

Childcare project includes seven recommendations for improvements to P.E.I. system ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

CHARLOTTETOWN, P.E.I. —

Starting universal preschool for four-year-olds in P.E.I. is one of the recommendations coming out of a research project released Tuesday.

The Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation partnered with CHANCES on the six-year research project to look at the impact of expanding access to early-childhood services with a focus on at-risk families.

Margaret McCain was at the CHANCES office Tuesday where she said there is a shift away from considering daycare as babysitting and, instead, focusing on the child and the need for education that includes care.

“The focus is changing from a workplace support to a child support,” she said.

During the first phase of the project, 110 children from families that weren’t eligible for government subsidies were given 20 hours per week of no-fee preschool.

That care was provided to children starting at age three until they entered Kindergarten.

With the project ended, McCain and researcher Kerry McCuaig presented seven recommendations related to early-childhood education.

The project partners recommended Premier Wade MacLauchlan appoint a special advisor to develop an implementation plan for full-day preschool for four-year-olds.

McCuaig said the outcome for the children who took part in the project was that they entered kindergarten with advanced social skills and advanced learning skills.

She also said it narrowed the gap between children who enter kindergarten ready to learn and others who are less so.

“For many of those children they never catch up,” she said.

Among the other recommendations were changes to the childcare application process, which the province has already implemented.

The report recommended adopting a provincial early childhood workforce strategy and implementing a quality improvement plan.

“The frank reality of that will be we do not currently have the workforce to be able to make a commitment like that at the present time.”
-Education Minister Jordan Brown

Other recommendations included conducting regular assessments of program quality and including early years centres in economic planning.

Martin Arsenault is the father of three children who he says benefited from attending CHANCES, including two that still go the centre in Stratford.

Arsenault said the kids used to stay at home, but their parents struggled with getting them socialized and around other people.

“Because of this program, they’re learning more social activities,” he said.

For Arsenault, he does seasonal work and said the family wasn’t eligible for funding to pay for their children’s care.

If it wasn’t for the program, Arsenault said his family wouldn’t have been able to afford it.

“It’s great for the people that need it,” he said.

In response to the recommendations, Education Minister Jordan Brown said the government has addressed some of the issues in the recommendations, including a recent announcement of pay raises for early childhood educators.

Brown said universal preschool isn't something he could commit to, but it's also not something he would rule out in the future.

"The frank reality of that will be we do not currently have the workforce to be able to make a commitment like that at the present time," he said.

Early childhood education is something that is important for Island children, Brown said.

"It's something that is of the utmost importance to our government and we will look to work on with the sector as we move forward."

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