

School childcare fees to increase under PQ budget ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Quebecers who are parents of pre-school and elementary school-aged children may have to dig a little deeper come September.

Thursday's tabling of the Quebec budget made mention of a rise in subsidized daycare costs - from \$7 a day to \$8 in September, and to \$9 a day in 2015 - but parents with children in school are also in for a fee increase.

Before- and after-school childcare programs at elementary schools, as well as lunch hour programs, are also subject to the increase in fees proposed by the Parti Québécois government.

The increases are expected to add \$120 million to government revenues over the next two years.

Parents at Montreal daycare Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense, near the Jean-Talon Market, were not too fazed by the increase.

"I think it's very reasonable. It's actually quite cheap," said Louis Lemire, who was bringing his three-and-a-half year old son Charles to daycare.

"I don't think it's going to make a big difference at the end of the day. One dollar, well it's not a big increase," said Patrice Barriault.

"If the people are giving a service we're going to have to pay for it," he continued.

Benjamin Ferland, the father of one-year-old Margot, said he already pays taxes to send his children to school, and maybe daycare should be subsidized the same way.

"I think we should see daycare as more of a continuation of education," Ferland said.

Daycare fees up only once since 1997

The subsidized daycare program has been in existence since 1997 as a way to encourage women to rejoin the workforce after having children.

The parental contribution was first set at \$5 to begin, and was raised only once - to \$7 in January 2004.

Finance Minister Nicolas Marceau said that the parental contribution to daycare in 1997 was 20 per cent of the overall cost. Now it's at 13.4 per cent, he said.

He said that the proposed increases would bring the parental contribution back up to 16 per cent.

The subsidized childcare and daycare program currently costs Quebec taxpayers \$2.3 billion, while parents pay \$364 million.

As of Dec. 31, 2013, there were 220,995 places for subsidized pre-school daycare. The PQ is aiming to increase that number to 250,000 spots by 2016.

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