

Allison Hanes: Study shows many Quebec daycares are failing our kids ^[1]

While a new report doesn't rate individual daycare centres, the analysis is nevertheless eye-opening and provides some important insight.

Author: Hanes, Allison

Source: Montreal Gazette

Format: Article

Publication Date: 21 May 2018

AVAILABILITY

[Read online](#) ^[2]

EXCERPTS

For working parents, there is nothing more important than leaving our kids in good hands when we drop them at daycare to head to our jobs.

We hope they're having fun with their friends, learning new skills, getting some fresh air and forging close bonds with their educators in a stimulating and nurturing environment.

We usually have pretty strong gut feelings about these things. But how do we actually know if our children are getting the best possible care?

The Observatoire des tout-petits has some answers. It released a report Tuesday examining how different types of daycare stack up in Quebec. The Observatoire, an initiative of the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, is focused on studying the well-being of Quebec children and their families. While it doesn't rate individual daycare centres, the analysis is nevertheless eye-opening and provides some important insight on where we are sending our children for as many as eight hours a day.

This latest project pulls together more than a decade of research to offer a comparison of all the various types of child care: subsidized Centres de la petite enfance, private daycares and at-home daycares. It also looked at pre-kindergarten programs for four-year-olds, which are in the process of being expanded in Quebec, mainly in underprivileged neighbourhoods.

"A fairly significant proportion of young children are attending facilities of poor or very poor quality" is the report's alarming conclusion. "This proportion is relatively low, however, in CPEs (provincially subsidized educational childcare centres). Studies carried out in kindergartens for four-year-olds have also revealed certain problems related to quality."

Fannie Dagenais, the director of the Observatoire, said the purpose was not to point fingers or show that one kind of daycare is superior to the others.

"For us, there are challenges for every type of milieu," she said. "But the goal is to look at what we have to do to improve the quality for all children."

According to data published in 2014, 41 per cent of private daycare centres offered care that was of poor or very poor quality for children up to 18 months old, while 36 per cent of them scored just as low for children 18 months to age five. In contrast, only two per cent of CPEs rated that poorly. More than 66 per cent of CPEs offered good or excellent care to the youngest children and 45 per cent got high marks for kids ages 18 months to five.

Data on in-home child care dates to 2003. It found that 60 per cent of the care offered to all age groups was acceptable, with 18 per cent deemed high calibre and 20 per cent found to be poor quality.

These are the overall results, but the study does a much deeper dive on all aspects of a child's day at these centres, from the healthiness of the meals they are getting to the educational materials in the classrooms to how much time they are spending outdoors. The evaluations were done according to three different in-depth scales early childhood experts use.

To decipher the results, it's important to know where Quebec's youngsters are spending their days. A third of children in daycare in Quebec attend CPEs; another third go to in-home daycares, some of which are subsidized; 22 per cent are enrolled in private daycares (which for the purposes of the study are referred to as "non-subsidized") and 16 per cent are at private daycares that are subsidized.

The Observatoire's report also notes that an unknown number of children go to unregulated in-home daycares, which don't have to be licensed if they have fewer than six children. A 2009 survey estimated that as many as 39,000 children could be in these unaccredited settings, which were not evaluated in the study.

Meanwhile, an examination of the rollout of all-day pre-K classes in schools during the last few years have shown mixed results. One study by researchers at the Université du Québec en Outaouais conducted between 2012 and 2016 examined teacher-child interaction. It found the quality of emotional support offered in the classroom was high, but the instructional support was low.

Another study of both half-day and full-day pre-K classes by the Université du Québec à Montréal rated the classroom environment to be poor. It looked at the pedagogical materials, furnishings, personal hygiene routines, activities, interaction with the teacher and program structure. The problems could be growing pains, as the program was introduced quickly. But it raises some important questions about whether it is meeting its lofty objectives, especially where it overlaps with the quality of service in CPEs.

Quebec invests more than \$2.5 billion a year in subsidizing 233,000 daycare spots. What started out in 1997 as a universal program where families contributed \$5 a day has since 2014 become an income-based fee structure that costs families between \$8.05 and \$21.95 a day. Quebec offers tax rebates to parents who don't have access to subsidized spots and rely on private facilities. Last year, the Quebec government also announced \$11 million to create 100 new pre-kindergarten classes.

But this isn't about money, or even assuaging our working parent guilt.

It's about our kids.

As Dagenais noted in an interview, children's brains develop so rapidly in the first few years of their lives that it has an impact on their social, emotional, intellectual and physical well-being far into the future. Given how much time children spend in daycare, the quality of the service is absolutely critical. And the positive effects of high-quality early childhood education are even more beneficial for vulnerable children.

"It can have repercussions throughout their lives," Dagenais said. "The 'protector effect' lasts even to adulthood."

Dagenais said addressing some of the disparities found by the study could mean more training and better pay or work conditions for educators, since the care they provide has such an important influence on their young charges. The study provides a roadmap for where action needs to be taken.

As Quebec tries to tackle its stubbornly high dropout rate and prepare the next generation to reach their full potential, ensuring our little ones get the best care at a tender age should be our top priority.

Related link:

Region: Quebec ^[3]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/05/allison-hanes-study-shows-many-quebec-daycares-are-failing-our-kids>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/05/allison-hanes-study-shows-many-quebec-daycares-are-failing-our-kids> [2]

<https://montrealgazette.com/opinion/columnists/allison-hanes-study-shows-many-quebec-daycares-are-failing-our-kids> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7855>