

School advocates launching Sangudo daycare, share vision ^[1]

Author: Quarin, Brad

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EXCERPTS:

Families may see an incentive to stick with Sangudo Community School or enroll their kids as new students with the creation of the Sangudo Children's Academy and Daycare.

The daycare is being launched under the Sangudo and District Economic Development Council (SDEDC) as part of ongoing efforts to keep SCS open.

"Our goal is to bring this resource to families, because there isn't a facility like this close by," said Paige Duplessie, an SCS teacher and SDEDC daycare subcommittee member.

"It's a need for families in the area."

She said the goal is to open the daycare in October.

"Rural Alberta needs more licensed childcare programs," added Jaimie Hagman, who's been designated as program director.

"I'm excited to be a part of building a program for a rural community."

Superintendent Kevin Bird's presentation on SCS' viability to the NGPS board in December showed SCS had 102 students in 2021, up from 82 in 2020.

After a portable was removed from the school, the viability study showed a utilization rate of 45 per cent for 2021. Schools trigger concern is they're at less than 50 per cent utilization.

Additionally, Bird had found that keeping SCS open for 2022-23 would cost NGPS an extra \$230,000.

Nonetheless, the study found SCS' building, constructed in 1962, is in "fair" condition.

"I think it's going to help keep members in the community," Duplessie said.

She said she's spoken to one family who was considering moving to Whitecourt for daycare, and she advised them to hang on for now.

Duplessie said daycares typically break even, and instead of generating revenue for the school, the daycare will keep families in Sangudo or attract families here.

Bird also confirmed to the Mayerthorpe Freelancer that leasing space to a non-profit would help raise the school's utilization percentage, as that space would no longer be factored in the government's formula.

Hagman, Duplessie describe local program

Hagman and Duplessie said it's expected Hagman will serve as daycare director, along with Emily McLeod.

Hagman has experience starting up and operating daycares in the Calgary area and she said she will patronize the daycare herself for her own child.

"(Families) can expect before- and after- school care at Sangudo School, as well as a daycare program that runs during the day for children (from) 12 months to kindergarten," Hagman said.

"This could help bridge the gap for families if they are looking to fill in their child's kindergarten schedule or if they would like to extend their child's preschool day."

Hagman said the daycare will be "a place of play and development," encouraging creativity and active engagement.

"The academy will have the same philosophy and standards of Sangudo School," Hagman said. She said this is "to provide a safe, supportive, respectful learning environment where each child has the opportunity to achieve his or her fullest potential."

One issue discussed during the revitalization meetings was whether there's available space for a daycare.

Duplessie said SCS has the space to host the Sangudo Children's Academy, and the daycare program will be run out of two rooms in the school building.

The old preschool classroom will be used during school hours, but in the mornings and after school a larger room will be utilized, Duplessie said.

The larger room will still be used for school purposes during the day, she noted.

Duplessie said both rooms will be suitable with no renovations required, and the larger room is equipped for a sink.

There is also access to a separate bathroom, Duplessie said.

Duplessie said a daycare licence application is being submitted and can take up to 90 days for news to come on an approval.

The daycare should be able to register children beforehand, she added.

To help with startup costs, Duplessie noted SDEDC held a bottle drive in July that raised at least around \$500, with bottles still to be counted.

This is "a nice start" top help with costs like crafts supplies, toys and staff, she said.

That said, Duplessie noted the daycare could receive grants that would help parents to be able to afford the programming.

"I think this will be really good for everyone in the community, and all parents who are unable to find licenced daycare spots," Duplessie said.

"This will give them another option."

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