

Daycare amendments have linguistic camps divided ^[1]

Changes could eliminate any new bilingual daycares

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EXCERPTS:

Proposed amendments to the province's Early Learning and Childcare Act are coming under fire from both the anglophone and francophone communities.

The changes, introduced Wednesday, could force new daycares in the province to choose between an English curriculum or a French one.

Carol McCluskey, who has worked in the bilingual daycare business for 14 years, doesn't think she should have to choose.

"It's dividing people," she said. "It's going to divide myself and my husband because he's English and I'm French."

But Michel Doucet, a lawyer and University of Moncton law professor who specializes in linguistic rights, contends the changes don't go far enough.

The Charter states that education facilities must be francophone or anglophone, not bilingual, said Doucet.

And that's a right that's particularly important for french-speaking children living in english-speaking areas, he said.

"In the daycare, what will be the language used usually will be the language of the majority and that might have an effect on the capacity of those children to learn French and to be able to integrate into the French school system," Doucet said.

And while some people might fear the changes could eradicate bilingualism from preschool learning, Doucet disputes the notion.

McCluskey currently addresses her English class and her French class at Moncton's Gardarie Daily Daycare in both languages throughout the day.

Existing daycares will be grandfathered, he stressed. "So it doesn't really change much."

In addition, childcare providers can still use both languages outside of curriculum work, said Doucet.

Education Minister Jody Carr told CBC News he recognizes the importance of duality and changes to the amendments can still be made.

Language commissioner urged duality

The Commissioner of Official Languages for New Brunswick was unavailable for comment on Thursday.

But Michel Carrier has previously urged the government to "fully implement the principle of duality in childcare services."

In his 2010-2011 annual report, called *Move Forward or Lose Ground*, Carrier said allowing childcare facility operators to use both curricula at a single facility is "diametrically opposed to the very objective of the act."

The act clearly sets out the importance of high-quality early learning and childcare services in promoting the development of young children, he said.

"It should be remembered that bilingual settings often spell assimilation for members of minority communities," Carrier said.

"This is also why New Brunswick has two public school systems, one for francophones and one for anglophones.

“Like many other stakeholders, the commissioner has recommended to the provincial government that it be consistent in its actions.

“If it truly wishes to give children, including francophone children, every chance of success, it must fully implement the principle of duality in childcare services.”

- reprinted from *CBC news*

Region: New Brunswick ^[2]

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