

Developments in Quebec child care ^[1]

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A number of changes in Quebec ECEC policy have prompted response and objection from organizations and experts in Quebec. These have been prompted by a number of factors: cuts to the overall child care budget; increases to parent fees as part of a geared-to-income approach (to be implemented through the tax system); increase in fees for school-age services. Objections are expressed about the effects of a policy introduced several years ago intended to increase the supply of “unfunded” for-profit child care centres (so do not offer reduced contribution fees) but for which user-parents receive a substantial reimbursement; this sector has grown significantly. Quebec has also made a number of changes to its kindergarten policy, expanding provision of full and part day kindergarten for four year olds in selected (vulnerable) neighbourhoods.

The Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance (l'AQCPE) has collected a number of responses and analyses, as well as providing their own. See *Accompagnée de l'économiste Pierre Fortin, l'AQCPE en commission parlementaire sur le rapport Godbout – “Le gouvernement joue avec l'avenir de nos enfants”* ^[2]

Mémoires (briefs) in both French ^[3] and English ^[4] are also available.

Links to a number of other briefs and comments are found on l'AQCPE's home page ^[5].

In addition, an **open letter** ^[6] outlining these concerns appeared in La Presse on September 3. Please find the English translation of this letter below:

Advocating for the development of CPEs, which promote optimal early childhood development and contribute to Québec's economy

It seems some people, based solely on system costs and a short-term vision, are willing to jeopardize what's taken years to build. Their well-worn claim: Québec can no longer afford its myriad social programs. We would counter that what Québec especially can't afford it to not invest in a program that is both socially and economically profitable for everyone in the province.

If you think of the education system as a chain, educational daycare services are the first link. Studies show these services, when they are of high quality, have major, lasting impacts on the development of our children, in particular those from underprivileged backgrounds. Some experts, including James Heckman, Nobel Prize winner in Economics, claim that investments in quality early childhood education yield a highly enviable 7-10% return, related to future savings in services such as health, education, and correctional services.

In Québec, it is the CPEs (Centres de la petite enfance, or educational daycare centres), non-profit organizations administered by parents, that offer the highest level of quality and are most conducive to optimal early childhood development, as demonstrated in a November 2014 study published by the Direction de santé publique (DSP) of the Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal. Throughout Québec, children who attend CPEs are cared for by more qualified educators, who have the credentials to implement a structured educational program in a secure environment that promotes parental involvement.

Not only does Québec's low-fee daycare program pay for itself, it is also profitable for the province. The labour force participation rate of women aged 25-44 jumped from 63% to 75% in Québec between 2004 and 2014, and still remains well above the Canadian average. As a direct result of this female-driven boost to our economy, Québec's gross domestic product (GDP) climbed 1.7%, representing more than \$5 billion per year!

In a move that completely ignores these data, the provincial government reneged on its promises by imposing an unfair tax solely on parents who, seeking quality childcare services, choose to send their child to a subsidized educational daycare centre. And parents will only be able to gauge the full measure of this cost in 2016. This rate hike, combined with massive cuts to the system (half a billion dollars since 2006), is significantly jeopardizing the quality of services.

Attempting to curtail public investment in preschool education at all costs, while substantially increasing the financial burden on young, middle-class families, is no way to prepare our children for the future.

We are completely mystified by the government's strategy of forcing young families to resort to non-subsidized commercial daycare centres, which do not adhere to the same quality standards as CPEs.

While not perfect, CPEs have a proven track record, which is why we are asking the government to meet the CPEs and subsidized daycare centres half-way in order to implement solutions aimed at increasing their financing and opening up more spots for children from underprivileged backgrounds. As such, we are advocating for the development of these quality services, which will enable our society to progress within a context of equal opportunity for all, including our children.

The signatories are :

Michèle Audette, militante autochtone, Nathalie Bigras et les chercheurs de l'équipe Qualité éducative des services de garde et petite enfance de l'UQAM, Camil Bouchard, psychologue, homme politique et blogueur, François Chagnon, professeur à l'UQAM, Marie-Ève Clément, PhD, professeure titulaire, Chaire de recherche du Canada sur la violence faite aux enfants de l'Université du Québec en Outaouais, Léa Clermont-Dion, co-initiatrice de la Charte québécoise pour une image corporelle saine et diversifiée, Gordon Cleveland, professeur d'économie à l'Université de Toronto, François Delorme, économiste et chargé de cours à l'Université de Sherbrooke, Martine Desjardins, consultante, conférencière et bloggeuse, Gilles Fortin, pédiatre, professeur à la Faculté de médecine de l'Université de Montréal et membre de la Commission des droits de la personne et de la jeunesse, Pierre Fortin, économiste, professeur émérite à l'UQAM et chroniqueur, Martha Friendly, directrice exécutive au Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Marie-Hélène Gagné, Ph. D., professeure titulaire à l'École de psychologie de l'Université Laval, Christa Japel, professeure à l'UQAM, Jane Jenson, professeure, Titulaire de la Chaire de recherche en citoyenneté et gouvernance de l'Université de Montréal, Marie-Noëlle Hamelin, présidente fondatrice de BICOM Communications, Carl Lacharité, professeur titulaire en psychologie à l'Université du Québec à Rimouski, Aurélie Lanctôt, bloggeuse et chroniqueuse, Catherine M. Lee, PhD, professeur à l'École de psychologie de l'Université d'Ottawa, Elsie Lefebvre, conseillère municipale, Ariane Moffatt, auteure, compositrice et interprète et Florence Marcil-Deneault, psychologue, Alain Noël, professeur titulaire en science politique à l'Université de Montréal, Yann Perreau, auteur, compositeur et interprète et Marie-Pier Veilleux, Geneviève Pettersen, écrivaine et chroniqueuse, ainsi que Louis Senécal, président-directeur général de l'Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance.

News stories:

Ped-day daycare fees to go up after Quebec cuts funding [7]
CBC News, 12 Aug 2015

Quebec government to cut \$74M in daycare costs [8]
CBC News, 19 Jun 2015

L'avenir s'annonce moins «brillant»... [9]
Le Devoir, 23 May 2015

Quebec's child care program and low-income families [10]
Medium.com, 15 Dec 2014

Fees set to rise for Quebec's cherished \$7 daycare program [11]
Toronto Star, 20 Nov 2014

Region: Quebec [12]

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Links

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