

Honourable Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education  
438 University Avenue, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 1N3

Honourable Ross Romano  
Minister of Colleges and Universities  
438 University Avenue, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 1N3

February 11, 2021

Dear Minister Lecce and Minister Romano,

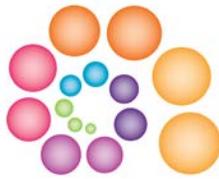
**Re: COVID impacts on early childhood education programs**

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact on the in-person practicum components of post-secondary programs in early childhood education. We are writing to clarify our position on these practicum placements and inform you of our approach to protecting the public interest in these unusual circumstances. We affirm our commitment to working collaboratively with your ministries, post-secondary institutions and sector stakeholders to address the impacts of the pandemic and ensure that families in Ontario continue to have access to high quality child care provided by qualified educators.

As you know, the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) serves and protects the public interest by regulating the profession of early childhood education and governing more than 58,000 registered early childhood educators (RECEs) across Ontario. Each year, we welcome more than 4,000 new RECEs to the profession, of whom 85% are graduates of an early childhood education program offered by an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology (OCAAT).

A key pillar of our mandate is establishing and maintaining qualifications for registration to ensure that RECEs entering the profession are equipped to practice safely, ethically and competently. The *Early Childhood Educators Act* provides that an OCAAT diploma in early childhood education satisfies the education requirement for registration. Post-secondary programs must comply with the early childhood education program standard established by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, but OCAATs have autonomy to design, develop and implement curriculum.

In-person practicum placements are a critical part of all OCAAT early childhood education programs, normally comprising over 500 hours of experience in environments such as licensed child care programs. Practicum is an essential complement to theory-based curriculum courses because it is the mechanism by which students develop skills and acquire experience applying theoretical knowledge in practice through formal learning arrangements under the supervision and mentorship of RECEs. The College's expectations regarding practicum are set out in detail [here](#).



Since the onset of the pandemic, OCAATs have been able to continue teaching theory-based courses via online learning, however, students have not been able to complete all of the in-person practicum placements typically required. In fact, due to the timing and duration of their program, some students may not have any in-person experience by the time of graduation. Future cohorts will be similarly affected for as long as the pandemic's impacts to the sector continue.

It is the responsibility of OCAATs to determine what modifications to make to their programs during the pandemic and how students are to fulfil graduation requirements. Since last spring, we have been communicating with programs about their efforts in this regard. We also reached out to staff at the Ministry of Education to explore options, including the possibility of temporary regulatory amendments to allow for additional oversight of graduates with limited practical experience as they enter the profession. Because a large cohort of students expect to graduate this spring, the window of opportunity to make those amendments with time for faculty, students and employers to prepare has now passed.

We are now focusing our efforts on supporting these future RECEs through our professional practice resources. As an initial step, we will provide OCAAT program coordinators with information and resources to share with students who anticipate graduating in spring 2021. To complement this effort, we will also reach out to employers and other sector stakeholders to raise awareness of the issue and encourage them to have additional supports in place.

We continue to communicate with post-secondary programs about the impacts of the pandemic on practicum and the strategies they are developing to ensure students are prepared for RECE practice. As our work progresses, we hope to share information and trends regarding the impacts of the pandemic on practicum, as well as promising innovative practices and potential areas of risk. We would be pleased to share this information with your ministries as well. We remain committed to working together with government, post-secondary institutions and sector stakeholders to address the challenges arising from the pandemic.

Sincerely,

Beth Deazeley  
Registrar & CEO

cc. Nancy Naylor  
Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Education

Shelley Tapp  
Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Colleges and Universities

Phil Graham  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Early Years and Child Care Division, Ministry of Education