

I have worked in Quebec's daycares for 18 years, but I can't hold on much longer ^[1]

Province needs to make changes if it wants to to hire more early childhood educators

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EXCERPT

Quebec has a great daycare model – why else would the federal government want to copy it? However, Quebec's is also a three, even four-tiered system, with CPEs (centres de la petite enfance) being at the top of the food chain, followed by subsidized for-profit daycare, private for-profits and then home daycare.

Those of us who have found employment in a CPE have it much better than other daycare employees. We follow a pay scale (however we are currently without a contract) and must pay into an insurance program (but because the burnout rate is so high, our premiums are high). Most importantly, educators in CPEs do not have to wash floors at the end of the day.

I have worked in all but a home daycare. In subsidized and private daycares, I have used my own money to purchase supplies because art materials and decorations are only purchased once a year. I have stayed beyond my normal working hours, unpaid, to respect the child/educator ratio. I have been pooped, peed and vomited upon, sometimes simultaneously.

I have bandaged countless cuts and bruises, hugged and consoled hundreds of kids missing their moms and dads, reassured worried and concerned parents that they are doing their best and that their child is achieving their milestones at their own pace.

I have also had to justify why children under five are not writing yet, why they do not know the alphabet, why they are not bringing home art projects daily. Why their child, still too young for kindergarten, cannot spell their own name.

I have had to justify why children learn best through play, how social and emotional regulation is more important than learning to write. We as educators play such a vital role in children from zero to five years old, but we are treated like a glorified babysitter.

Early childhood educators have argued for years that what we do is far more than babysit. Society must start to change its mentality toward daycares and their educators.

This only became more clear when COVID-19 shut down Quebec last spring. We all went into lockdown – everyone but CPEs. Somebody had to take care of the nurses' and police officers' children. We never stopped working. Quebec calls us their "guardian angels" and expects us to be grateful to be employed.

However, after the first few months of the pandemic, expectations and requirements increased. As daycare "educators," we are now required to disinfect the centre from top to bottom multiple times during the day while still following the mandated daycare program and somehow maintain social distancing from the children and our co-workers.

We are constantly worried for our own health and safety as well as that of our families, as we are expected to welcome kids into our centre, not knowing if they have been in contact with the virus.

If somebody asked me what I love about my job, it is still the kids, with their boundless energy and positive attitude toward everything. The team I work with is fantastic and truly makes the days run smoother. But the government is making it hard to like anything else about the job.

The pay is mediocre at best, the hours are long, much longer than the usual workday, as parents must get to and from work. Educators bring work home as well. We do extra research in our time off, keeping our First Aid up to date and continuing our professional development.

We genuinely feel guilty calling in sick because we are already short on staff. My colleagues in this field exclusively feel the same. We feel burnt out, worried and frustrated that the economy is more important than us.

If the government wants to attract people to this domain, give us some reasonable working conditions such as paying us a fair salary, not just enough to get by. Add to our pension plans. Provide us with better insurance. Treat us with the same respect as teachers. If you are

closing schools to stop the spread of COVID-19, close the daycares too, or open us up just for emergency workers as you did in the spring.

I have done this job for 18 years, but I do not know how much longer I can hold out.

Laurie is a married mom of two young boys and has 18 years of early childhood education experience in a variety of daycare settings.

Region: Quebec ^[3]

Tags: professionalization ^[4]

workforce ^[5]

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