

Finding enough workers still challenge as Nova Scotia rolls out pre-primary ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Private and non-profit child care operators in Nova Scotia say it remains to be seen how their sector will ultimately be affected by the ongoing rollout of universal pre-primary for four-year-olds across the province.

However, representatives told the legislature's human resources committee Tuesday, the big issue remains access to enough trained early childhood educators.

Nova Scotia has 2,700 registered early childhood educators (ECEs) with about 1,700 employed in regulated child care.

"Despite the reported numbers of ECEs available to practice in the province, the regulated early learning and care sector has experienced and continues to experience significant challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, impacting quality across programs," said Pam Streeter, of the Private Licensed Administrators Association, a group of for-profit day cares.

A key Liberal campaign promise during the May 2017 election, pre-primary was launched last September in 54 classes in 45 schools. In March, Education Minister Zach Churchill announced an additional 130 new classes are slated to open in 84 schools next fall.

Critics have questioned how fast the government proceeded with its plan, contending the sector will be hurt by the loss of children and qualified staff.

Lisa Davies, of the Non-Profit Directors Association, said the quick rollout has had negative effects, although there hasn't yet been the overwhelming loss of staff predicted.

"Action creates change, speedy change often creates fear," Davies told the committee.

"I believe the speed with which this happened probably is the underlying fear for a lot of the issues that have been raised around the pre-primary program and its impacts on the child care sector."

Education Department officials said 110 early childhood educators were hired to meet initial requirements, and an additional 700 will be needed by the time pre-primary is fully implemented in 2020.

"All of these new classrooms require ECEs. That is pulling those folks away from us – again not a new problem, but adding on to it," Davies later told reporters.

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