

Parents fight back when day care killed ^[1]

Manordale children were to be left high and dry

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EXCERPTS

When parents heard an extended child care program before and after full-day kindergarten would be cancelled at Manordale Public School, they got mad and they got mobilized.

"All the parents in the room's mouths dropped," said Patti Taggart, whose son, Nic, is registered for junior kindergarten at Manordale in the fall. "They were all in the same boat that I was. We'd given notice to (our) full-day daycare to go to junior kindergarten. People were putting up their hands and saying, 'We weren't informed of this.'"

The extended day program, which the Ontario government initially promised would provide on-site child care at every school offering full-day kindergarten, has been cancelled at 14 out of 22 schools in the Ottawa Carleton District School Board. Manordale was supposed to bring that number to 15 until parents at that meeting demanded the principal collect their registration forms on the spot and reassess the decision, Taggart said.

Poor communication between staff and parents was to blame for the fact that, at the time of the information meeting on June 16, Manordale had only received four forms from parents notifying the school of their interest, Taggart said. She said the forms were included with acceptance packages handed out to the parents of newly registered children and did not include a due date or instructions about how to submit them.

Taggart, who teaches early childhood education at Algonquin College, said she called the school to find out when she was supposed to hand in the form and was told she should submit it in person as soon as possible, making her one of the four parents whose forms were received by the school before the June meeting.

But it shouldn't have been up to her to find that information on her own and it would have been easy for parents to assume they could submit the form at the information meeting or in September, she said.

"The school board should have followed through with these parents. This is a lot to deal with for parents."

OCDSB chair Cathy Curry was not immediately available for comment, but told the Citizen earlier that trustees were assured parents would be given a firm answer as to whether or not the extended day program would run at their children's schools before the end of the school year in June.

When staff announced the program would not run at Manordale at the June meeting, several hands immediately shot up, with parents frustrated and angry they had not been told the forms were due, Taggart said. One parent suggested the principal collect forms on the spot and about 20 parents formed a line to register, she said.

Taggart said she received a letter on July 5 informing her the program would be offered at Manordale in the afternoon, but not the morning, and asking for a \$100 deposit within a week. After all the confusion, she said she was still worried the decision could be reversed.

"I still don't know for sure. Even though they've asked us to fill out these forms and give us a deposit, it still doesn't guarantee us anything. I don't think we're going to really know until September," she said.

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