

Report reflects on Ontario childcare workforce needs

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DISTRICT - A report was made to DTSSAB September 18 outlining the needs of the district for more, and better supported, early childhood educators and childcare providers. The report is part of a wider Northern Ontario study aimed at supporting a greater investment of government funding in ECEs (early childhood educators) and childcare providers.

In an email, District of Timiskaming Social Services Administration Board (DTSSAB) chief administrative officer Mark Stewart said the board "recognizes the challenges facing

our early childhood educators and childcare providers."

He said the Knowing Our Numbers report shows they're "seeing significant staffing shortages across the childcare sector, which is limiting access to services. Despite these challenges, childcare educators remain dedicated to the development and well-being of children. We continue to advocate for increased funding and new ways to recruit and retain educators. Our goal is to ensure that they have the training, fair wages, and the resources they need to continue their important work."

Dr. Emis Akbari, the lead researcher on the project, outlined the findings of the reports at the September 18 meeting.

She noted that the Timiskaming district was given special attention because of additional considerations for Francophone and Indigenous children.

The report noted that in 2021 there were over 4,300 children in the district under the age of 12.

The early childhood education field is "in a workforce crisis right now in Ontario," said Akbari.

The crisis is mainly in the province, she said, because there are better policies at the provincial and territorial levels across the country.

Child care, full-day kindergarten, EarlyON centres, licensed home childcare providers, supervisors, directors and registered early

childhood educators and non-registered early childhood educators were all looked at in the project, she said.

The report is publicly available, she noted, and can be found on the DTSSAB website.

IMPACTING QUALITY OF CARE

Speaking on a province-wide perspective, she said workforce shortages have been impacting quality of childcare. A percentage of children with disabilities have been sent home because of workforce shortages, she continued.

There is "a massive burnout in the sector, a low satisfaction, a low morale, and a large percentage that are planning to leave the sector in the next five years."

However, in Timiskaming the percentage who said they wanted to stay was one of the highest in the province, she said.

"We have just under 50 per cent which are reporting that they want to stay in the sector, which is much higher than many other regions."

There are also many who are saying they are unsure, and this creates an opportunity for policies for retention, she said.

"There are opportunities there for strategies to retain the workforce due to those reporting uncertainty and it's quite a high percentage, so this has implications for those types of investments and strategies."

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