

Policy creates latch-key kids ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

It's difficult to imagine a parent paying more than \$600 a month to hold a spot in a daycare in order to provide a safe environment for them between the time kindergarten gets out and the parent gets home from work.

In some cases, that's exactly what parents are having to do, as a result of the transition from half-day to full-day kindergarten this province has embarked upon.

It may be doable for some families, but it's hardly a realistic solution for low-income parents, especially single moms trying to make ends meet to feed, clothe and house their children on a minimum-wage income.

The reason this was not as big a problem before all-day kindergarten is when the provincial government made the switch, it also quietly pulled the plug on daycare subsidies for low-income parents.

Now, families of kindergarten-age children who earn more than \$21,408 annually are disqualified from receiving subsidy for afterschool care.

The Ministry of Children and Families now considers such children the same as older children, who are ineligible for a subsidy.

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The old subsidy threshold was \$33,300, nearly \$12,000 higher.

For the parents who no longer qualify for subsidies, the reality is often they are unable to find after-school care and have to leave work early in order to pick up their children. Others have no choice but to give their five-year-olds a key to let themselves into the family home, alone, after school.

Ministry officials say that while they recognize the changes pose new challenges for parents, such options as before-and afterschool, and licensed child care exist for parents.

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The owner of a facility licensed for eight children will be operating under a business plan that projects income based on children being in care for a full day, each day of the month. Replace two of those children with after-hour spots and suddenly the business isn't meeting its cashflow projections.

Daycare operators have little choice but to ask for full-time pay for a part-time child, unless they can somehow fill the remainder of the day with other children.

It's not a realistic expectation. That leaves low-income parents with a dilemma. Where they once could afford to put little Jack or Jill into subsidized daycare until first grade, now they have to scramble to find hundreds of dollars a month for child care. Or they can give them a key to the house.

Somewhere in the halls of government, it seems the policymakers failed to consider the full impact of the changeover to all-day kindergarten.

On its own, starting children in kindergarten earlier is without question a good idea. It will reduce the shock of full-time attendance in school by the time they arrive in Grade 1.

It may better prepare children for school at an earlier age, but it shouldn't result in younger schoolchildren becoming latchkey kids.

-reprinted from The Daily News

Region: British Columbia ^[2]

Tags: full-day kindergarten ^[3]

subsidies ^[4]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/11/10/policy-creates-latch-key-kids> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7860> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/full-day-kindergarten> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/subsidies>