

EDUCATION: Daycare centres should be build in all new schools:

Child-care waiting lists tackled by public board

BY JENNIFER BROWN
Staff Writer

Daycare spaces in York Region schools are hard to come by, and the public board wants to help parents who are on the waiting list.

In a report to the school board Monday night, co-ordinator of community services Gayle Whitehead told trustees that waiting lists grow longer because the region's population is expanding and no new school-based centres have been opened since 1996.

The board is considering asking the province to let it resume building daycare centres.

The Harris government stopped funding the construction of child-care centres in July 1995 and lengthy waiting lists now exist for all age groups.

Every fall, a child-care report is provided to trustees, outlining the lack of space in the region. But Vaughan Trustee Harvey Nightingale said simply accepting the report every year isn't doing anything to improve the problem.

"Just receiving this report is not enough. I think we ought to do more than just receive it," Nightingale said. "We need to write a letter to the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Education asking to allow us to resume building child-care centres in our schools."

"We're coming to the next millennium and, the fact is, we have to expand or the situation for child care will just come back and hit us one day."

Director of Education Bill Hogarth agreed, saying it is the board's responsibility to the community to pursue the issue with the province.

"I think it is one way we have short-changed a growing region," Hogarth said.

Whitehead's report indicated there are no initiatives or funding sources to encourage new programs and operators are reluctant to start new

before- and after-school programs because staff is difficult to find and hard to keep.

The idea of writing to the province was introduced by Nightingale during a committee meeting Monday and all trustees will consider the motion during its regular meeting next week.

Our numbers keep going up and the supervisors at the centres are becoming more and more stressed and the families are calling and becoming more and more stressed.

Whitehead said parents are becoming savvy to the waiting list problem, calling the board to inquire about daycare space before they purchase a new home.

"We can't serve our communities with those waiting lists. Our numbers keep going up and the supervisors at the centres are becoming more and more stressed and the families are calling and becoming more and more stressed. They expect the child care to be there," she said.

The board has a list of 21 pre-qualified child-care operators, including two commercial providers, who will be given first opportunity to bid should the province approve the construction of new centres, Whitehead said.

But there is also a growing space problem for before- and after-school programs. With the demolition of hundreds of portables and renovation of space such as lunch rooms, family studies, industrial arts and French rooms to become classroom space, the available space for children in before- and after-school programs has dropped.

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