

N.L.'s pre-kindergarten pilot program falling short, so far ^[1]

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Excerpts

The government of Newfoundland and Labrador has, so far, fallen short on its promise to have a pre-kindergarten pilot program in place at 35 schools in 28 communities across the province.

The goal of the pilot, created by \$347 million in federal funding and first announced in May 2022, was to have 600 more child-care spaces opened up as parents struggled to find placements for their preschool-aged children.

The end goal is a fully implemented program by 2025-26 with about 3,100 regulated spaces in N.L. Those spaces are supposed to be operated by non-profit organizations and not the school district.

The pilot began in September 2022.

CBC News has attempted to set an interview with newly minted Education Minister Krista Lynn Howell multiple times since July 7. The Department of Education instead emailed a statement on Tuesday, saying the minister is unavailable for the remainder of the week.

"The pre-kindergarten pilot program has been under a continuous evaluation since it began in September 2022. Following the conclusion of the pilot program, the Department of Education will evaluate the program in its entirety in preparation for it to continue," the department's statement reads.

"Pre-kindergarten programs are operating on school-based sites. Additional components, such as enhanced transition and school readiness activities, which can be found in a junior kindergarten curriculum, will be incorporated into the pre-[kindergarten] program. This program has the added benefit of being available to families year round, which is important for continuity of care."

Right now, there are only 13 licenced sites in Newfoundland and Labrador for the pre-kindergarten program.

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At the time of the province's announcement, David Philpott, a retired Memorial University professor in education and longtime advocate for improving the province's daycare system, shared his concerns.

Among them were the lack of available early childhood educators (ECEs) needed for the expansion of the industry under the pilot.

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