

Acadian families in Nova Scotia worry English-run preschools will stifle language learning ^[1]

Starting in September 2023, child care centres will be regulated by Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services.

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EXCERPTS

Starting in September 2023, pre-school and child care centres in Nova Scotia will be regulated by the province, so can access major federal funding designed to make fees drop. For some, the lowered costs and added oversight will be a welcome change, but not everyone is happy with the decision.

“We want self-governance,” says Lisa Spinney-Hutton, a member of the board of directors for CAPENÉ, a French-language early childhood education organization.

The organization that will oversee early childhood education in the province will be a part of Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services. Currently, NSECDIS provides services to families that have children with developmental delays.

The group is anglophone, and while the federal government has an obligation to issue releases in both official languages, Spinney-Hutton says “everything is communicated in English first, and then French second.”

For Nova Scotia child care centres that operate in French (there are seven Petit Voilier locations in HRM alone), this presents a few issues. For one, some of the staff don’t even speak English.

“(We’ve) spent the last three or four years recruiting ECEs from French-speaking countries,” says Spinney-Hutton. “What that means is you get all these staff that will fall under an English-speaking org that have minimal English skills.”

It may be a slow change, but the erasure of the French language in the province’s Acadian communities is a real problem.

“Anything that we put forth would have to be approved and determined by the English-speaking people at the top,” says Spinney-Hutton, whose own daughter is almost six, and went to French pre-school before starting at a school run by the Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provinciale (that’s CSAP, Nova Scotia’s francophone school board). “We should be able to make those decisions by ourselves.”

Right now, all of CAPENÉ’s paperwork is done in French. When the NSECDIS takes over, it will have to switch to English for many things—finances and professional development—while everything from communications to best practices will have to be translated from English.

There are also cultural aspects of learning provided by CAPENÉ that aren’t offered by, or even in the scope of, the NSECDIS. These include providing books and resources and community-based centres with family programming.

“The French community is a different community, we have different needs and different systems in place and ways of doing things,” Spinney-Hutton says. “The CAPENÉ doesn’t really have an English equivalent.”

It’s not just the francophone community that could be affected. While the province has created Mi’kmaq Services to act as an education liaison for the community in public schools, Indigenous-language daycares like the one at the Mi’kmaq Childhood Development Centre could face similar problems.

The CAPENÉ hopes to convince the provincial government to let it continue to run its own programming, use its own best practices and work in its own language.

“I think a lot of parents don’t quite understand what this could mean for the community,” says Spinney-Hutton. “But I was talking to my anglophone friends and they were like, ‘We don’t want affordable childcare at the cost of linguistic and cultural loss.’”

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

Tags: child care ^[4]

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