San Diego schools take over day-care duties [US-CA] [1]

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Source: CNN
Format: Article
Publication Date: 16 Mar 2001

> AVAILABILITY
> See text below.

EXCERPTS

San Diego has become the first major city in the United States in which every public elementary and middle school offers free child care to students attending the schools.

Under the program -- called "6 to 6" for the dawn-to-dusk schedule the schools maintain -- students get child care that includes academics on either side of the traditional school day.

Every afternoon, children have 90 minutes of homework assistance and tutoring, said Deb Ferrin, child care coordinator for the city. That is followed by "free-choice activities" that include sports, art, music, recreation and science.

"It gives you a little more quality time at home," said Paula Ball, whose child is in the program. "You're not so stressed and pressured to get all this homework done. You can have a little more time to relax and enjoy your child."

The change in policy will help the many children who used to go home to an empty house and no supervision, said Kathleen Phillips, a principal. "Some just sat outside the doors waiting for mom and dad to come home."

The Urban Institute's Gina Adams estimates about 4 million children nationwide between ages 6 and 12 -- one in five -- have working mothers and are regularly unsupervised after school.

The program costs more than $15 million a year, from state, county and city funds.

Already enrolled are 25,000 students, selected by need. Thousands of others are on waiting lists.

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