

## How did one of Ontario's first legal pot stores end up next to a Toronto public school?

Parents at Blantyre Public School, just south of the location at Victoria Park Ave. and Gerrard St. E., say they had no idea a marijuana outlet would open at the strip mall where students go at lunchtime.

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Premier Kathleen Wynne is demanding answers on why one of the Ontario government's first cannabis stores will be located 450 metres from a school in a Gerrard St. plaza.

The Toronto District School Board also has concerns — saying it had asked to be consulted, but was not.

“I would love to know if schools were even considered as part of the equation. I hope they were,” said board Chair Robin Pilkey. “... This is new, and it is an opportunity to do things the right way from the beginning — because once (the stores) are established, it's hard to go back.

“It all seems not very well thought out.”

Wynne, speaking to reporters Thursday at Mount Sinai Hospital, said she was going to ask staff to find out “exactly how the decision was made.”

“My priority in the implementation of the [federal government's decision](#) to legalize cannabis has been safety. It's been safety and security particularly for young people,” the premier said. “I just want to know that the school board had input into it. I know there are a lot of factors and in Toronto there are 800 schools so there are schools in many, many, many neighbourhoods.”

Of the province's other three initial sites — in Guelph, Kingston and Thunder Bay — only the Lakehead school board in the north had any say.

“It was made very clear throughout the process that we did not support a location that was near a school or where young people frequent,” said spokesperson Bruce Nugent, noting the board is satisfied given the closest elementary is three kilometres away and secondary school more than five.

In Kingston, the outlet will be at least two kilometres from the nearest school. In the Upper Grand board, the closest school is an elementary about 850 metres away, with two others about a kilometre away.

Toronto families whose children attend Blantyre Public School, just south of the location at Victoria Park Ave. and Gerrard St. E., say the strip mall is a place where many elementary and high school students go at lunchtime to get food from McDonald's or Tim Horton's — or where kids go for after-school math tutoring or martial arts classes.

“We’re disappointed we weren’t consulted at all,” said Scarborough Southwest Trustee Parthi Kandavel. “If we were, we would have consulted with parents on this.”

Parents discussed the matter at a Wednesday night school council meeting at Blantyre, said co-chair Garfield Richards.

“Overall, they weren’t welcoming of the idea,” he said, adding families want to know if there are any alternate sites that could be considered instead.

“That just speaks to one of our concerns,” Richards said of the lack of information on how the spot was chosen. “There isn’t the level of engagement there. It seems like a decision that was made removed from any of the key stakeholders in the community. To me, that is very worrying.”

The Ontario Cannabis Store outlets will be run by a subsidiary of the LCBO. The federal government is expected to legalize marijuana this summer.

In a statement, the LCBO said “we are continuing to engage with municipalities through the siting and ultimately through the construction process” and that guidelines include “minimizing proximity to primary and secondary schools.”

“We can confirm that the Toronto location does adhere to the local criteria that were provided to us by City of Toronto staff.”

Local Toronto Councillor Gary Crawford is worried about the volume of traffic in the already busy area.

“Ultimately, safety is the biggest concern, and (the location) does pose challenges,” he said.