

Ontario Montessori schools brace for child care changes ^[1]

Author: Ballingall, Alex

Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 9 Dec 2013

EXCERPTS:

Ontario Montessori schools are bracing for potential changes in the daycare business, which could force some to hire more staff or relocate to meet beefed-up rules proposed at Queen's Park.

"To offer the highest quality Montessori education, and to deal with these changes - it's a big one," said Katherine Poyntz, executive director of the Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators (CCMA), who oversees about 100 Montessori schools in Ontario.

The Child Care Modernization Act, introduced Tuesday, amounts to the first substantive change to daycare legislation in the province since 1983. Part of the suggested update is to close a longstanding regulatory loophole, where private schools that have been operating since before 1993 are exempt from provincial child care rules.

If the minority government's proposed bill is approved, Montessori schools - and any other private institution - operating in this "grandfathered" loophole will be forced to meet the new legal requirements that include staff-child ratios and space specifications. If they don't, they'll have to either shut down, or be deemed illegal, with possible fines of up to \$250,000.

Poyntz is concerned these "grandfathered" schools have been unfairly lumped in with "very unregulated" unlicensed home daycares, but said she hopes to negotiate a smooth "transition period" with child care authorities in the Ministry of Education, if the new rules are enacted.

"We would like to understand what would be expected, and how long it would take, what kind of transition the government is looking at," said Poyntz.

As it stands now, the roughly 20 Ontario Montessori schools in the CCMA that are "grandfathered" do not have child-caregiver ratio requirements for daycare-age kids, Poyntz said. That means these schools would likely have to hire additional staff to meet provincial standards, and possibly renovate or move to meet specifications like window sizes, ready access to outdoor play areas and prepared food that's up to standard.

Kimberly Redhead is the owner and principal of Creative Children's Montessori School, which has locations in Bolton and Maple. There's a daycare in each branch, but since her schools opened in 2000, they can't be "grandfathered" and instead offer licensed child care under the provincial Day Nurseries Act.

Redhead contends the current disparity between "grandfathered" Montessori daycares and those that are licensed has put her schools at a competitive disadvantage. She needs to employ more staff, ensure prepared food is available and potentially pay higher rent for ministry-approved class space, in order to meet the province's licensing requirements.

"We need to have three staff in a room of 24, and they need to have one," said Redhead. "They're making (money) hand over fist comparatively."

If the new law passes, Redhead expects schools making the shift to experience her struggle.

"I think they have no idea what's to come," she said. "There will be a lot of facilities questioning their profitability."

Poyntz isn't so sure, though she acknowledges some schools will have to make changes. Despite this, she supports the bill in spirit, and will help schools understand how to enter the regulatory fray if it goes through.

"I know that this legislation, if passed, is directed for health and safety," she said. "We want the standards for all children in Ontario too."

Meanwhile, a petition has been launched Hamilton unlicensed care provider Katherine King, arguing the bill will make it harder for high standard unlicensed businesses to make ends meet. As of Friday afternoon, it had more than 1,040 signatures.

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: unregulated ^[3]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/13/12/ontario-montessori-schools-brace-child-care-changes> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/unregulated>