

Federal money lags provincial interest in early education and child care, report shows [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The co-author of a report on the state of early childhood education and care in Canada is calling for a national vision on child care - and the funding to back it up.

Provincial interest in early childhood education seems to be on the rise but funding continues to lag, said Martha Friendly, who helped write the eighth biannual report for the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, a policy and research facility, that was released Tuesday.

"There really seems to be, on the part of the provinces, a new recognition about early childhood education," said Friendly in an interview in Toronto.

Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia already have full-day kindergarten, while Ontario, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island have promised to expand their kindergarten programs from a half to a full school day within the next year or two, she said. Ontario plans to do it by next year while B.C. plans to have it fully in place by 2011. New Brunswick is piloting its first school-based programs blending kindergarten and child care.

While the provinces may have more of an interest in early education, the report showed the amount of money earmarked by the provinces and territories for child care has not been increasing as much as in previous years and federal funding has fallen.

Provinces and territories set aside a total of \$3.08 billion for regulated child care in 2007-2008, up \$147 million from two years earlier. Compare that to the \$538.3 million increase between 2003-04 and 2005-06, and the \$512.1 million rise between 2001-02 and 2003-04.

The report also showed 77 per cent of working mothers had children aged three to five in 2007. Yet there were only enough regulated child care spaces for 20 per cent of children up to five years old, said Friendly.

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