

Certain city daycares receiving tax break next year ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The New Year will be a bit happier for Tasha Balkwill. She runs the Whitmore Park Childcare Co-Operative, one of the daycares in Regina eligible to receive a 40 per cent property tax reduction as part of the 2019 city budget.

Balkwill says the two year tax break is bringing relief to centres like hers, after facing an increase a few years ago when the city reassessed daycares as commercial properties instead of residential, tripling taxes in some cases.

"I would say it could save us probably about 3 to 4 thousand dollars," Balkwill said. "The 40 per cent won't bring us back to residential, but it will definitely help alleviate some of that financial burden."

Kara Steiner, the Executive Director of Prairie Lily Early Learning Centre, says her daycare is also eligible for the reduction, and will save about \$2,600 as a result. She says those savings will go right back into their programming.

"For our centre, we'd like to look at things like bringing kinder music into our program, taking the kids on more outings," Steiner said. "Or if you looked at it a different way that money would almost cover our whole craft supply budget for the whole entire year."

"It's a really exciting policy that they're making, and we're really happy to have that money to re-invest."

But not every daycare in the city is eligible. The criteria includes that the daycare must be owned by its operators, meaning daycares that lease or rent their space are left out.

"Being the operator of a centre that leases their property, the tax reduction isn't going to affect us," said Tara Jors, Executive Director with First Years Learning Centre. "There's going to be months of policy development, so hopefully centres such as ours will be involved in getting further tax reductions going forward."

The tax reduction will be in place in 2019 and 2020, and Mayor Michael Fougere says the city plans to use that time to develop a larger policy on child care centres. He says a full exemption was not in the cards because Regina does not have a large enough tax base to cover the cost, so instead, council opted for the temporary, less costly solution.

"We looked at a bridge sort of policy for a few [daycares] until we finish our broader policy on daycares, and we feel this is generous," Fougere said. "Does it please everybody? No it doesn't, but we had some delegations come forward that looked for an exemption from commercial rates down to residential rates, and they seemed happy with that."

Balkwill says she's happy to see the city take some sort of step to help out daycares.

"It's really nice to see that the city is supporting us and hearing us, because we haven't been heard at all up until now."

The city says its administration will be taking a look at different options for a childcare centre plan to be presented sometime in the New Year.

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