

Manitoba nursery schools urging province to overturn decision on funding changes ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

WINNIPEG -- A number of Manitoba's enhanced nursery school directors and board members have penned an open letter to the province, asking it to overturn its decision to end the Enhanced Nursery School Operating Grant model on July 1, 2021.

According to the letter addressed to Premier Brian Pallister and Families Minister Rochelle Squires, the new funding model's annual operating grant would mean a 50 per cent cut to enhanced nursery schools, which will cause shortages of operating revenue.

"These shortages range from \$20,000 to \$70,000 per year," the letter states

"Even if centres opt to place hardship on families by raising their daily parent fee by the suggested 100%, they will continue to face a loss of revenue into the thousands annually."

THE REQUESTS

The letter makes four requests to the province, asking the government to take immediate action. These requests are:

Repeal the decision to implement a new funding model for nursery schools;

Reinstate the previous operating grants;

Bring all of Manitoba's nursery schools up to the enhanced operating grant rate; and

Reinstate the annual two per cent increase to all non-profit early learning and child care operating grants.

It says there are three main reasons the province should repeal its decision: the quality of care and education, affordability, and accessibility.

QUALITY OF CARE AND EDUCATION

The letter says if operating grants are cut in half, it could result in centres hiring less qualified early childhood educators (ECEs) without post-secondary training, and replacing trained ECEs who have worked at the centres for many years, with lesser-qualified and lower-salaried staff.

"This will result in not only a lowering of the quality care and education offered, but further destabilization of the ECE workforce," it says.

"A workforce that is historically underpaid and under-recognized, that has been struggling for years to recruit and retain qualified educators because of this government's ongoing decisions to deny funding increases to match operating cost increases each year."

AFFORDABILITY

The letter describes the government's suggestion to raise parent fees by over 100 per cent as an "unacceptable" solution to financial losses.

It states that families depend on the \$5 a day parent fee to access licensed early learning and care programs. The letter notes that if fees are raised, an entire demographic of families will no longer have access to quality, early years education.

"This government's statement that families who cannot afford the doubling of their parent fees can use the Manitoba Subsidy Program is dangerously misleading," it says.

"The current subsidy program is very outdated and flawed, resulting in the majority of families not qualifying."

ACCESSIBILITY

The letter goes on to say that families who can't afford the 100 per cent increase to daily parent fees will no longer be able to access enhanced nursery schools.

It says this would result in a province-wide issue of accessibility, as there are enhanced nursery schools all over, including small rural communities and northern Manitoba.

“Our enhanced nursery schools across Manitoba provide vital services for families with additional support needs,” the letter states.

“Children with ASN (additional support needs), both diagnosed and in the process of being diagnosed, benefit tremendously from access to high quality, affordable early learning programs. And families seek out enhanced nursery schools as a result.”

The letter ends by saying it is the province’s fundamental duty to make sure all families have access to affordable and high-quality early learning and child care.

“This is what Manitoba’s families require in order to have the maximum contribution to our economy,” it says.

“This is what Manitoba’s children deserve.”

In a statement, Families Minister Rochelle Squires said before the new system was put in place, 66 nursery school programs were receiving an enhanced funding grant, while 96 were not.

“Despite being labelled as a program for low-income families, there was no income-testing to ensure that these 66 enhanced grant recipients were providing service to low-income families,” Squires said. “In addition, the enhanced funding for some nursery school programs created two distinct funding streams, despite identical regulatory requirements.”

Squires said the new funding approach puts all nursery school programs in an equitable position to provide services and generate revenue through operating grants and parent fees.

“We are increasing the grant for all nursery school programs in the regular stream and creating fairness and equity in the system,” Squires said. “All nursery schools will be able to receive enhanced equitable operating grants and charge parent fees that reflect the services provided to parents. Our government provides other means of subsidy to low-income families that need help in affording childcare, and this will continue.”

Region: Manitoba [3]

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