

Ontario budget: Hundreds of daycares will close without new money in the spring budget ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Hundreds of Ontario daycares will close if there is no new money in the provincial budget this spring, advocates warn.

At least \$287 million in emergency funding is needed this year to stabilize the system, say parents and child-care operators who are taking their campaign to Queen's Park on Tuesday.

"We need that money and we need it right now," said Andrea Calver of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "If we don't get it, we will see a wave of closures across this province and we will see a lot of heartache from parents who, even today, are having trouble finding child care."

Chronic underfunding and the poor implementation of full-day kindergarten for 4- and 5-year-olds have left daycares with no money to re-tool for younger children who are more costly to serve.

New funding is critical this year because in September, half of the province's public and Catholic schools will be offering full-day kindergarten.

In Toronto, city staff say 320 child-care centres serving more than 20,000 children will be affected. It means daycares will have to scramble to convert space for younger children; raise fees to cover the higher cost of serving younger children; manage staff turnover as early childhood educators leave to work in all-day kindergarten; cut service or close due to lack of money.

If centres close, there will be fewer licensed spots, longer waiting lists and daycare fee hikes of up to 30 per cent. Parents will be forced to give up their jobs and the success of the province's investment in full-day learning will be at risk, the coalition says in a new website it is launching to mobilize public action.

In the lead-up to the budget, the coalition is posting daily online stories about the positive impact child care plays in communities across the province and the plight of individual centres at risk.

In addition to new money, the coalition is calling on Queen's Park to commit to a new child-care funding formula during the transition to full-day kindergarten. It also wants a commitment to increase child-care funding to municipalities by inflation each year and a moratorium on new for-profit child-care licences.

Under questioning on the issue in the Legislature last week by NDP education critic Peter Tabuns, Education Minister Laurel Broten was non-committal.

"Will we continue to support child care in this province? Will we continue to invest in it? Of course we could. I've invited the member opposite to give me his advice. I look forward to that advice," Broten said.

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

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