

Editorial: PQ should use private daycares to expand public system ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Pauline Marois's commitment to expanding Quebec's low-cost public daycare system this year and on through 2016 is highly commendable.

The premier introduced the landmark public system back in 1997, when she was education minister in a former Parti Québécois government. Several weeks ago she announced that her government will step up expansion of the \$7-a-day system by adding 28,000 new spots by 2016, an initiative that will add \$260 million more to the existing \$2-billion annual cost of the daycare network. The ultimate objective, she said, is to have a space for every child who needs it, something that is far from the case today.

Marois also pledged to maintain the current \$7-a-day fee for public daycare at least until 2016, after which, she said, the government might index the fee to cost-of-living increases.

A recent study by economists from various Canadian universities suggested that readily available daycare has overall benefits for the economy, in that it allows more parents to enter the workforce and subsequently pay taxes. The study reported that in 2008 the subsidized daycare system returned \$1.50 in taxes for every dollar spent on the system.

The downside is that there have never been enough spaces in the public system to meet the demand. In many cases, lower-income families have been unable to put their children in subsidized public daycare because the spaces have been snapped up by wealthier Quebecers.

Alongside the public system is a network of private, unsubsidized daycares for which parents pay at least \$35 a day per child. The association representing these private operators maintains that the expansion of the public system proposed by the premier will have the effect of inevitably driving many of them out of business, particularly if \$7-a-day facilities are established close to any of their operations.

While there are lengthy waiting lists for spots in subsidized daycares, with some parents frozen out even though they signed onto a waiting list when their children were conceived, spaces in private facilities are apparently going begging. The private operators' association says these daycares are operating at only two-thirds of capacity.

Along with some economic commentators, the association suggests that the government could create thousands of new \$7 spaces immediately, as well as save millions of dollars in new constructions costs, by absorbing private facilities that wish to join the public system. After all, these private daycares have already been built.

This suggestion has been flatly rejected by the premier and the minister responsible for family issues. The proposal was put to Marois during a recent TV talk-show appearance, and she maintained that subsidizing more private daycare centres would not create a single additional space. Yet the private daycare association maintains that there are 11,000 currently available spaces in their facilities that would readily be filled if the fee were to match that in the public system.

A further government quibble is that there are more complaints about the private system than the public, even though both are regulated and subject to the same standards. At the time of her announcement, Marois further maintained that fairness is not an issue since tax deductions allowed for private daycare fees make the cost to parents of both public and private facilities roughly the same.

If that is indeed the case, then the government should take a hard second look at incorporating currently private daycares into its plan. It would be fairer to have a level playing field for parents, as opposed to a two-tier system. And if spaces could be created sooner and more cheaply that way, then why not do it?

-reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

Region: Quebec ^[2]

Tags: privatization ^[3]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/13/01/editorial-pq-should-use-private-daycares-expand-public-system> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7855> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/privatization>