

Statement from families Minister Heather Stefanson on child care in Manitoba ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The opposition parties continue to spread misinformation about our government's position on child care and it is important that we correct the record. We are not reducing funding for child care in Manitoba – in fact, we continue to make significant investments in child care including nearly \$70 million since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. These investments have helped ensure that 914 child-care facilities are now open across the province, offering over 22,000 spaces. In fact, the supply of child care has now exceeded demand as we reopen – there are now over 3,500 vacant child-care spaces in Manitoba.

This summer, the Manitoba government posted amendments to The Child Care Regulation that reflect changes contained in The Community Child Care Standards Amendment Act (Enhanced Powers Respecting Governance and Accountability) that was passed by the legislative assembly in 2018. As part of the development of this legislation and its regulations, the Manitoba government consulted widely with the child-care sector including with the Manitoba Child Care Association and the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba.

What we heard from stakeholders was the need to streamline regulatory requirements so that child-care providers can focus on what matters most – providing accessible, quality early learning and child care for Manitoba families. That is why these regulations simplify the licensing process, reduce duplication in codes of conduct, and improve financial and board governance accountability for child-care providers across our province. Despite false claims by the opposition parties, the regulations also strengthen supports for children with exceptional additional support needs, ensuring that all licensed child-care providers develop written inclusion policies and inclusive programming for the children that they support.

It is also clear the current enhanced nursery school grants established by the former administration are not working for Manitoba families, which is why these regulations provide the legal foundation for change. The current system creates two tiers of nursery schools in Manitoba – those that receive enhanced operating grants and charge reduced fees, and those that do not. There is no difference in the services provided between these two tiers and there is no income test for parents accessing child care at reduced fees. The regulatory changes reflect our intention to move toward a fair funding model that better supports all nursery school programs in Manitoba so that we give families equal access to child care. We are not making these changes immediately and when we do, parents and children across our province will be better served by our child-care system.

The opposition parties continue to take an ideological approach to child care. In contrast, the Manitoba government continues to invest in choice in child care, which is why we have launched a funding model review to ensure that Manitoba families have access to the child care that they need regardless of whether that care is delivered by a non-profit, private or home-based provider. The review of the enhanced nursery school grants is part of that critical work.

The Manitoba government also recognizes that child care is critical to our economic recovery, and that those who work in the sector are truly heroes helping heroes, which is why we have invested in over 25,000 individual personal protective equipment items to help them stay safe. Many child-care staff are also eligible for the \$120-million Manitoba Risk Recognition Program, which is providing a one-time payment of \$1,377 to more than 78,000 essential front-line workers who have taken extraordinary risks to keep Manitobans safe.

In contrast with the fearmongering of the opposition parties, the Manitoba government will continue to support the child-care sector and Manitoba families as we safely restart our economy.

For more information:

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