

Parents frustrated over wait-lists for care at new elementary school in Halifax ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Classrooms and school-grounds will soon be bustling with the beginning of a new year roughly two weeks away.

While the fresh start may be exciting for many children, a lot of parents say they're scrambling to arrange childcare for their children due to lengthy wait-lists for the EXCEL before and after school care program.

The EXCEL program being provided at the new LeMarchant-St.Thomas Elementary School is a fee-for-service recreational program run by the Halifax Regional Centre for Education.

But one Halifax father, Paul Morillo, said the program "doesn't offer enough spots for everybody."

"Now you basically are trying to look for private childcare, which is very difficult and extremely expensive," he added.

Morillo said his family is still waiting to find out whether there is enough space for his children to access the EXCEL program at the new elementary school opening this September in Halifax.

He said he doesn't understand how a newly constructed school still doesn't have answers regarding space for before and after school care.

"I find it hard to believe that at this stage they still don't know if there's going to be spots available. You build based on the requirements," Morillo said.

"You already know what you're going to have and what you're going to need. So the school, how many grades, how many children per classroom and the EXCEL program how many you intend to accommodate," he added.

Morillo said he received an email from EXCEL coordinators stating that the space at the new school needs to be assessed in order to "better understand" the need for the program.

Morillo feels more planning should have gone into expanding the EXCEL program to meet community demand in the area.

"I'm not blaming the EXCEL program, I don't know if this is a school-board issue that they don't actually take that into consideration during the construction and now they're trying to figure it out," he said.

According to the Halifax Regional Centre for Education, wait-lists are common for parents wanting access to the before and after care program and they're notified of any delays once their application is submitted.

"What we try to tell parents when they find out that they are on a wait-list in the spring is that they may want to consider other childcare options for their children because we can't guarantee them a spot," Hadley said.

Hadley added that demand may have increased for the program over the summer due to a local childcare centre closing its doors this July.

"There was quite a popular option for before and after school care in the community that is no longer operating this year so there's probably more interest in EXCEL than ever but we had wait-lists there last year and the year before and the year before," he said.

Meanwhile, other parents in the area feel annual wait-lists need to be addressed through program expansion.

"We've been trying to get into the program for a long time not just this year and it's always been a challenge because numbers are low compared with the number of kids who need it and it's very tough to get in," Ruben Zaiotti said, a resident.

Hadley said beginning in September the EXCEL program at LeMarchant will expand from 60 spots to 75.

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