

Nova Scotia to add 130 more pre-primary classes by September

[1]
Province's new pre-primary program is roughly 6 months away from a major expansion

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The provincial government is expanding Nova Scotia's pre-primary program and will add 130 more classes by next September.

That will bring the total number of pre-primary classes in the province to 184 in 129 schools.

There will also be one privately run facility in Kentville, where a licensed daycare will run the service on behalf of the government as a pilot project, as there wasn't space to create a pre-primary class in any school in that community.

Premier Stephen McNeil and Education Minister Zach Churchill announced the expansion Wednesday in the middle of a rambunctious pre-primary class at Harbourview Elementary School in Dartmouth.

"[This] is one of the early 50, one of the first ones that we did ... across the province, which is showing tremendous results," said McNeil, surrounded by four-year-olds stacking blocks and rolling Play-Doh.

"The biggest complaint that we were receiving from communities was 'Well, how come we didn't get one?'"

250 more educators needed

The additional spaces will bring the program to 65 more communities in Nova Scotia, including Thorburn, Albert Bridge and Mahone Bay.

"This announcement will create spaces for up to 2,600 four-year-olds in our province, which is very exciting," said Churchill.

But, he said, that was contingent on hiring 250 early-childhood educators before next fall. "We do believe we have the labour market here to fill these positions."

Churchill also said it was likely there would be additional partnerships in the future with other licensed child-care providers, similar to the arrangement in Kentville.

"Our ideal is to provide the space in schools because that helps with the transition into the academic learning environment from the play-based environment," he said. "But in communities where there isn't space, we still want them to have access to pre-primary."

"So a partnership with the regular child-care sector, I think, will help us accomplish our goal of giving 100 per cent access to families and four-year-olds across Nova Scotia."

More than 800 children in 45 schools across the province are currently enrolled in the pre-primary program, which launched last fall.

The governing Liberals will add \$24 million to the coming spring budget to fund the expansion. Last year's budget for the program was \$6 million.

The government has promised to extend pre-primary across the province by 2020.

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