

Parents make child-care case: Public board urged to include choice in extended-day ^[1]

Author: Pearson, Matthew

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EXCERPTS:

About 40 parents arrived on a big yellow school bus Thursday night in hopes of convincing Ottawa's public school board to continue working with third-party child care providers to offer the extended day program, a key part of the full-day kindergarten initiative.

The splashy entrance was the most dramatic point of the evening, which included a series of formal presentations, followed by speakers and a question-and-answer period.

The meeting was the third and final consultation about the extended day program, the before-and after-school piece of full-day kindergarten.

At issue is whether the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board should run the program internally or partner with third-party child care agencies to offer it in schools where agencies have already established themselves.

Some parents criticized the OCDSB after it emailed many to say questions would not be immediately answered Thursday because the meeting was intended for parents and child care activists to present their ideas to the board.

Off the top, though, Walter Piovesan, the board's deputy director education, tried to address the chief concern shared by parents and child care workers in the vocal crowd of about 200 people.

While the preference of OCDSB staff is a board-run model - in line with what program architect Charles Pascal envisioned - the OCDSB will work with outside agencies if trustees choose a hybrid model, Piovesan said.

However, Piovesan also admitted that staff had heard loud and clear from many parents who cherished their current providers and were nervous about what the OCDSB model might look like.

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The lone voice of dissent came from Shellie Bird, who represents about 300 unionized Early Childhood Educators in Ottawa. She urged the OCDSB to stay the course on implementing Pascal's seamless vision for full-day kindergarten.

"You are to be commended for thinking forward," she said, adding Ontario's current child care system was fragmented and underfunded. "Change is never easy. There will always be resistance."

Trustees are expected to make a final decision sometime in November.

- reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

Region: Ontario ^[2]

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