



Changes to Childcare in Waterloo Region

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Changes to Childcare in Waterloo Region

In recent weeks, the local media and increasing numbers of residents have turned their attention to an ongoing debate about the future of childcare in the Waterloo Region. This issue has many important implications for residents of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

Under the revised Education Act, school boards have the responsibility to offer an extended day program for students in Jr. Kindergarten to Grade 2 on a cost-recovery basis, where the school boards deem it viable. Unlike all other Ontario school boards that are working with third party providers to provide the extended day program, the Waterloo Region District School Board and the Waterloo Catholic School Board have made decision to take over provision of extended day program (before and after school) for 4 to 7 year olds. Before this year, licenced childcare in the region is delivered by non-profit, for-profit and home-based providers. Nonprofit childcare providers say that this change will have considerable consequences for families if implemented, including the possibility of fee increases and centres closing and childcare spaces lost, while the school boards maintain that they have the obligation to extend extended day programming to all residents.

What childcare providers are saying

A coalition of local nonprofit childcare providers has been formed to respond collectively to this decision and voice their concerns with the process and the unintended implications this decision.

They point out that:

- ◆ Waterloo Region is the only area in the Province where the school boards plan to provide all before & after school care for children 4 - 7
- ◆ No consultation has been held with parents and guardians in the region about what choice they would want for their children
- ◆ Rates for before & after school care for Childcare Network of Waterloo Region (a group of local nonprofit childcare providers) are \$17 - \$22 per day while the school boards charge up to \$26
- ◆ In summer, the school boards have said they won't offer any child care similar to what is now available through existing centres. Childcare will no longer be set up to help parents in the summer, parents will need to rely on camps, and recreation programs— other options with shorter hours and less availability

Source: Waterloo Region Early Childhood Coalition,
<http://www.ykids.ca/en/resources/WRELCParentHandout-Nov21withTrustees.pdf>

Parents' Choice?

A number of parents who's children are affected by this change are speaking out on this issue. They have demanded that they have say into the decision-making process and that they have the right to be consulted about what they feel is best for their children.

Parents are increasingly making their concerns heard at public meetings and are lobbying trustees and officials to reconsider the way that extended day programming is implemented to favour a "hybrid model" that allows third party providers to continue to operate in schools.

School Board Response

The Waterloo Region District School board and its Catholic counterpart maintain that its approach will best serve all families in Waterloo Region. The boards favour the “seamless day” approach, as advocated by Charles Pascal in his report, “With our best future in mind”.

The school boards assert that they must address the gap in lack of access to licensed child care. Currently, it is only offered in 28 of 103 public elementary schools. In order to be able to provide equal access and ensure viability, the board must offset lower enrolment in some school communities. Many of the school sites currently hosting third party providers are in higher enrolment locations for extended day programs.

The boards have stated that it intends to work with third party providers to investigate the expansion of their delivery of recreational programs for students aged 8 to 12. As well, the proposed comprehensive model for early learning would have third party providers shift their focus to the much needed infant, pre-school, and toddler care to offer increased access to these services to parents.

Source: Waterloo Region District School Board, <http://www.wrdsb.ca/news/and-after-school-programs>

Provincial Context

The Ontario government has been the key driver of changes in early childhood education, including the implementation of all-day kindergarten and extended day programs.

How this is implemented remains the jurisdiction of local school boards. However, Ontario's new Education Minister, Laurel Broten, says school boards should work with third-party childcare providers to implement the extended day program as part of the province's full-day kindergarten. No other board in Ontario has made the decision to entirely exclude third-party childcare providers from providing extended day programs in schools.

Source: Ottawa Citizen, <http://www.ottawacitizen.com/news/minister+pushes+dual+daycare/5667017/story.html#ixzz1dblsqgeF>

Childcare Providers Foresee a Negative Impact on the Community

- ◆ Child care fees for children from birth to 3 years old are expected to increase by 15-30% to offset higher cost of serving younger children. Some child care centres will close across the Region as a result of the proposed model
- ◆ When children turn 8, before & after school care will not be available through the school board. Parents will need to look for alternative care or the school boards may look to community organizations to run before and after school care.
- ◆ There will be more unlicensed and non regulated care if licenced providers are no longer financially viable and are forced to close their doors.

Source: The Impacts of the WRSB Childcare Plan, <http://www.wrdsbdaycare.com/in-the-media/>

Additional Resources

YWCA Cambridge, www.ywcacambridge.ca

YMCA Cambridge & Kitchener Waterloo, www.ymcacambridgekw.ca

OWL Childcare Services of Ontario, www.owlchildcare.org

Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare, www.childcareontario.org

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