

Ontario planning daycare overhaul^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Ontario is moving to rescue its teetering child-care sector.

The chronically under-funded sector has been on the verge of collapse due to the loss of 4- and 5-year-olds to all-day kindergarten.

In a discussion paper released Wednesday, Education Minister Laurel Broten suggests \$242 million in previously announced provincial funding over three years will be used to maintain and improve existing daycare services.

In the long-term, the money will help to transform the current patchwork of programs into a coherent system of high quality care for children from birth to age 12 with daycares more closely linked to schools for a more seamless transition for children and parents.

Key areas up for discussion include a new child-care funding formula and regulatory changes to the Day Nurseries Act to improve quality, reflect the shift in care to younger children and address the province's new focus on school-based care for older children.

Missing from the document, however, is any discussion on how to make child care more affordable for parents who in Toronto pay as much as \$1,900 a month for infant care, advocates say.

Nor does the paper discuss the thorny question of non-profit versus for-profit daycares.

"At a time when for-profit, corporate-style child care is expanding at a record pace in Ontario, there is no discussion offered on whether continuing to fund and license for-profit child care is good public policy," said Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam, of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario, which represents thousands of municipal, school and community-based child care workers across the province.

Toronto Councillor Janet Davis said the paper is "frustratingly vague."

"Mothers and fathers across the city are waiting for fee subsidies and additional spaces," said Davis. "I don't see anything in this document that addresses those needs."

More than 20,000 Toronto children are waiting for subsidies.

Broten, who is inviting public input on the discussion paper until Sept. 24, said she looks forward to "a conversation" on how best to move forward.

"In a very challenging fiscal times I'm incredibly proud of \$242 million in new investments when many other ministries and sectors are seeing cuts and not able to make any kind of investment," she said. "I think it demonstrates the priority we've put on child care."

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

Related link: Modernizing child care in Ontario: Sharing conversations, strengthening partnerships, working together^[2]

Region: Ontario^[3]

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