

Trustee urges public board to stay out of child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS.

An Ottawa public school trustee says the board should stay out of child care and stick to what it does best - educate.

Mark Fisher wants the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board to work with the child-care providers currently operating within public schools to develop before and after-school programming as part of Ontario's fledgling full-day kindergarten program.

Launched by the provincial government last September, full-day kindergarten is expected to be offered at all elementary schools by September 2014. The play-based program also features a before and after-school component that school boards were initially expected to provide in order to create a seamless day for parents and children.

But that part of the plan didn't roll out as smoothly as possible and some boards balked at having to offer a new service already being provided by the child-care sector, so the province changed the rules and said school boards could partner with outside agencies - a move Fisher welcomed.

"I fundamentally don't believe that (we) should be doing child care. I think the board should be focusing on what it's best at doing, which is providing quality education between nine o'clock and three o'clock," he said.

Licensed childcare providers across the city offer high-quality programming and employ the same Early Childhood Educators the school board would be looking to hire, he said. "Why reinvent the wheel? We've got a partner that exists in our schools, we've got partners in our communities that could come into our schools to do the before and after component," Fisher said.

He added that outside agencies would operate on days when elementary schools are closed, saving parents the hassle of making alternate child care arrangements. "When there's a PD Day, when there's March Break, when there's summer time, the daycare centre's still open, so as a working parent, I don't have to worry about where my kid's going to go," he said.

Still, the trustee for the Gloucester-South Nepean, Osgoode and Gloucester-Southgate municipal wards said he's hearing from some providers that school board staff have informally told them the board intends to operate its own before and after-school program. Some centres have already begun advising parents of the potential change.

That's prompted Fisher to bring forward a motion to the board's business services committee Wednesday night asking trustees to confirm to providers and parents that the board wants to partner with third-party providers and direct staff to work with these partners to develop a seamless day for children and families.

Fisher also wants trustees to commit board staff to meeting with parents and service providers to understand the affects of going forward with a board-run model if that's what trustees eventually decide to do.

The question of third-party providers was not a big issue in the early years of the full-day kindergarten rollout because some of the schools that initially got the program didn't have child care centres, Fisher said. But it will become an issue in the third year as the program expands into middle-income parts of the city where there are more child care centres already established at schools.

By this September, 45 English public and Catholic elementary schools will offer full-day kindergarten.

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