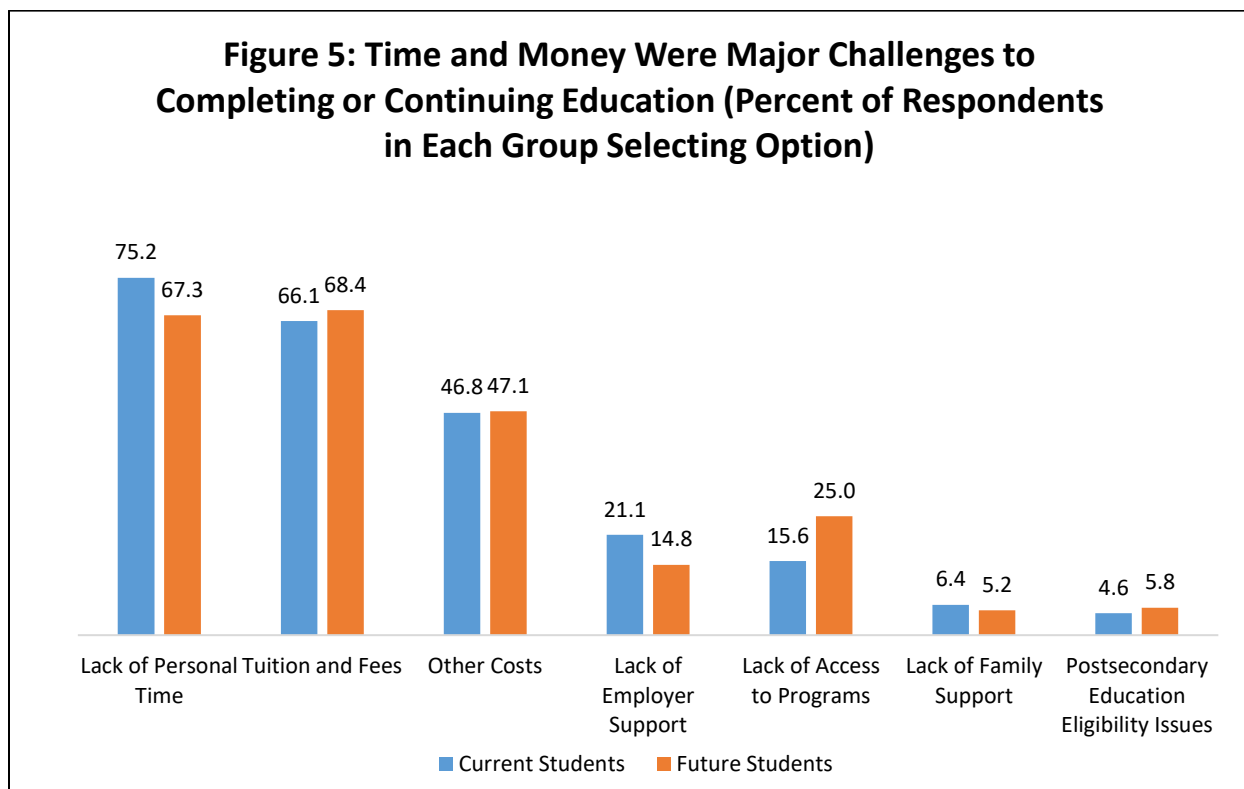


For current students (blue columns in Figure 4), there was a clear preference for online delivery methods, with a slight overall preference for full-time education. Potential future students, in contrast, strongly favoured part-time options, with online, part-time education options (45.5%)

winning out over any other delivery method. It is notable that the majority of both current students and future students preferred online options to face-to-face options for their postsecondary education. These preferences did not vary appreciably between those current or future students with differing levels of general education (more specifically, current and future students with less than a 2-year diploma had roughly the same preferences as current and future students with a 2-year diploma or higher).

Current and Future ELCC Students: Challenges to Completing / Continuing Education

Both current and potential future students were asked whether they faced any challenges to completing or continuing their educations. In both groups, about 7 out of 10 (69.0% for current students, 73.0% for future students) replied yes. Figure 5 compares how often each challenge was mentioned by each group (percentages add to more than 100 because respondents were able to select as many challenges as they wanted).



Among both current and future students who said they faced challenges, there are two types of barrier that stand out above the others. **Time**, specifically lack of personal time to study, was most frequently mentioned by current students, and was near the top for future students as well. This is unsurprising, given that postsecondary education is time-intensive, and all of the respondents to this survey were also simultaneously working in ELCC (in fact, 77.2% of current students were *also* working full-time). **Money** was the other main barrier to completing or continuing education. In fact, 73.4% of current students, and 76.1% of future students, selected at least one of the two money-oriented barriers (tuition and fees or other costs related to attending school, including potential lost earnings, ongoing living expenses, computer/internet costs, or transportation costs). As can be seen in Figure 5, “tuition and fees” was the top-rated financial concern, with somewhat fewer current and future students mentioning other costs.

Lack of employer support and lack of access to programs were less frequently selected, but these two barriers cannot be dismissed as unimportant—one out of five current students noted a lack of employer support, and one out of four future students sees lack of access to programs as a barrier to continuing their education.

For most respondents (more than 95%), these seven categories seemed to adequately cover the barriers they faced. Some, however, noted other challenges, such as problems related to transferring of previous education (i.e. “current education fees not transfer, would need to start over”, “related coursework does not transfer to an ELCC program, would have to start from scratch”), residency or immigration issues (i.e. “too much requirements/hassle and higher fees if not Canadian citizen”, “current residency status does not allow for courses to be taken”), or language barriers (“English language requirements”, “no French language program in Alberta”).

Respondents Uninterested in Future Education

Of those who reported not wanting to continue their education (308 individuals, or 28.8% of respondents who were not currently students), the top reason cited was that their current education was adequate (43.8%). Less frequently cited reasons included lack of personal time to devote to coursework (14.6%), age (14.5%), lack of money (11.7%), a feeling that additional education would not result in adequate increased compensation (7.5%), and that they were considering a career change (6.5%).

Deeper Dives

Respondents Working Outside of ELCC for Pay

One group that deserves a closer look are the nearly one in ten survey respondents who said they worked outside of ELCC in the past year to supplement their income. Table 1 contains a detailed comparison of this group to those who did not work outside ELCC to supplement their income in the past year.

Table 1: Comparison of Survey Respondents Who Worked Outside of ELCC for Pay with Those Who Did Not

	Worked Outside ELCC (n=113)	Did Not Work Outside ELCC (n=1,155)
Female	94.7	96.9
Age (mean, in years)	35.0*	41.5*
Living in Edmonton or Calgary Region	71.7	70.4
Completed 2-year diploma or higher (any area)	74.3*	85.1*
Completed ELCC-specific certificate, diploma, or degree	73.5*	84.8*
Working full-time in ELCC	81.4*	89.2*
5+ years' experience in ELCC	48.7*	76.2*
Certified at CDS level	54.0*	73.3*
Primary Position		
Early Childhood Educator	64.6	53.0
Director	22.1	27.8
Owner / Operator	5.3	9.2
Other	8.0	10.0
Type of Program		
Day Home Agency	8.0	8.3
Day Home Provider	8.0	6.8
Child Care Centre (Daycare)	47.8	55.7
Preschool	12.4	8.9
Out-of-school Care	19.5	14.7
Early Childhood Services	3.5	2.9
Other	0.9	2.8
Felt respected / valued by parents	83.2*	91.2*
Felt respected / valued by public	53.1	58.4
Current Post-secondary student	20.4*	12.1*
Not current student, but want to continue education	78.9	70.5

All figures are percentages unless otherwise noted. Statistically significant differences at the $p < .05$ level (using chi-squared, Fisher's Exact, or t-tests) are denoted with an asterisk.

It is clear that respondents who worked outside ELCC for pay in the past year were a different group. They were younger, somewhat less educated, somewhat less likely to be working full-time in ELCC, less experienced, far fewer held Child Development Supervisor certification, and somewhat more were current students (though still only 1 in 5). Most felt valued and respected by parents, but there was a significant gap in this perception between respondents who worked outside ELCC for pay and those who did not.

It may be that those who worked outside of ELCC for pay in the last year were younger and earlier in their ELCC careers, and therefore both more capable and more willing to work a

second job to supplement their incomes. But it is also possible that pay for younger, less experienced ELCC workers in Alberta is insufficient, and that some feel that they need to work more to support their lives and families. This is potentially problematic, as having to work a second job to make ends meet could delay or prevent an ELCC worker from progressing or continuing in the field of early learning and care. These results also suggest that feeling valued and appreciated by parents may play an important role in keeping younger, less experienced ELCC workers more strongly attached to the field—or, at the very least, prevent them from taking another job while they work in early learning and care.

Perceptions of Being Valued and Respected

All survey respondents were asked a pair of questions about whether they felt valued and respected for their work, both by parents and by the general public. The overwhelming majority of respondents felt respected by parents (90.5%), but considerably fewer (57.9%) felt respected by the general public. Comparisons for respondents on perceptions of value and respect by parents are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of Survey Respondents Who Felt Respected by Parents with Those Who Did Not

	Respected (n=1,111)	Not Respected (n=117)
Female	96.8	95.7
Age (mean, in years)	41.1	39.5
Living in Edmonton or Calgary Region	70.1	74.4
Completed 2-year diploma or higher (any area)	83.9	86.3
Completed ELCC-specific certificate, diploma, or degree	83.9	82.9
Working full-time in ELCC	87.9*	94.0*
5+ years' experience in ELCC	73.3	77.8
Certified at CDS level	71.2	74.4
Indigenous	6.0	5.1
Born outside Canada	41.1	32.5
Worked outside of ELCC in past year	13.7	19.7
Worked outside of ELCC in past year to supplement income	8.5*	16.2*
Primary Position		
Early Childhood Educator	54.1	53.9
Director	27.0	29.9
Owner / Operator	9.1	6.0
Other	9.8	10.3
Type of Program		
Day Home Agency	8.6	5.1
Day Home Provider	7.1	5.1
Child Care Centre (Daycare)	54.7	57.3
Preschool	9.6	5.1
Out-of-school Care	14.3	23.1
Early Childhood Services	3.2	0.9
Other	2.5	3.4
Current Post-secondary student	12.4	17.1
Not current student, but want to continue education	71.5	68.0

All figures are percentages unless otherwise noted. Statistically significant differences at the $p < .05$ level (using chi-squared, Fisher's Exact, or t-tests) are denoted with an asterisk.

Those who did not feel respected by parents worked outside of ELCC for pay at roughly twice the rate of those who did feel respected (16.2% vs. 8.5%). This is unsurprising given the findings in the “Deeper Dive” on respondents who worked outside of ELCC for pay in the section above. Those who did not feel respected by parents were also more likely to be working full-time than part-time, though both groups were, for the most part, employed full-time (94.0% vs. 87.9%).

Several differences in Table 2 were on the border of traditional measures of statistical significance; together, these differences suggest some interesting patterns. First was the difference in perception between respondents who were born outside Canada, where those born outside Canada were *more* likely to feel valued and respected by parents than those born in this country ($p=.07$). Second was that people who worked outside of ELCC in the past year for any reason were less likely to feel valued and respected than those who did not ($p=.08$), a finding that makes sense given the majority of those who worked outside ELCC in the past year did so to supplement their income. Third, feelings of being valued and respected by parents varied somewhat on the type of program in which respondents worked ($p=.07$). Generally, day home and day home agency workers, those working in preschools, and those working in Early Childhood Services (ECS) were more likely to feel valued and respected, while those working in out-of-school-care programs were less likely to feel that way.

Table 3 (next page) provides the same comparison as Table 2, except using perceptions of being valued and respected by the public rather than parents. Again, far fewer respondents felt that they were respected and valued by the public (57.9%) than by parents (90.5%).

Several differences in Table 3 are worth noting. One is the gap in ELCC experience between those who said that they felt respected by the public. In particular, those with *more* experience in ELCC were *less* likely to say they felt respected by the public. It is unclear why this might be, though it could be that over time, these respondents had accumulated more experiences of being demeaned by members of the public (for example, being called a “babysitter”) compared to those who had been in ELCC for less than 5 years. (This idea is somewhat refuted by the higher average age of those who said that they felt respected—that is, it seems like being older means feeling more respected by the public, but working more years in ELCC means feeling *less* respected.)

The small but significant gap between those certified at the highest level in feeling valued by the public—where *fewer* people certified at the highest level actually felt valued by the public—may be because respondents with more experience also tend to be certified at the highest level. However, it may also suggest that those certified at the highest level may feel some sense of frustration that, despite their efforts to educate themselves, these efforts were not recognized or rewarded publicly.

Other differences in Table 3 are harder to explain. There is a large gap in perceptions between those born outside of Canada vs. those who were born here. If a respondent was born outside of Canada, there was a much higher chance that person would feel respected and valued by the public for their work (in fact, 69.7% of respondents who were not born in Canada felt respected by the public, while only 49.9% of those born in Canada felt the same way). There was also a higher chance of not feeling respected if the respondent was a director of a program, or if the person worked in a daycare or out-of-school care, though these observations should be regarded with caution due to relatively small numbers working in some types of programs.

Table 3: Comparison of Survey Respondents Who Felt Respected by the Public with Those Who Did Not

	Respected (n=711)	Not Respected (n=517)
Female	96.5	96.9
Age (mean, in years)	42.0*	39.6*
Living in Edmonton or Calgary Region	71.0	69.8
Completed 2-year diploma or higher (any area)	85.0	83.0
Completed ELCC-specific certificate, diploma, or degree	82.4	85.7
Working full-time in ELCC	11.3	12.0
5+ years' experience in ELCC	68.5*	80.9*
Certified at CDS level	68.2*	76.0*
Indigenous	5.1	7.2
Born outside Canada	48.5*	29.0*
Worked outside of ELCC in past year	13.5	15.3
Worked outside of ELCC in past year to supplement income	8.4	10.3
Primary Position*		
Early Childhood Educator	55.3	52.4
Director	24.1	31.7
Owner / Operator	9.1	8.3
Other	11.5	7.5
Type of Program*		
Day Home Agency	9.0	7.2
Day Home Provider	7.5	6.2
Child Care Centre (Daycare)	53.2	57.5
Preschool	10.0	8.1
Out-of-school Care	13.5	17.4
Early Childhood Services	3.4	2.3
Other	3.5	1.4
Current Post-secondary student	12.9	13.7
Not current student, but want to continue education	71.3	71.1

All figures are percentages unless otherwise noted. Statistically significant differences at the $p < .05$ level (using chi-squared, Fisher's Exact, or t-tests) are denoted with an asterisk.

Finally, while it is useful to closely examine Tables 2 and 3, it should be noted that many of the differences in these tables—while statistically significant—are not particularly large. Perhaps the most relevant gap remains the most easily observed one: the difference between respondents' perceptions of respect by parents (90.5%) vs. by the general public (57.9%). AECEA may want to consider what a much lower perception of being valued and respected by the public among the ELCC workforce could mean going forward. It is unknown at this point what specific negative effects this relatively low perception might be having on the ELCC workforce, or the profession in general. It is worrisome, however, and it may be some indication that there is a still long way to go in promoting the importance of the ELCC profession in Alberta.

Conclusions

This survey is the only one of its kind that has been conducted in Alberta: a survey that focuses primarily on the educational needs of the ELCC workforce. Although this group of respondents does not necessarily represent the entire workforce in the province, their responses provide some interesting and heretofore unknown insights into the workforce. In particular, these results suggest that there could be a considerable appetite among ELCC workers for more education, though it may not be through traditional channels such as face-to-face programs. It is also encouraging that over 90% of the workforce feels valued and respected by parents. Educators who feel valued and respected by “clients” in their everyday work, and who are hungry for more education, can create a good foundation upon which to build a high-quality workforce.

There is also some cause for concern in these results. Seven in ten respondents cited at least one major challenge to completing or continuing their educations. Over four in ten did not feel valued or respected by the general public. One in ten respondents worked outside the field in the past year to supplement their income. These results are troubling, especially given the relatively high level of education and experience in this group of survey respondents. It is possible that a more representative and less “select” sample would reveal even higher rates in these three areas, or other issues that did not emerge here. Despite what might be a solid foundation, there still appears to be long way to go in overcoming some key barriers to strengthening the ELCC profession in Alberta.

Appendix: Survey Methods

This survey (The 2018-2019 AECEA Survey of the Alberta Early Childhood Education Workforce) was conducted entirely online. Survey responses were gathered using a Drupal web form available on the AECEA website. The link to the survey was initially distributed via email on October 23, 2018 and final submissions were allowed up to, and including, May 31, 2019.

The survey was shared via email 15 times from October 2018 to May 2019 in targeted email blasts to a total of 2,741 individuals and 2,354 organizations, for a total of 5,095 email addresses to which the survey link was sent. Organizations contacted included childcare centres, family dayhome agencies, preschools, and out-of-school care centres in Alberta; the complete list of childcare programs was provided by the Alberta Children's Services as of May 1, 2019.

Links to the survey were also shared at conferences attended by AECEA representatives, including:

- 2018 ARCQE National Child Day Conference
- 2019 SACDA School Age Care Conference
- 2019 SAPTA Energize Convention
- 2019 Foothills Early Learning and Care Conference
- 2019 AECEA 3-day Event (Students' Day, Leaders' Day, Essential Pieces Conference)
- 2019 MacEwan University Child Care Conference.

Finally, the survey was also shared at numerous AECEA engagement sessions (funded by a Ministry of Status of Women grant), which were attended by 2,695 individuals.

From October 2018 to March 2019, all of those who had completed the survey were given the opportunity to enter their name into a monthly draw (raffle). Winners received either a \$50 Visa pre-paid debit card (two available each month) or a complimentary 2019 AECEA conference registration (one available each month).

Funding to AECEA for the design, administration, dissemination, and analysis of the survey was provided by the Alberta Government, Ministry of Status of Women, and the Alberta Early Learning and Care Leaders Caucus.