

Early learning sector worries about future [CA-PE] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Kindergarten is now well on its way to moving into Island schools, but early childhood educators who teach pre-kindergarten levels will have to wait another year before they know the fate of their sector.

On Monday, Kindergarten Commissioner Pat Mella's report to government recommending how best to bring kindergarten into the public school system was made public.

The extensive 74-page report offers detailed suggestions to government on how to handle the changeover of kindergarten into the school system including staffing, delivery models, logistics, legislation and impacts for children, parents and schools.

But moving kindergarten out of current non-profit and private locations will have a major impact on these community centres, Mella's report states.

Kindergarten provides over \$5 million a year in revenues for the early childhood sector, so when it moves into the school system, these centres will lose not only revenue, but also one-third of their students and a large majority of their teachers.

Without some kind of assistance, many of these centres will likely close. That will be devastating to families with working parents in need of child care, Mella said. That's why she recommended the province undergo a comprehensive review of early learning on P.E.I.

"There are already a number of issues - in some rural areas of the province there's very limited access to early childhood centres so if two parents want to work there's practically nowhere for them to turn," Mella said.

"All of that needs to be addressed, we've got to have a good, quality early childhood system that can be monitored, that has qualified teachers, where we have certain standards that can be addressed."

Although government committed Monday to commissioning a review of the early learning sector, Sonya Corrigan, president of the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of P.E.I., said she believes it may already be too late.

"The ECDA requested this when the announcement was initially made that kindergarten would be reviewed," Corrigan said.

"The review for kindergarten took a year and now we're into action to plan that implementation successfully for 2010, so if we're only now beginning the review for the rest of the early childhood system I'm just concerned as to what we might be looking at in 2010-2011."

She echoed Mella's warnings that many smaller and especially many rural child care centres will be forced to close when they lose revenues, children and teachers to the public system.

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In her report, Mella suggests a few short-term initiatives to help in the interim, including one-time payments or grants to those centres affected by the loss of kindergarten.

To promote enrolment in early childhood centres, Mella further suggests government could raise the income cutoffs to increase the number of moderate-income families eligible under the provincial subsidy program.

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- reprinted from the Charlottetown Guardian

Region: Prince Edward Island ^[2]

Tags: kindergarten ^[3]

