

Community 'shocked' by consolidation of 2 Dartmouth Day Care Centre locations ^[1]

Not everyone will keep their spots, according to the board of directors

Author: Cooke, Alex

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EXCERPTS

The consolidation of the two Dartmouth Day Care Centre locations has left some families blindsided, according to the area MLA.

In a letter to parents Wednesday, the Dartmouth Day Care Centre's board of directors announced its location on Crichton Avenue will close at the end of April and consolidate with its other location on Caledonia Road.

"The consolidation to our Caledonia Road location comes with the opportunity for many families to relocate their child's care from our Crichton location to our Caledonia Road location," the letter said.

"Unfortunately, it will not be possible for all families to be accommodated during our consolidation."

The letter did not provide a specific reason for the consolidation, saying "the child-care sector in Nova Scotia is experiencing fundamental changes, which have been further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic."

"Non-profit daycares throughout the province are struggling with these issues, and Dartmouth Day Care Centre (DDC) is not an exception," the letter read. "Despite the best efforts of our executive director, teachers and staff, these factors have destabilized the future of DDC and, unfortunately, our current model is no longer sustainable."

The Crichton Avenue location has 56 child-care spots, and the Caledonia Road one has 60. The letter did not specify how many spots would be added to the Caledonia location.

The two locations will consolidate beginning May 3, and the board of directors "considered this decision deeply," the letter said.

The board of directors for the Dartmouth Day Care Centre did not respond to repeated requests for comment Thursday.

A 'parent swell of concern'

Claudia Chender, the MLA for Dartmouth South and the NDP education critic, said she has heard from more than 20 parents since the announcement was made.

"As soon as parents began receiving that letter, I began getting calls and emails," she said. "I think everyone was shocked. Not only are parents losing their daycare, but a number of early childhood educators are losing their employment. My understanding is they found out the night before parents did."

It's unclear how many employees will be laid off.

Chender, whose children used to attend the Crichton Avenue daycare, said the consolidation points to larger issues "prevalent throughout the entire child-care ecosystem," such as a scarcity of spots.

She said she's heard Dartmouth will lose another daycare over the summer and was concerned about what that would mean for access to child care in the area.

"Many of these parents may in fact not be able to find child care anywhere near their community, and we know that that often leads to people leaving the labour force and other associated challenges, so it's a huge concern," said Chender.

"I'm hopeful that if this parent swell of concern can't stop the consolidation and closure of this particular daycare, that we can find a way for another daycare to open in its stead."

Push for universal child care

Chender said the current scarcity in child-care spots and a need for affordable child care for parents points to a need for universal child care — something governments have promised for decades, but has not yet materialized.

She said the province's child-care system faces many issues, including the fact that they are funded through a "fairly complex patchwork of grants" and "extraordinarily high" parent fees.

"We have known about this issue for a long time," she said. "We need for families to have guaranteed access to affordable, accessible child care in Nova Scotia, and [the consolidation] just highlights the challenges when we don't have that."

During question period at the legislature Thursday, Chender asked the province's new premier, Iain Rankin, if he would commit to investing in a universal and affordable public child-care system in the next budget.

Rankin stopped short of that commitment, though he said he believes in universal child care and would make it a "priority to start that conversation" and to see how the province can "leverage that priority with the federal government."

"We're going to continue to support that sector and the federal government has stated priorities in this area," he said, noting the province introduced a free pre-primary program for children the year before they begin school.

"As we move forward, we're going to have to look at ways that we can continue to subsidize for those that are under the age of four."

Region: Nova Scotia [3]

Tags: closure [4]

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