

Extending the partnerships ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

OTTAWA - As the city's largest school board prepares to hold a series of public consultations on how best to offer the extended day program - the provincially-mandated before-and after-school component of full-day kindergarten - a senior manager says evicting established child care providers from local elementary schools is not part of the plan.

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On Monday night, Charles Pascal, architect of Ontario's full-day kindergarten initiative, will be in town to give a presentation and answer questions about how the program is rolling out in Ottawa.

Child care operators and the general public will have chances to ask questions or offer feedback at meetings set for next Wednesday and Oct. 27, respectively. Details are posted on the board website.

The province initially called on school boards to offer both components of the full-day kindergarten program, but the Ministry of Education later ruled school boards could partner with outside agencies to deliver the extended day component.

Some senior OCDSB staff members have indicated their preferred model would be one run by the board, but the OCDSB has so far operated a hybrid model that allows either the board or a third party to offer the program, based on the needs of a specific school.

Of 29 elementary schools that offer full-day kindergarten, the OCDSB operates the extended day program at seven schools, up from just four last year. About 60 child care programs run by outside agencies are operating in local public schools.

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She said communication and continuity were the key reasons that the seamless, board-run model was beneficial to families: The same early childhood educators (ECEs) who supervise the before-and after-school program also work in the full-day kindergarten classes. They can talk to parents dropping off children in the morning and pass pertinent information on to the classroom teacher. They can also build lessons from the school day into either the morning or after-school portions of the day.

Heap said the board would survey parents who had children enrolled in the program to see if there was sufficient demand to offer a similar program over the summer months.

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Most of the 343 children enrolled in the extended day program are in kindergarten, which means there is a curriculum set by the Ministry of Education.

There is no curriculum for the older children registered in the program, but Heap said the children participate in age-appropriate activities with other school-age children, such as making art or playing in the gym. The students also had a chance to work on homework or to read.

Beyond a slightly lower teacher-to-student ratio, it wasn't clear from talking to Heap that - when it comes to school-age children - the board-run program was or would be in any way superior to before-and after-school programs that outside agencies had been offering in schools for years.

Speaking from their own experience, some parents say the board-run program is convenient, flexible and beneficial for children.

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