

Sudbury daycares stepping up to provide emergency child care to essential workers ^[1]

In Greater Sudbury, 7 child care agencies at 17 locations, providing 490 spaces, subsidized by government

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Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 4 May 2021

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Online learning has been a reality in Sudbury since mid March. But for essential workers they can't always be at home to help their children with school work.

Last month the provincial government announced emergency child care for school-aged children of essential workers.

In order to get the free child care, workers had to meet the provincial criteria for an essential worker, and have no other option available.

In the City of Greater Sudbury, seven local child care agencies stepped up to the plate, says Monique Poirer, manager of Children's Services. Those agencies provided 17 different locations across the city for a total of 490 spaces for the school-aged children.

The city is the service system manager for childcare and early years programs in the community, and it is mandated by the province to provide the services for emergency child care.

"As of late last week we had about 200 spaces that were remaining vacant, but most of those were in the Walden area," Poirier said.

"We have one larger provider that has a very large license for school age children."

That large provider Poirier is referring to is the Walden Day Care, which has three sites that provide emergency child care: Copper Cliff, Walden and St. James. They are daycare centres connected to schools.

Reduced screen time

Students are cohorted by age or grade, and don't intermingle with other day care children, says Mary-Lou Coffey, executive director.

Only part of the school day is spent online in front of a screen.

"We are also incorporating other learning experiences throughout the course of the day where they're not sitting in front of a computer," she said.

"So we're doing lots of life skills things, like there's lots of baking and cooking and even sewing and woodworking."

If during their school work a problem comes up the day care staff can help, but it's not their first priority.

"It's not our mandate to be behind them walking them through each program that they do and each lesson that they're doing, but certainly if they have challenges or any issue we would be there."

"But the intent is that they are not at those computers all day long."

Coffey says that the day care submits its attendance to the provincial government, which pays for the care.

The amount from the province is similar to how much the centre is provided for subsidized child care, but Coffey says it's not about the money.

"These parents need to work. These children need a safe, productive place to be, and this is what they know and this is what they're used to, so this is what we're going to do."

Provincial response

Essential workers can apply on the city's website, but they must meet the provincial criteria to be eligible for the free child care.

"Our government is once again stepping up to provide health care and other frontline workers with access to emergency child care as they continue to work around the clock in our fight against COVID-19," said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education in a release.

"Doing so will allow these frontline workers to perform their duties knowing that their children are safe and in good hands," he added.

In an email to CBC News, a spokesperson for the minister said that as of April 27, the emergency child care program is now offered in more than 650 locations and provides care for approximately 9,300 children daily across Ontario.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: COVID-19 ^[4]

school-aged child care ^[5]

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