

Early childhood education sector needs regulatory body, critic says^[1]

Childcare centre ECEs are governed by Nova Scotia Daycare regulations, while pre-primary ECEs follow guidelines set out by the Education Act

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EXCERPTS

PC MLA Tim Halman says last week's announced increase to the NSCC program training early childhood educators (ECEs) is a step in the right direction, but doesn't address underlying issues.

"There's a lot of voices out there not being listened to when it comes to childcare and pre-primary," Halman tells NEWS 95.7's The Todd Veinotte Show.

In September 2017, the provincial Liberal government rolled out a new pre-primary program.

Halman says the program is a great idea, but was implemented too quickly.

"The Liberal government didn't create that period of transition," he explains. "What's happened now is because of that rushed implementation you're seeing a staffing shortage throughout the province."

On October 18, it was announced that 60 new seats will be added to the NSCC's Akerly campus ECE program next fall, with Education Minister Zach Churchill saying this would help reduce wait lists in the province.

The MLA for Dartmouth East says he also spoke with ECEs on the day the announcement was made, but they had mixed feelings.

"We had quite a few early childhood educators outside of Province House and what they're describing is a system that's very messy," he says.

Halman says that the creation of pre-primary has create a "two-tier system" that pits private childcare centres against public pre-primary programs for enrollment and staff.

"We know childcare centres have closed," he says. "We've seen staff becoming frustrated as a result of this quick implementation."

Additionally, while childcare centre ECEs are governed by Nova Scotia Daycare regulations, pre-primary ECEs follow guidelines set out by the Education Act.

"For those that work in the pre-primary program their wages are higher, they get access to pension and benefits," says Halman. "But for those working in the licensed early learning centres, the daycares, that's not the case."

Halman says he doesn't blame ECEs for moving from the private sector to pre-primary, which is taxpayer funded rather than based on payment from parents. Halman also says many of the ECEs he spoke with are asking for a regulatory body.

"What they were saying to me there is that the profession is inconsistent," he adds. "What I'm hearing is a government system is needed to ensure ECEs meet those professional standards. Just like doctors, nurses, teachers."

Halman says some in the profession have suggested that a database of certified ECEs could be created, similar to those used for substitute teachers in the school system.

"The recommendations for improvement are out there," he explains. "The ECEs outside of Province House, they listed off four or five things that the government could be doing now to alleviate these stresses."

The MLA has hopes that Minister Churchill will acknowledge the challenges facing ECEs in the province.

"I encourage the minister and I encourage the government childcare operators to listen to early childhood educators," says Halman.

"Because there's a lot of things that they're saying that they need done in order to improve the system."

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