

Province announces new five-year plan [CA-MB] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Family Choices agenda funds 6,500 more child-care spaces, up to 35 more sites.

Unprecedented child-care expansion strengthens workforce, creates core curricula: Mackintosh

An ambitious five-year, 12-point child-care agenda called "Family Choices" will mean more accessible, quality, low-fee child care for Manitoba families, Family Services and Housing Minister Gord Mackintosh announced today. Mackintosh was accompanied by Education, Citizenship and Youth Minister Peter Bjornson who unveiled an enhanced capital fund for more child care in schools.

"Parents have a tough job balancing family and work commitments and families need more choices to help them strike that balance," said Mackintosh. "Helping parents achieve that contributes to the province's prosperity and helps ensure a strong start for children."

"Schools provide a natural setting for early learning and child-care programs, and are extremely convenient for parents," Bjornson said.

Since 1999, the government has doubled funding for child care and allocated funding for over 7,000 more spaces. Family Choices will increase funding by a further 84 per cent to fund 6,500 more child-care spaces and enrol 1,300 more children in nursery programs in just five years.

Family Choices includes:

1. 6,500 more funded child-care spaces
 - a 28 per cent increase.
2. Nursery school for 1,300 more children
 - a 33 per cent increase.
3. Family Choices Building Fund
 - up to 35 more program sites,
 - capital to prioritize converting surplus school space, and
 - a \$22.5-million increase from Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth to create a \$37 million fund.
4. Child-care safety charter
 - Canada's first legislated comprehensive code with minimum safety standards, and
 - resources to help meet standards.
5. Age-appropriate curricula and enhanced program quality
 - each licensed program to determine play-based learning with provincial criteria and a new act;
 - learning to include literacy, numeracy, interpersonal skills, emotional and physical development;
 - parent information on expected learning outcomes; and
 - enhanced enforcement of standards.
6. Centralized online wait-list
 - an accurate account of families seeking spaces and a straightforward registration process.
7. Lowest fees outside Quebec
 - maintaining regulated maximum fees, and
 - ensuring predictable costs for families.
8. Greater inclusion
 - enhanced inclusion training and mentoring for workers and specialized resources for children with disabilities, and
 - better training and accessibility to provide greater service to Manitoba's diverse cultures including francophones, Aboriginal people and new immigrants.

9. More flexible hours

- more funding for off-hours programs, and
- development of seasonal spaces.

10. Stronger workforce

- a 20 per cent overall funding increase for pension plans, wage increases and adjustments to establish a minimum wage base;
- more training spaces; and
- a recruitment campaign including Aboriginal student incentives, staff upgrade assistance, scholarships and more home-based providers.

11. Strategic expansion

- new planning capacity to help target spaces,
- reduced barriers for more school-age spaces in school,
- new small-centre model for smaller communities, and
- home-based child-care incentives in under-served communities.

12. Stronger parental stewardship

- a pilot voluntary regional governance network, and
- an advisory council in a new act with parents and stakeholders.

In the first year of the Family Choices agenda there will be:

- funding for 1,500 more child-care spaces,
- funding for 100 more children in nursery school,
- a three per cent overall increase for wages effective July 1 plus a low-wage adjustment,
- equalization of tuition for early childhood education students at rural Red River College sites, and
- safety charter implementation assistance for all child-care facilities.

The total new investment for 2008-09 is \$7.75 million. It is estimated that funding for child care will increase to \$201.8 million over the five-year plan, up from \$109.8 million in 2007-08.

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- reprinted for the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba

Related link: Family choices: Manitoba's five-year agenda for early learning and child care ^[2]

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