

Dozens of child-care projects on ice as school boards say province's 'final' funding offer won't cover costs ^[1]

The Toronto District School Board said it would still need up to \$100 million for its nearly 30 projects

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Excerpt

Dozens of child-care projects are in limbo after several school boards said a recent offer from the province to increase funding to build these spaces just won't cut it.

Three school boards have told The Trillium they don't have enough money for the previously approved projects even after the government recently offered "25 per cent additional funding."

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Even with a funding boost, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) said it would still need up to \$100 million for its nearly 30 projects.

"While the offer of additional funding from the ministry is certainly helpful, it still does not come close to covering the total cost of these child-care projects," TDSB spokesperson Ryan Bird said. "We're willing to put some money toward it, but we cannot possibly make up the complete shortfall amounting to millions of dollars ... for these projects."

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On Tuesday, Chernos Lin said the board would be short \$43 million for these 17 priority projects after a funding boost from the province and the proceeds of disposition.

"The math doesn't add up," said Chernos Lin. "This would result in us paying over 50 per cent of the cost of building those child cares, that's not our core mandate and that just doesn't seem right when child care is the province's responsibility, not the board's responsibility."

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Meanwhile, the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) said it has 20 child-care projects that have been approved, but that construction hasn't started for any.

"Half are awaiting Approval to Proceed from the Ministry, others are in final costing phases, in design, construction documentation and ready to submit to the Ministry," board spokesperson Shazia Vlahos wrote in an email.

She said the projects have "exceeded approved funding amounts by up to 100 per cent" due to increased construction costs and pre-pandemic funding allocations.

"Unfortunately, we do not have a revenue source to fund these child-care projects (and) doing so would lead to a reduction in funding for student learning and other related programs," Vlahos said.

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He said the ministry also offered the board a 25 per cent increase in capital funding, but that PDSB "has advised the Ministry of Education that our school board and the Region of Peel are unable to identify sufficient funds to proceed with these child-care projects."

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The letters, obtained by The Trillium, both said that while the government values working with partners like school boards, "at the risk of not meeting 2026 timelines in association with Ontario's commitments under the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) agreement to create thousands of new affordable child care spaces, the ministry is eager to explore alternate arrangements."

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"It will be used for public purposes, be it in schools or other supports to expand affordable spaces," said Lecce at an unrelated announcement at St. Demetrius Catholic School in Etobicoke on Tuesday morning.

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The minister called the "co-location" of child-care centres in schools a "strength," saying it makes drop-offs easier for families and that the province is on track to build 10,000 new spaces in schools.

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"One way or another, we're going to be building more spaces for the families of Toronto," he said, adding that the city would receive a "healthy share for under-represented communities."

Chernos Lin said she believes having child-care centres in schools, a "seamless day model," is beneficial, and that she hopes the parties can find a way forward. She said she has a meeting scheduled with the education minister this week to discuss the issue.

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