

Manitoba's new funding model for nursery schools may mean fee hike for some parents, director warns ^[1]

Province promises move to single funding model, says two-tiered model wasn't fair

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EXCERPTS

Some Manitoba parents may have to pay more to send their children to nursery school, after the province announced it will provide the same funding to all centres for the same work.

The Manitoba government faced an outcry from the nursery school community this summer when it said it was thinking of axing the enhanced nursery grant — a pool of money that allows nearly 70 nursery programs to charge as little as \$5 a day for a spot.

The province argued at the time it wasn't fair for some nursery schools to receive more money than others.

But on Tuesday, the government announced it would develop a single funding model for all nursery schools, starting in 2021.

When CBC News asked if that means the enhanced grant will be cut, a provincial spokesperson didn't answer directly, only saying a "number" of schools are in line for a funding increase.

But if the province follows through with its initial plan, some schools are expecting a major financial hit.

If these centres are relegated to an existing non-enhanced funding formula, St. James Montessori School would lose tens of thousands of dollars in funding and parent fees would at least double to \$10 a day, said executive director Laura Burla.

"It's very disheartening," said Burla, who organized a petition against the proposed changes this summer, garnering 5,300 signatures.

"The language that they've chosen to use when describing the enhanced nursery school model leads me to believe that they don't see much value from it....There are many Manitobans across the province who would strongly disagree."

She disagrees with the province's assertion the funding system was an "inequitable approach" that meant some parents were paying more for the same service.

As it stands, 66 of Manitoba's approximately 162 nursery schools receive \$4,180 per child-care space per year, and the remaining 96 programs collect \$528 for the same space per year, according to government figures from the summer.

"There was never a system in place to ensure lower-cost spaces were held for lower-income families that need them," a news release from the province said.

But Burla said the enhanced funding meant adequate financial support for nursery schools that got it, which in turn allowed them to offer more programming and hire additional staff.

She says the previous NDP government, which introduced the funding structure, extended the increased grants to more and more child-care centres over time, she said.

Now, she worries the province will offer less money to these facilities, in the name of fairness.

Jodie Kehl, executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association, said she was assured by a government official that no money will be taken out of the nursing school system and no families will be impacted.

That sounds good, Kehl said, as long as no centre receives a smaller financial grant than they're already getting.

'Consistent contributions' from government, parents

The province said more details on the single funding model will be revealed to nursery school programs in the coming days, but didn't say when the new model would take effect.

"Our government will establish a fair and equitable funding model for all nursery school programs, with consistent contributions from the

government and from parents," Families Minister Heather Stefanson said in a news release.

The province also announced Tuesday it will streamline the licensing process for child-care centres. It said centres with good track records will be able to renew their licence every three years, rather than annually.

"This government has caused nothing but chaos and confusion for working families and early childhood educators throughout this pandemic," Danielle Adams, the NDP's critic for early learning and child-care, said in a statement. "It's the last thing families need right now."

Manitoba Liberal Leader Dougald Lamont said the province should be supporting existing centres, creating new spaces and paying workers properly.

"Instead, we're getting more right-wing social engineering and a promise of fewer inspections," he said by email.

The child-care sector is still waiting for the results of a review of early learning and child-care funding in the province commissioned from the accounting firm KPMG in 2019.

The government says it has received a draft report.

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

Tags: funding ^[4]

policy ^[5]

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