

Amid cuts, PCs opt to keep major child-care program ^[1]

Province will continue \$12.2M program started by previous government

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EXCERPTS

New Brunswick's Progressive Conservative government has decided to stick with a major child-care program launched by the previous Liberal government.

Education Minister Dominic Cardy has confirmed the province will go ahead with the roll-out of early learning centres around New Brunswick as well as subsidies to families who use them.

In December 2017, the then-Liberal government announced \$12.2 million from a federal-provincial child care agreement would be used to improve the quality of childhood learning at an estimated 300 centres around the province.

"The program's been a big success in Edmundston and in Saint John, where it's had lots of uptake from the centres that wanted to join. So I was quite happy to go ahead and we're going to be continuing the roll-out." - Dominic Cardy, minister of education

Non-profit and for-profit daycares would be allowed to seek designations as early learning centres, making them eligible for increased funding.

Additional money from the federal-provincial agreement would subsidize families using the centres, based on their income. Those with household incomes of less than \$37,500 would not pay anything.

The first centres were rolled out last March in Saint John and Edmundston. Those in remaining areas of the province were due to be designated during the current fiscal year ending March 31.

But in the interim, the PCs took power on a promise to curb rampant government spending.

Cardy says after reviewing the program, he recommended it continue, given the money was already budgeted.

"I decided yes, this does make sense," he said. "The program's been a big success in Edmundston and in Saint John, where it's had lots of uptake from the centres that wanted to join. So I was quite happy to go ahead and we're going to be continuing the roll-out."

All areas of the province are set to be covered by the end of the fiscal year.

Welcome news

Beth Lyons with the New Brunswick Women's Council said that's a good move considering how expensive it is to run a childcare centre and to pay for it as a parent.

"It's really critical that we view daycare, early learning and childcare as a piece of social infrastructure that requires public investment," Lyons said. "So we're really excited to see money being directed both to the families and towards the daycares themselves."

Lyons said now she'll be on the lookout for another Liberal-government promise to be fulfilled by the PCs, this one about pay equity for early childhood educators.

She said the previous government announced a plan to increase wages over a couple of years, "not to the point that would represent pay equity necessarily but it was still an increase."

"This government has spoken about a couple of female-dominated professions that are underpaid and they do want to be addressing wages in those sectors," she said.

"We are eager to see what the next steps are going to be around increasing pay for early childhood educators in New Brunswick."

'Less partisanship'

After losing power in November, the Liberals repeatedly pushed the Higgs government to say whether it would keep the program.

Cardy said he hopes this shows that the PCs want "less partisanship" in their decisions.

"This is a Liberal program," he said. "This is one where the previous government deserves some credit for getting it going and I hope that we can earn some credit for making sure that ... it's continuing to move ahead."

In a tweet Tuesday afternoon, former premier Brian Gallant said he was pleased to hear the Tories would keep the program in place.

Region: New Brunswick ^[3]

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