

Hamilton child-care providers optimistic about provincial changes ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Local child-care workers are hopeful changes to provincial funding will help stabilize services in Hamilton, but that doesn't necessarily mean more spots will open up.

The new model, announced in December by Education Minister Laurel Broten, gives municipalities more control over how they allocate funding. The model is based more on need than 20-year-old demographic data.

Hamilton's projected funding for 2013 shows an increase of \$3.3 million from 2012, noted Jane Soldera, director of social development and the early childhood services division in the city's community services department.

"We're very optimistic and we see this announcement as good news for us," Soldera said.

She said Hamilton's child-care system faces many pressures that are consistent across the province: a wait list for fee subsidies, wage subsidies, the need to increase per diems for child-care operators and increased support for children with special needs.

Targeting these pressure areas will help support quality across the whole child-care system, Soldera said.

As of December, 1,748 children were on the city's child-care fee subsidy wait list, she said. An average of 3,600 children receive fee subsidies in Hamilton monthly, Soldera noted.

"If we just had pressure in one area, it would be easy, but we don't."

Soldera said she doesn't have all of the details yet about how the new funding model will affect child care in Hamilton. The city will meet with Ministry of Education officials this month and next to discuss how funding can be used, she said.

YMCAs across Ontario will also be meeting at the end of January to review the funding changes, said Christina Martin, senior regional manager of school age, day camp and community outreach for the YMCA Hamilton, Burlington, Brantford.

The new funding model is a positive step in shifting the government's attention toward child care, said Marni Flaherty, CEO of Today's Family, a non-profit child development organization.

"Child care, historically, has been underfunded and somewhat undervalued as an important or essential service for families," she said. "We're trying to correct that in the province."

Flaherty worries people might see these funding changes as a "quick fix."

It's important to "continue the spaces we have across the city, build on quality, and work together to make sure we're more accessible to families," Flaherty said.

"We have to work together as a city to figure out what we want in child care," she said.

-reprinted from the Hamilton Spectator

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