

Eighty-three per cent of Ontario schools now offer student care before and after class ^[1]

The province says the numbers show that the program is working. But in some areas — in particular in Toronto's east end — parents continue to struggle to find spots.

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EXCERPTS

Across Ontario, 83 per cent of schools offer before- and after-class care for students, new statistics show - but in Toronto, only about three-quarters do, the lowest rate across the Greater Toronto Area.

The figures, based on early estimates, show Halton public and Catholic boards as well as the Dufferin-Peel Catholic board run after-care for kids ages 4 to 12 in all elementary schools - the highest rate in the GTA.

The Toronto public board has programs in 74 per cent of schools, with the Toronto Catholic board slightly higher at 76 per cent.

This is the first year that boards are mandated to offer after-hours care for students up to age 12, where demand warrants, run by the boards themselves, private licensed child-care centres or approved agencies that run recreational programs.

"This is an important milestone we have reached," said Early Years Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris in announcing the new numbers. "... It's a step forward toward giving Ontario families the quality care they want, during the hours they need ... working parents rely on this kind of care at the beginning and end of their day."

But in some areas - in particular in Toronto's east end - parents continue to struggle to find spots.

Sara Ehrhardt, who is the administrator of the 300-member Toronto East Enders for Child Care, said her child is already on a wait-list for school-aged care not needed for another four years. The East York and Scarborough area has seen unusually high growth in preschool age children, she added.

"What we're seeing on the ground is that while there may be spaces in many of the schools, the number of spaces are insufficient to meet the demand," she said.

While pleased to see more spaces open up, her concern is also about the quality of care.

"It remains very unclear who is ensuring the quality of program," she said. "It was even an issue before these changes. We want more spots, but we also want them to be safe spaces."

Elaine Baxter-Trahair, general manager of Toronto children's services, said the province sets the licensing standards, and the city monitors the quality.

Baxter-Trahair said staffing has also emerged as an issue, as before- and after-school care leads to the dreaded split shifts. Both the province and city are looking to create workforce strategies, looking in part at ways "to make it less precarious employment."

Beaches-East York Councillor Janet Davis said additional spaces are welcome, but affordability is still an issue that needs to be addressed.

Percentage of schools in boards across Greater Toronto that have before- and after-school child care:

York Catholic - 98%

York public - 97%

Peel public - 79%

Dufferin-Peel Catholic - 100%

Halton public - 100%

Halton Catholic - 100 %

Toronto public - 74%

Toronto Catholic - 76%

-reprinted from Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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