

Ministry of Education
Childcare Modernization
C/o Early Years Division
Ministry of Education
900 Bay Street, 24th floor Mowat Block
Toronto, Ontario
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Friday January 24, 2014

To whom it may concern;

I am writing on behalf of Lakeshore Community Childcare Centre, and all of our staff. We have an excellent program serving children 18 months to 10 years, licensed for 152 children. We have 16 RECE staff and 8 assistant teachers working together to provide responsive, inclusive care to all of our enrolled children and support to each family.

We are very concerned with the proposed ratio changes; we understand the rationale for changing toddlers to 1 – 2 years and preschool from 2 – 4 years; however we do not support raising the adult to child ratio. It is difficult enough for staff to work within current ratios of 1 – 5 for 18 month to 30 month old children; to add infants from 12 – 18 months to that mix, the ratio needs to come down, not stay the same. Same can be said for the preschool group. Adding 24 to 30 month old children to that group demands that ratios come down as well.

Currently we are able to have 2 children underage in our group of 10 toddlers. We have made an internal decision to not have children younger than about 16 months enter our program, because in order to be able to serve them well within the ratio of 1:5, they need to be walking and eating table food on their own. At a 1:5 ratio, staff cannot be carrying and feeding children. Nobody will be served well. We do not have the equipment (strollers, high chairs, cribs, etc.) that is required for these young children, nor the space to store them.

Likewise with our preschool group, we can have 3 underage children currently in our group of 16 children. Staff always finds it difficult and again we keep children within a few months of 'move up' age. They do not have the self-help skills to be able to cope well within a 1:8 ratio.

Our staff are phenomenal childcare professionals. They take their responsibilities to the children, the families, and the centre very seriously. They have grave concerns about their ability to provide a quality program within compromised ratios. With the advent of ELECT and the City of Toronto Operating Criteria, the bar on quality has been raised significantly. A responsive, child centred emergent curriculum is much more time consuming and demanding on staff than the theme based programming we used to do. Staff struggle now to do the observations, the anecdotal reporting, the photo documentation, and other things required to provide a high quality emergent curriculum, and to meet (and exceed) the standards of the Operating Criteria. There is already not enough time in the day. To add younger children, or more children in the case of the kindergarten groups, makes an already challenging task next to impossible. To quote one of my (great) staff, when presented with this document:

" Ok, no problem, we'll go back to theme based planning. It will be fine if you don't care about quality of care. We will be able to keep them alive." These staff are not afraid of hard work – they do it every day. They do not want their workload increased, with a loss of quality interactions and experiences for the children, for the sake of saving a few dollars. To meet the individual needs of the children, and express to families how we meet those needs, will be severely compromised with significant numbers of younger children mixed in these age groups. Childcare programs are already struggling to find and keep good quality staff, with more migrating to Boards of Education, and not choosing childcare as a career path. To add this to the workload invites more to leave the field as they are set up to fail in offering excellence in care, and are forced to lower their standards and expectations in order to be able to get through the day.

We understand that this document says that we could go with these new changes or stay with the old age groups and ratios. We have serious misgivings about the City of Toronto funding the old ratios, given their demand for licensing efficiencies at all times. We would not be able to afford to stay at the current age groups and ratios if the City did not support them.

For the kindergarten groups, they are already in shared space situations. To add another six children to the mix will significantly increase the pressures on staff. To compare us to the kindergarten teachers is not the same; childcare staff offer physical care, we change kids, care for them when they are ill, and provide far more nurturing care than the school staff do. It is an entirely different animal, and 4 and 5 year olds who are in institutional care for the majority of their waking hours are entitled to some nurturing.

For the school age groups, we support having professionals with varying (appropriate) education recognized as trained staff in some circumstances. However we strongly oppose using youth as a second staff in a group. Are these youth to be held accountable? How can a teen as young as 13 be a partner in offering a quality, responsive program? These afterschool programs are almost entirely in shared space requiring full set up and take down daily... Shared space which must be left ready for the next group. It is not reasonable to replace another professional staff with a youth and expect the same level of care. This was regarded by our school age staff as "a slap in the face" and completely degrading the quality of care, and also cash grab - or pull back, as may be.

We appreciate the opportunity to express our concerns.

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