

More spaces for child care [CA-QC]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Starting in 2009, it will cost middle class Quebecers about the same amount to send their children to private or public subsidized child care centres, Finance Minister Monique Jérôme-Forget announced Thursday.

The province is also renewing its pledge to create another 20,000 subsidized daycare spaces over the next five years - 4,500 in 2008-2009 alone - to cope with the burgeoning demand and waiting lists. There were 82,000 births in Quebec in 2007.

Continuing to jockey with the Action démocratique du Québec and Parti Québécois for the title of being the most "pro-family," political party in Quebec, the Liberal regime said it will spend \$900 million more over the next five years on family measures ranging from child care to tax credits for adoption and infertility treatments.

Quebec says it will now be spending \$5 billion a year on family measures.

"Not surprisingly, Quebec is considered a paradise for families," Jérôme-Forget said tabling the 2008-2009 provincial budget in the National Assembly.

The biggest measure in yesterday's budget was \$85 million over five years to level the playing field between the costs of private versus subsidized daycare - a move seen as a way to reduce the waiting lists for public daycare.

Of the 392,000 children under five in child care in Quebec in 2008, 93,000 were in private daycare at a cost of about \$25 a day compared to the popular and overcrowded public system which costs only \$7 a day.

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The move targets the vote-rich middle class with the refundable child care tax credit for incomes ranging from \$46,755 to \$82,100 rising from 30 per cent to 60 per cent.

In concrete terms, taking into account both Quebec and federal tax credits, a couple with a child under five with an income of \$50,000 will pay \$2.68 a day in a subsidized daycare centre and \$3.02 a day in a private centre.

The change applies as of 2009 and will benefit 150,000 families, providing them with \$20 million in tax relief.

The credit's appeal drops off for people with incomes over \$80,000. In their case the cost for a subsidized spot will be \$2.73 compared with \$9.28 for a private spot.

Yesterday, Michelle Courchene, the cabinet minister responsible for childcare, said the government made the change for the sake of "fairness."

"It's totally important and normal that when you are a Quebec citizen with a child in daycare - especially when there's not enough space in the public system - that we re-establish the equity between citizens and parents. That is what the minister is doing today. Starting from now it's going to be fair."

Jérôme-Forget said the government said the renewed promise to add more daycare spaces is responding to a reality. Quebec now projects the number of state-subsidized spaces required by 2012 will reach 220,000.

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But later, ADQ finance critic Gilles Taillon said his party had a hand in influencing the minister's beefed up family policy. Announcing the ADQ will support the budget, Taillon took credit for the government's decision to make the public and private systems equal.

"It's progress to have recognized there was something unfair in the system," Taillon said.

He conceded the ADQ failed to convince the government that the ADQ's childcare philosophy - which is to give parents freedom of choice and the same money whether they send their children to daycare or keep them at home - is the path to follow.

The ADQ had argued the government should give parents \$100 a week for each pre-school child who does not attend the network instead of creating more daycare spaces.

"For us it's one step at a time," Taillon said at a news conference. "We still have freedom of choice in our program. You can be sure it will be there our next electoral platform. We aren't giving up."

Taillon argued the ADQ's plan - scaled back to \$50 a week - would have cost the government the same amount as its daycare investment.

- reprinted from The Gazette

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