

# Day-care operators take issue with failing grade [CA-NB]<sup>[1]</sup>

**Source:** New Brunswick Telegraph Journal

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 27 Apr 2004

EXCERPTS

Day-care operators are taking aim at the failing grade a national parent's magazine gave New Brunswick's child-care system arguing they're doing their best to ensure children get the best care possible. A national child-care report card in the current issue of Today's Parent Magazine ranked New Brunswick day cares the lowest in Canada in terms of quality and government spending. "I'm disheartened. I've been in this for 30 years and I have good quality child care and I pay staff quality wages and have trained staff," said Laura Smith, who owns the Oromocto West Child Care and Oromocto Day Care centres. "In day care everyone is lumped together and we're always at the bottom." "We do the best with what we have. When it comes to heart and souls our workers are doing far better than Quebec, Ontario or Saskatchewan," said Tracey Law, the administrator for three non-profit day cares in Fredericton called the Pre-School Centre. Both operators acknowledge there are problems in their field especially when it comes to training. In 2001 the government announced funds for training to encourage child care providers to improve their education. Ms. Law had hoped this would mean re-establishing the early childhood education program at community college campuses across the province. The two-year certificate had been offered on evenings and weekends in the early 1990s but can now only be taken in Saint John. Instead of returning to this program, however, the government money created a distance education course which Ms. Law said just isn't effective. "We have staff doing distance education but it isn't the hands on the way they would get in the classroom working with other people. It's just a Band Aid program. It's like they are offering just the minimum they have to offer," Ms. Law said. The province also announced that by 2006 all day-care centres must have their child-care directors or one in four of the staff complete the year of training. Ms. Law said this provision won't improve the quality of child care because directors don't spend much time in the classroom working with kids. The executive director of Mom's Little Miracles Discovery Centre in Saint John said everyone working in child care should have proper training. "Now all you need to work in most day cares is a first-aid course and CPR training," said Lori Legere, who herself has a bachelor of education degree. "Early childhood education training is extremely important. I think it is very important to understand childhood development at the ages of two, three and four to be able to deliver quality programming" Ms. Legere said the lack of training requirements furthers the public's misperceptions about day-care providers. "People look down at day cares as baby sitters. They don't see it as it really is. We're not watching TV or going out for a coffee when looking after your child. Our whole job is caring for the child, educating the child," she said. Another key problem in child care is salaries. The report card said that in 1998 New Brunswick day-care providers earned \$7.12 an hour and Ms. Smith confirms staff continue to garner little more than minimum wage. "We're losing good people to teacher assistants jobs in schools because they can earn \$14 an hour where they pay us \$7," Ms. Smith said. "At call centres they can earn \$10 an hour and all they have to do is pick up the phone." Ms. Law said the government has begin to offer grants to all day-care centres to improve salaries but similar grants were cut in the past. Many operators are afraid to increase wages only to find the government funding drying up in a few years. Instead many are giving out money in quarterly bonuses as each provincial cheque rolls in. When it comes to government spending, Ms. Legere said much more needs to be done to give trained employees the wages needed to retain them. "There's still a long way to go because once the training is in place they are probably going to move on to Halifax or Ontario. They are not going to stay in New Brunswick when they are offered higher pay elsewhere," Ms. Legere said. All three day-care operators say more government spending must be given to ensure workers are paid appropriate wages and training opportunities are available. In the meantime, they say it's time to stop criticizing the quality of care based on factors such as salaries and funds which are out of their hands. Instead these day-care operators would like the national report card to recognize how passionate child care workers here are to educating kids. - reprinted from the New Brunswick Telegraph Journal

**Region:** New Brunswick<sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** quality<sup>[3]</sup>

staff<sup>[4]</sup>

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