

Early child-care workers in Cape Breton ponder job action ^[1]

Licensed daycare centres unable to compete with pre-primary program, according to one worker

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EXCERPTS

Early child-care workers in Cape Breton will meet this week to discuss walking off the job.

They want to draw attention to what they say is a labour crisis created by the introduction of pre-primary in Nova Scotia schools.

"We are struggling with staff, trying to replace staff that have gone to the pre-primary program to work," said Patricia Landry Martin, a co-director at a Sydney daycare.

"We can't find subs. If someone's off sick it's a scramble to cover the ratios with the children."

The issue, she said, is that licensed daycare centres are unable to compete with the wages, benefits and pensions offered by the pre-primary program system.

"I have been an early childhood educator for 35 years and lead teachers in pre-primary make much more than me," she said. "I'm talking four or five dollars more than I make an hour."

Daycare lost five staff members

Her own daycare centre has lost five staff members to pre-primary.

She and the other early childhood educators she's consulted in organizing this week's meeting want equal pay with workers in the pre-primary system.

Zach Churchill, the minister of education and early childhood development, acknowledges the challenge.

"When you're creating 500 new jobs in any space, you're going to create some labour pressures on those that are already working within that system," he said.

Churchill said government currently subsidizes the regulated child-care sector to the tune of \$70 million per year.

"So we do invest heavily," he said. "And we've actually seen that sector grow at the same time that pre-primary has been brought into Nova Scotia."

The answer to the labour pressures, he said, is training.

"We're training hundreds of more people now than we ever have. And also we're looking at recruitment within the province and in other provinces as well," he said.

'Burnout rate is at an all-time high'

Landry Martin argues that while the province does provide subsidies to centres, it also caps the amount they can charge parents.

While training more workers may offer relief a few years down the road, she and her colleagues need help now.

"Burnout rate is at an all-time high," she said. "We have staff left, right and centre having to leave because they're overworked. They're exhausted. So it may be a solution down the road, but the here and now is change has to happen."

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