

Ontario eyes lower child care standards ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Ontario is considering regulatory changes that would allow fewer staff to care for larger groups of young children in daycares as the province moves to all-day kindergarten.

The proposed changes to the Day Nurseries Act primarily affect children up to age 4 and are "intended to enhance operator flexibility during the implementation of full-day early learning," according to a discussion document from the provincial ministry of children and youth services obtained by the Star.

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"We are horrified," said Jane Mercer of the Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care, which represents non-profit daycares in the city, or about 70 per cent of centres.

"We never hear parents asking for fewer staff and larger groups for their children," she said Wednesday. "This is clearly not the way to go."

Child care operators are worried about staffing and the loss of subsidies when 4- and 5-year-olds move to full-day kindergarten in September and when schools begin offering before- after-school care for kids up to age 12.

And with the province still not committed to pick up \$63.5 million in federal child care funds set to run out in April, many daycares say they may be forced to close.

But changing child-to-staff ratios and group sizes won't help, said Mercer.

"This is just tinkering that will affect our standards and quality of care without helping anybody to remain more viable," she said. "I think (the province) will be going back to the drawing board."

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If the proposed changes go through, Ontario would be the first province to lower child care standards, said Martha Friendly of the Child Care Resource and Research Unit. Friendly also attended the consultation.

"At a time when the province is moving towards a public system based on quality and best practices, this just doesn't make sense," she said. The last time Ontario tried to do this in 1974, there was a huge outcry and the province backed down, she added.

Ontario's early learning advisor Charles Pascal, who is advising the premier and education minister on the implementation of his report to integrate early learning and care to age 12, was surprised the children's ministry is discussing regulatory changes now.

"The whole purpose of the new Early Years Division in Education that is in the works is to ensure timely and coordinated policy discussions in order to reduce fragmented policy making and programming," he said Wednesday.

Pascal's report notes that changes to legislation -- the Day Nurseries Act and the Education Act -- should be made two or three years down the road so that "implementation experience can provide some excellent ideas for developing and refining legislation."

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: legislation and regulation ^[3]

full-day early learning ^[4]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/10/02/ontario-eyes-lower-child-care-standards> [2]
<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/legislation-and-regulation> [4]
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