

Parents cautioned about early Grade 1 start [CA-PE] ^[1]

Prince Edward Island, CBC News

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EXCERPTS

The P.E.I. Department of Education is suggesting that parents not rush to start children recently made eligible for Grade 1 next year.

The province adjusted the age eligibility for students starting Grade 1 last week, meaning children turning six before Oct. 31 can start school this year. Previously the cutoff had been Aug. 31.

As a result of the change, some parents are trying to enrol their children in kindergarten to prepare them for entering school in the fall, but the government is now saying parents don't need to be hasty, unless their children can already read and are ready to advance.

"What I'm recommending to parents when I get the calls is that they stay the course, because they would have been planning to put their child in kindergarten in September anyway," senior director of public education Linda Lowther told CBC News Monday.

"I really, really recommend highly that parents continue with that decision, that they leave their child wherever their child was, whether it's in pre-K or at home, and that they start kindergarten in September."

The government says it changed the age requirement at the request of parents who complained that children were able to start at a younger age in other provinces.

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For those parents who decide to start their children earlier, the province has asked kindergarten teachers to prepare special readiness programs.

Provincial officials met Monday with early childhood educators to talk about the earlier entrance age.

Elizabeth Jeffery, owner-operator of Little Wonders Childcare Centre, said she had four students move up from the junior kindergarten on Monday into the regular kindergarten program in order to get them ready for first grade.

"I'll have one kindergarten class and one readiness class. Unfortunately I don't have enough time to finish the junior kindergarten class and give them the entire kindergarten curriculum within the next three to four months. It's not physically possible. The children won't be able to learn properly," said Jeffery.

"The Department of Education has just asked us to do a readiness program for those children so that they know how to take care of themselves, go to the bathroom on their own, can work well in groups and so on. But they are not going to have the educational background that the rest of the children have. They are going to be at a great disadvantage."

She's advising parents to consider keeping their children back to give them the advantage of having a full kindergarten program, even though they may now be eligible to start school.

The province estimates about 250 more children will be eligible to start Grade 1 next year with the change.

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