

Manitoba to reform child-care system, spend \$6.2M to add more space ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Manitoba government is investing more than \$6 million to create up to 739 new licensed child-care spaces, while also promising to modernize the early-learning system.

Tackling some of the regulatory barriers for operators will improve the efficiency of the system, Families Minister Scott Fielding said.

"It has been evident since forming government [that] there are many opportunities for us to improve and modernize the system to ensure it is meeting the needs of Manitobans," he said.

"This first step will reform the licensing process and build a service-oriented system that focuses primarily on the needs of children, parents and child-care professionals, rather than on the administrative procedures that place an excessive burden on operators."

Reforming the system will include:

- Making it easier for child-care centres with a good track record to renew their licenses. The inspection and licensing history of centres will be factored into their application for licensing renewal. This will streamline relicensing and monitoring as inspection visits will focus on centres in need of extra support.
- Streamline applications of certified early childhood educators who want to open a licensed family child-care home. This new process will recognize the professional credentials and intensive training that early childhood educators (ECEs) receive and will fast-track their applications.
- Simplify the process for age exemptions so developmentally ready infants can more quickly move into vacant preschool spaces within the same centre. The change will allow vacant preschool spaces to be filled more quickly and result in faster availability of infant spaces.
- Improve public access to information on how to open child-care centres. Existing documents will be consolidated, updated and placed online.

'More tinkering' than major changes

There is always room for improvements in procedures but many of the strategies announced by the government "are more tinkering" than major reforms, said Pat Wege, executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association.

"They aren't going to solve the problem, but they are a way of making the best use of what we already have."

In order to truly address the space shortage there needs to be "many thousands more child-care spaces" created, she said, noting there are well over 14,000 names already in the online child-care registry and the average wait time for child-care space is 14-15 months in Manitoba.

In addition to spaces, there is also a shortage of early childhood educators. For each new 10 new spaces opened in a child-care centre, one new childhood educator is required.

"And they're already in short supply," Wege said. "So strategies to attract and retain a workforce is important. We can't just talk about spaces without considering all the moving parts that are important in developing a child-care system."

Nonetheless, Wege said she is excited about the new funding, which will "certainly be welcomed by families and the facilities that want to expand in their communities."

In terms of creating new child-care spaces, the government said it will direct a total of \$6,181,500 toward the following 15 community-based projects:

In Winnipeg:

Les Heures Claires, up to 56 spaces in River East.

Campus Day Care Centre, up to 52 spaces at the University of Manitoba.

Soul Sanctuary Preschool, up to 40 spaces in Fort Garry.

Little Saints Learning Centre, up to 48 spaces in St. Vital.

Qualico – Sage Creek (with community partner), up to 74 spaces in Sage Creek.

Kookum's Place Preschool Centre, up to 24 spaces in south Point Douglas.

YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg at Great West Life, up to 100 spaces in the downtown area.

University of Winnipeg Student Association Day Care Centre, up to 32 spaces in the downtown area.

Ka Ni Kanichihk Daycare, up to 32 spaces in central Winnipeg.

Ryerson School Age Centre, up to 48 spaces in Charleswood.

In other communities:

Pembina Valley Child Care Centre, up to 52 spaces in Morden.

La Salle KIDZ, up to 60 spaces in La Salle.

Niverville Heritage Holdings (with community partner), up to 90 spaces in St. Adolphe.

Riverside Daycare, up to 10 spaces in Thompson

Springfield Learning Centre, up to 21 spaces in Anola.

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