

# There's little talk about early learning <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Willick, Frances

**Source:** The Chronicle Herald

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 20 Sep 2013

## EXCERPTS:

It's a bit like herding cats.

The head of the province's child-care association has been trying to get the leaders of the province's three main political parties to participate in a discussion next week about early childhood education.

But they're all playing chicken, said Kathleen Couture, chairwoman of the Nova Scotia Child Care Association.

Couture said the NDP told her they won't participate unless the Liberals are there, the Liberals won't go unless the NDP agrees, and the Tories won't attend unless the other two parties are there.

"So, obviously, where's the commitment to children?" she asks. "If they were as committed to children from 0 to five as they say they are, why aren't they jumping at this? Why aren't they able to explain to voters where their platform is on children from 0 to five?"

The parties' platforms, Couture said, aren't pithy: "Each one has approximately one sentence."

She said the early learning and child-care sector is facing so many challenges that it should be a more prominent election issue.

Couture laid out those problems so that a four-year-old could understand: Daycares are partially funded by the province, but they don't receive enough grant money to pay their employees adequate wages. The centres can't simply raise the fees to compensate because many parents can't afford to pay more for child care.

Daycare subsidies aren't enough for low-income parents, so it is more economical for some parents to stay home with the kids than go back to work or school.

And since the wages are so low for daycare teachers, there is a high turnover rate and the centres are forced to employ workers with little training.

Early childhood educators in Nova Scotia are the lowest paid in the country, with a median hourly wage of \$12.84, according to a survey called You Bet We Still Care, published this year by the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council.

The median wage across Canada is \$16.50 per hour.

"Dog groomers get paid more," Couture said. "The cashiers at Costco get paid more."

The pay is especially poor considering the importance of kids' development in the early years, she said.

"We are not just babysitters. We're not just here to wipe their noses. Everything we do in the run of a day increases their brain development, increases their success at school, increases their success in life, increases their job potential."

A look at the parties' platforms indeed shows few commitments about daycares.

The NDP platform makes no discernible mention of plans for preschoolers.

But Leader Darrell Dexter said his party created 1,000 new daycare spaces over the last four years and announced four early years centres that will offer early intervention programs, before- and after-school programs and parent education.

As for early childhood educators' wages, Dexter said he hopes to tackle that soon.

"Now that the budget is balanced, we'll be able to start to address that. But we have not laid out a plan for that as of yet."

The Liberal platform commits \$2 million for family resource centres, which provide early education and parental support and help connect families with government services.

Liberal Leader Stephen McNeil said his government would continue to support the existing child-care spaces and would work with the Nova Scotia Child Care Association to discuss the problems facing the sector.

"In terms of the training, we would be working with that association to deal with the issues of the spectrum of training that's available to their workers."

The Progressive Conservative platform announces \$20 million over four years for "a comprehensive early learning program," but details

aren't outlined in the document.

"That is the biggest investment of any of the parties," Progressive Conservative Leader Jamie Baillie said Wednesday. "The funding is available. It's used to help raise the pay and benefits of daycare workers, regardless of whether they work for a government daycare or a privately run daycare. Parents just want to know their kid is going to get a good start."

All three parties say they will provide more support for families of kids with special needs.

Michelle Lohnes, an early childhood educator at St. Joseph's Children's Centre in Halifax, said it is high time leaders take action.

Lohnes has worked in the sector for about 20 years and has two diplomas and a certificate. She makes about \$16.50 an hour.

She said investing in daycares will improve wages and retention rates, raise the standard of training for employees and, ultimately, increase the quality of care.

"They say they're looking at it, but they say that every year," she said of the politicians. "They've been saying that for 20-plus years. It would be nice if they finally stopped talking the talk and start walking the walk."

-reprinted from the Chronicle Herald

**Region:** Nova Scotia <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** election <sup>[3]</sup>

---

**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/13/09/theres-little-talk-about-early-learning>  
**Links**

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/13/09/theres-little-talk-about-early-learning> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7853> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/election>