

Nova Scotia pre-primary program may further disadvantage students with autism: advocates ^[1]

Author: Walsh, Marieke

Source: Global News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 20 Jun 2017

AVAILABILITY

Read and watch online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Pouring more cash into mainstream school programs while issues with inclusion are outstanding is leaving a sour taste with some Nova Scotians.

During the May election, the Liberals promised to introduce a new pre-primary school year across the province. Stephen McNeil said it would take four years to roll out but the province will go from eight to 30 schools starting in September. Once fully in place, the Liberals say it will cost \$49.4 million annually.

The decision to invest so heavily in pre-primary when there are no extra funds for inclusion is a "slap in the face," according to Allison Garber. And she said other families share a similar sentiment.

Her son is in Grade 1 and is on the autism spectrum. He needs one-on-one support but she said that often isn't possible because his teaching assistant is assigned to more than one student.

"Our children have great potential, but we're feeling let down, we're feeling exhausted," she said in an emotional response Wednesday. "Integrating pre-primary into our public education system right now seems to me exactly the same thing as deciding to put a new roof on your house as it burns to the ground."

"We are not taking care of the children we currently have in our public education school system," Garber said.

She said in both primary and Grade 1 her son waited until January before he got access to a speech language pathologist. She said that falls well short of meeting her son's needs and she wants the government to focus on improving the current system before adding to it.

But Education Minister Zach Churchill suggested any gaps in resources lies with the school board.

"Those are local school board decisions in terms of where those resources are allocated," he said.

Pressed on his government's funding for those boards, he said the government is "focused on tackling what I think the root cause of a lot of that the stress is and that's the model of inclusion that we do have."

An interim report on Nova Scotia's inclusion policies is due next week. Churchill said the review will lead to "very important" changes in the system. And he said his government's previous investments in education show its committed to making improvements.

The Liberal's review of classroom conditions came with a \$20 million budget over two years. The inclusion review called for at the same time didn't come with a budget for implementation.

Autism Nova Scotia has 'a lot of concerns'

Autism Nova Scotia said its heard similar concerns to those raised by Garber.

"There's a lot of questions that we have about the pre-primary program," executive director Cynthia Carroll said.

She said supports and classroom conditions are "not where they need to be right now" and the organization has "a lot of concerns" about those gaps being amplified with an extra school year tacked on.

The government said the eight schools that currently have pre-primary are "inclusive environments" and the program will support inclusion.

Children on the autism spectrum are often forced to start primary school one year after other Nova Scotians because a crucial treatment called Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI) can't be done at the same time as primary school and is often only available when a

child turns five.

Carroll said she was worried that would force students to be two years behind their peers rather than one. However, late on Wednesday the government said students will be able to attend both EIBI treatments and pre-primary at the same time.

"Pre-primary programming will not affect those children who access other programs such as EIBI," spokesperson Heather Fairbairn said in an email. "It's not an either or, they can do both."

Garber said that is "welcome news," but much more detail is needed.

-reprinted from Global News

Related link: Nova Scotia to offer free pre-primary care at 43 locations [3]

Region: Nova Scotia [4]

Tags: early childhood education and care [5]

disability [6]

inclusion [7]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/17/07/nova-scotia-pre-primary-program-may-further-disadvantage-students>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/17/07/nova-scotia-pre-primary-program-may-further-disadvantage-students> [2]

<http://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/17/07/nova-scotia-pre-primary-program-may-further-disadvantage-students-au> [3]

<http://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/17/07/nova-scotia-offer-free-pre-primary-care-43-locations> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7853> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/early-childhood-education-and-care> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8951> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8952>