

# Update: Ford government plays shell game on funding for child care centres <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Doug Ford's government announced \$234.6 million in funding for child-care centres today. But it's not actually new money. It's part of the \$19-billion package already announced by the federal government to reopen the economy safely.

"It's pretty shocking that the Ontario government is trying to pass it off as their own," says Carolyn Ferns, policy coordinator at the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

"The province hasn't increased its allocation and still hasn't released a comprehensive plan."

The coalition and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) issued a statement Thursday that says the Ford government is neglecting the safety concerns and financial needs of child-care centres as it prepares to reopen schools in Ontario.

The Ford government has given child-care centres the option to operate at full capacity once schools reopen in September. But the groups say that without any new funding, many are on the brink of collapse over COVID-mandated closures.

Alexandra Adamo, a spokesperson for education minister Stephen Lecce, said yesterday in an email to NOW that "additional funding and operating information will be shared with the sector shortly."

She confirmed Friday that "Today's announcement is a product of our negotiations with the federal government."

Ferns says that "the same issues that people are flagging about school reopening – class sizes, staffing, space – are all being experienced in child care."

"They need to reduce the group sizes, hire additional staff and re-purpose existing indoor and outdoor public space for use by schools and child care."

The Ford government's reopening plan for schools announced last week is coming under increasing scrutiny.

Lecce offered assurances at today's press conference that "We made a promise to have parents' backs."

He described the province's plan as "a living document."

"We're going to continue to be there for school boards," he said. But the minister was unwilling to commit to smaller class sizes.

"We have to be flexible and adaptable [but] parents, teacher unions and school boards need to work with us."

Toronto Public Health expressed concerns about the province's school plan yesterday in a letter to the Toronto District School Board. Toronto Public Health is calling for smaller class sizes and a two-metre physical distancing rule. The province is recommending a one-metre rule between students.

Meanwhile, Ferns says, many child-care operators have seen their costs double since the pandemic and are uncertain they will be able to reopen.

Premier Doug Ford says Ontario is spending more than any government in Canada on child care. Ferns says "that's completely untrue. Quebec spends twice what Ontario does. Many centres are facing mounting deficits," she says.

The most recent information from the Ministry of Education shows that 2,700 of Ontario's 5,523 child-care centres have reopened.

But most of the remainder say they will not be able to reopen. That's according to a national survey of child-care centres conducted by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam, CUPE Ontario's social services chair, says that the lack of funding to ensure children and workers can adequately physically distance "presents huge and unnecessary risks" of major COVID-19 outbreaks.

“Children will move from over-packed classrooms to underfunded and under-resourced child-care centres,” she says.

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