

New pre-kindergarten programs open across Saskatchewan^[1]

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EXCERPTS

As 18 new pre-kindergarten programs open across Saskatchewan this school year, the provincial government hopes to eventually see several more such classes established.

While unable to say when it could happen, Education Minister Donna Harpauer said Monday that the ultimate goal is to have pre-kindergarten programs universally available.

"That would be absolutely ideal," said Harpauer. "We've expanded 45 per cent in the last three years. It's going to take some time and some resources for the school divisions to be able to get settings that are appropriate... but we hope to expand with our pre-K programs fairly aggressively."

With the 18 new pre-K classes - 15 of which started in September and three more which begin in January - there are 230 programs in Saskatchewan, serving approximately 3,700 children.

Each half-day program serves 16 children three-and four-year-olds. There is no cost for pre-kindergarten as it stands now, but there is an interview process for interested families and those children with the greatest needs are selected.

Three new pre-kindergarten programs are opening this year in Regina at Grant Road, Marion McVeety and St. Matthew elementary schools. Four are opening in Saskatoon, one in Rosetown and 10 others in northern Saskatchewan. Funding for the programs was previously announced in the 2010-11 provincial budget.

"The sooner you can stimulate their minds in learning, in reading, the longer they will retain in school and the better they will do in school," Harpauer said following an appearance at the pre-kindergarten class at St. Francis Community School.

Diane Diebel, a pre-kindergarten consultant for Regina Catholic Schools, said developing oral language and literacy skills and getting used to the school environment is vital for future success.

"The development of oral language is key once they get into kindergarten and Grade 1 so they have the language to learn from the books and develop further," said Diebel.

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