

# Province reveals plan to revitalize early childhood sector today<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

The province's long-awaited plan to revitalize the early childhood sector will finally be released to the public today.

The Early Years Report will reveal government's plan to help the struggling sector and detail how \$7 million dedicated to the sector in the recent provincial budget will be allocated.

Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Doug Currie has been loath to give any details about the plan before the official release of the report, but he did say the strategy would include a boost in wages for early childhood educators.

Early childhood educators, daycare operators and parents have been eagerly awaiting this strategy since last July when Kindergarten Commissioner Pat Mella's report on the rollout of kindergarten into the public school system was released.

The move of kindergarten into schools has created a major strain on the early childhood sector.

Over 100 early childhood educators (ECEs) have left P.E.I. daycare centres to take better-paying jobs in the public system as kindergarten instructors. That has left a concerning gap in licensed educators for Island daycares.

Now many centres, especially those in rural P.E.I., are facing imminent closure if financial support and trained teaching staff isn't injected into the sector soon.

But there are also parents who are concerned about children who don't attend childcare centres. They are hoping government's early childhood development strategy will include supports for all children on P.E.I., regardless of whether they attend daycare.

"We're really hoping to see much more reference to a comprehensive approach to the early years," said Jane Boyd, president of the childcare advocacy group Parents for Choice and Quality.

Many parents can't afford to put their children in licensed childcare facilities, so if the government focuses its support only on the sector of early learning operators and educators, children who attend unlicensed centres or who stay home with parents will fall through the cracks, Boyd said.

"We really hope there will be components of the government's early learning action plan that will address the needs of those children too because, let's face it, the majority of children on P.E.I. are not in licensed childcare ... there are so many young vulnerable children on P.E.I. and we remain concerned about what is the plan so that there is a comprehensive approach that reaches all children."

Sonya Corrigan, executive director of the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA), told The Guardian last April she hopes government's early childhood plan will help make quality childcare more accessible for all families.

"Children and families deserve to have access to early learning opportunities in all communities," Corrigan told The Guardian when the provincial budget was released in April. "Unfortunately affordability has been a huge barrier to that as well as access to service, so we hope that as we go forward we're going to put systems in place that will eliminate the affordability factor and increase accessibility."

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- reprinted from the guardian

**Region:** Prince Edward Island <sup>[2]</sup>

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