

PD Days coming soon at daycares in many regions across Ontario ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

As the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be waning in Ontario, a new challenge will soon be facing parents of toddlers in some areas: professional development days.

These have been in the works for a while now as the federal and provincial governments reached an agreement in 2021 that saw Ottawa provide \$149.9 million in funding for daycares across the province in an effort to recruit and retain staff as well as to provide more training.

The money was to be distributed by the Ministry of Education for a professional learning strategy that would see funding for licensed child care providers so they could potentially provide two professional development days for staff.

After that, the province left it up to individual service system managers to decide on how they wished to proceed with the money.

In Waterloo Region, officials recently issued a letter to area parents letting them know that there will now be professional development days at some local daycares with the first taking place on May 9.

"Parents will not be charged any fees for these designated PD Days," the letter from Barb Cardow, the director of children's services, read.

"We have not finalized a second date; however, we will notify parents as soon as possible — at least two months before the date chosen."

She said the new PD days will pay for educators to reflect and learn with their co-workers and others across the region.

In Chatham-Kent, there will also be PD Days on May 9, while Hamilton will hold theirs on April 22. Prince Edward-Lennox and Addington director of social services Lynn Chenier told Global News that it is leaning toward holding its first PD Day on April 29.

"As the service system manager we will support the day but operators will be responsible for determining if they will be closing their business for the day in order for their staff to participate and for communicating the closure to their parents," she said in an email.

In any event, parents will be left figuring out what to do for child care on these days as no alternatives will be offered.

A spokesperson for Waterloo Region told Global News that it considered moving the professional learning days to weekends to lower impacts to families "but given the current level of stress being experienced by so many RECEs and child care workers, we determined that paid, weekday training would be the option that most supported the goals of strengthening and encouraging the workforce."

A spokesperson for the city of Hamilton said a number of child-care programs already support professional development.

All of the areas noted that parents will have been notified well in advance that they will be without child care on the PD Days.

"Every Hamilton child care centre and EarlyON program that is participating in this event will be communicating directly with the families enrolled in their programs," said communications officer Sarah Ghandour.

She said the city is teaming up with Professional Resource Centre, Affiliated Services for Children and Youth (ASCY) to host a professional development event.

Some areas, such as Bruce County, Toronto, Ottawa and Prince Edward-Lennox and Addington, are working on their plans but will likely be having PD Days at some point.

"For Bruce County, professional learning dates and opportunities are in the process of being finalized in collaboration with local licensed child-care operators and home child-care providers," Bruce County's Tina Metcalfe told Global News in an email.

But other areas, such as London and the Algoma District, have also chosen not to have official professional development days.

"Based on feedback from local child care operators, the city of London plans to build on existing professional learning opportunities that

offer flexible choice and do not result in broad closures of child care centres,” Trevor Fowler, Child Care and Early Years director in London, told Global News.

“If there is any potential for service impacts to child care through this initiative, families will be given ample notice.”

Kawartha Lake, Toronto, and Halton Region are still working to determine what direction they will go with regard to the PD Days.

“At this time, locally we have not made any decisions to close any childcare centres for PA days,” said Kawartha Lakes spokesperson Ryan Cowieson.

“We are still in the planning phase and collecting information to inform whether and when our staff and educators would take part.”

Toronto Children’s Services says it is still in discussions with daycare operators to determine how to proceed.

“The City of Toronto’s Children’s Services is in the process of meeting with the early learning and care workforce in our municipality to determine their priorities and how these professional learning opportunities could be offered,” general manager Shanley McNamee said.

“Toronto Children’s Services is currently reviewing options to minimize disruptions to families.”

A spokesperson for Halton Region said it is still considering the best options for recruitment and retention of people in the industry.

Back in Waterloo, Cardow said that early childhood educators provide very important work in supporting kids when they are in a critical phase of their development.

“They have worked so hard over these last two years under very challenging circumstances to provide essential child care services to families,” Cardow said.

Karen Kennedy, who is part of the planning efforts in Chatham-Kent, seconded that emotion.

“Ontario’s early years educators are too often our unsung education heroes. We are pleased to support them, and in doing so, recognize their valuable contributions to the children and families of our communities,” she said.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: child care workforce ^[4]

professional development ^[5]

early childhood educators ^[6]

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<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/professional-development> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9021>