

Saskatchewan's failing report card on child care ^[1]

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Source: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Saskatchewan

Format: Report

Publication Date: 1 Jan 2019

AVAILABILITY

Access full report online [PDF] ^[2]

Excerpted from executive summary

Canada ranks very poorly amongst peer nations for overall quality measures and rates of access to regulated child care, and Saskatchewan ranks the lowest of all Canadian provinces. Since child care policy was introduced in Saskatchewan in 1969, it has been developed in a piecemeal fashion by a series of Liberal, NDP, Conservative, and Saskatchewan Party governments. The resulting system fails to meet the needs of 21st century families and penalizes the province's most vulnerable. Licensed child care in Saskatchewan can accommodate only 18 percent of children aged 5 and under, but 70 percent of Saskatchewan mothers of children aged 5 and under go to work. This means that most children in Saskatchewan are left in the care of extended family members or in unlicensed family child care homes, where they do not benefit from provincial funding or any form of assistance that may accompany regular oversight.

This study examines Saskatchewan's historical approach to child care. It reviews the consequences of the province's neglect of this area and asks why successive governments have remained so reluctant to invest in affordable, flexible, and quality care programs for its youngest constituents. It demonstrates that all families struggle under the current child care paradigm, but those most negatively affected include families living in rural and remote areas, Indigenous families, single parents, parents working shift work, contract work, and seasonally, and low-income families generally.

Child care provision is not a partisan issue, as every governing party has paid it inadequate attention. The Liberals, NDP, Conservatives, and Saskatchewan Party have all approached child care policy under the basic assumption that child care is primarily a matter of private family responsibility, to be resolved through existing market mechanisms. Demand-side subsidies have been provided only to low income parents, a notion that assumes that middle-class children and children who are disadvantaged have fundamentally different developmental needs. Furthermore, household income levels eligible for subsidy, which were already considerably lower than the Canada Assistance Plan guidelines, were frozen in the 1980s. This means that many families today—even many living below the poverty line—are too "rich" for assistance and too poor to pay for licensed child care.

We make several policy recommendations for improving child care in Saskatchewan, underlining that the child care system is complex and requires a flexible approach, providing not only appropriate spaces but qualified and properly remunerated educators and caregivers, adequate operational funds, and administrative systems that do not punish the province's most vulnerable. Furthermore, we argue that the question of regulated child care provision must be reframed away from an exclusive economic argument (with a focus on increasing female labour force participation) to consider equally the challenge of creating equitable learning and development opportunities for young children as part of an effort to equalize longterm opportunities and life outcomes for all Saskatchewan residents.

Saskatchewan gets failing grade for childcare policy: report ^[3]

Region: Saskatchewan ^[4]

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[3] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/19/02/sask-gets-failing-grade-childcare-policy-report> ^[4]

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