

Substitute teachers, in-home care to be provided for kids of essential workers ^[1]

Early childhood educator says questions still remain over funding for operators

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EXCERPTS

Premier Dwight Ball says the government will provide funding for essential workers to pick a relative or friend to watch their child, but the province will still need to rely on some early childhood educators and substitute teachers.

"These workers are critical to the operations of their employers and to government during this pandemic," Ball said during Wednesday's COVID-19 briefing.

Public health officials advised the province that care in a home environment is best, Ball said. "Home environment is family, could be a trusted neighbour, could be some friends."

The announcement comes a week after **regulated early childhood educators expressed concern** ^[3] over what they called strong-arm tactics by government to reopen their daycare spaces for children of essential care workers. The contract provided to regulated centres suggested they would lose provincial funding already promised to shuttered spaces if they refused to reopen their doors.

Ball said the province received 800 applications for free child care, and 50 of those will still need care outside of the home.

"The program will also allow families to avail of an alternate arrangement in a safe, regulated environment with guidance from public health," he said.

Ball said child-care centres have been contacted, matching families with their current child-care providers prior to the COVID-19 closures.

'All the options'

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is working with the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association to use classroom space and bring back substitute teachers to care for school-aged children.

"We are exercising all the options we have available to us," Ball said.

"Of course, keep in mind, appropriate physical distancing can be maintained if the demand increases."

Families who are able to arrange their own child care will be reimbursed up to \$200 per week, per child, upon confirmation from their employers that they are essential employees.

Asked what the incentive would be for daycares to reopen, Ball doubled down on previous comments that regulated operators are "already being paid" and that the government is merely asking to work together for essential workers.

Looking for an apology

Susan Baker, an early childhood educator and advocate, said she and other operators do want to help out, but says the devil is in the details.

"They're painting the picture that we don't want to stand up and help essential workers, which couldn't be further from the truth," Baker said.

The Early Childhood Educators Human Resource Council in St. John's, of which Baker is a member, sent a letter to Premier Dwight Ball, Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Brian Warr, Advanced Education and Skills Minister Christopher Mitchelmore, and Mary Goss-Prowse, a director in the education department, with their concerns.

She said Ball's announcement does appear to be a step in the right direction; however, she has not heard from any operators who have been consulted.

She said it's still unclear if operators will continue to receive funding to ensure the cost isn't offloaded to parents.

Baker said she and other early childhood educators want an apology from the premier over remarks he made during previous briefings.

Ball had said health-care professionals would care for child-care providers if they were sick, so he hoped early childhood educators would help them in their time of need.

Baker said a lot of operators felt the comment was threatening and unfair.

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