

Zach Churchill: Nova Scotia government investing millions in our children ^[1]

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EXCERPT

We are building a stronger, more accessible and more affordable early learning and regulated child-care system in Nova Scotia.

In 2016, only one in four of our preschool-aged children and their families were able to access critical child care and early learning opportunities. Recognizing the importance of early learning for young, developing brains, this was not acceptable.

This is why we're changing the landscape. In September 2020, all Nova Scotian families will have access to high-quality, free, universal pre-primary programs for four-year-olds, a \$50 million investment. This will come with busing and a before and after program option, removing those potential barriers for families who want to enrol their children in pre-primary. This allows more four-year-olds to access pre-primary and may allow parents to get back in the workforce or studies, knowing their children are well cared for while they are at their jobs or in school.

We are also working with the private and not-for-profit regulated child-care sector to grow opportunities for families who want to access their services. We have done this by doubling our investment in the sector to \$78 million so we can support subsidies, wages and operations and the establishment of new child-care centres, and more child-care spaces, particularly in areas where there were none previously.

The investment also goes to make child care more affordable for families. We changed the eligible income limit from \$35,000 to \$70,000 per year. That means families receiving full subsidy are paying, on average, \$10 per day for child care. Making child care more affordable means more families can access that care for their children.

Of the \$78 million invested in the sector, \$26 million directly supports employers to increase wages for early childhood educators (ECEs) in the private and not-for-profit sector. ECEs, on average, have seen their wages increase from \$12 an hour to \$18 an hour.

Our investments have ensured that more spaces are available for kids, child care is more affordable for more families and that hundreds more jobs are available for ECEs in Nova Scotia.

Of course, periods of transformation can create challenges. Primarily because we've created upwards of 600 new jobs for ECEs. We've created pressure and competition for ECEs in the labour market, including private and not-for-profit child-care centres.

To address this, we're training more ECEs by opening more seats at the Nova Scotia Community College and have offered bursaries for those interested in seeking a career as an ECE. We're also supporting aggressive recruitment of ECEs locally, nationally and internationally.

More than 200 new ECEs are graduating this year into a competitive and lucrative job market, and hundreds more will graduate next year.

While transformative change always brings short-term challenges, longer-term, having greater access to child care and early learning provided by more highly trained ECEs is good for families and good for kids.

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