

Daycare owner fears closures under tougher training regulations ^[1]

Proposed changes would require higher ratios of staff to children and better trained staff

Author: Fraser, Elizabeth

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EXCERPTS

A Moncton daycare owner says proposed new regulations are too strict and could lead to daycare closures across New Brunswick.

The proposed changes to the Early Childhood Services Act would require higher ratios of staff to children and better trained staff.

By 2020, half the staff in a child-care centre would be required to have an early childhood education certificate or equivalent training.

Stephanie MacMullin, the owner of ABC Daycare on Mill Road in Moncton, said she would love to have more trained staff, but it's not possible.

She has a hard enough time hanging on to trained staff as it is, she said.

Once staff members get their early childhood development diplomas, they head to the New Brunswick school system for larger salaries, MacMullin said.

"We support them through their two and a half years to do their course part time," she said. "Once they have their diploma, they'll leave us to go work in the schools. We can never keep up."

The minimum salary for daycare employees in New Brunswick is about \$16 an hour and in the schools, it's between \$20 to \$25 an hour, she said.

Under the proposed bill, administrators would also be expected to have early childhood education certificates, which MacMullin said will be challenging since some administrators work more than 45 hours a week and will have little time to take the course.

The proposed changes are expected to come into effect on July 1, 2020, but because it takes 2½ years to complete the diploma course part time, staff would have to start training now, she said.

"It's very short," she said.

Staff-to-child ratio

MacMullin's daycare has 30 staff members, who look after 175 children.

The daycare is already close to the 50 per cent mark for trained staff, but if someone goes on maternity leave, or the daycare loses five employees who have certificates, she doesn't have trained backup to turn to.

Looking ahead to 2020, MacMullin asked: "What's going to happen then? Are we going to have to close?"

Every year, she said, there's almost a 30 per cent turnover, meaning the daycare is "always starting over."

She said the proposed changes came out Dec. 5 and comments had to be returned by Tuesday.

MacMullin sent in her concerns and has also started a petition for parents to sign, because she believes they will notice the impact.

A raise in wages

Last week, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development announced it would contribute \$28 million over four years to support the wages of early childhood educators.

Geneviève Mallet-Chiasson, communications officer with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, said the funding will start in 2019-20, raising wages to \$19 an hour from \$16 for trained early childhood educators by 2022-23.

"The Department will continue to work with operators and educators over the next three years to support them to reach the proposed training requirement."

Pay increase needed now

This is in addition to the more than \$26 million in wage support currently being provided, said Mallet-Chiasson.

But MacMullin said employees will need higher wages as soon as possible.

"I'm not saying you have to change the goal, but you have to give us a means to obtain it," she said.

"What we would want is they increase the wages now, at the same time they're passing the law."

-reprinted from CBC News

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