

Coronavirus: Saskatchewan daycare operators call for increased communication from province ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Some Saskatchewan daycare operators think the province could improve the way they communicate relevant updates to the pandemic response.

"They announce things before they let us know what's going on," said Regina-based First Years Learning Centre Inc. acting director Megan Schmidt.

"They'll announce it, the general public will see it, and if I don't happen to catch the live broadcast then I've missed out on something. I have parents calling me and saying, 'Oh, we can come back to daycare!'"

A survey ^[3] recently conducted for the Canadian Childcare Federation asked 8,300 Canadian care centres and family care homes about their experience with the pandemic.

Sixty-eight per cent of respondents said COVID-19 has taken a toll on their finances.

Schmidt, however, said navigating changing government mandates has been just as challenging. She says emerging guidelines for everything from capacity to who can access her school-based facility have meant she's had to stay on her toes.

"It would have been nice if the provincial government communicated with the Early Years branch, who could have communicated with us before things are announced."

With the launch of Phase 3 of the Reopen Saskatchewan plan, the number of children a child care facility could accommodate was increased to 15.

Before Phase 3, child-care facilities that wished to operate were limited to eight children per "designated space."

Prior to that, some child-care facilities based in schools, like the one operated by Schmidt, were open to the children of parents deemed "essential" by the province.

Balgonie Early Learning Centre Inc. executive director Ashley Austman said she would like to see an emphasis on child care as an essential service beyond the pandemic.

"I know it's been said a lot, but our educators are definitely underpaid and underappreciated. I'd definitely like to see that change in the public eye," she said.

Schmidt said that despite getting a career-specific education, many child care workers in Saskatchewan make near minimum wage.

She said she'd like to see more grants for child care facility operators provided by the Ministry of Education regardless of whether or not there's an ongoing health emergency.

"It's not enough. I think funding is crucial. That can never be said enough. That goes for home providers too. And going forward in the pandemic we need communication ahead of time."

Global News reached out to the Ministry of Education for comment but did not hear back by deadline.

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