

Ontario lags on day care [CA-ON] ^[1]

Editorial, Toronto Star

Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 20 Jun 2008

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Ontario has little excuse for its dismal D rating on a report card from the Canadian Labour Congress measuring its record in providing affordable regulated child care.

When criticized on the child-care file, the province often points its finger at Ottawa for not providing sufficient funding. But over the past five years, Ontario has received \$1 billion plus from the federal government for child care. While the Liberal government at Queen's Park has created 22,000 new daycare spaces, none has been delivered since 2005, according to Jenny Robinson, executive director of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

The province says it is spending \$869 million on child care this year. "If they are spending that much money, we'd like to know where," says Robinson. "Child care in Ontario is an incomprehensible patchwork of policy, programs and public investment that does not work for families, providers, workers or the government."

Deb Matthews, minister of children and youth services, says the poor grade from the labour movement is unfair. But child-care workers in Ontario are among the lowest paid in the country, and the provincial waiting list for affordable care has grown to about 50,000.

What worries child-care advocates is that much of the federal funding to Ontario runs out next year and will not be renewed. The Conservative government in Ottawa has cancelled daycare agreements with the provinces and replaced them with a \$100-a-month payment to parents with children under 6 years old.

Ontario has pledged to implement full-day junior and senior kindergarten at an estimated cost of \$500 million. That would free up daycare spaces for younger children. But the initiative isn't scheduled to begin until 2010.

What provinces are doing better than Ontario, according to the labour report card? All but British Columbia, although Quebec, with its \$7-a-day child care, is so far ahead of the other provinces that it didn't even get a grade this year.

Quebec has only 22 per cent of the population but 45 per cent of regulated child-care spaces in Canada.

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Manitoba has capped full-time fees for preschool children at \$4,512 a year, improved the subsidy for low-income families, and increased the wages for qualified preschool staff.

It's time that Ontario began showing some leadership in providing quality, affordable child care instead of trailing behind its neighbours.

- reprinted for the Toronto Star

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