

Crackdown on day-care absentees: Children only allowed 26 days away [CA-QC] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

The Liberal government is cracking down on truancy at publicly funded day-care centres, a move critics warn will deprive parents and children of precious together time.

Starting in April, children enrolled in \$7 day care can only be absent 26 days a year or else their child-care facility will be penalized financially.

The 26 days include statutory holidays, vacation time, sick days for parents and kids as well as any other time a child may choose not to come - like when grandparents babysit.

Junior Family Minister Carole Theberge explained the stiffer rules are necessary because the government wastes \$29 million a year funding empty places when those spots could be offered to children on waiting lists.

For instance, day-care centres could find a child who only needs to be at day care two days a week, so the subsidized spot is filled for the full five days. Or, if some children will be away in the summer, the day care could find others to occupy the places while they're gone.

The point is not to make punish anyone, least of all parents, Theberge said, but rather to encourage day-care centres to "optimize" their occupancy.

But a group representing day-care centres and the Parti Quebecois opposition said the rules are unrealistic, rigid and will hold families hostage to their day-care centres.

The general manager of a group representing nonprofit day-care centres said what the government wants to accomplish is not unreasonable, but the way of going about it is.

The government is generalizing about the reasons behind absenteeism, she said: Parents aren't using day-care spots they don't need.

Opposition leader Bernard Landry said the idea demonstrates the Liberal government's willingness to break promises to families.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

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