

City is closing daycare doors [CA-ON]^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

City councillors who promised to be more open with the public in last fall's election campaign, went behind closed doors last week to axe the Castle of Learning and Children's Discovery Centre.

Councillors made the decision at an in-camera meeting Tuesday, March 2. A formal vote to close the centre June 30 is slated for tonight's council meeting.

Jocelyn Neill, whose son, 4, attends the day care part-time and who's daughter, 3, attends full-time, said her husband learned the news from tearful staff Friday morning. The family received a letter from the city Friday informing them of the closure.

The letter, written by community services manager Barry Reynard, said decreased enrolment, demographic trends forecasting no future increase and program deficits as reasons for the decision.

Councillor Ted Szajewski, chairman of the community services committee, said the meeting was held in-camera because of "property and personnel issue."

He said a meeting was held to inform staff Thursday, March 4, adding the city didn't want staff or parents to learn the news through the media.

The Castle of Learning enrolled about 30 per cent of Kenora children who attend day care, Szajewski said. For every five of the 21 children attending full-time, one full-time staff is needed.

An employee of the Castle of Learning said Monday the staff had heard rumours -- but nothing concrete -- about the closing before Christmas. They got official word Thursday night from Reynard, human resources manager Sharon McDowell and two union reps.

The employee, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said, "We're worried sick, we're upset, we're in shock. We're really concerned about what's going to happen to the children. They get used to you. They get used to the program."

- reprinted from Kenora Daily Miner & News

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