

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, November 2, 2011

LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER

Early Childhood Development Services - Daycares

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

Public Accounts Committee

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Mr. Chuck Porter
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Mrs. Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Jacques Lapointe
Auditor General

Ms. Evangeline Colman-Sadd
Assistant Auditor General

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Community Services

Mr. Robert Wood, Deputy Minister
Mr. Dave Ryan, Associate Deputy Minister
Mr. George Savoury, Executive Director of Family & Community Supports
Mr. George Hudson, Executive Director of Finance and Administration
Ms. Virginia O'Connell, Director of Early Childhood Development Services
Ms. Martha Gillis, Director of Licensing Services



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2011

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Ms. Diana Whalen

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Mr. Howard Epstein

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Good morning, everyone. We're here to start the meeting of the Public Accounts Committee. This morning we have visitors with us from the Department of Community Services. Our subject today is Early Childhood Development Services.

To begin the meeting I'll have the members and the support staff introduce themselves. I think we have a substitute today, so if we could begin with Jim.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. MAT WHYNOTT: With me today I actually have someone following me around from my constituency, Mairi Campbell, as part of "take your student to work day".

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Very nice. Welcome.

What we'll do is begin our meeting with an opening statement from the department, so I'm going to call on the Deputy Minister, Robert Wood. If you would begin?

MR. ROBERT WOOD: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I would like to start just by simply introducing the folks from Community Services. On my left I have George Savoury, Executive Director of Family and Community Services. I have on my right Dave Ryan, Associate Deputy Minister for Community Services; Virginia O'Connell, Director of Early Childhood Development Services; George Hudson, Executive Director of Finance and Administration for the department; and Martha Gillis, Director of Licensing Services.

Good morning to you all, and thank you for giving us an opportunity to speak today. We appreciate the opportunity to highlight the work that is being done in Community Services, and we want to learn ways that we can better serve Nova Scotian families and its youngest residents.

We are committed to ensuring that children receive the best possible start in life that we can give them. We know that the early years of a child's life are so important to help shape their future. We also know that the best way to make Nova Scotia a better place for all of us is to invest early and wisely in our children. Successful children build a successful province.

The government is committed to improving life for Nova Scotia families, and that commitment starts with investments in early learning and child care. The department has been doing tremendous work in the child care sector since the Early Learning and Child Care Plan was implemented in 2005. The ELCC Plan has enabled the department to invest more than \$154 million in child care.

Over the last two years we have had an annual investment of more than \$50 million in early learning and child care. Joint funding from federal and provincial governments has delivered over 40 expansion loans to facilities needing more spaces, which has created 1,350 additional child care spaces. More than 120 repair and renovation loans have been awarded to daycares throughout the province so that they can make the necessary changes to better serve their communities, and 1,110 new subsidies have also been made available to families in need. We have also reduced the cost of child care for families by adjusting the eligibility guidelines for subsidies, making them accessible to even more Nova Scotia families.

We have given parents more options when it comes to choosing child care for their children by making all child care subsidies portable. Portable subsidies empower families and make room for life's changes because the subsidy stays with the child rather than the facility. In addition to creating new child care facility spaces, we've also expanded family home care, which gives parents the option of having their children cared for in a home environment.

We are very pleased with the loans and grants we have committed to the early childhood sector and we will continue to make quality child care more accessible and

affordable to all Nova Scotia families, but we wouldn't be here the expertise and professionalism of our child care providers whose contributions are essential to the well-being of children, families and communities. That is why we've introduced a new grant for child care providers, the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant. This new grant combines two existing grants into one and will provide an additional \$2 million annually to child care operators for staff salaries, benefits, professional growth for child care educators, and general operating expenses. A total of more than \$15 million will now be available every year.

While the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant will help to take some of the pressure off, we know the child care workforce is stretched. Nova Scotia is unique in many ways, but not when it comes to child care staffing challenges. We recognize that this is a challenge that exists across the country. These are wise investments, investments that are necessary to give our children the best start in life so that they can develop into healthy, contributing citizens.

In the past few years we have focused more attention on attracting and keeping talented, caring, qualified early child care workers through the grant - providing those who work with our children the opportunity to shape their educational and developmental foundation is important to the department.

The continuing education program enables child care staff to continue their education while working, and offers reimbursements of up to \$5,000 per year. We provided nearly \$800,000 in funding to eight ECE training and support programs, as well as support workshops for those already working. The Early Childhood Education Assistance Program offers assistance to full-time ECE students during their studies, and debt reduction of up to \$5,000 per year upon graduation. Since 2008, more than 80 students have benefited from this program.

Of course, part of the quality care is making sure our children are eating well every day - proper nutrition is vital to a child's development. We recently worked with colleagues at Health and Wellness to create the standards for regulated food and nutrition child care settings which apply to all regulated child care centres and are based on Canada's Food Guide. The standards help children learn about eating healthy and the importance of proper nutrition through books, games, and being active participants in healthy eating habits. We are also the only province to have set a comprehensive nutritional standards incorporated into its daycare regulations.

Since the introduction of the ELCC plan in 2005, Community Services has accomplished much to increase the affordability, quality and quantity of child care spaces and we are well positioned to continue to make further improvements to the care we provide our children.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. We welcome your feedback - it helps us to improve what we do and ensure our programs are effective, sustainable and in the best interest of the people we serve. We're committed to working with our early childhood workers, staff, children and families, and we continue to improve these essential programs and make life better for families in Nova Scotia. We look forward to providing you with more specific information in response to your questions today. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Wood, I appreciate that.

As is our custom we have 20-minute rounds and I will begin with the questioning from the Liberal caucus. Mr. Colwell.

HON. KEITH COLWELL: First of all, thank you for coming in today to talk about this very important topic that is important to all of us in the province, and has a great bearing on families and children as they begin life.

Just a couple of quick questions. First - how many daycares applied for the Early Childhood Enhancement program in 2010?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. O'Connell.

MS. VIRGINIA O'CONNELL: Last year, in 2010-11, we received applications from 370 child care facilities out of approximately 395, meaning the majority of facilities have applied for the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant.

MR. COLWELL: How many applied again? I didn't hear that.

MS. O'CONNELL: Approximately 370 out of approximately 390 facilities applied for the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant in 2010-11.

MR. COLWELL: That expended the full budget, did it, at the time?

MS. O'CONNELL: It expended the budget which we had, which is over \$15 million.

MR. COLWELL: In these programs what exactly do you see the benefits so far - have you seen any benefits from the program so far?

MS. O'CONNELL: The benefits in the context of the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant?

MR. COLWELL: Yes.

MS. O'CONNELL: Yes. I don't know if some of you may know, but in 2001, with the first round of federal funding, as a department we implemented what was then called the Child Care Stabilization Grant with a budget of \$4.5 million. By the third year of that grant, we had maxed the \$4.5 million and we certainly continued to spend.

The purpose of that grant - I just would like to say that when we look at the best practice in early childhood education and early learning and child care, the key indicator of best practice is the level of quality of the training of staff. If you look at any research in this field, that is the key indicator or the key ingredient of a quality program.

So in 2001 we as a province knew the importance of supporting salaries and enhancing salaries. The Child Care Stabilization Grant, from 2001 until 2010 - it was in April 2010 that we started the enhancement grant to provide funding to enhance salaries. What we have found - and it's of great delight for me, having spent many years in the field of education - is we certainly are seeing that many more staff have been able to remain working in the field, meaning there's actually less staff leaving the field. Because the grant that we provide to facilities is based on the level of training of staff, we are certainly seeing many more staff access training, and therefore we're providing more dollars to facilities. Because we see more staff accessing training, that certainly is a link to quality.

We as a department realized that in order to enable staff to access training, we also wanted to provide, within the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant, a portion for professional growth and professional development for the facility. When you look at the enhancement grant that we provide to centres, when we review the information we have, 80 per cent of that grant is to be allocated to salaries and benefits for staff. We know when you look at the workforce, no matter where you work, what's also important is that there are benefits - meaning many people in the field didn't have sick benefits, didn't have vacation leave, et cetera. Now that grant can provide funding to enhance salaries and funding for benefits; 5 per cent can go to professional growth and professional development of the facility in accordance with the facility's needs.

It's not just for the staff. It's for the professional growth of the whole facility to better meet the needs of the children. What we heard from the Early Learning and Child Care Working Group, which was part of the work of the plan, was that facilities also needed an amount of money to enable them to operate, meaning operational expenses. Not capital, but whether it means a bookkeeper, whether it means additional funds for substitutes or it means additional funds for cooks.

Therefore, in the context of the whole grant, we are looking at the importance of really looking at the base. What's most important in a facility is certainly the level of quality of training of staff and the retention of staff, as well as professional growth and looking at the operational expenditures. What we're seeing in Nova Scotia right now - and even looking at the data from this year, we're seeing that 85 per cent of the staff

working in our province meet what we consider to be the training requirements to work in child care.

MR. COLWELL: Are these grants a one-year grant per daycare?

MS. O'CONNELL: What happens is that every year a facility applies for the grant. It's not a given. It's an application form which they complete. We also complete an annual report on how the previous year's monies were expended. Yes, they apply annually.

MR. COLWELL: In other words, if I had a daycare, or worked at a daycare, we may get it this year and not next year - is that correct?

MS. O'CONNELL: I'm sorry, I didn't hear you.

MR. COLWELL: I wonder if they could turn the volume up a little bit in here because it's hard to hear? In other words, if I operate a daycare and I get it this year, there's no guarantee that I get it next year, right?

MS. O'CONNELL: In essence, in most cases there are very few facilities that we would turn down for a grant. The only issue would be - and it states it in all of our grant funding - if the facility was in noncompliance with our Act and regulations. We cannot fund a facility that has significant noncompliance, because it really shouldn't be operating. That's the only criteria.

What I think your question is, every facility can apply. There has been no facility that we have not funded from their application.

MR. COLWELL: Okay. Maybe I didn't understand your answer at first, and I'd ask you to make your answers a little bit shorter so that I can ask more questions.

MS. O'CONNELL: Certainly.

MR. COLWELL: How many applied last year, and how many got grants?

MS. O'CONNELL: Everyone who applied. Every facility that applied last year received the ECEG. Some facilities choose not to apply.

MR. COLWELL: Now I'm understanding what's going on here. In reality, as long as I apply every year and as long as there is funding in the budget, I will get this funding.

MS. O'CONNELL: Yes.

MR. COLWELL: That makes sense. I was just worried about if, indeed, it was only for a year or two years like a lot of government programs are, and then I've given

everybody raises and now I've got to put my costs up in the daycare so it becomes unaffordable. That's good; I'm pleased to hear that, actually. How do you track the benefits from this? And a short answer, please.

MS. O'CONNELL: We ask the facilities to report on what the benefits are.

MR. COLWELL: Do you audit that once in a while?

MS. O'CONNELL: Every year, after the facility applies, they also must provide what is called an annual report of last year's expenditures. This year they applied for the 2011-12 grant, following which they completed an annual report, which identified how they allocated the funds.

MR. COLWELL: But is it audited?

MS. O'CONNELL: Do you mean do we have auditors going in to review the grant? No, but what we do have is that the application form as well as the annual report is first sent to our regional office, meaning our staff who work in the regions - who know the facilities, who visit the facilities, who are our ECD consultants - first review the grant application and the annual report.

Upon their review, it's forwarded to the specialist in the region who then forwards it to head office, where I have two staff who review the documentation as well. If there are questions, we go back to the facility. Right now, at this point in time, we're not actually auditing, but we do have a series of accountability processes in place.

MR. COLWELL: Really my question was, were they audited? I have no reason to believe that there's anything wrong, none whatsoever. I believe the daycares are doing a terrific job in this province. I know I have three in my riding and they're all exceptionally good organizations. It just seems like everything in the province - if you don't keep an eye on it, something always seems to go adrift.

That's the only reason why I was asking. I have no reason to believe that with this program whatsoever. I'm just asking the basic question - is it audited or is it spot-audited every now and then? If not, it's probably something that should be implemented, even if you do two-year or three-year, whatever you think is appropriate, just to make sure the money is going where they said it was going.

MS. O'CONNELL: Absolutely. We want the same thing.

MR. COLWELL: Again, I have no reason to believe there is any problem, none.

I see in the budget, in the supplementary information that you have, the Early Childhood Program shows the 2010-11 estimate at \$57,835,000 and then the forecast is

\$48,389,000 but it shows the estimates for 2011-12 as \$53,462,000. It actually looks like a reduction in the budget. Is that correct?

MR. GEORGE HUDSON: The answer to your question, with respect to what appears to be a reduction - you have to appreciate that what is flowing through here is the federal funding, so you have a combination of the base program plus the expansion grants. That grant side of the program is naturally reducing. It's not a reduction in the actual program. The actual program and the costs for it are increasing. What you have in prior years is a larger component relative to grants. So the grants for repairs and renovation expansion projects are inside that number in prior years, and it's reducing as that program also reduces, as more and more centres are, in fact, repaired and expanded. There is a capital and operating piece to what you're looking at.

MR. COLWELL: That makes sense. One question I've got to ask - the federal government set this program in place and they're doing some pretty drastic cuts right at the moment, and dear knows what all they'll cut- if the federal government came to the province tomorrow and said that next year we're going to cut this program or reduce it substantially, have you got sort of a plan in place that the province could pick this up? After you've given people increases in salaries and the training is one thing because that stays with people for their lifetime, but in salaries and some operating costs for the daycares, and I know they really struggled, is the province prepared to - I'm almost scared to ask this question because I'm afraid that the federal government might be watching and if you say yes, they might cut the program down - is there a plan in place that this can continue? I think it's a very important program

MR. HUDSON: I'll speak to the financial part and Virginia can speak, of course, to the plan, because there is a plan. From a financial perspective, we've got two lumps of money from the federal government early on, which part of that is still on deposit and is being drawn down to fund the program. We're also getting federal money on an annual basis, a much smaller amount.

The plan with respect to both the funding and the program - and Virginia can speak to other provinces - we're pleased to say that the plan from day one was always about creating a sustainable plan. So yes, there is a plan and, yes, it is intended to be a sustainable one. If you wish, Virginia can speak to choices made by other provinces, which sets us in a very good position.

MR. COLWELL: No, that's satisfactory, I'm just glad that you have a plan. I just wouldn't like to see the federal government all of a sudden come along and say, okay, we're going to scrap this whole thing and spend our money on something else and we have all those valued workers in the daycares, all of a sudden they have a problem. The daycares can't operate so they have to put the costs up and then the costs become prohibitive for the parents of the children and it causes a huge ripple effect.

I am really pleased to hear that you have a contingency plan in place, let's put it that way, and I would be surprised if you didn't have one.

The Early Learning Program that you put in place must really help when the children first enter school. Have you seen the effects of that? Maybe the deputy minister could talk about that a little bit.

MR. WOOD: Certainly, I'll speak to it first and then I'll ask Virginia as well, who is really an expert in this. There is lots of literature that shows, in fact, investments early on in a child's life, in fact does set them up effectively for long-term success. And it is across the spectrum, it's not just around the daycare programming but it's in a strong start at the beginning, through the health care, what is happening in prenatal right through to childbirth and into those very early months and years of life and then into other kinds of early childhood development. It is very much a continuum of services, us being just one component of that.

Certainly the literature shows that children do much better in school when, in fact, they have had those strong foundations and they are prepared when they start to enter into a Primary program they have not only the development in terms of numeracy and phonics and so on, but just in terms of motor skills, in terms of social development. All of those components are extremely important to lay that foundation to enable children to succeed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. O'Connell.

MS. O'CONNELL: Thank you. I certainly welcome your question because economists, Nobel Prize-winning economists, have said that for every dollar you invest at the early year, your return is actually almost doubled, \$3 actually. So if we were an economist today and we wanted to have a long-term investment, it is the field of early years, early childhood development, that is really important to vest in.

In the context of our plan, and I think I actually distributed this morning the consultation summary which we did in 2005 and, as well, the checklist on the Early Learning and Child Care Plan, when we heard from all the people, and the parents especially, as to what was wanted, and in essence we are very pleased to be here today and tell you what we have done. We know that what we've been able to do is really secure a better base in Nova Scotia, an actual better foundation so that we can continue to promote early learning and child care. Your question about children and attending school, we are certainly seeing - and most primary teachers you would speak to today could well identify the children who have had opportunities to be part of a child care or early learning program, so it's definitely making a difference.

What is also making a difference is that we now have over 15,000 licensed spaces in child care. That doesn't mean only 15,000 attend because in many spaces there is actually more than one child can occupy a space.

MR. COLWELL: That is good. I thought that would be the answer, but it's nice to have it on record. Is there any consideration of expanding this program any further or are you satisfied with the level it's at now?

MS. O'CONNELL: In essence, your question leads to something that I had previously said and thank you for that. As I said earlier, in looking at the plan, which we've done since 2005, and even what we started in 2001, I think that we have somewhat created a base or a foundation to move forward. It's great to have Martha Gillis with us today because when we look at early learning and child care and our regulated or licensed programs, the very first component is that our facilities are in accordance and in compliance with our regulations. If we know children are safe, they're free from harm, then we can really now focus on the quality of the programs. We know that by enhancing quality, we can certainly move this forward and so on the context of moving forward, what's really important - at least in my opinion - in Nova Scotia is that we take a broader approach and look at an opportunity to develop an early learning framework in this province for our facilities.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wood, you wanted to add to that?

MR. WOOD: Yes, please. When I go back and I look at the Early Learning and Child Care Plan that was developed in 2005, there was a very comprehensive consultation process with parents and daycare providers and they had a list of things that they wanted to see changed. When I look at the summary of changes that have happened to 2011, I think that we have done a good job of developing that base. We have increased the number of spaces and of subsidies, so that base is there.

I think really, because this is a 10-year plan and we're kind of just more than halfway through it, it's really saying, so where do we go next? How do we, in fact, actually improve the quality of the programming? How do we imbed more early childhood development principles into the daycare programming itself? I think the department really can take a great deal of satisfaction of putting that foundation in place and it gives us the opportunity to then say, where do we now want to go in terms of improving education and improving the quality of the programs?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Your time has just about elapsed right now, Mr. Colwell. I'm going to turn the questioning over now to Mr. Porter for the Progressive Conservative caucus.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Welcome to the panel this morning. It's good to have you here and an opportunity to ask some very important questions with regard to daycares. I know from seeing most of you over there that I've met with a few of you in the past with other organizations to discuss daycare issues. I'm just kind of curious starting off, how many daycares are there in the province?

MS. O'CONNELL: We have about 395. Usually over the summer there are about 400, but what we're certainly finding is that some close but we are continually having more spaces.

MR. PORTER: Is that enough, do you think, to accommodate what we have? We keep hearing about student populations going down, for example. People are having fewer children and so on, so when we look at how we're accommodating, are we accommodating or meeting our needs?

MS. O'CONNELL: I think I would first premise, what do parents want? I think it's important in Nova Scotia that we provide child care options. Not every parent may need or want an actual child care facility for their child. One of our focuses has certainly been to expand and grow child care and maybe have some larger facilities, some smaller facilities. I'm very pleased to say today, looking at where we were in 2007, we had three family home daycare agencies; today we have 13, meaning we have over 650 children that can be involved in regulated family home daycare, which is very exciting to see.

In the context of do we have enough? I certainly think it's important to look at the demographics, to look at the number of children actually living in communities. We certainly need more infant spaces. That has been one of the goals of the plan, and I'm very pleased to say that we have 666 infant spaces in the province now, which is a big growth from what it was four years ago.

I do believe that what's important is that we actually look at communities, we look and see what the needs of the community are, we look at the ages of children in the communities, we look at what's already provided. It's important to do that.

MR. PORTER: Thank you. I think it's very important to note as well - and from my own experience, four children have all gone through the daycare system, and there are so many different levels. I think a lot of people don't realize. I think there's this perception that it's a pre-school event. It's much more than that; they are starting young.

You spoke a moment ago about infant spaces, that too being a very important aspect. Generally speaking, if it's not a single parent, both are usually working in a lot of cases these days to meet the needs of living today. There are many programs. We have the need for infant - not only the pre-school but the after-school programs that are offered.

I know at our local daycare there's a great after-school program that kids have gone to for years until they're old enough to be home alone or other arrangements have been made or they've moved on to high school, et cetera. Hours of operation and work change to meet those needs. I think a lot of that is missed. I think there's a lot to be said - you can physically, you can literally see the differences in the abilities of these children. I don't say that as a bias just because my own kids went to daycare; I say it because of what I see, the people I represent and so on. Those kids that have gone to daycare do learn. There's

certainly a lot to be said for the programs being offered. They're of great value, whether it's learning to read, learning social skills, or learning to interact.

When you see the child who perhaps hasn't had the opportunity - not to take anything away from that child - to go to a daycare or pre-school program prior to going to elementary school, you do see a difference in many aspects of that child, whether it's social or ability. Not 100 per cent, but I think a huge percentage. You see a large difference.

We feel - I know that you know this already from previous discussions and involvement we've had - that in our area daycare is a great value. Windsor in West Hants has numerous - we have a big one in Windsor, the Windsor Day Care Centre. We have some in-home-style daycares that are smaller in scale but still provide very good programs and do great work on behalf of the kids out there and the parents and families that they're looking after.

There were commitments that were made in previous government nearly three years ago. When the government changed, were those commitments kept across the board? I think for the most part government promised - I don't have literature in front of me to say this, but it has been said that government projects that were committed would be followed through. Is that accurate, or am I wrong in that?

MS. O'CONNELL: From my perspective, it's accurate.

MR. PORTER: So all of those have been. I'm sure you know where I'm going with this. I want to speak a bit about the Windsor Day Care Centre. As you are well aware, in 2008 they were awarded a grant or a non-repayable loan of \$675,000. Documentation has gone out and I know they've been working back and forth. I know you know this as well, and the department does. There has been a great deal of work going on between the project manager, the committee there, and the Town of Windsor; the CBDC is now financially involved with support, et cetera.

I guess the issue I'm concerned about is that we keep sending a lot of paper back and forth, and sometimes there are delays in getting it back and forth. I would say that, in fairness, we've established that there have been delays on both sides, and miscommunication to some degree. There was a letter, though, that came that was very concerning, and on a couple of occasions. It said that now the \$675,000 is no longer available. I wish I had that with me today, but I don't. I don't know if you would have a copy of that or not, but I do know that that was retracted, that was taken back. Can you maybe speak to that a little bit, just for my own clarity about why that's happened and also why this has taken so long now?

I realize there's a fundraising component, and securing the finances - that all makes sense. I know that they've come back and said, look, we have a balance - a low interest loan

- that we want to borrow from the government. Which makes sense too - it's cheaper to pay back a low interest, as we all understand, in an organization like this.

I also want to point out, just before I let you get to the answer here, that this isn't a fly-by-night organization, this is an organization that has been in place solidly for nearly 35 years now and we know, I've heard the department say it because I've asked and we know around the community, some of these gals work in there - Pat Post being one of them, who is the coordinator there, I think she has been there for 30-plus years herself. This is a very solid organization so I think there's a belief in the department - I'm not taking anything away - that you believe in what's going on at the Windsor Day Care Centre. I'm not slighting that at all; I do not doubt that for the least moment.

There are concerns and you can understand the frustration at this point as to how these folks are feeling. Every step they take there seems to be another letter coming back saying it's not enough, it's not enough, it's not enough.

Just back to my original question on this, how could they get a letter saying - if the commitment was already made - that the \$675,000 is no longer available?

MS. O'CONNELL: I would like to answer that first question but maybe Mr. Hudson could also. In the context of the expansion program and the award that was provided to the Windsor Day Care Centre initially, that was the amount awarded. To my knowledge, that funding has never been retracted. I do know that the funding that was initially awarded, the Windsor Day Care Centre did come back with a different proposal, about a year later, which had to be looked at. Since that point in time, I'm not sure if all of you know, but in essence the early childhood development expansion loan program is in the context of reviewing the application and awarding the funding.

After that component takes place and all the requirements are met, from the point of view of the contractor, et cetera, it then moves to the Nova Scotia Housing Development Corporation, which is responsible for all of the legal components, setting the mortgage, et cetera, which as you most likely understand, I cannot speak to. I would perhaps ask Mr. Hudson to speak to the requirements for every repair and renovation loan, as well as every expansion loan must meet the mortgage and/or loan requirements.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Hudson.

MR. HUDSON: I'm answering these questions as the chief financial officer of the Nova Scotia Housing Development Corporation, which is my other job. In that context, in the case of daycares, we are the bank and just as you apply for a loan from the bank, there is a certain amount of due diligence that is expected of us on behalf of the taxpayers. You're into legal issues and we have legal counsel to support the Housing Development Corporation with respect to things like there is a mortgage, there are first security charges, and we often get into difficulties in terms of the legal side of these issues, in terms of

expectations with respect to the loan application through to the actual granting of the loan. Sometimes we have just the technical issues around getting the mortgage in place.

We also have and work with the program around ensuring that there is a viable business plan from which we, the Housing Development Corporation, can be assured that we get paid back. We don't provide these loans with the plan to foreclose on anybody, that's not our business, so there is a significant amount of due diligence put in place around these loans to avoid or reduce the risk as much as possible that we get into difficulty later.

MR. PORTER: Thank you very much, I appreciate that and understand that there is always a risk, but we're dealing with taxpayers' money so the risk should be truly mitigated. There's no doubt, I don't think at all that that shouldn't be done, no matter what you're building or putting money out or supporting, I think that's fair and I think that everybody understands that. Mr. Hudson, I don't think there's any doubt in any of that, I think that's great.

I do want to say, though, so we have \$675,000 that was put up on a \$1 million project, that's a pretty good down payment in comparison to when we think about financial institutions, banking, securities, assets, et cetera. In this case we even have the CBDC now involved in town in Windsor, who stepped up and said yes, look, we've looked at your business case, we're confident you can make the payments back, which included the balance going back to the province on what was requested as a loan, and I know you're familiar with that.

Without any hesitation they took this to a board of people, a solid board of people that understands finances, that understands abilities to repay. They looked at the business plan, they looked at the budget and many years of the budget that was provided, as well, to the department was provided to these folks and they said, you know what? We can make the payments. There always seemed to be some doubt here, and what keeps coming back at least is that there's a doubt that there's an ability to repay.

If I'm hearing you right - and maybe you can clarify for me and explain it more - are you saying there's a doubt that the risk is too high here because we've not been able to get a commitment from the department to move forward with the project? Understanding, as well, what Virginia said is there are all these steps that you have to go through and they're lengthy and I think everybody appreciates that project managers - our project manager, Paul Clarke for example, a great guy, a great company at Avondale, has built other daycares. I think maybe they did the one in Chester or somewhere, I just forget the location now, but they have done others.

They're very familiar with department policy and process and they know the finite steps that are required - and so should they be - in building such a facility. Nobody has ever argued that, it just seems that we keep getting turned away, turned away when you think you've got everything in. Letters have come back that have asked for A, B, C and D, the

answers have been given, and letters will come back and ask for something else. Why didn't they ask for everything at once? This flow keeps turning over and over by way of nothing more than delays is the appearance, and that's the frustration we're having here in getting it done.

So understanding that finances are always the biggest part, it's challenging to fundraise, they continue to do so, there's \$50,000 in the bank that says we have a portion already raised, we've got other securities from the town, we own a property, we have a current facility that has had no mortgage for 20-plus years. It doesn't seem that consideration for the value of assets that are already on the table has been given here if there is, in fact, a financial risk that you're still referring to. I just wonder, is that still a problem at this point, Mr. Hudson? Can you clarify that I'm on the right track or I'm off here?

MR. HUDSON: First of all you've referenced a \$1 million project in the \$675,000. We have a small number of daycares throughout the province where that difference between what we were providing the funding for and what was to be contributed through other loans or whatever, we have had challenges in some daycares where that difference was not actually delivered and the project got into difficulty. Those are the things - so yes, we're focusing on the whole project and ensuring that there are funds available. Through these back-and-forth letters certainly that difference has been, shall I say, solidified because it has changed in terms of the first application to now having CBDC involved.

Certainly the due diligence and the back-and-forth discussions with the applicant have brought more security around that contribution and those sources. So certainly CBDC wasn't there at the start so those are partial answers, I hope, to your questions. Yes, things are in much better shape now than they were a year ago.

MR. PORTER: Thank you for that. Mr. Hudson, I'm just having a hard time hearing you, I think probably because we're just back a bit from the microphones, but I think I got most of that. I appreciate that due diligence is vitally important and I would never say that government or anyone should get into any project without doing that due diligence and making sure that there is a sound, financial case to be made for any project. I'm curious though, I think I heard you say it sounds like things are in better shape. We just recently got a letter last week, another letter was sent out and came back asking another four or five questions. I think there was a meeting yesterday where they went back to the CBDC and tried to answer some of the questions that were being asked. I guess I was going to ask if there's a belief, obviously, that this project still has some legs.

For awhile here, I guess, the folks at the daycare would believe that this is probably dead because it has just gone on so long and every time they think they've taken a step forward, another letter comes back and they're feeling like there are a couple more blows. The feeling is, I think in all honesty - and I'll say this to all of the department - they just feel like they should throw it in a box and leave it until government changes hands, that's how

frustrated they are now. They started out on a positive note - so if you can just picture how these folks are feeling for a second - and here they are, they're underway a few years ago, they've got this great idea, they've got an old building that's rundown - I don't know if any of you have been there or not, it's in rough shape. They just repaired a roof that has been leaking, the floors are rotting away from under them, but they're doing everything they can, you know, nickel and dime, keeping the repairs up because it's vitally important to this community to keep this place open.

It will stay open, they'll find a way until it gets done; they want to get it done, there's no question. And then they get letters and they get frustrated and they're saying, we just answered this question. There were questions sent back, we didn't get this, this and this. There was a package this thick that was hand-delivered to the department. They wrote back and said we didn't get this and the question was, I wonder if they looked at the package because everything they asked for was in it. So you could just sort of picture the frustration that has gone on with this project.

Now, in all fairness, I don't think that the everyday person, the employees, the staff, the coordinator, would ever for a moment understand all of the ongoings within government departments and maybe not understanding all that due diligence, not to take anything away from them. But it's significant what has to be done to make such a project happen, I would never say anything less. I think it's quite big but it's the back and forth. Like I say, just when they think, wow, maybe we're actually on the way, they go to the CBDC, they secure something else. They work with the town to get whatever language needs to be used by way of first and second mortgages. They get it all in place so it looks like finally, here it is, the money is all in hand, we're going to move forward, we're talking to our project coordinator and bang, no, haven't got the letter yet.

Now here we are, it's November, the chances of a project starting in this year are highly unlikely, if it ever does get awarded it would be in the warmer season because that's a cost saving as well. At the same time, the way the world goes we can't control markets and the prices of things go up, building supplies, et cetera. We all realize the changes and potential changes for project costs, I think that's fair.

Back to my original point here - Mr. Hudson is the chief financial officer, and wearing your other hat, then, and looking at the numbers, I guess I would just clearly ask you, in your opinion, has the Windsor Day Care Centre, in this facility, in this grant, et cetera, and the money that's required, the ability to pay the debt that would be associated with this?

MR. HUDSON: Certainly in the last review that we've done there were only a few technical issues that were laid before them and we're used to dealing with second lenders like CBDC and clearing up so those technicalities between our position and theirs is certainly part of the few things to clean up, shall we say, in terms of the final answer.

No, we don't have that concern at this moment with respect to repayment. We do have problems in terms of the technical security positions that I think were laid out fairly clearly. This is very technical stuff and I appreciate the challenges that the average person would have with some of these technicalities. We, on the other hand, have also dealt after the fact with loans put in place that didn't have these technical issues dealt with properly up front and it is way worse to deal with them after the fact.

MR. PORTER: Thank you and I appreciate that very much. I know I've got only a few seconds left, I'll ask this maybe to the deputy. Given all the technical, as per Mr. Hudson, is out of the way here, any idea when this project may be awarded actually to go ahead and move forward in a positive, final deal so that there's some idea here where we're going? Is there any idea on the time frame?

MR. WOOD: First off, I can appreciate the frustration in terms of the time and the amount of effort that is associated with these kinds of projects. When we talk about technical elements we're really talking about financial due diligence and legal obligations and the questions associated with that. From my perspective, I think the ball is now actually in the Windsor Day Care Centre's court and the time that they can come back with answers to those questions and we can sort through who has a first mortgage and a second mortgage and all of those other legal components, then we will be in a position to be able to move. Obviously we want to be able to move on these projects as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, your time has elapsed.

MR. PORTER: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call on Mr. MacKinnon, please, for the NDP caucus.

MR. CLARRIE MACKINNON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It's great to have the guests with us this morning. This is a very important topic for many young families in Nova Scotia. I'd like to begin first by congratulating Mr. Wood and wishing him well as the new Deputy Minister of Community Services. Perhaps beginning on a personal note, one of my daughters was the director of a daycare facility in Calgary and at a fairly young age she decided to go back to school and get a B.A. and a B.Ed., because zoo-keeping staff, in fact, get paid more than daycare workers. I think our enhancement program is trying to really do something about that, but still the wages are low. How do we find the balance between the fees being paid by parents not going too high and paying staff a decent wage? How do we find that balance? Is the program helping to do that?

MS. O'CONNELL: Thank you for your question. In the context of the difference the grant is making, we actually do know it's definitely making a difference. We see that and we do analyze the information that we get back in the context of the annual report from the facilities. The context of the balance between the fees and remuneration of staff, the

child care facilities are independent businesses and in the context of operating a business, many facilities pay little rent. Other facilities are actually leasing space, so it's really in the context of the facility itself where they can best put forward a financial budget, plan, and certainly look first at the importance of the wages for staff.

It has been very rewarding to find out and hear from staff that it's making a difference. We know, as was said earlier, we're not making enough of a difference yet with respect to wages but in consultation with some members from the sector, I have been hearing that some of the staff are actually starting at a wage that they're very comfortable with. We certainly see our diploma and certainly our staff with degrees, starting at a much higher wage, \$27,000 to \$30,000 I'm being told, and in the context of benefits, as well, being available.

We also heard that many staff in the context of even this grant are happy to be receiving benefits, maybe even more so than the wage. It's certainly work that we do need to do. We also though need to inform parents. I think parents, at a point in time, it's important that they're aware of the importance of the staff who are working with the children and to really ensure that this is a really important service that's being provided. We would certainly like to do more in this area. Right now our ECEG budget, which was \$15 million last year, will already exceed \$16 million this year. Considering in 2001-02, we were providing about \$2.3 million to \$3 million for wages we're now exceeding up to \$16 million.

MR. MACKINNON: That's quite a commitment. How does it compare with other provinces per capita? Other provinces have a similar enhancement program, I would expect; some of them would, at least.

MS. O'CONNELL: Some of them do, yes you are correct. Some of them just provide operational dollars to facilities that are not actually wage-focused so that in essence it's up to the facility to use it. In one province - Manitoba - they actually legislate parent fees and they legislate wages. So in the context of centres that are in Manitoba, the wages must be at a certain rate in accordance with your level of training. As well, they also legislate the fees parents pay for child care. In that type of entity, it's a very different perspective. As well, on a monthly basis, every facility has to submit a report of the wages as well as their operational expenditure.

MR. MACKINNON: I understand that there is, in fact, a recruitment and retention strategy in Nova Scotia. Could you perhaps elaborate a little bit on that?

MS. O'CONNELL: Yes, it's actually threefold in the context of the recruitment and retention strategy. One program is called the Early Childhood Education Assistance Program. We're certainly finding over 80 people have applied for that. What it means is that if you qualify for a student loan and you get your diploma or even your degree in early childhood, when you finish the degree and/or the diploma, you submit information to the

department and we will pay back your student loan at \$5,000 per year. That's called ECEAP.

The other program is called Continuing Education which means - and this is what's also very important and I just want to tell you one quick story. We had an individual who for years worked in the field, had never received her diploma, had done some preliminary course work, and we have many more individuals like that who are now going back and getting a diploma because they can get \$5,000 a year towards courses at any of the six institutions in the province, but they must be working full time. They're studying part time and one of the funding initiatives we did provide many years ago was that the Nova Scotia Community College has all their courses and practicum on-line, which means that you can study on-line.

So we're finding a very large opportunity for that and we're looking, as well - all of our community colleges in early childhood since we commenced the ECEAP and the Continuing Education, their enrolment is really escalating. That's also very satisfying. As well, as I said earlier, the professional growth, the professional development component of the ECEG also promotes recruitment and retention.

MR. MACKINNON: I certainly commend you for the ongoing changes that are, in fact, taking place. I think the department is doing a very good job.

One of the items I'd like to talk about, you mentioned that there were 395 daycares and 370 are actually getting funding from the enhancement program. You also mentioned at one point that from time to time we have daycare facilities that are closing. This presents a tremendous problem for parents. What is the role of the department in trying to alleviate some of the problems that arise when that does occur?

MS. O'CONNELL: One of the first things we usually do when we hear that's happening, we actually visit the centre, our regional staff meet with the operator and determine the reason for closure. In many cases, the reasons for closure have been retirement. Many of our smaller rural centres have been operated by people who have worked in the field and are very committed. They choose to retire; they actually choose to move on.

We have also found that in a lot of cases what we've been able to do is we've met with the faculty and we've worked with them to even change the age range that they're serving, and that has meant it has been able to stay open. We also had a centre close but what has actually happened over this summer is that three or four centres closed but they were bought out by other facilities, which not only bought them out but they've created larger spaces. There was a facility for 50 children closed in HRM this summer, it was bought out and now it's serving 100 children.

I certainly agree with you. It's very challenging, but it's certainly their choice. We work with them; we really work with the families. If we find there's a family that's receiving subsidy, we really make our best opportunity to accommodate that. It's definitely challenging. But what is happening is other ways are actually meeting the need and our family home daycare program is certainly growing.

MR. MACKINNON: Thank you. I did promise to share my time with Mr. Whynott and I will do that, but I do want to say that my constituency office is dealing with Community Services in a whole realm of areas on a daily basis and I'm very pleased with the results that I get from the department locally. Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Whynott.

MR. WHYNOTT: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Can you explain to me - I think maybe George - how much money comes from the feds to help with child care costs and all the rest of it?

MR. HUDSON: If you turn your attention to the Supplement, we actually produce a table in the Supplement that shows the federal money, where it goes. For example, in the current fiscal year, \$46 million is actually federal money out of the \$57 million. But we also produce - and it is part of the deal with the federal government to produce a public report not only on the money side, but the program. So there's an extensive report on that.

MR. WHYNOTT: Okay, do the feds put any restrictions on that money, like in specific areas?

MR. HUDSON: No, unlike many of the agreements we have with the federal government, this one does not have a cost-sharing component; it's money directed to child care. But there isn't a technical cost-sharing agreement; in fact, the largest amount of the funds came by way of press release or communiqué.

MR. WHYNOTT: I think it's really a positive thing here in the province. We're helping families with the cost of child care. In particular, I know of a couple of cases in my constituency where a family of two children, a mother and father, the kids both under the age of 2 years old, and the mom essentially wants her maternity and the paternity leave was up for both parents, so there was the decision of do I go back to work?

Because of the cost of daycare at this particular centre that they're going to was rather high, luckily enough they were eligible for the subsidy which now allows both parents to be working, which is what they wanted to do, but also allows the kids to have a good early childhood education which I think is a positive thing. In particular, I know my wife did the Child and Youth degree at the Mount, it's obviously a positive thing and we're moving forward. The question I have with regard to the Mount and NSCC - I don't know who could take this question - my understanding is that there's some sort of an agreement

between the two educational facilities to allow a transfer of credits and that sort of thing. Can you explain that a little bit and when that agreement took place and the benefits that has for the people in the program?

MS. O'CONNELL: I don't know the specifics of when it happened, but I know Mount Saint Vincent University, even in the early 1980s, they had a two-year diploma program and then they stopped that and they now have the Bachelor of Applied Arts and Child and Youth Study.

They have articulation agreements with the Nova Scotia Community College as well as the Institute for Human Services Education in Truro. I believe they're developing them, as well, with the Nova Scotia College of ECE. That means that if you successively achieve your diploma you can move into the Mount's degree program and you certainly don't need to do all the courses, neither do you need to do all of the practicum. In many cases it has been a great opportunity for staff to really perfect their knowledge and skill in the field. I'm certainly aware the Mount is really enjoying that opportunity.

MR. WHYNOTT: Absolutely. Actually, I had the opportunity to meet with the president of the Mount in the last six months. I talked about my wife's case in particular where she did her Child and Youth degree and then decided to go and do her B.Ed., but she had to do the practicums in her Child and Youth degree as well as in the B.Ed. program. Actually, the president said that's a great idea, why don't we try to collaborate? My understanding is that they're actually moving forward on trying to collaborate those two practicums so that you don't have to do them both because in the Child and Youth degree you are doing placements in schools across the province. I think it's a good thing.

Going to the other George, George Savoury, I just want to talk a little bit about the Child and Youth Strategy. I know we had an opportunity to be - one of our caucus retreats was in Cumberland North. We did a tour and my colleague, the member for Lunenburg West and I had the opportunity to go to Maggie's Place and they mentioned to us they receive funding under the Child and Youth Strategy, I believe, for early childhood interventions and that sort of thing. Can you talk a little bit about the money that was set aside under the Child and Youth Strategy and how many early intervention childhood education centres in the province receive those funds?

MR. GEORGE SAVOURY: Mr. Whynott, we do have early intervention programs to serve children from zero to preschool, which is actually a program that's under Virginia's program. I'm pleased you referenced the Child and Youth Strategy and I know you've been very involved with it, especially on the youth engagement side of it, and there are some - you mentioned Maggie's Place, which was one of the facilities or programs that did get funding through the Child and Youth Strategy.

We've actually for all of the programs that we've funded through the Child and Youth Strategy that were pilots, like SchoolsPlus, or they could have been an early support

program or a parenting journey type program, as a result of the successful evaluations we've decided to actually move their funding into core funding so it's no longer pilot-project funding. I know that has been well received throughout the province.

In terms of our Early Intervention Program, I can tell you it's one of our - you know, we believe it's a very successful program. We have 17 locations throughout the province and the folks who work in that program partner very much with Health and Wellness, Education, and other resources in the community. It's a program that we've been able to continue to add some resources to each year, as well, to deal with the wait lists for that program. We're not totally there in terms of eliminating the wait lists but we've been, I would say, very aggressive in terms of trying to reduce it and will keep within the context of our resources, trying to get it down so we don't have an actual wait list for that program.

MR. WHYNOTT: Great, thank you. Just before - I think my time is up very shortly?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: A few minutes.

MR. WHYNOTT: A few minutes, okay. I think you mentioned, Robert, in your opening remarks - or someone did - about the new regulations around healthy eating and healthy spaces for children zero to four, zero to five. We're the first jurisdiction in the country to put in such regulations which I think is a very positive thing to move forward, especially with our - you know, we've heard in the media many times that we're an obese society and all the rest of it. I think it gives children such an important start in life. Can someone talk a little bit about why that is such an important start to a child's life?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Would that be Ms. O'Connell? Ms. O'Connell.

MS. O'CONNELL: Yes, it's incredibly important and we're very pleased in Nova Scotia to actually be the first province to have a comprehensive set of standards that are integrated into our regulations, meaning that the standards must be met. We've had an opportunity for the last four years to partner with Health and Wellness. We had a committee of parents, people in the field and the academic institution that developed the standards, as well as we consulted.

We heard from everyone that if we're looking at having a healthier society and we're looking at enabling children to grow up healthy in the context of the food and nutrition that when you consider the fact there are over 16,000 children attending licensed child care, we as a department believe that we can begin through our facilities that role model, not only of the foods that are offered, the foods that are served, but even of the environment and enabling the environment of actually working with children and being with children, to be one that encourages children to try new foods. It's very much linked to Canada's Food Guide.

What's really important is that not only do we have the standards, but we're asking facilities now to look at the nutrient criteria in a way - there was one point in time that any change to the menu used to have to be approved by the nutritionist. Now we're giving a lot of opportunity and training and resources to the centre itself to develop a healthy menu because we know healthy children, even if they're two, or if they're four, if they're presented with healthy foods, if this is what's happening in the facility, hopefully their parents will begin to model that.

MR. WHYNOTT: Right. Any sense of when we'll start to see some sort of change in behaviour, like if there will be a change in behaviour for parents at home and kind of in our school system, once they get to public school, that sort of thing?

MS. O'CONNELL: Well, in essence, I'm not sure you're aware - and I certainly can't speak to it - but the school system has had an actual nutrition policy for years.

MR. WHYNOTT: Yes, exactly.

MS. O'CONNELL: And it's a policy.

MR. WHYNOTT: Yes.

MS. O'CONNELL: Where we have ours as standards, we knew it was important to tie them to regulations because the policy can be very high level. In that context we're already seeing a difference, we're getting some very positive feedback from parents, as a matter of fact, because in essence they're quite delighted that the facilities are certainly ensuring that their foods meet the nutrient criteria.

We've been doing information sessions right around the province with our facilities and we're getting some very positive comments back. If you're looking at longitudinal research to know if it's making a difference in five to 10 years, we're not there yet, but I think the initial feedback we're hearing, and as well it's also focused on buying local so that we're wanting to support communities and we're wanting to ensure the staff themselves become role models for healthy nutrition.

MR. WHYNOTT: Great, thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Your time is up, thank you very much, Mr. Whynott. We've got 15 minutes in the final round. Mr. Colwell.

MR. COLWELL: Thank you very much. I also want to echo one of my colleague's sentiments about your department. You come into a new department and I can tell you the staff in that department are incredible to work with. We've had a lot of serious issues in my riding and the department has always been very professional up front. When they can help, they do, and if they can't, they explain why. We couldn't ask for any better help for very

difficult situations so I'd ask you to pass that on to your staff. You're inheriting a very good department, even though it has to be awfully stressful for the staff as they work with people who have difficulties and sometimes they can't help. I know I find it personally very stressful.

I've got a few questions here as well. What is the average cost for the parents in the full-time preschool spaces? Does it change by the areas in the province or does it change by profit and not-for-profit organizations or is it flat across the whole province? How does that work - in a short answer, please, if possible?

MS. O'CONNELL: If you're looking to preschool, \$28 to \$32 per day, but it does fluctuate in the province.

MR. COLWELL: One of the difficult things with spaces in Nova Scotia is spaces for infants. Has that been addressed? I know it's a difficult one because I believe you have to have special training and facilities and all that sort of thing, and not every daycare probably wants to get into that. Really, with a mother going back to work, it's essential to sort of make that transition from the time until the children are big enough to go into the regular daycares. What work has been done in that area?

MS. O'CONNELL: In 2005 we had about 290 infant spaces, we now have 660, as well as our family home daycare providers can also care for infants. We don't really keep track of the number of infants per homes but we're certainly seeing, and in a very short answer, what is happening is that what is exciting is that some of our child care facilities are now also serving as family home agencies and the family homes are the opportunity for infant care. Then they can move into facilities when they're toddlers, so that's an exciting component as well.

MR. COLWELL: On that in-home sort of care system, would that be typically less expensive to operate, because you don't have to have all the facilities, than actually having a big facility set up and it's also probably a better environment for the infant as well - not necessarily.

MS. O'CONNELL: The care provider, the individual family home-care provider, they set the fee scale. However, what is very good, we provide child care subsidy to children who attend a regulated family home. We're certainly seeing a real uptake in our subsidies in the family home.

MR. COLWELL: That's good. Now also, is there portability in the - this portability issue is with the subsidies - and clarify this for me if you could because I don't totally understand how it all works. There's a subsidy paid for daycare space and that's directly related to the child. Now, is that paid or portable to the daycare or is it portable with the parent? In other words, if the parent for some reason has to move the child to another

daycare - maybe they move or whatever the case may be in the province - is that portable with the parent?

MS. O'CONNELL: Absolutely. It means if I'm leaving Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, finished school and I want to move to Dalhousie to go to school, I take my space with me and I keep it. We have children who keep their space for 12 years, no matter where the parent lives in the province.

MR. COLWELL: And what if they just change from one daycare in the community to another?

MS. O'CONNELL: No, the parent, the family owns the subsidy, it's attributed to them.

MR. COLWELL: That's very positive. It's something that we've been pushing for a long time and I think that's very appropriate. It sort of keeps the daycares on their toes and also gives the parents, for whatever reason, options.

MS. O'CONNELL: Great for training and education purposes.

MR. COLWELL: The other thing is that as we see the economy in Nova Scotia and the cost of living in the province increase substantially due to the increase in taxes - you know, a year ago the price of gasoline was roughly 20 cents a litre less than it is today, so it's really expensive for people to get back and forth to work. The low-income families are struggling, but the middle-class families are starting to feel a pinch now too. Is there any move toward helping the middle-class families with more affordable child care programs to come? How does that fit into what your plan is for the future?

MS. O'CONNELL: In the context of subsidy, when we changed the eligibility rates for the child care subsidy, the cut-off rate now for a two-parent family is \$62,731, which really has meant that many families are accessing subsidy. The majority of our families that do access subsidy fall under the minimum wage cut-off, meaning under \$40,000, so 93 per cent of our families are accessing subsidy, the minimum wage cut-off, but the remainder, we have at least 20 per cent of families whose income exceeds \$40,000 who are accessing subsidy. It's certainly making a difference and it's certainly enabling families to enable their children to stay in child care once their wage increases.

MR. COLWELL: Is that number moving up on a regular basis? Do you review it every year?

MS. O'CONNELL: As a matter of fact, we actually run reports all the time and will be running an actual report this month for this past year, but certainly looking at last year's numbers and this year's numbers, they're very similar.

MR. COLWELL: I'm seeing it in my own area; there's a substantial increase in people coming in and looking for help because they just can't make it anymore. If you have a family that's sort of middle income that's just on the edge, if they could get support for something like this, it would be a tremendous help for them. I don't know what the number is, \$62,000 may cover it but I doubt it. If you had a couple of children, two people working, you have to have a home to live in and all the things that go with that - I know my daughter has her two children in hockey and she and her husband make very good money but they struggle with it - I mean, just to have them in hockey, over and above the other things they do.

MS. O'CONNELL: We're looking at net income, as well, under the CRA guidelines, so that's another component of the positive part of the subsidy program.

MR. COLWELL: Also, what about if a family has more than two children? Two children is probably the average in Nova Scotia. What if they have four or five children? How do you address that? Is that still the maximum of \$62,000?

MS. O'CONNELL: No, in the context of the number of children you have and depending on your income, you would receive more subsidy. The more children you have, we actually calculate it up to six children. So if you have more children other than just the two, then it certainly makes a difference.

MR. COLWELL: That's good. It's got to be a difficult balancing act for your department. I mean, as was already alluded to, you want to get the wages higher for the workers, but at the same time you still have to make it affordable for the parents and also affordable for the province, so it's a real balancing act.

I know that you were trying to get the full- and part-time spaces in licensed daycare increased by 5 per cent in 2011-12. How are you making out with that? Is that increasing or are you getting close to the 5 per cent increase?

MS. O'CONNELL: We've exceeded it.

MR. COLWELL: That's always good news to hear.

MS. O'CONNELL: It's excellent news.

MR. COLWELL: It has to be so difficult for people who are working now to get daycare. I've talked to a lot of people who come into my office. We fortunately in my area have exceptionally good daycares. The East Preston one has received national and international awards, and all those things. I remember when a person from outside my constituency came in and set up a business there and she said that the highlight of being in the community was the fact that the daycare was next to her workplace and was the best

daycare she had ever seen. That was the East Preston daycare, and the other daycares in my riding are equally as good. So it's wonderful to see the support you're getting there.

I do have some issues that I would like to talk to the deputy minister and your staff about after the meeting, in an area I think that you might be able to help me with and help the community with - not so much me but the community - and I'd like to do that if I could, but I don't want to discuss it in this forum.

The other thing that's an issue - and this is very difficult and I don't know how you would address it - are there any options in daycares out there for parents who work shift work or night work, or are there any programs available for that? I know that's a very difficult one.

MS. O'CONNELL: One of the things we actually did this year when we did the amendments to the regulations, we actually created five sets of standards. One of those standards is called extended hour care because we are certainly open to facilities wishing to provide that. So what we did create was the information that they would need to know and how they could deliver extended hour care. To date we haven't received an application from a facility to do that but we're ready. Our family home child care certainly can enable that to happen. In essence, they don't have to necessarily operate 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. So a family home child care provider, which would be approved by a family home agency, could certainly enable that to happen for the shift workers.

MR. COLWELL: So that, in sort of a form, is available now?

MS. O'CONNELL: Yes, in essence, and we were very pleased to develop the standards for extended hour care.

MR. COLWELL: That's very positive because working conditions change for many people. I know I have some friends who work sort of weird hours and if they can't get daycare, they can't keep their job and that's very, very important for people in our province.

Now, when you go through this process of licensing daycares, have you got any of the daycares that are sort of not up to scratch with their licences?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That might be Ms. Gillis, I think.

MS. MARTHA GILLIS: Sorry, could you repeat the question for me?

MR. COLWELL: Yes, I was just wondering if you have any daycares in the province that are having difficulty with their licences. Some of them say the rules are a bit too stringent - and I'm not saying they are but they claim they are - and are there any issues around that?

MS. GILLIS: What I can say is our approach to licensing is to work with operators, to help them come into compliance and maintain compliance. That's not to say there isn't an enforcement component but my staff, when they substantiate a violation, will work with the operator to problem-solve, to come up with solutions to help them meet compliance. So right now I think there are something like five daycares across the province that are in what we call escalated enforcement but I'm quite confident that before their "correct by" date - the time we allow for them to make the correction - that they will be able to do that.

MR. COLWELL: Are these typically minor corrections or some major things?

MS. GILLIS: Some are minor, some are more serious. For the more serious ones - and we're talking about safety here when I talk about more serious - we will help. So we will go in, my licensing staff will go into the centre and provide consultation, provide support. There's also a monitoring component so if there's a safety issue, then that monitoring is provided as well.

MR. COLWELL: Do you receive many complaints in a year about daycare non-compliance or difficulties?

MS. GILLIS: My staff and my program is responsible not just for daycares but for two other programs, as well, but right now we average about 60 per cent non-compliance, so for every inspection, for all of our inspections, and about 60 per cent of the cases a violation is identified. The vast majority of those violations are corrected within a one-month period.

MR. COLWELL: So it's a proactive program that you feel is working effectively?

MS. GILLIS: I do, yes.

MR. COLWELL: And usually there is co-operation, I would imagine, from daycare facilities, in particular, to get these things resolved.

MS. GILLIS: Yes. In fact I was talking with my staff just yesterday that, as I said, it's not unusual that once the violation is identified, it's corrected within a matter of days.

MR. COLWELL: Yes, I'd be surprised if it wasn't. At least the daycares in my area, they're pretty conscientious about how they look after the children, and their facility too.

MS. GILLIS: That's right, they want to be in compliance as much as we want them in compliance. That's why we work with them to support them. The corrections happen usually quite quickly, as I said.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Colwell, your time has elapsed now, so Mr. MacMaster, you have the next 15 minutes.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. May I confirm that there are no new child care centres being able to obtain subsidy funding at this time?

MS. O'CONNELL: Just to clarify, it's the family or parent who receives the subsidy. Right now, we do not have a wait list for child care subsidy - for a period of time this summer we did. If you're a parent and you meet the eligibility requirements, you most likely will receive a subsidy in a short period of time.

MR. MACMASTER: Okay. Maybe I'm confusing this, I'm thinking of the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant - are we referring to the same thing?

MS. O'CONNELL: No. When you mentioned the word "subsidy", I automatically thought of our Child Care Subsidy Program.

But with respect to the enhancement grant, as I said earlier this morning, if a facility applies for a grant and their application is filled out correctly, completely, et cetera, they do receive the grant.

MR. MACMASTER: They do?

MS. O'CONNELL: Yes.

MR. MACMASTER: This is kind of surprising because there was a new centre that was looking to start up in my area and I believe they were told at this time there were no new spaces being funded.

MS. O'CONNELL: No, what happens in the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant, if you're a new operator and you're just opening, we do not fund the grant for a period of three months. But after the three-month opening, you can apply and we'll actually pay you retroactively for those first three months.

One of the reasons we did that was we were finding facilities were opening and they maybe only had 10 children and two staff, but three months down the road they had their 40 children and the number of staff they had, so it just means that they were able to apply when they had more staff and more children rather than start off with a couple of staff and a few children. It works very well.

MR. MACMASTER: Okay. There must be a limit at some point on how many subsidies can be extended?

MS. O'CONNELL: A limit on the number of - you mean the enhancement grant?

MR. MACMASTER: Yes.

MS. O'CONNELL: At this point in time, we haven't reached that limit, so we're pleased to be able to provide this funding.

MR. MACMASTER: What does the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant work out to per child?

MS. O'CONNELL: It's not really based on the child. It has sort of a complicated formula - do you want to hear the formula?

MR. MACMASTER: Actually, I was curious. I did look at the formula and it looked like it was about \$8 per day per child.

MS. O'CONNELL: You could look at it that way. What it really depends on - and I'll do this very quickly - the number of operating days of the centre, some centres don't operate 260 days; the enrolment of the facility; the age range of the children plays a role because if you have infants and toddlers you need more staff than if you have just school-aged children; and the other really key component of this grant is the level of training of staff.

As we said earlier, we talked about professional development, staff retention, and recruitment. We pay a facility based on the level of trained staff. If you have staff with a degree, that facility gets \$42 a day for that one staff; staff with a diploma is \$40 a day; staff at the next level is \$32; and less for untrained.

MR. MACMASTER: Exactly. I think I ran the numbers with higher-educated staff and that's kind of what I came up with. I guess it would be in the neighbourhood of about that per day, but I respect that the variables may change that depending on how many days they're open and whatnot.

What would be the true cost per day - would it be around \$40 per child per day?

MS. O'CONNELL: As I said earlier, it could depend on the location of the facility. There are many facilities that are in rent-free space; whereas in other facilities there's a lease component. I would certainly say that, of course, you have to consider the food costs and all of that.

MR. MACMASTER: I suppose in all cases the parent would cover the other portion - like say it was \$40 a day to run the facility per child, any amount over and above the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant would have to be covered by the parent, or can they get assistance from Community Services to cover that other portion?

MS. O'CONNELL: Well if you're operating a facility there are many ways of income: (1) your straight parent fee; (2) the child care subsidy that we could be paying on behalf of some parents who are eligible for subsidy. Our Early Childhood Enhancement Grant is an enhancement grant; it's meant to enhance the wages, not pay the full wages. It's also meant to provide funding for professional growth and for operational expenditures.

Many facilities fundraise, many facilities certainly receive charitable donations so if you were doing the finances of a facility, you would have to look at the many variables and the many costs to determine that. In essence, basically it's the parent fee which is the primary determiner of the income for the facility.

MR. MACMASTER: Yes, and I know that facilities are run quite lean, as far as operations. When I was trying to help the local group in my area you could see how everything has to be run very tight to be able to provide the service. I just make that comment from the reality of it, not to be critical of the funding that's available.

MS. O'CONNELL: No, we know that.

MR. MACMASTER: I guess one of the things I think about is the parent-child relationship and I've got two sets of questions. I'll go in one direction first and I'll go back in the other. The first direction, I guess what I think about, is there's certainly a lot of value in the parent-child relationship, especially in the early years. I guess when parents are making a decision, if somebody has to go out to work and if they're in a situation where they don't have a lot of marketable skills and they go out to work and they're trying to find a spot for their child, is there a point at which they may be better off to be able to be with their child, maybe for the first few years of formative development, and maybe instead of a subsidy for a child care centre, maybe a subsidy to help the parent stay at home with the child?

Is there a point - do you ever give advice on that? Do you look at that when you're comparing, should we invest in child care spaces or should we invest in support for a parent at home?

MS. O'CONNELL: That's a very complex question. I believe it's important that when a parent makes that decision, because it's a very important decision to make, not only looking at the parent's long-term availability of income or going back to school or certainly looking at the child, they would need to maybe have someone assist them with that decision because it can have long-term ramifications.

I do think, though, what is important is that at some point in time that children have an opportunity to socialize, to be with other children. The indicators of life success are not necessarily school readiness; it's about the opportunity for a child to relate to other children. When you look at children going to school, how they can relate with their peers is extremely important.

So yes, in essence, I really think a parent needs to make that decision about what's best for the child, what's best for the family, what the family can accommodate, and certainly the most important thing is the environment for the child, whether it's at home or in a facility or wherever.

MR. MACMASTER: I think I'm going to switch direction here, just given the time.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You have until 10:41 a.m.

MR. MACMASTER: Okay. There was a man who you probably all know, John Hamm, who was a champion of early childhood development. I'm just going to mention a couple of facts here; I'm sure you'll be aware but just to put them on the record. Apparently a three-year-old's brain is twice as active as an adult's and early experiences directly impact the capability young children will show as an adult. Is there a voice for early childhood development in Nova Scotia? Does it exist within the department? Is there an advocacy group that focuses on early childhood development?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wood, would you be taking that or shall we stay with Ms. O'Connell?

MR. WOOD: There is an early childhood development working group that we do work with, with experts in the field, with daycare providers. They have been an excellent advocacy group in terms of increasing awareness and understanding of the importance of early childhood development, and helping us to make recommendations in terms of the direction that we go as a department and what our future planning should be.

MS. O'CONNELL: Yes, and in essence, as I referenced earlier, from 2005 to 2010 there was the Early Learning and Childcare Working Group, as well as in our province we have a number of associations that are very strong advocates for the importance of child care and the importance of respect and reimbursement for the sector. We welcome the opportunity and we often meet with them and, you know, we always value their comments.

MR. MACMASTER: Have any of those discussions found its way into the child care centres by way of programs or support for people who are working there to help with the development of young children?

MS. O'CONNELL: In the context of the working group, in many cases it may certainly do that. We certainly have organizations that host conferences. We certainly are looking at our six institutions across the province - they offered well over 335 workshops last year for professional development, and in that context we certainly see that that is making a difference. We, as a department, deliver a program called Building Blocks: Strategies for Inclusion which is really to support inclusive environments, which our staff deliver.

We are delivering that on an ongoing basis, as well as does the Nova Scotia Childcare Association, which is an association of early childhood individuals in the province with whom we meet and which also hosts conferences - so in a combination whether it's our training institutions, whether it's our working groups, whether it's our associations, whether it's our training institutions themselves that are actually going out and providing mentoring to facilities. But also it's very important that in the province we have eight early childhood development consultants, many of whom have a master's degree, who work for the department and are available always to consult with programs.

And we are seeing a very big difference in the context of our inclusive environments and even this year, on a personal note, seeing information to be coming in from the facilities, in looking at the work plans, we know they're making a difference.

MR. WOOD: Just to add to that - so in the development of their early learning and child care plan what I think was also important is the consultation that went out to parents. So within that there was a survey process and there was a total of 2,311 surveys that were completed and, of that, 1,590 of them were actually from parents. So there was a large representation in terms of the child care sector, in terms of being engaged in that process, but there were almost twice as many parents that in fact actually provided us with feedback in the development of the plan.

MR. MACMASTER: I'm just watching the clock here. There was a program called Read to Me and I think it was put in place so that a bag of books would be delivered or supplied to every child born in Nova Scotia, and also they would be provided with a free library card. Does that program still exist? I know it was put in place a number of years back - and has it been helpful?

MS. O'CONNELL: This is a program which in the very first funding of the early childhood development initiatives we provided funding for. This is an amazing, successful program, but it's delivered by the IWK hospital so that every newborn in this province, every parent receives this amazing bag of books called Read to Me, and it's also delivered in French, as well as in other languages. It's amazingly successful and it's meant that it really does promote literacy, and there's information for parents on parenting and other brochures and information - and having an opportunity to see what's in this bag, every newborn and every family in this province is incredibly fortunate. I think Read to Me is well known across Canada and not every province does this.

MR. MACMASTER: Thank you. I think it was John Hamm at the time who implemented that program.

I think I only have time for about one last question. I believe Nova Scotia is the only province not to have committed to five EDI measures important for early childhood development, especially between kindergarten and Grade 4. The five measures are physical health and well-being; social competencies; emotional maturity; language and

cognitive development; and communication skills and written knowledge. And I may be wrong when I make that statement, but I think until recently that has been the case. Is there a plan to try to implement that? I'll let you answer that.

I would like to throw in a final question - is there support for that for parents who have children at home and also support for parents who might have their children in a child care facility?

MR. SAVOURY: Actually, we're very pleased that the Department of Education actually has made a decision that we're going to expand EDI province-wide because, as you say, it was piloted in a few areas. We believe that instrument has been well tested, it's objective and it will assess children's readiness for school.

The second part of your question, we believe that those results will be able to be used by organizations like local Child and Youth Strategy tables and others that are involved with early learning and child care, to look at why it is that children in one area may be more ready for school than others, and to be able then to put actions in place so that we can correct them. We're very excited about it and I think we're very fortunate; we're probably going to be the third province in the country to go province-wide.

MR. MACMASTER: That's good to hear, and if I may slip a final one in . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, your time is up, I'm sorry to say.

MR. MACMASTER: Okay, thanks.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, because we're going to run out of time otherwise. I'd like to turn it over for the next 15 minutes to Mr. Skabar.

MR. BRIAN SKABAR: Thank you very much. Mr. Hudson, or anybody, do we have any kind of inkling as to how much of the cost of child care programs are capital related - you know, the building, the heat and maintenance, as opposed to just the staff?

MR. HUDSON: Certainly that has been a big focus with the additional federal funding which has allowed many of these centres that were in need of capital where their operating funding certainly couldn't cover the kind of capital needs that you see today. The expansion program along with repairs has certainly met many of those needs. To answer your question directly in terms of the capital needs, I think we heard earlier how these centres are in various locations - some are rent-free versus leased versus their own buildings - and the capital requirements side of providing their programming is quite different.

MR. SKABAR: Yes, but what I meant is in terms of globally speaking, regardless of whether the facility is owned or if there's a mortgage or if there is high maintenance,

there's still a cost associated with it, even if it's already paid for. So like out of every \$100 spent on child care, how much of that would go towards a capital cost as opposed to towards just the staff?

MR. SAVOURY: I couldn't answer that as an average but, as I say, in many of these centres the facility is provided free. In those cases we wouldn't be providing funding that would cover our capital cost because that facility, they are not paying for. Others, yes, there is a capital component so an average would be misleading and it would actually be impossible for us to calculate.

MR. SKABAR: Okay, where I was going with this is I particularly like the idea of the family home agency concept so where I was going with that in particular was - well, we'll just park that for a second. For a small agency or a small family home concept, how many children would be able to be taken care of per staff member?

MS. O'CONNELL: If it's a family home provider, the family home provider can have up to six children of any age or eight children that are school age. So that's one provider in a home. But we have many licensed small facilities located in individuals' homes, so in that case they may be providing a pre-school program part-day for 12 children. It's quite variable.

MR. SKABAR: Is this taking off? Is this becoming more popular?

MS. O'CONNELL: Very popular. The actual family home concept, as I said earlier, in 2007 we had three historical family home agencies in the province; we now have 13. We license the agency, the agency approves the homes. We have over 96 homes and we're serving about 600 children. What's wonderful is that it's primarily rural Nova Scotia, where in many cases if you built a 50-space child care facility it really wouldn't be sustainable or viable, but where you would have an agency which could be part of a child care centre, part of a family resource centre - and we're seeing partnerships and that's so exciting, meaning that a family can have all the services from that one entity.

MR. SKABAR: That's exactly where I was going with my question on the capital. And if it's a family home, the capital costs would be - like they're heating the home anyway, it's already there and presumably has sufficient washrooms and things like that, plus the flexibility of having something in the neighbourhood, both for the staff to travel and . . .

MS. O'CONNELL: Absolutely.

MR. SKABAR: That being said, in the public school system we've been noticing a decline of about 8 per cent of the school-age population over the last number of years. Are we looking at, or expecting, any reduction in infant population that would require child care?

MS. O'CONNELL: That's certainly possible but we know that as more families need child care - and we're not serving every child in the province yet in licensed child care, so in that context we certainly feel that if there were further opportunities to have more spaces where it can be viable and sustainable, that would be something we'd be very interested in. Right now we do have 57 schools that do have licensed child care facilities in them, and we're certainly seeing and, certainly, in our expansion program, many of our new facilities are in schools or built adjacent to them - and that's very exciting for us to see that partnership because it's a normal transition for families.

MR. SKABAR: I just want to say well done on that one as well.

Moving back into the family home agency again - these would receive the full subsidies as well, or a partial subsidy? Basically what I'm asking is, is it any less expensive for the parents to use a family home agency as opposed to something that might have 40 or 50?

MS. O'CONNELL: I think it's definitely the parent option. Once again, the care provider sets the fee, which may not necessarily be as high as a large facility with many operational costs. The families, if they're eligible, they can also have a subsidy. The subsidy can pay a portion of their fee at the family home.

MR. SKABAR: Okay. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Epstein.

MR. HOWARD EPSTEIN: In common with a lot of my colleagues, I have associations with daycares. It's not just that I sent my children to daycare, but I served a term on the board of directors of a daycare located in my constituency known as St. Joseph's daycare. It's a long-established entity and one that I think has taken something of a leading role in doing some training for teachers who are acquiring their skills. I was very pleased to have served on the board there.

This is a model of a daycare that has a board of directors and runs on a not-for-profit basis and the board of directors is drawn from the community at large, and of course there are also daycares that operate as private businesses. I'm wondering, of the 400 or so that we have in the province, whether the department happens to know the breakdown between those that are operated as not-for-profits with boards and those that are not. If you have an answer I'd be happy to hear it; if not, perhaps you could send the information to the committee later on - does anyone know?

MS. O'CONNELL: In the context of the facilities that are commercial - 222 facilities are commercial, 57 per cent; 166 are non-profit, 42 per cent.

MR. EPSTEIN: Am I right in my understanding that so far as the department programs that are on offer, either to daycares or to parents who use them, that there's no distinction made between the kind of facility that is offered?

MS. O'CONNELL: All the facilities need to meet the regulations.

MR. EPSTEIN: Yes, and also in terms of the financial aspects - it's also irrelevant whether it's a profit or non-profit, is that right?

MS. O'CONNELL: Yes, in essence, the actual funding which we're providing now is the same, but both the commercial and the non-profit facilities did have an opportunity to apply for the expansion loans. If you were a non-profit facility, you only had to pay 25 per cent repayable, where if you were a commercial facility you had to pay back 75 per cent. So, in the context of non-profit and commercial, the department certainly made a distinction as well as with the repair and renovation loan.

MR. EPSTEIN: Okay, that's very useful. I wanted to just have a quick look at a question my colleague asked just a moment ago, because it wasn't entirely clear to me what the answer was, and this has to do with demographics. We hear a lot, of course, about the school system and declining school-age population, and therefore some pressure to close schools or reduce their size all around the province. I'm wondering what the picture is for the daycares. It just wasn't entirely clear to me whether we have an adequate or an inadequate supply of daycare spaces around the province.

MS. O'CONNELL: Well, we're one of the leaders in Canada for serving children from birth to age five. We are serving 26 per cent of the population of children, zero to going to school. We only are serving 12 per cent of the school-age population so in the context of asking do we need more child care facilities, in that context, considering the percentage we're serving, we most likely do need more regulated child care.

What is important is what does the community need, rather than just a child care facility being built and being meant to serve so many children and families. What I do think is important is an opportunity for the community to consult, to determine its need, and then come forward and certainly have that opportunity to build the child care.

MR. EPSTEIN: Actually, that's a fairly striking number. I hadn't realized before that you're telling me that 26 per cent of the children who are of pre-school age are accommodated in the province's daycare system.

MS. O'CONNELL: Can be accommodated by our spaces, yes.

MR. EPSTEIN: So the rest of them, presumably, are at home or are having some kind of family arrangements made on their own. Is that really the situation?

MS. O'CONNELL: So, therefore, we probably could do with more child care.

MR. EPSTEIN: Well, I guess that's the question, do we know whether there's actually demand or do we think that the other 74 per cent are perfectly happy with what they have? I mean I tend to hear that there's unmet demand but I'm wondering if the department actually has any solid information about this.

MR. WOOD: I think one of the most important indicators is the uptake in the use of the subsidy. At the moment we're in a position where, in fact, we have no wait list. We had a wait list throughout the majority of this year and we've been able to work with those families; for those families that, in fact, did qualify for a subsidy, they have received one. That seems to be, I think, probably one of the leading indicators for us about what the demand is and how many families, in fact, are requiring daycare.

MR. EPSTEIN: It's a useful indicator but I wonder if anyone has actually asked the direct question, whether the department in Nova Scotia or whether any national agency or whether the equivalent departments in all the provinces have, at some point, surveyed the population, or whether this has actually turned up in a kind of general polling that is sometimes done in which people are directly asked, do you need a daycare space and are you having trouble finding it, or some variation of that. Has that kind of polling or surveying been done, do you know?

MS. O'CONNELL: We often talk to facilities about their wait list, to determine are they maintaining wait lists for their programs. We certainly find that it's a very hard one to measure because many parents will call five different centres maybe to put their name on the wait list, so when they do go to offer a space to a parent, the parent may actually not be there.

I think the challenge is that parents - I've also, as a parent many years ago of young children - want child care the day they call for the space, so that's very important. What we have done is we've really looked at the demographics of the province and we've done some mapping, looking at the ages of children in communities, to determine what's there now and is what is there now somewhat meeting the need.

For example, we know that in HRM the population will be growing but we know that in smaller communities it will really be declining. There was a question earlier about facilities that are closing. Some of the really small part-day facilities have closed because many children - well, they're actually moving away or else their families are taking them to a child care on their way to work, but we do know - and we've actually plotted this - where growth is needed.

MR. EPSTEIN: Thank you for that. Can I switch topics briefly? I'm curious about the formal qualifications for staff who are employed in daycares and I'm also wondering what programs are on offer either at the community colleges or at the universities, or in

terms of apprenticeship on-the-job training, and part of my question would be whether there are staff who work in daycares who have no formal training at all and, if so, whether you have numbers about these and how they have to interact with other staff on the premises who do have appropriate training - so can I have a bit of an overview about what kinds of qualifications are required?

MS. O'CONNELL: Well, according to our regulations, two-thirds of the staff that are employed in a facility, to meet ratio must meet training requirements, meaning one-third do not have to. When we looked at the tabulation of the grant which I've spoken about previously, the Early Childhood Enhancement Grant, and we look at the numbers, out of 1,983 staff who are working as early childhood educators in a facility, we have 262 staff who are untrained, which really works out to a small proportion.

But what are we doing about the untrained staff? What we have commenced, and will be commencing in January and December, a requirement for them that they must complete 16 sessions of what's called child care orientation for untrained staff working in licensed childhood facilities, and in order for them to continue working, after one year of employment in a facility they must enrol in this program within that one year. We're actually delighted to have this because we know in a facility you could have an untrained staff being on the floor with the trained staff, and we want them to have a base knowledge.

MR. EPSTEIN: Thank you, that's very helpful. Am I out of time?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Your time has elapsed.

MR. EPSTEIN: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We have just a few minutes left to ask if you had any closing statement at all, Mr. Wood, on behalf of your staff and the group here today?

MR. WOOD: Thank you very much. I feel really blessed to be joining this department and to be working in an environment where so much has been done. As I said earlier, the province embarked on an early learning and child care plan a number of years ago and, you know, I think that they have done some amazing work and we have created a foundation that really allows us to start thinking about what's the next step for us, and I think a lot of work in terms of affordability and quantity has been realized and we're now talking about how we continue to extend the quality of child care in the province.

I also wanted to just give a thank you for all of the people who are working in this sector. We realize that we in fact work within a network - we have service providers and we have agencies that are incredibly dedicated to helping our kids and we have a department that does an amazing job.

I just want to acknowledge the work that Virginia O'Connell does. She came to our department in 1999. She ran the Mount Saint Vincent daycare for 16 years before that, and was a teacher for eight years from Primary to Grade 7, spending lots of time with children who were inner-city kids, as well as kids with special needs. She is an expert in her field. She has chaired many national committees and is, in fact, the co-chairman of the federal-provincial committee on data. She is just a real treasure for us to have in the department and, I think, a real asset to the province.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I appreciate that, Mr. Wood.

With that, we've completed our examination today of Early Childhood Development Services and I would ask for a motion to adjourn.

MR. MACKINNON: So moved.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

Our next meeting will be agenda setting, as it shows on the agenda there.

[The committee adjourned at 10:59 a.m.]