

The ESSEX FREE PRESS BUSINESS



Five-year-old Matthew Burns, left, and Marshall Brownell, 7, do some colouring in the room used for a new before-and-after school daycare and latchkey program at Sun Parlor Junior School Friday. The program is an expansion of the Story Book Early Learning Centre.

Story Book Early Learning Centre expands to Sun Parlor Junior School

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Parents with children at Sun Parlor Junior School will now receive a daycare option as Story Book Early Learning Centre expands its program to the school this year.

The two schools working together, along with the Greater Essex County District School Board, have established a before-and-after school program in a classroom at Sun Parlor.

Story Book now offers a "seamless" program for 20 children from junior kindergarten to the early grades, so parents won't have to drive their kids back and forth between the two facilities each day, said Story Book executive director Jill Foster.

"The town has grown and community needs tend to change," Foster said. "It's very convenient for parents. If they happen to have one child in senior kindergarten and one child in Grade 2 for example, both can be dropped off at Sun Parlor when they go to work and picked up there when they go home."

Foster says the program was originally going to operate with federal funding under the Best Start

Program. She said when the Harper government came into power much of the financial support was reduced and Sun Parlor was taken off of the list of schools slated for funding.

"We've dipped into our rainy day account," Foster said. "But since the need had already been identified, irrespective of there being no funding, we decided we would continue to look at starting the program."

The full-day, alternate day, program will also offer latchkey services and include an enriched, early childhood educational experience that focuses on pre-reading and writing skills, art works and sciences.

"We plan on covering a total program," Foster said.

Linda Becken, principal of Sun Parlor, said the two schools will be "working together as a team."

"Both schools have the same philosophy for child development and education," Becken added.

Sun Parlor's kindergartners, Grade 1 and Grade 2 students will be able to attend the new daycare at 6:30 a.m. and join other students in regular classrooms when the school day begins at 8:10 a.m.

At the end of the day, the daycare students will be accompanied by Story Book staff to the new room until their parents pick them up after work, Becken said.

"They're in the same spot, so it's nice for parents as well," she added.

Donna Hedrick, a supervisor of the new program, said the goal at the beginning of the school year is to ensure there is a smooth transition for the children.

"We want to make sure the kids are settled and comfortable and that they know what's expected of them," said Hedrick, who has worked with Story Book for 26 years. "Later on, we might be accessing other community centres such as the library and nursing homes."

The program will not be exclusive to children attending Sun Parlor, Foster said.

"Even if a child doesn't attend Junior or Senior Kindergarten, we would take them either at Story Book or the new site at Sun Parlor," she added.

Foster also said that when Maplewood Public School merges with Sun Parlor in 2008, she assumes there will be space set aside for the new program.

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