

Push to get daycare reform passed angers its critics [CA-QC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Quebec daycare reform is back on track, even as a study suggests that parents are being shortchanged by the system.

Bill 124, a controversial plan to upgrade and streamline the province's daycare system, is expected to be given its third and final reading in Quebec today.

The push to get the law adopted at a special session after the National Assembly adjourned to March upset critics of the reform plan.

"It's terrible," said Helene Potvin, president of the Association quebecoise des centres de la petite enfance (CPE), an association of 884 non-profit daycare centres.

"Whatever we do, there is no interest in working in partnership," she said yesterday, referring to an agreement late Tuesday with Family Minister Carole Theberge that led the association to cancel plans to shut down their centres for a day.

Earlier yesterday, the minister said she had made no concessions. But she had agreed to set up a working group to discuss the new coordinating offices that will replace CPEs in overseeing family-based daycare operations - one of the main sticking points of the reform.

Quebec's heavily subsidized daycare - a \$1.4-billion program serving 193,000 children - is often cited as a model for Canada.

But the Quebec system is far from ideal, researchers say.

Six in 10 daycares in Quebec meet only minimum standards, says a study released in English this week by the Montreal-based Institute for Research on Public Policy.

"I don't want to alarm parents but I think they should be more aware of what constitutes quality daycare," said study co-author Christa Japel, a professor at Universite du Quebec a Montreal.

Daycares are a safe enough place to park your child for the day but don't expect a stimulating environment and high standards of hygiene, Japel said.

Non-profit centres generally scored better than other daycare providers in the province.

One-third of non-profit CPEs were rated good to excellent, compared with only 14 per cent of for-profit daycares, the study said.

Researchers observed 900 children in 1,500 daycare settings: Centres de la petite enfance, family-based centres associated with a CPE, for-profit centres and unregulated home daycares for six children and under.

They found that children from low-income homes were not only less likely to attend daycare but they could expect inferior services at local family-based, for-profit and unregulated home daycares.

Marie Belanger, director of the Association of Private Day Cares of Quebec, said the study, like others before it, was skewed.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

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