

Parents call on politicians for child-care cash ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Almost 400 child care centres have closed across Ontario since the last provincial election in 2007 and advocates say many more are at risk if the province doesn't shore up the chronically underfunded system.

"This wave of closures - almost four centres a week - is just the tip of the iceberg and we are calling on all the parties to commit to solving the child care crisis," said Andrea Calver of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

The coalition, which launched a website Thursday, www.4outof5.ca ^[2], to track centre closings and those at risk of closing, says some 397 centres have been shuttered including 45 in Toronto.

Toronto parent Kristin Schwartz, whose 4-year-old daughter has endured two centre closings, said the disruption is devastating to families.

"Child care centres are not just important services," she told reporters Thursday. "They are our kids' home away from home . . . and for working parents they are a resource for child rearing issues."

As daycares lose 4- and 5-year-olds to full-day kindergarten, centres are struggling to cover the higher cost of serving younger children, the coalition says. Without new provincial funding, centres predict fees will rise by 15 to 20 per cent, fewer parents will be able to pay and vacancies will cause more programs to close, Calver said.

In addition, centres in schools - representing 45 per cent of all child-care spots in the province - are competing for space to accommodate full-day kindergarten. Most at risk are the 22,000 school-based spaces created by the Liberals between 2003 and 2006, she said.

Without a provincial policy to protect those programs and no money to move them, many will have to close, Calver added.

The Liberal campaign platform says the party is "committed" to maintaining and enhancing child care services.

The NDP has committed to spend \$250 million over two years to protect child care spaces and freeze fees.

The Tory election platform is silent on child care and party officials have not responded to requests to elaborate.

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-reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: election ^[4]

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