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Auditor General of Nova Scotia

Pre-Primary Program Not Adequately Planned, says Auditor General

For release July 7 -- The government's Pre-Primary Program was not adequately planned before it was launched in classrooms across the province in 2017, says Nova Scotia's Auditor General.

In her latest report released today, the Auditor General says key activities were overlooked during the creation of the universal education program, including an analysis of the full implementation costs of the program.

In addition, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development didn't set specific measurable goals to evaluate the program's effectiveness or create a process to monitor risk.

"With only five months between program announcement and launch, the Department didn't complete a thorough planning process, which may have contributed to some of the issues found in our audit," says Auditor General Kim Adair-MacPherson.

In addition, the program was rolled out to schools without consistently ensuring staff had the required qualifications, background checks or orientation before working in the classroom.

"Background checks are especially important for staff working with young children to ensure the learning environment is safe," said Adair-MacPherson.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is responsible for the Pre-Primary Program, which began with 891 students and now provides programming to close to 6,200 four-year-old students across the province.

The Pre-Primary Program is now in its fourth year. Since it started, the department has made program enhancements to respond to feedback, including the introduction of busing and before- and after-school care.

The department completed consultations with both families and licensed daycare providers, but not until after the first year of pre-primary started.

"While the consultations helped inform some positive changes, identifying concerns in advance of implementation would have allowed time for licensed childcare providers to prepare for potential impacts and the Department to identify strategies to support the industry," says the Auditor General.

The Auditor General's report makes nine recommendations to improve the Pre-Primary Program, including establishing specific and measurable goals for the program and introducing regular evaluations to determine if they are being met.

"Department focus is needed now to ensure Pre-Primary is an effective program and benefits students."

The full report and a highlight video are available at: www.oag-ns.ca

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