

Educators pleased with Preschool Excellence Initiative ^[1]

"It's something we've been waiting to hear for so long"

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EXCERPTS

The atmosphere in a banquet room at the Loyalist hotel on Saturday was almost festive. Early childhood educators and daycare operators were gathered there to learn about the Province's Preschool Excellence Initiative that was unveiled Friday.

June Scott, who operates the not-for-profit YMCA of P.E.I. in Summerside, said the plan was what she and other operators have been waiting for.

"We've been asking for years to look at a system and not just a quick fix for children and parents. This is a guaranteed system that's going to continue on, it's not going to end in a year or three years, which is phenomenal," she said.

With the new plan, P.E.I.'s patchy system of daycare and early childhood education will move to a province-wide system built around standardized curriculum, regulated fees and better access for parents and children.

And with this fall's move of kindergarten programs into the public school system, daycare operators were crying out for help.

"That prompted a faster reaction, but government could've chosen a Band-Aid solution," said the education department's Linda Lowther. "But this is a whole change of philosophy and direction. (The response from operators) has been overwhelmingly positive because we've focused this whole plan on children, operators and educators. There's something there for everybody."

The report was compiled by early childhood education expert Kathleen Flanagan, and has already been accepted by government.

The plan gives private daycare centres the option to become Early Years Centres that will follow a provincial curriculum. It also mandates better access for parents.

The initiative also means better wages for educators, something that interests rural daycare centres like Tracy Doyle's in Tignish. Magic Moments Childcare and Kindergarten will lose 29 children to the school system this year.

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- reprinted from the Journal Pioneer

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