

David Alward's daycare election promises fall short ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A key social policy commitment made by the Progressive Conservatives in the 2010 election campaign to increase daycare spaces in the province by 50 per cent has come up more than 5,300 spots short of that target, new figures show.

The Department of Education released new figures to CBC News that show there has been an increase of 4,751 daycare spaces since the election of the Alward government in 2010, including 346 spaces specifically for infants under the age of two.

The Progressive Conservatives had promised to create 10,087 spaces, including 677 spots for infants.

Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Marie-Claude Blais said the failure to establish even half of the daycare spaces promised during the election does not constitute a broken promise.

"Certainly it was a number that we wanted to target," said Blais.

"We had set up for an achievement. We're still working towards the achievement."

Daycare has been an issue in the last two provincial elections. Former premier Shawn Graham's Liberal government presided over the creation of 6,500 new daycare spots following the 2006 election and promised to create another 7,000 as he campaigned in 2010.

But David Alward dismissed the Liberal record as inadequate and promised during the election campaign to spend \$35 million to greatly expand available spaces in the province from 19,913 to 30,000 in his first term.

"The Graham government hasn't invested enough to make a real difference in additional spaces over the past 4 years," Alward told a crowd of preschoolers and their parents at a Dieppe daycare during the first week of the campaign.

"We will create 50 per cent more childcare spaces bringing the provincial total of childcare spaces to 30,000," he said in August 2010.

New figures show that as of May 1, the provincial government was well short of that target promised in the 2010 election campaign with a total of 24,644 licensed child-care spots

The education department says \$15.8 million was spent during the government's first three years on child-care wage subsidies, parental assistance and other programs to enhance daycare.

But significant barriers exist for many parents, especially middle income families who don't qualify for financial help.

A typical daycare spot in New Brunswick costs between \$700 and \$800 per month per child.

Penny Buck, a Saint John daycare operator, says many working parents, especially those with more than one child, find the cost of child care difficult to afford.

"It can be pretty expensive, you know sometimes you probably weigh the options of whether it's worth it to you to work or not " said Buck.

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