

# N.S. daycare struggles to hire staff as government rolls out pre-primary program <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

The Halifax Regional School Board has thrown a lifeline to a daycare centre struggling to find early childhood educators.

The East Preston Daycare Centre has been operating in East Preston, N.S., for more than 40 years, and is now serving a third generation of children, but the chair of the daycare centre's board of directors says it's facing a staffing problem.

Mike Brownlow says early childhood educators are becoming more difficult to find as the province's new pre-primary program gets up and running.

"Some of our staff have actually left to go to the pre-primary program," says Brownlow.

He says they have been working to create a substitution list of qualified early childhood educators for the last three years, but they haven't had much luck.

"There (aren't) the numbers of people available out there," he says.

Brownlow says he's frustrated the provincial government is going ahead with the pre-primary program without understanding its potential impact on the childcare sector.

"They've certainly got good things planned, and they've done good things, but the problem is no one really seems to know what the number of qualified early childhood educators are available," says Brownlow.

The province estimates it will need between 250 and 500 qualified early childhood educators over the next four years. The program will have 50 classrooms in 43 locations in its first year, and will expand to include all four-year-olds in the province by 2021.

A spokesperson for the Nova Scotia Department of Education says it's also working with training institutions to do future workforce planning, but that doesn't address the current problem at the East Preston Daycare Centre.

Frustrated by its staffing dilemma, the daycare centre decided to reach out to the Halifax Regional School Board, which offered to help.

"A handful of [early childhood education] applicants who were not successful in securing a position with the board were informed that [the daycare centre] was recruiting," said board spokesperson Doug Hadley in an emailed statement. "It was a one-time effort to provide support to a not-for-profit organization working in an under-served area of the municipality."

First announced in April, pre-primary became a major Liberal promise during the spring election campaign. The program is to be introduced across the province over the next four years at a cost of \$49.9 million a year.

The government announced in mid-July that it wanted to add 30 new classes to 20 existing classes at 43 locations across the province this fall, with availability contingent on the number of available early childhood educators.

However, the opposition party has been calling on government to delay the start of pre-primary until next year to ensure adequate staffing levels.

"The government has been saying they've consulted with daycares but the daycare operators I've spoken to, no one has been consulted," says Progressive Conservative MLA Tim Halman.

The province is starting a consultation process on the impact of preprimary this fall. The East Preston Daycare Centre is still looking for staff.

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**Region:** Nova Scotia <sup>[3]</sup>

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