

PCs moving ahead on half-day preschool plans despite concerns

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P.E.I. scores top marks in early childhood education, according to report

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EXCERPTS

P.E.I. Education Minister Brad Trivers has tabled a document in the legislature indicating the Island has the top marks in the country when it comes to early childhood education.

Though Trivers referred to the numbers in the 2017 Early Childhood Education Report, he echoed Official Opposition concerns on protecting those numbers when considering adding more programming.

The Early Childhood Education Report is an assessment of a series of benchmarks for early childhood education in Canada. P.E.I. scored 11 out of a possible 15 points.

"The thing we have to be cognizant of is we have one of the best early childhood development systems in Canada," Trivers said Friday during question period before tabling the 2017 education report.

"As we move forward we want to make sure we're not impacting that."

During the recent election campaign, PC leader Dennis King announced that the party would create a new half-day preschool program for four-year-olds at a cost of about \$5 million.

Trivers said the government is in the "beginning stages of moving forward" on the program.

Trivers responded to a question from Green MLA Karla Bernard. She said with the government's plan to implement a half-day universal kindergarten program could have a negative consequences.

Bernard said the opposition has been speaking to many childhood educators and daycare owners.

"All of them are already struggling to maintain enough staff and cannot imagine staffing a program such as this," she said.

Concerns around wages, staff retention

Bernard said the concerns she has been hearing are around wages, staff retention, care for special needs children and local access to educational programming for childhood educators.

Trivers said he has heard the same comments from early childhood educators on the Island.

There are challenges with early childhood educators moving to become education assistants and "sometimes that has to do with wage," he said.

P.E.I. struggled in the 2017 report in regard to the salaries paid to early childhood educators. In a category asking if early educators made three-quarters of the salary of teachers, P.E.I. picked up no points.

"These are all parts of the areas we need to address and that's one of the things that we're going to be doing as part of the First 1,000 Days and the [pre-kindergarten] development," Trivers said.

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Region: Prince Edward Island [3]

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