

Pour continuer à grandir: Commission sur l'éducation à la petite enfance ^[1]

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Source: Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance (AQCE) & Institut du Nouveau Monde (INM)

Format: Report

Publication Date: 21 Feb 2017

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To keep growing: Report by the Early Childhood Education Commission

In 1997, the Québec government published its Family Policy, *Les enfants au cœur de nos choix*. Twenty years later, the Early Childhood Education Commission was established to evaluate early childhood educational services and their impact on young children.

The commission and its work

The Commission has combined different forms of participation in evaluating early childhood educational services and determining any adjustments needed. Commission members visited 14 cities to foster social dialogue focusing on quality, access, universality and governance of educational services for young children.

Highlights of the consultation process

The very large majority of testimonials the Commission received emphasized the absolute need to offer a high quality of service to support optimal child development and equal opportunity in Quebec. Studies show that the quality of such services remains lackluster in Quebec. In addition to the issue of funding, unequal childcare provider training requirements and a virtually total lack of suitable means for assessing these services are crucial gaps that must be bridged to boost the quality of early childhood educational services.

Access seems to have been improved thanks to rapid growth in spaces at unsubsidized daycare centres. Questions remain, however, about the quality of these new spots. Furthermore, vulnerable families face many barriers to obtain such services. One failure of the Family Policy is its lack of success in reaching more vulnerable families, as desired. Yet it is precisely the children of these families who have the most to gain from attending educational services, starting at an early age.

The practice of charging different fees for subsidized places and giving tax credits for unsubsidized spots is often questioned because of the impact this strategy could have on the services parents decide to use. The Commission's consultation process underscored the adverse influence that such initiatives could have by encouraging parents to replace subsidized services that are generally of better quality, with their unsubsidized counterparts, for financial reasons.

The accounts of citizens and experts that the Commission received underscore the need for better cooperation among educational daycare services, the healthcare and social services sector, schools and community groups in ensuring better support for child development and in particular, the child's overall development. By the same token, the government's early childhood initiatives must be better coordinated because piecemeal actions by different ministries undermine the integrated effort needed.

Five policy statements:

1. The government should clearly state that child daycare services are above all educational services.
2. Early childhood (birth to age 4) educational services should be free, just like school.
3. The quality of early childhood educational services must be improved.
4. Early childhood educational services must reach and include children from disadvantaged communities and vulnerable situations.
5. Cohesion and complementarity must be enhanced among all stakeholders involved in early childhood services.

Region: Quebec ^[5]

Tags: quality ^[6]

universal ^[7]

review ^[8]

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