

COMMUNICATION 133083

Received From: Tracey Freill, Manager of Carleton Place Childcare Services.
Addressed To: Committee of the Whole
Date: September 27, 2022
Topic: Busing Charges for Carleton Place School Age Childcare Services

SUMMARY

Staff recommend that Council approve postponing/not charging extra bussing fees for Carleton Place School Age Childcare Services during the current school year 2022 - 2023.

BACKGROUND:

This is a further communication to Communication 133028 presented at the Committee of the Whole meeting held on March 22, 2022 entitled 2022 Childcare Services Parent Fee Proposal.

At the January 11, 2022 Committee of the Whole meeting, Trisa McConkey, Treasurer presented a summary of the Carleton Place Childcare Services Service Delivery Review (SDR) Report prepared by ONE Human Services Network (OneHSN). The SDR report included 29 recommendations in five (5) key areas in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the services:

- Financial
- Governance and Organizational
- Efficiency through use of resources
- Digitization to streamline administration and improve customer service
- Service delivery improvements

At the March meeting, Staff recommended a new busing fee effective September 1, 2022 and new fees based on ½ hour increments for over 10 hour days effective January 1, 2023. These two recommendations were in line with the OneHSN report recommendation #6.

COMMENTS:

Charging extra fees for busing will directly affect enrollment in our school age program as parents are still hesitant to enroll children in before and/or after care. Factors contributing to enrollment issues are parents continue to find alternative childcare options post COVID such as working from home, shorter workdays, friends and neighbors, etc. In addition, Francis Street numbers were not as high as we rebounded from COVID, thus we had less children in our preschool rooms who graduated to kindergarten.

Parents may look for care in other childcare settings versus Carleton Place School Age Services as costs for childcare continue to climb for children over 6 years of age if we add additional busing charges.

Students are allowed only one bus stop/location. The bus company has busses that operate daily, morning and afternoon, to the Carleton Place School Age program operating out of the Carambeck Childcare Centre for children in both before **AND** after care. Children in before **OR** after care may not have a seat on that bus if their regular stop is at a different location.

Please note that there are available spaces on the bus coming daily to our Center. We were hoping that Student Transportation of Eastern Ontario (STEO) would allow children who require two (2) bus stops/locations to commute on the bus that is already providing transportation with no additional costs to STEO.

School Age supervisors were in talks with STEO to see if two bus stop/location would be allowed for School Age children at our Carambeck location as the bus company drops off and picks up at our program daily. Mid-September we found out that it would be a hard “no” for students who are only morning **OR** after care to ride the busses. The delay in charging fees occurred as we were waiting for a reply from STEO. They will allow only one bus stop/location per child. They will only consider two (2) bus stop/locations if a child is from a split family.

From an Environmental standpoint, the emission and gas use contribute to pollution and greenhouse gases would increase if we used a separate bus.

The extra fees may affect our enrollment numbers that are lower than anticipated this year.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

As in the past,

- Up to \$25.30 per week (\$5.06/day – 2019 rate) for parents will have a major impact on families who are currently struggling due to higher interest rates, food costs and gas prices.
- The number of children requiring busing services fluctuates with enrollment and need, therefore making a consistent expense hard to predict.
- In 2021/22, busing fees were \$15,800 so the cost to pass onto families was calculated at \$5.06 per child. This number is not necessarily an indication of what the costs and rates will be per family for 2022/23 (currently due to enrollment numbers it is \$ 10.54 per child.)

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

THAT Staff, on behalf of Council, continue to lobby the Student Transportation of Eastern Ontario (STEO) to alter their policy to allow children who require two (2) bus stops / locations to commute on the bus providing transportation from the Carambeck Child Care Centre to schools; and

THAT Council approve delaying the implementation of extra busing charges for a one-year period to September 1, 2023.