

Review could debase city's after-school care: New provincial presence means lower standards, needless duplication [CA-AB] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A proposed review of the city's role in after-school care could lead to a big drop in standards that would affect thousands of children, parents and operators say.

The city imposes strict rules on the 156 centres qualifying for out-of-school care subsidies for low-income families and visits each facility at least four times a year.

Last year the province introduced its first regulations in this area, which a city report describes as less comprehensive than Edmonton's.

Staff from the provincial Child and Family Services department now make their own semi-annual inspections, leading operators to complain about extra visits, duplication and the potential for receiving conflicting information, the report says.

It suggests taking an overall look at what the city is doing, focused mainly on monitoring.

But Judy Smith, executive director of the McKernan Child Care Society, fears this could lead the city to decide it will cut inspections and forget about enforcing the standards it has created.

Alberta's regulations aren't adequate, she said. The city report found the province orders less space for children than Edmonton, allows higher staff-student ratios and doesn't require opportunities for parent involvement.

"It would put our programs back 20 years," Smith said. "I think the city has worked long and hard to ensure the school-age kids in our city are offered good programs, and I see that could be lost without their continuing support."

Sherry Woitte would hate to see Edmonton's high standards reduced to those she encountered with one son elsewhere in Alberta.

"It was basic custodial care. There was nothing beyond that. They basically kept them from being injured," said Woitte, who has another son in Grade 5 attending McKernan without subsidy.

"(The staff) had no post-secondary training at all ... some days you went in and there were a whole lot of children with one or two caregivers."

The city spends \$6.5 million on subsidies under the program, helping an average of 2,175 children a month in 2004, the report says.

Two-thirds of the money is from the province. No changes are planned to the subsidies, which last year paid an average of \$230 per child each month, said out-of-school supervisor Colleen Burton-Ochocki.

- reprinted from the Edmonton Journal

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