

Lord wants broad range of child care options [CA-NB] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

New Brunswick Premier Bernard Lord says parents and grandparents who stay home with young children could be trained to provide a more supportive learning environment -- and he wants Ottawa to help foot the bill.

Social Development Minister Ken Dryden has been signing bilateral deals with the provinces to distribute the \$5-billion over five years for a national system of early learning and child care. But the signing was stalled in New Brunswick.

New Brunswick wants to "provide some of this money to parents who decide to either provide the early learning environment for their children at home by staying at home, or by having someone come to their home and do it, or by having a family member do it," the Premier said.

The goal would be to "provide some training in early learning and child care to those people," he said.

"And, frankly, I don't think the federal government should dictate to us how we're going to do this. . . . What may work for downtown Toronto may not work for Plaster Rock, N.B."

But Mr. Dryden said yesterday that federal money will pay for regulated care only.

It could be used to train family members, he said, "so long as the end result is something that meets the standards of regulation and meets the standards of the QUAD [quality, universality, accessibility, developmental] principles" that form the framework of what Ottawa envisions for a national system.

But "if it meets the standards of regulation, it can be regulated."

Bilateral child care deals have already been signed between the federal government and five provinces -- Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Mr. Dryden and Prime Minister Paul Martin were set to fly to New Brunswick in mid-May to ink a similar agreement with Mr. Lord, but the trip was cancelled at the last minute when the province refused to accept the federal terms.

Alberta has also said it would like to give the money directly to parents. And Quebec wants more autonomy over how it spends the money.

Mr. Dryden said he does not understand why Mr. Lord has difficulty with the idea of meeting the requirement that the federal dollars go toward regulated care.

"New Brunswick is like every other province in the country, it has a significant rural population," he said, adding that children in rural areas deserve the same quality of care available to those in the cities.

Still, Mr. Lord said he hopes that the federal government will show some flexibility, and pointed out that Ottawa has already softened its approach. But he acknowledged that the federal government has the upper hand.

"In the end, if the federal government will not budge at all and they are totally inflexible, we don't have the luxury of leaving \$100-million on the table," Mr. Lord said.

"But I want the federal government to explain to New Brunswickers why they are opposed to providing that choice to parents."

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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federalism ^[10]
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