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Oakland Tribune, The (CA)

Y-Kids child care program cut from Alameda schools

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Cassie Harwood Oakland Tribune

Parents of 19 children at Alameda's Washington Elementary School must find alternative means of before- and after-school care for their children after they were notified in November that the school's YMCA-sponsored child care program will be canceled at the end of winter break.

Y-Kids, the only on-site child care program at the school that also provides before-school care, was slated to be cut as early as July, after the state-funded "Latchkey Program" originally was cut from the state's budget. The Latchkey Program subsidized low-income families enrolled in child care programs throughout the state.

The YMCA's West Contra Costa branch, which runs the program at Washington Elementary and ran a similar program at Alameda's Henry Haight Elementary School that was canceled in June, intended to keep it going despite budget cuts but was hurt this year by low enrollment.

"We wanted to give it a shot, because we understand that child care is a very important thing for parents to have," said Don Lau, executive director of the YMCA branch. "But we were about 10 students short of making budget."

Y-Kids, a program for kindergartners through fifth-graders, opens before school at 7 a.m. and is open after school until 6 p.m., 246 days a year, on school days and holidays. A two-person staff provides children with snacks and educational and recreational activities. The day care will run through winter break, until classes resume Jan. 4.

Sarah Jones, whose kindergartner attends Y-Kids before and after school, is struggling to find an affordable alternative for the remaining school year. She said the midyear announcement has left her and other parents with few options. "I know that times are hard for schools and school districts," she said. "I just feel like the school is really failing these kids by having no solution for us. Our alternative is basically to find another school that has a similar program."

LEAPS, the school's other on-site child care option, which is state-funded, runs after school only and has a waiting list for kindergarten through the second grade. Another option, RAP, sponsored by Alameda's Recreation and Parks Department, is also after school only.

Jeff Knoth, director of student services for Alameda Unified School District, was notified of the cancellation last week and is looking into alternatives for families affected by the district's loss.

"It's looking a little grim at the moment," he said. "The options are limited at

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this point. But never say never. Somebody might pony up and help us out."

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