

The provincial government needs to fix the childcare system ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

While planning my move from Calgary to Montreal with a toddler last year, I was in a state of joy.

Not only is childcare largely subsidized in Quebec, but I had heard wonders about the CPE system. CPE stands for “centre de la petite enfance,” government-funded daycares where qualified educators follow Montessori-like pedagogical programs.

It turns out things were more complicated than I expected.

First of all, the length of the CPEs waitlist is unfathomable.

According to the Québec Ministry of Family, as of March 2018, CPEs had a capacity of 96,000 spaces. Compare that to more than 115,000 in private daycares and some 90,000 in at-home private daycares. Most children, therefore, attend private facilities – subsidized and unsubsidized, the cost of the latter being alleviated by tax returns.

Licensing private daycares costs less than opening more CPEs, which is the avenue the past and present governments have embraced. While childcare in a CPE costs on average \$60 of public funds per day per child, a day in a private daycare usually amounts to \$22 in taxpayer money, say *Le Soleil* and *L'Actualité*.

Second, too many private daycares are of substandard quality.

The Observatoire des tout-petits, part of the Lucie et André Chagnon Foundation, said in a 2018 report that between 33 and 40 per cent of children placed in private daycares “are attending facilities of poor or very poor quality.” The proportion is below 3 per cent for CPEs. In a mirror effect, while 45 per cent of CPEs provide “good or excellent” care, less than 10 per cent of private facilities do.

In one private daycare I had put my child in, I found that kids aged between two and three were just put in front of the TV for several hours a day instead of taking part in the educational activities I was told they were doing. Some weeks, children did not go outside a single time, even when the weather allowed it.

Besides health and safety regulations, requirements to open a private daycare are minimal. In theory, two out of three educators should be ‘qualified,’ which is to say that they have a diploma in early childhood education. But a 2016 report of the Ministry of Family found that only 16 per cent of private daycares respect the two out of three qualified educators’ rule.

In an attempt to make childcare more affordable for families, the Legault government announced on Nov. 8 the reduction of fees in subsidized facilities, from up to \$13.20 per day to \$8.25 per day. And, according to *La Presse*, the government is working on subsidizing 3,000 spaces in private daycares.

These measures are beneficial to Quebec families. However, they do not solve one of the most pressing and worrisome issues of childcare in Quebec: the quality of care in private facilities.

Finally, Premier François Legault campaigned on the promise of developing the preschool system for kids of age four. But the educational support and equipment in preschools are poor as per the study by the Observatoire des tout-petits. Children in CPEs receive a better education than children in preschools.

Too many families struggle to find decent daycare. Low-income parents rarely have the time and money to invest in finding a good option and potentially commuting to get there. More CPEs have to be established to foster the needs of Québec children, especially in underprivileged neighbourhoods. And the bar needs to be raised with respect to the regulation of private daycares. The future of the next generation is at stake.

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