

Reader's Corner: Province has sabotaged publicly funded daycares ^[1]

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EXCERPTED

As a parent of four school-aged children, I know that decisions made in the education system have a significant and direct impact on my life and the lives of my children. As such, I try to be engaged and informed on the issues and trends in our public education system.

So I was surprised when, in 2018, seemingly without consultation or public demand, the government of Nova Scotia began the rollout of a pre-primary program. The rollout came when the demands I was hearing in the media and beyond were for more supports for teachers and students already in the school system – inclusive education supports, better student-teacher ratios, simplifying of reporting systems, etc. Instead of responding to these existing needs, the government invested millions of dollars in a new – and poorly planned – service that was not high on the priority list for teachers, parents, students or the general public.

The introduction of pre-primary has had an impact – and not a positive one – on families of young children who rely on publicly funded daycares. Pre-primary has pulled qualified ECEs, already in very short supply, out of daycares into the school system, where they can earn better pay and get better benefits. It has led to more work for daycare administrators, who have gone out of their way to provide creative solutions to parents of pre-primary kids for wrap-around care.

The Whycocomagh Child Development Centre, which our family relies on for child care, is in the midst of a critical staffing shortage as a result of the pre-primary program. Its hours have been reduced, and for two days this week, there will not be any after-school care available for our daughter. And if one of the remaining ECEs gets sick, the staffing ratios will be such that all programming may need to be cancelled.

The government of Nova Scotia made this mess, and now it needs to clean it up. In the short term, it must acknowledge that this is a crisis, and it must immediately adjust the regulations so that centres like the WCDC continue to operate with lower percentages of ECEs. And in the long term, government officials need a strategy to train, recruit and fairly compensate ECEs in non-profit licensed child-care centres.

If the money the province foolishly invested in pre-primary had gone into subsidizing and strengthening existing child-care centres like the Whycocomagh Child Development Centre, the benefit to families like ours – and so many others – would have been something to be proud of.

Education Minister Zach Churchill – it's time to fix your mistake.

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

Tags: public management ^[4]

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