

Our children deserve more [CA] ^[1]

Opinion

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

That many people are reacting with skepticism and downright disbelief to a new United Nations report that ranks Canada last among 25 developed countries in a comparison of child care services is understandable.

Last? Behind most of Europe, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea? We're used to hearing we lag the world's most socially progressive regions, such as Scandinavia. But last, behind even the United States?

Critics and deniers are coming out of the woodwork, those with agendas and many with the best intentions. The criteria or measurement must be wrong, they charge. Governments in the U.K. and Ireland are publicly decrying the report as being inaccurate.

But guess what? The United Nations Children Fund report may have flaws, but overall it seems pretty sound.

Here are the measurements: Parental leave of one year at 50 per cent of salary; a national plan with priority for the disadvantaged; subsidized and regulated child care for 25 per cent of children under three; subsidized, accredited early education for 80 per cent of four-year-olds; 80 per cent of all child care staff trained; 50 per cent of staff in accredited early education services educated with relevant qualifications; minimum staff-to-children ratio of 1 to 15 in preschool education; 1 per cent of GDP spent on early childhood services; child poverty rate less than 10 per cent and near universal outreach of essential child health services.

Canada meets one of these benchmarks, with more than 50 per cent of early childhood education workers having relevant qualifications.

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Strategic investment in early life childcare makes sense in a socially democratic society. It makes solid economic and social policy sense. What sane person would disagree that an ounce of prevention beats a pound of cure?

We're talking a lot of late about infrastructure investment. How about we start to recognize that a balanced and responsible approach to early childhood care is an investment in social infrastructure?

Being last in this research is only embarrassing. Doing nothing to change the reasons we're last amounts to a betrayal of the future.

- reprinted from the Hamilton Spectator

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