

Little demand for after-school care for full-day kindergarten students, province finds ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Despite predictions that demand would be strong, just 15 per cent of Ontario schools offering full-day kindergarten are expected to also have before- and after-school care, the Star has learned.

Early projections were that half of all families enrolling their 4- and 5-year-olds in the all-day program would also want school-based care before and after class, but critics say that with few details of cost or availability, parents are simply avoiding it.

"That's very low uptake - if there's 600 schools, that's 90 schools in the whole province," said Annie Kidder of the advocacy group People for Education.

As a parent, "you need security, you need sureness, you need to know exactly what it is," she added. "I really do think it's a disappointment, to say the least, that this wasn't organized much, much sooner."

Catherine Fife, president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, said "there's no question that people want full-day - there's a strong uptake on that component."

But parents have a lot of questions about the child-care portion, and boards have been unable to give answers as they awaited provincial regulations on everything from what they can charge for the extended day to who can provide it.

Those regulations were only released Tuesday; Fife said they should have been out in April.

The first phase of the province's ambitious full-day kindergarten program begins this fall for 35,000 kindergarten students. Where there's enough demand schools must also provide before- and after-school care that parents pay for.

Boards must let families know by the end of June what's available in the fall.

"We have worked very hard to get information out to school boards in a timely fashion so that boards and parents can plan for the upcoming school year," said Michelle Despault, spokeswoman for Education Minister Leona Dombrowsky.

"We are confident that boards will now have all the information they need to finalize arrangements for Phase 1 schools."

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"Boards really are trying to make the program as accessible as possible," she said. "We realize that the extended day is the key to the success of the entire vision of the early learning program" of providing a "seamless day" of schooling and care for kids.

Karen Grose of the Toronto District School Board said that so far, interest in the extended day is lower than expected, but once trustees approve fees, she expects the board will have a better sense of parents who are willing to "commit or recommit" to it.

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: accessibility ^[3]

demand ^[4]

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