

Early child-care education worker shortage in N.S. being called a 'crisis'^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Calls come in daily from families looking to enroll their children in daycare programming, says Kids & Company in Bedford, N.S. But because of a lack of qualified workers in the province, the company has said they've had to roll back enrollment at certain child care locations.

"There's a variety of reasons right now, but a big player is pre-primary for sure," said Dorothy DeVouge-Morphy, the senior area director for Kids & Company.

They operate seven locations across the province but, like other regulated child care centres, they've been hit with a "staffing crisis," says DeVouge-Morphy, as they lost four employees already this summer to the pre-primary hiring blitz and found out today they'll be losing one more.

"We just had one give her notice this morning because she was offered a job yesterday," said DeVouge-Morphy.

The provincial Liberal government has been rolling out its four-year pre-primary programming, and that's not only helped families access free child care, it's also created 500 additional ECE jobs, says Education Minister Zach Churchill.

But this is where operators like Kids & Company say they are losing staff to the school board.

In order to help those regulated child-care centres, Churchill says the government is providing millions in annual subsidies.

"That's why we work with our regulated child-care sector so closely," Churchill said from his constituency office in Yarmouth, N.S. "We invest approximately \$70 million a year in that sector to help them have competitive wages."

With 84 new pre-primary classrooms set to be added to schools with the Halifax Regional Centre for Education this September, and additional 50 more classrooms scheduled for next year, it has created a strain on the job sector, said Churchill, adding the province is actively supporting recruitment measures.

"We have added over 130 new seats at NSCC (Nova Scotia Community College) for training," he said. "We have new bursaries and grants available for people who want to be an early childhood educator. There's never been a better time to be an early childhood educator in Nova Scotia."

Pam Streeter has worked in the early childhood care field for more than 30 years and is the founder and executive director of Creative Kids Education Centre. She says staffing shortages have been ongoing since the late 90s.

The introduction of the pre-primary education system was a Liberal campaign promise, said Streeter, who added she believes the rollout has been swift and only exacerbated the staffing issues.

On paper, she points out, it might look like there was enough ECE staff to accommodate the pre-primary rollout, but says that's not the case.

"There's retirees who have kept up their classification, or there are substitute teachers, or there could be ECEs that are taking time off to help raise their families but keeping up their classification," said Streeter. "So the numbers don't actually reflect the available ECEs."

Churchill says every regulated childcare company that has applied for government grants have been successful in receiving funding.

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Region: Nova Scotia^[3]

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