

# Nova Scotia daycare operators take pre-primary concerns to education minister <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

People who run daycares across Nova Scotia met with Education Minister Zach Churchill on Thursday to express their concerns about the province's pre-primary program.

They say wages and pensions being offered by the pre-primary program are luring away qualified workers, resulting in labour shortages at daycares across the province.

Patricia Landry Martin says she has wanted to meet with Churchill for a while, and there's still a lot to figure out after Thursday's meeting.

"I was hoping we would get there and everything would be flat out and everything would be arranged toady, but everything is in steps and we have to take our time to make these decisions," says Martin, the co-director of Sydney Daycare.

Martin says wages and pensions are much more desirable for the early childhood educators working in the pre-primary program, which makes it difficult to find staff willing to work in daycares.

"Having a free program is a great idea. However, in doing so, the infants, toddlers and junior pre-schoolers were kind of forgotten," she says.

Churchill called the meeting a positive one and acknowledged the challenges daycares are having in acquiring qualified staff.

"Of course that's going to create some labour pressures for folks in the field, and we're responding by recruiting more early childhood educators by training more, and by actually bringing some through our immigration stream as well," he said.

Churchill says 200 early childhood educators are expected to graduate this year; 100 of those educators will fill roles in the pre-primary program, at which time he says they will be fully staffed, which should help daycare operators.

"We are recruiting folks who weren't pursuing careers in early childhood education, because of low wages in the past, to come back and work in early childhood education," he said.

Meanwhile, Martin and her group are still discussing whether or not they will walk off the job if changes don't happen soon.

"It has turned into a provincial walkout, and, in fairness, I will have to call those I've been in contact with to discuss as well," she said.

Martin says her group will meet again on Oct. 18 to discuss whether to walk off the job before the federal election.

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