

YG moves forward on child care, early kindergarten ^[1]

With an election looming this year, the Yukon government is moving to make good on more of its promises in its Putting People First strategy.

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EXCERPT

“Yukon families will have increased access to high-quality, affordable childcare options for their children starting on Apr. 1, 2021,” according to a news release from the government.

“Additionally, full-time early kindergarten programs will be offered in all rural Yukon schools starting in the 2021-22 school year.”

As part of these changes, the Child Care Services Unit will transfer to the Department of Education as of the same date.

The release also stated the government is “currently engaging with Yukon First Nations governments and key stakeholders, including childcare operators and education partners, on how to create a universal childcare model for Yukon based on the principles of affordability, accessibility and quality, and enhanced early kindergarten programming at all rural schools in Yukon.”

These items are both part of the policy platform outlined in the Putting People First strategy that was first announced in August 2020.

“We know that families are struggling to afford the costs of childcare, and we are taking action to make life more affordable, said Health and Social Services Minister Pauline Frost.

“We are very excited to be moving forward on these early learning initiatives that will support learning and improve our long-term health and education outcomes for Yukon children, families and communities,” added Education Minister Tracy-Anne McPhee.

In July 2020, Premier Sandy Silver announced that the Yukon would be moving to a universal, affordable childcare system.

The services provided by the Child Care Services Unit include licensing and monitoring childcare programs, and processing funding programs such as the Child Care Subsidy Program, Direct Operating Grant and Supported Child Care Program applications and renewals.

Ted Hupé, the president of the Yukon Teachers Association, said Monday he was generally pleased with the news, although he hadn't seen the release as yet.

“The YTA is generally in favour of the early kindergarten programming,” he told the Star. “But it's going to be a huge undertaking.

“You can't just do kindergarten programming for this,” said the longtime elementary school principal.

“It's going to be a broader expansion for three- and four-year-olds. It needs to be well-thought-out, and there's a lot of work to do if it's going to be ready by the fall.”

Along with designing a curriculum, Hupé said, he's worried recruiting teachers will be a challenge.

Most places in the North, as well as provinces as far east as Ontario, are experiencing teacher shortages right now, much less for specialized teachers needed for junior kindergarten programs.

Hupé said most qualified teachers don't have training in early childhood education, which is what is needed for junior kindergarten classes.

The Yukon Party was less than pleased with the announcement's lack of concrete details.

“The Liberal government recently announced they were going to introduce a universal childcare plan,” the official Opposition said Tuesday.

“Like many of their promises, the plan is now far past a committed deadline, and is extremely light on details.

“The February 1 announcement offered very little new detail about when a universal childcare system would be implemented in the territory, how the system was going to operate, and the program costs.”

The announcement, the Yukon Party noted, “comes half a year after the Liberals committed that the details for this plan would be released in the fall.

“It also comes after questions on December 22 from the Yukon Party official Opposition asking why the Liberals had delayed the plan so significantly and for the details of the plan.”

Region: Yukon Territory ^[3]

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