

New Brunswick, feds closer to inking child-care deal [CA-NB]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

New Brunswick is closer to signing a child care agreement with the federal government and could reach a deal within a month, say several MLAs.

Yesterday Percy Mockler, minister of intergovernmental and international relations, said he's optimistic the province is closer to signing the deal which would see \$100 million be made available to fund child care in New Brunswick.

Six provinces have already signed deals with the federal government but Mockler said those deals are agreements-in-principle and the provinces have yet to receive any money.

"I don't want a photo-op agreement," he said. "What I want is an agreement in that when we sign on the dotted line, we immediately have access to the funds." The main delay in the signing of the deal has been the province's request for more flexibility.

Premier Bernard Lord has said he would like to give some of the money to help stay-at-home parents.

Mockler said he was able to explain the province's position in a meeting with Fredericton MP Andy Scott.

The two politicians met at Scott's home for several hours, eating pizza and discussing issues ranging from the child-care agreement to infrastructure projects.

The frank discussion allowed both men to hammer out the differences in opinion on several projects, Scott said, adding the meeting "ran out of time, not topics." "We agreed on a lot of stuff, much more than we disagreed on and where we didn't see exactly eye-to-eye we outlined each other's position for the understanding of each other and we'll continue to talk," Scott said.

Tony Huntjens, minister of family and community services, said the province is considering a child care agreement that would allow some money to be spent immediately.

The province is looking at a model similar to the one Alberta signed with the federal government, he added, which allows more flexibility for giving funding to for-profit daycares.

"The Alberta model includes some of the things that we were looking for, although not all of it and perhaps a different slant on it as well, so we're just trying to make sure it is adaptable to New Brunswick," he said.

- reprinted from the Moncton Times and Transcript

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