

# Quebecers divided on \$7 fee for day care [CA-QC]<sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Cornacchia, Cheryl & Beaudin, Monique

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

With the province's unionized day-care workers prepared to strike as early as Monday, Quebecers are divided about whether parents should pay more than \$7 a day for the popular service, a poll conducted for The Gazette has found.

Just under half of the respondents - 49 per cent - said that the fee should not be raised, but 45 per cent said that it should, according to the Leger Marketing survey.

And 67 per cent of respondents said people who earn more should pay more for day care.

"The universality of the service does not seem to be something that Quebecers in general are demanding," said Mathieu Gagne, project manager at Leger Marketing.

The survey was conducted between Wednesday and Sunday, when 380 non-profit day cares across the province were closed because of a breakdown in pay-equity negotiations between Quebec and the workers' union.

Even as parents scrambled to find alternate care for the 25,000 children affected by the walkout, Quebecers supported the striking workers. More than half of respondents - 55 per cent - said day-care workers should be paid more than they are now.

Income had a significant impact on responses. People with higher incomes said the \$7 daily fee should increase, but they did not think people with above-average salaries should pay more. They also strongly supported the day-care workers' demands for higher wages.

Lower-income respondents said the \$7 fee should not go up. Those with an annual income of between \$20,000 and \$40,000 strongly supported making people who earn more pay extra.

Of course, on the street, there were exceptions. As they dropped off and picked up children at Montreal-area day-care centres yesterday, parents espoused a wide range of opinions about paying more.

"I could afford to pay more," said Tim Thomas, a West Island father of two. "I'm rich by the definition of things. But I don't think richer people should pay more."

"Good quality day care should be a public investment in our children," he said before picking up his 3-year-old son, Ryan, at La Garderie de la Pointe, a non-profit Pointe Claire day-care centre.

Brigitte Piuze, who is expecting her second child, explained they plan to keep working as their family grows and will be using day care for years to come.

Other parents said they just couldn't afford to pay more.

"The reason we changed was the price," said Vicky Page, an Ile Perrot working mother.

As she dropped her 21/2-year-old son, William, off at day care, she said she waited for a year for a \$7-a-day spot. She used to pay \$25 a day to have someone care for her child.

Ruth Rose-Lizee, an economist at the Universite du Quebec a Montreal, said the poll's findings offer no surprises.

Rose-Lizee said, however, she takes issue with the suggestion that paying more is required to preserve the system.

"It suggests the system is in crisis," she said. "It's not - it's a question of choice."

Rose-Lizee, a longtime supporter of publicly funded day care, said Quebec's system is about equity between people with young children, people with no children and people with older children.

"Even at \$7 a day, it's an obstacle for people who earn less than \$30,000 a year," Rose-Lizee noted.

For them, she said, it's cheaper to use inferior, unlicensed care.

Universality is one of the problems with Quebec's day-care system, said Martha Friendly, a leading day-care researcher.

While it might have a "universal approach," there are gaps, said Friendly, co-author of a national day-care report made public last week by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit at the University of Toronto.

She said Quebec remains Canada's best example of a publicly funded child-care system, but it still doesn't measure up to publicly funded child-care programs in other countries, like France, Italy, Spain, Denmark or Sweden.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

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