

N.L.'s pre-kindergarten pilot 'doomed to failure' unless it gets an overhaul, advocates say ^[1]

A total of 3,100 spaces for 4-year-olds supposed to open by next fall

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

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The Newfoundland and Labrador government announced the pilot in 2022 as part of its Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan, aiming to create 3,100 regulated spaces for four-year-olds across the province by next fall. Unlike junior kindergarten in other provinces, which is rolled into the public school system, the Newfoundland and Labrador model pays the YMCA to operate the pre-kindergarten centres out of select schools.

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David Philpott, a retired Memorial University professor who's been advising the province on its education system for over a decade, says the lack of communication to parents is only a small part of the problem.

The model itself, he argues, needs an overhaul.

The pilot as it now stands is "child care, not kindergarten," Philpott said – a program operated by a third party for a fee, that uses a different curriculum than the one implemented by NLSchools.

"Nowhere else in the country do you have to pay for it."

It's also not the junior kindergarten model he recommended in 2017 as part of an education task force, he adds.

Philpott points to Nova Scotia, which adopted full-time junior kindergarten several years ago, as a success story Newfoundland and Labrador should follow.

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Introducing junior kindergarten as part of the normal K-8 system, he says, would all but solve the daycare crisis.

"If we plucked the four-year-olds out of the early years programs and put them into the schools, we would create infinite space. We literally would create thousands of desperately needed spaces," he said.

"They're not following the lead of the rest of the country.... It's doomed to failure."

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Region: Newfoundland ^[4]

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