

# Full-day care headache for parents <sup>[1]</sup>

Extended care cancelled at 14 Ottawa public schools

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## EXCERPTS

Many Ottawa parents are scrambling to find alternative child-care arrangements for the fall after finding out that extended care before and after full-day kindergarten has been cancelled at 14 schools.

Cathy Curry, chair of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, says the cancellation is creating hardships for many parents.

"I've heard from parents that have told me, 'It has taken me a year to find care for my children,'" Curry said. "Even if we had (announced) this a long time ago, it's still challenging in some areas of the city."

The province is introducing full-day programs for junior and senior kindergarten students at 22 Ottawa schools in September. The plan is for teachers to deliver a standard curriculum in the morning, then transfer care to early childhood educators in the afternoon.

A major goal of full-day kindergarten is to spare parents the hassle of rearranging work schedules to pick up children in the middle of the day. The Ontario government originally announced every school offering full-day kindergarten would also have early childhood educators available to provide care on site before and after school for a daily fee.

In early June, though, the province changed its policy, saying schools without enough children registered in the extended day program to break even financially weren't required to offer it. That turned out to be the case for most schools offering full-day kindergarten in Ottawa.

"We learned as we went to say, 'Oh wow, this isn't as easy as we first thought,'" Curry said.

The names of the eight schools that will offer the extended day program and the 14 that have cancelled it have not been released. Curry confirmed when asked by the Citizen that the program would not be available at North Gower/Marlborough Public School or Glen Cairn Public School for the coming school year.

Schools started surveying parents about their interest in the program in February, and in June the board knew which schools would not be offering the program, Curry said. She said school staff assured her parents at schools where the program was cancelled would be told as soon as possible to give them time to find childcare alternatives.

"Caregiving is huge and people need to plan their lives," she said. "We let the schools know as soon as the reports came out."

Curry said parents who were planning to rely on the extended day program in the fall can consider pooling childcare with other parents of young children, ask their school principal about other after-school programs, ask their employers for flexible hours so they can pick up and drop off their children or consider taking time off work.

David Moen, the trustee for Innes/Beacon Hill-Cyrville, said parents should be able to rely on the same day-care spots that were available before full-day kindergarten was introduced.

"One of the criticisms of the move to the all-day learning program has been the toll it was going to take on existing day-care providers," Moen said.

"Where we aren't offering the extended day program, those daycare providers should still be in business to cover those periods of time which, every year up until now, they've been covering."

Curry said the school board would survey parents again next year about their interest in the program and hopes to be able to offer it at more schools in the fall of 2011.

-reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** full-day early learning <sup>[3]</sup>

work/life balance <sup>[4]</sup>

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