

# Public school board changes stance on child care <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board is backing away from a controversial decision to award child care for the city's youngest students to Umbrella Family and Child Centres.

Education director John Malloy says he's agreed to reconsider the agreement with Umbrella - an arm's-length organization chaired by longtime trustee Judith Bishop - following a "positive" meeting with the YMCA, Today's Family and other local service providers Thursday.

Those operators, along with the YWCA, Boys and Girls Clubs and Waterdown District Children's Centre, came together last month to protest the staff decision, which would have allowed Umbrella to take over all before- and after-school programs for children in kindergarten through Grade 2.

"We are stepping back from that decision because what they've said to us loudly and clearly is that together we can create a better position - and I'm open to hearing what that better position is," Malloy said.

Currently, child care in Hamilton public schools is offered on a school-by-school basis by a variety of not-for-profit service providers. That means organizations such as Umbrella or the YMCA typically provide a range of programs to students under 12 at any given school.

But with a shift in provincial child-care rules on the horizon, the board planned to have Umbrella take over as the sole child-care provider for the lucrative K-2 age group. Other operators, meanwhile, were expected to continue offering programs for older and younger children at some schools.

Local providers were prompted to speak out after being blindsided by the decision at a meeting in early April. Parents likewise raised concerns over the lack of consultation and lack of transparency surrounding the choice.

"We were able to say at the meeting that we had no intention of hurting or harming any of our partners," Malloy said. "We want to work together."

The education director also noted that this is not a change in direction - "it's an openness to an important collaborative process."

"They asked if we could collaborate so that it's not our only provider, and we said we are certainly open to doing so," he added.

YMCA president and CEO Jim Commerford characterized Thursday's meeting with Malloy as "tremendously positive."

"John shared the obligations and expectations that the board is under vis-à-vis Ministry of Education requirements for all of us - whether it's those involved in the early-learning field or full-day learning in schools," he said.

"These are changing and challenging times, so John demonstrated, in my opinion, an absolute clear commitment to community collaboration, open and transparent communication and a process to move forward with results that will focus on a made-in-Hamilton solution."

The YMCA and other service providers expect to meet with the board again June 7.

-reprinted from the Spec

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