

Day care strategy is needed ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

For many working parents, particularly the ever-growing number of two-income families, day care is the lifeblood that allows them to raise a family while balancing work.

But a new report to the Region's public health and community services committee this week painted a scary picture of those vital day care centres struggling to keep their staff from jumping ship and moving over to the public or Catholic school boards, where demand for registered early childhood educators is soaring in tandem with the phasing in of full-day kindergarten in Ontario.

The third phase of that program, which is scheduled to be fully implemented by 2015, takes place next September and will nearly double the number of kids in full-day kindergarten in Niagara. This, at a time when day care centres are already facing shortages of qualified staff.

That third phase was described at Tuesday's meeting at the Region as a "freight train" headed at day care centres.

A letter from one west Niagara day care operator said he's lost 40 per cent of his staff to the school boards.

The vast majority of day care centres simply can't compete with the wages paid by the school boards. Working at a big school board is often seen as having more prestige, regional staff said, and offers much broader opportunities for additional training.

The regional committee decided to have Regional Chair Gary Burroughs write letters to Premier Dalton McGuinty and Education Minister Laurel Broten, asking the province to commit to providing the childcare sector with competitive salaries, benefits and training opportunities to stem the loss of qualified daycare staff leaving for school boards' full-day kindergarten classes.

Realistically, it's doubtful the province - which already subsidizes day care spaces - can afford to fork over wads more cash at a time when it's wallowing in debt in the wake of the recession.

That could leave day care operators with no other option than to turn to the parents of the kids they care for, asking for what could be substantial increases in fees to be able to pay competitive wages.

-reprinted from Niagra this Week

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