

Children's Services to ditch child care accreditation process ^[1]

The province will abandon the early childhood education accreditation process that has been in place for 16 years to cut red tape, according to the Ministry of Children's Services.

Author: Johnson, Lisa

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EXCERPTS

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"It really seems like a common-sense way to ensure that childcare operators and child care workers can focus their time supporting kids and families, as opposed to filling out government paperwork," said Children's Minister Rebecca Schultz in an interview Friday.

Wage top-ups for child care workers will no longer be tied to accreditation, but will instead be rolled into the ministry's licensing program. Because all licensed child-care centres and day homes will receive top-ups, 18,000 workers will qualify to access them, up from 16,000, said Schultz.

Effective April 1, the changes would be announced to providers Monday, said spokeswoman for the ministry Lauren Armstrong.

Adrienne Keller, the chairperson of the governing council of the Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Childcare Services (AELCS) wrote in a social media post Friday that children and families in Alberta have benefitted from the "tremendous work and achievement of AELCS."

"I am almost overwhelmed by sadness and helplessness," she said.

The move will save roughly \$3 million in contracts for administering accreditation. Grants to the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA) and the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement will not be renewed, Armstrong said.

That funding will be redirected towards top-ups, professional development and a total \$13 million this year in low-income child-care subsidies, Schultz said. The rates for wage top-ups, which are key in attracting staff, will stay the same, she said.

Nicki Dublenko, vice-chairwoman at AECEA, said she worried about such a big change being implemented in such a short time and that the association — a key stakeholder — had not been consulted.

"Any big changes to the child-care system need to be consulted on and planned for," said Dublenko Saturday.

For Sue Tomney, CEO of YW Calgary, a registered charity that also offers accredited, licensed childcare, the change will help make quality child care more accessible to those who need it.

"This is time now that we can dedicate to working with our children versus working in the back room getting ready for an audit."

Accreditation standards focus on outcomes like children's well-being, development, inclusion, respect for diversity and support for staff.

Provincial licensing, under the Child Care Licensing Act, lays out minimum standards, including rules against "any form of physical punishment, verbal or physical degradation or emotional deprivation."

The AECEA has urged the provincial government to raise education standards and legislate mandatory ongoing professional learning for workers when the legislation governing child care licensing expires in October. Schultz said she believed the government could build high safety and quality standards into the new legislation.

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