

Early Years in BC School Districts: *A Scan of Promising Practices*



Provincial Office
for the Early Years

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Introduction

In 2013, the Province of British Columbia released the BC *Early Years Strategy* (the strategy), which is government’s long-term plan to ensure that young British Columbians have the best possible start in life. The strategy highlights the importance of healthy early childhood development and the knowledge that investing in young children has lasting impacts on individuals and society as a whole. It also recognizes that improving outcomes for all children, including the most vulnerable, requires the joint efforts of multiple partners – not only provincial ministries, but school districts, health authorities, service providers, local governments and the federal government. Recognizing that improving outcomes in the early years requires involvement of multiple partners, government established the Provincial Office for the Early Years (Early Years Office).

While the Early Years Office is hosted by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, its role is to oversee the successful implementation of the strategy by working across partners to collectively move from “strategy” to concrete “action”. As part of this concrete action, the Early Years Office and the Ministry of Education partnered in 2015 to create a position called the Superintendent of the Early Years. This joint position provides a link between the Early Years Strategy and the modernization underway in the BC Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system. The modernized education system is focused on creating a more personalized and flexible teaching and learning environment that will better prepare all learners for success in a changing world.



A key activity of the Superintendent has been to conduct an environmental scan of early learning initiatives in school districts across BC. The scan forms the basis for sharing some of the promising practices and strong leadership offered by many school districts, and provides an opportunity to identify areas for further study and/or enhancements.

Phase one of the scan, which took place in September 2015 focused on conversations with Superintendents and concentrated on issues pertaining



to governance, leadership and policy as it relates to the early years. The second phase included follow-up discussions with school district personnel involved in managing early learning initiatives within the district, to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist in regards to early years programs and services.

Early Years In BC School Districts: A Scan of Promising Practices is the result of these conversations, and highlights just some of the many initiatives districts are undertaking to address early learning and service delivery in schools and local community through collaboration with community partners.

Overall, it is apparent that school districts have welcomed early years programs and services. Superintendents and school district early learning leads articulated the importance of early learning services to their school districts. In particular, many noted that programs such as StrongStart BC have had a positive impact by helping to bring families into schools much earlier, enabling positive relationships to be built before their child starts Kindergarten. Also highlighted were the benefits that early learning programs provide for young children by enabling them to enter the education system with enhanced emotional, social, cognitive and physical skills that contribute to a smooth and comfortable transition into Kindergarten.

School district early learning leads noted the benefits that collaboration amongst early years partners has on supporting smooth transitions for children into Kindergarten, and specifically how this coordinated approach enables them to proactively initiate extra supports for young children who may require them.

School districts continue to work closely, and build relationships, with community early years partners in order to further establish programs and services that are accountable to communities and governments; that make efficient use of the available resources; and that ultimately help to improve outcomes for all children, families and communities.

This document provides a snapshot of some of the leading promising practices and innovations supporting early learning across BC. The document focuses on four core areas: (1) governance and leadership in early childhood, (2) access to programs and services, (3) enhancing quality, and (4) providing resources to support smooth and successful transitions into Kindergarten.

1 Leadership and Governance

System-level leaders are responsible for creating policy, and for planning and monitoring early childhood systems

A key factor in creating district-level change to support a coherent early learning system is through system-level leadership and governance. This includes the creation of policies, plans and strategies that speak to the school district's commitment to early learning services, and help to establish priorities. While the majority of school districts have working practices that support early learning, a written commitment and/or strategy provides clarity and a demonstrated level of assurance. A number of school districts have developed policy documents and strategic plans which include connections to early learning, while some are currently establishing 'Enhancing Student Learning' plans that promote or prioritize work in early learning. Some school districts have established early learning plans in partnership with their local early years tables, which are typically endorsed by the local Board of Education.





Some districts have stated their commitment to early learning through ambitious vision statements that position early childhood and the years before school as fundamental aspects of lifelong learning. A few school districts have set priorities through their Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement, establishing specific goals to support our youngest Aboriginal learners. Other districts have worked with community partners to establish a Children's Charter that outlines some general commitments to ensuring young children have access to supports and services.

Vision and Mandate

The goal of articulating an early learning vision and mandate is to create a district-wide understanding and joint commitment to young children and families. The vision speaks to creating a comprehensive early learning system that responds to the changing needs of children, families and communities. A comprehensive system provides young children with a range of quality early learning experiences while supporting parents in their parenting role.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ As part of a growing network of BC Early Years Centres (EYC), various school districts are providing leadership in managing their local EYC to ensure families have greater access to early years programs and services. This includes SD 34 (Abbotsford), SD 70 (Alberni), SD 42 (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows), SD 23 (Central Okanagan) and SD 67 (Okanagan Skaha). In addition, many districts are working closely with community partners to offer satellite programs and services where families need it most, including SD 46 (Sunshine Coast), SD 19 (Revelstoke), SD 75 (Mission) and SD 51 (Boundary).
- ▶ SD 23 (Central Okanagan) has an established Early Years Partnership Committee with representation from the early learning community, the Aboriginal community, parents, educators, Health, Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and trustees from the Board of Education. The Early Years Partnership Committee collaborates around: increasing accessibility for all families; creating well supported and seamless transitions; and providing quality programs to support the growth and development of the whole child. <http://tinyurl.com/jhaf86o>

The district has also established an partnership policy that provides the foundation and commitment for their work together:
<http://tinyurl.com/gvszxgm>

- ▶ SD 40 (New Westminster) has been actively involved in the New Westminster Early Childhood Development Committee since its inception, and participated in the planning process that led to the development and revision of the Kids New West Child Development Committee Strategic Plan (2015 – 2019). The district has an Early Learning Advisory Committee that developed an Early Learning Vision. The vision is reviewed annually, and priorities are established. <http://tinyurl.com/gq9ybjh>
- ▶ SD 46 (Sunshine Coast) states in their 2015-19 strategic plan: *Excellence in All We Do*, that they believe students will enter Kindergarten well prepared and with engaged, well-informed parents invited to partner with their children’s teachers through a comprehensive early learning program: <http://tinyurl.com/hzg535j>

Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements



Many school districts identified that they are working with the community to deliver early years programs/services through partnerships with their Aboriginal partners (First Nation’s Bands, Aboriginal Friendship Centres and other Aboriginal organizations). While most school districts have Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (EA), most agreements do not explicitly link to the early years. Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements establish a collaborative partnership between Aboriginal communities and school districts that involve shared decision-making and specific goal setting to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal students, and has the potential to create a more holistic link for all Aboriginal learners from the early years into the school system.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 48 (Sea to Sky) has a goal to enhance academic skills and achievement for success in school, the community and life. Their EA commits to helping Aboriginal students to “Be prepared and supported for their early learning years, ages 0-8.”
- ▶ SD 50 (Haida Gwai) has a goal for students to develop a strong sense of belonging to their learning environment and community. They state as one of their commitments: “We believe that our students will benefit from a strong connection to their school and that teachers will benefit from an increased awareness of Haida traditional knowledge and language, utilising strategies ranging from Culturally Responsive Education to Aboriginality oriented Early Childhood Education programming.”

Service Planning and Monitoring

By working with community partners, school districts can identify community needs through assessing existing assets, consulting with families, seeking input from partners, assessing existing community strengths and identifying needs or gaps in programs and services.

Some school districts have worked closely with their early years community partners to identify goals for improving child outcomes. In some instances, municipal or regional governments have taken leadership, working alongside early years partners to help understand how the system works to support young children and families. It is important to understand both the challenges and resources/supports (assets) of a community, and to monitor their impact on child outcomes, as school districts and their community partners establish benchmarks and set goals and targets for enhancing the impact of the service they provide through quality improvement or increased access.

A range of data is available to a community that allows them to monitor changes and impacts over time, and enables communities to strategically plan service delivery, including:

- ▶ the Early Development Instrument (EDI)
- ▶ Foundational Skills Assessment (FSA)
- ▶ Middle Development Instrument (MDI)
- ▶ Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (CHEQ) – currently being piloted by the Human Early Learning Partnership
- ▶ Graduation rates
- ▶ Statistics Canada information
- ▶ Health data (local Health Authorities and Ministry of Health information)

By working with community partners, school districts can identify community needs through assessing existing assets, consulting with families, seeking input from partners, assessing existing community strengths and identifying needs or gaps in programs and services.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 34 (Abbotsford) went through a process to create and then fulfill the vision for early years in their community. As part of their community planning process, the district looked at the information available including EDI data tracked at the district, provincial assessments and graduation rates to analyze the impact of early years services in their community.
- ▶ In 2011, Metro Vancouver Region conducted *A Municipal Survey of Child Care Spaces and Policies in Metro Vancouver*. <http://tinyurl.com/zlcr2vk>

The report provides an inventory of spaces, background on municipal policy, zoning information, consideration of barriers to child care, and looked at opportunities to expand child care. Several of the municipalities within the Metro Vancouver Region have worked with local school districts as partners to identify potential space and establish policy to expand access to early years programs in school district facilities.

Human Resources

The majority of school districts have established early learning lead roles. For some districts the tasks are spread across several key positions including Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent, District Principals, Aboriginal education, student learning, curriculum, instructional and literacy leads. Many districts are creatively supporting these positions with one or more full-time equivalent individuals, and using different pockets of funding to ensure there



is early years leadership within the district. Early learning leads are typically staff employed by the school districts. Funding has been leveraged from early years programs like Ready, Set Learn and StrongStart BC, or from other sources to provide this level of district leadership.

While these positions vary considerably, often depending on the size of the district and the needs of families, the roles of the early learning leads typically include:

- ▶ Supporting and assisting StrongStart BC facilitators. In some districts, this also includes Kindergarten and grade one teachers.
- ▶ Early learning curriculum implementation and formative assessment supports.
- ▶ Planning and implementing district-wide programs (e.g. Ready, Set, Learn, StrongStart BC programs and other district early learning initiatives).
- ▶ Liaising with other professionals within the district, as well as within the broader community, in support of early learning.
- ▶ Participating at local early childhood development/early years tables.
- ▶ Working with local groups to support community early learning priorities.
- ▶ Planning and implementing professional learning opportunities for teachers, StrongStart BC facilitators.
- ▶ Working with the community partners (child care, preschool, child development, family support etc.), to plan potential opportunities for joint training and professional development.
- ▶ Reviewing existing district resources and staffing to identify opportunities to support early years priorities and enhancing duties (e.g. StrongStart BC facilitators supporting Kindergarten program in the afternoon; Aboriginal Education workers connecting with the StrongStart BC programs to outreach and build connections with families).

Resource Allocation/Funding

By considering available resources (including funding, space and personnel), districts are working to try and facilitate equitable access and parent choice through strategic and sustainable financial supports. School districts overall identified that additional funding resources were needed to support and sustain early years work within their districts. Those districts that placed a high priority on early learning often leveraged funds with creative use of Ready, Set, Learn, CommunityLINK, and StrongStart BC funding, as well as prioritizing operating funds. Some districts are utilizing Ready, Set, Learn funding at the district level to implement specific initiatives that address the unique needs of families and children in their community with a focus on neighbourhoods with increased levels of child vulnerability. Many districts also work closely with their local early years tables on funding proposals and grant applications, to further support the work in the early years. In addition, many districts support early years initiatives through the provision of in-kind resources, which may include district personnel, educator's time and physical space.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ Ready, Set, Learn funds are being used toward funding a range of programs and services including developmental screening fairs, Mother Goose programs, outreach initiatives, Welcome to Kindergarten events, Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS), Immigrant PALS, Aboriginal PALS, family early learning events, and 4-year old early learning /preschool programs.
- ▶ SD 36 (Surrey) is using Ready, Set, Learn funding to offer a series of PALS sessions. The program is offered to children and families throughout the year prior to the child transitioning to Kindergarten.
- ▶ SD 49 (Central Coast) has developed a full-year 4-year old early learning program funded through CommunityLINK.
- ▶ SD 51 (Boundary) rents space for various community uses. Funds are collected and redistributed to support early years programs and services.

2 Access to Early Childhood Programs and Services

Children 0-6 and their families are offered access to a comprehensive range of early years programs, providing a coherent system of supports that responds to the diverse needs of families in our province.



Access means that families can easily use a range of high-quality programs in locations that are convenient for them. Families today have busy lives, with a large majority of parents working outside the home and requiring some form of child care. For those families where one parent is at home with their children, they too need quality early learning program options for their children to socialize and engage in enriched early learning settings. More families today are juggling care of their children while a parent might work at home, attend school or work part-time, so flexible hours are required. At the same time programs need to be culturally safe, inclusive of individuals with different abilities and welcoming of fathers.

Services are needed in locations that work for families – sometimes this is in schools but sometimes elsewhere in the community. Co-locating services as community hubs can help families by, for example, ensuring they can drop their older child off at school while they take a younger child to attend the StrongStart BC program (or other early years programs) or drop their other children off at the child care centre. While co-location can work well for convenience, collaboration between programs ensures a more seamless approach. When programs collaborate, children transition from one program to the next and experience consistent behaviour guidance methods, similar pedagogical practices and a coherent approach across the early years team.

The development of common policies and practices across sectors helps to provide the footing for collaboration. These might include for example, a joint behaviour guidance policy; consistent pedagogical statements; and a continuum of curricula goals between the school, child care and preschool program.

Collaboration among early years service providers facilitates the ability to work outside the box, and plan for the range of services that are required by families. This may include improving access for families to early identification and intervention services, child development centres, literacy, music and other programs. Sometimes these linkages are made through community screening fairs, through connections with public health and doctor's offices, and outreach in shopping malls.

Child Care in Schools

Early learning opportunities in child care programs contribute positively to children's long-term health and educational outcomes. High quality child care supports the cognitive, physical, emotional and social development of children, and helps children develop the foundational skills they need to be successful in school. Child care co-located in elementary schools can provide seamless early learning and care environments in familiar settings. Community agencies are important partners with school districts in the provision of child care. School-based child care provides an essential support for parents and caregivers. Collaborative programs provide the potential for a consistent team of educators, and reducing transitions and travel for children and families.

Several school districts in BC, particularly those with growing populations have placed the creation of child care within their schools as a high priority. Section 85.1 of the *School Act* (Use of Board Property) requires school districts to establish a policy promoting the use of board property by licensed child care providers. The *School Act* requires that licensed child care programs have access on business days, and requires that any revenue obtained is not more than the direct and indirect costs by the board as a result of making that use available (cost-recovery).

School districts support the establishment of child care in schools through:

- ▶ Creating policies and procedures regarding the use of space that recognizes the value of child care as a quality early learning program;
- ▶ Building strong partnerships with child care providers in order to support curriculum and program coordination;
- ▶ Involving child care programs in school district events, and professional development opportunities where possible;
- ▶ Utilizing district facilities to accommodate child care programs by providing exclusive and shared-use (for out-of-school care programs) space, that meets the standards required for child care licensing, where it is available, on a cost-recovery basis;
- ▶ Recognizing that child care centres need to feel secure in their occupancy arrangements, by establishing occupancy terms and conditions that are reasonable for the use of district property;
- ▶ Providing recognition in school registration policies for children who attend school-based child care, and promoting alignment between district and child care program admissions policies.

Examples of Promising Practices

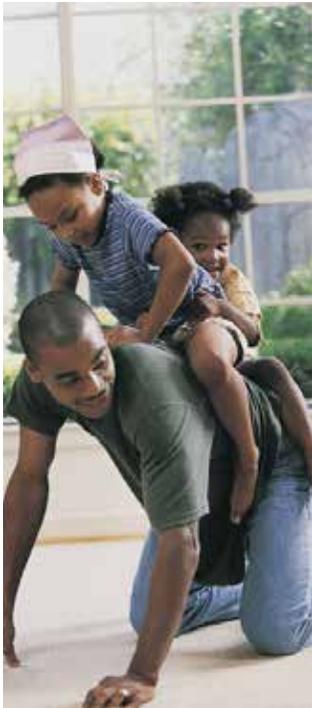
- ▶ SD 40 (New Westminster) established a Child Care Task Force in 2009 at the direction of the Board of Education. The Task Force revised policy and administrative procedures that define the roles and relationship of school staff and child care providers.

A *Child Care Protocol* between the school district and the City of New Westminster was developed to outline common interest in maintaining and, where possible, expanding child care spaces for families in facilities owned by each respective organization. <http://tinyurl.com/gsdv68t>

The SD 40 Child Care Services in District Facilities policy (Policy 903.3/1004.5: <http://tinyurl.com/zf7tltc>) establishes that when space for child care services is available in a district facility, a Request for Proposal (RFP) is to be released. The policy outlines protocols regarding relocation of child care, maintenance, resolving concerns and quality/licensing expectations of the district.

To ensure good communication, the district requires that the child care programs (in co-located schools) be represented on the district Early Learning Advisory. In addition, to ensure coherent programming and expectations, programs in schools are required to review the district Early Learning Vision and ensure the child care vision and philosophy are aligned with the district. In the new Neighbourhood Learning Centre (NLC), the district held a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to find child care operators who were aligned philosophically and pedagogically with the district.





- ▶ SD 47 (Powell River) recently opened a child care centre in a new NLC operated by the YMCA. The provision of quality child care is a key part of their Early Years Centre (EYC) strategy. The school district held an RFP process to find a suitable child care operator. The NLC is now transforming into an EYC.
- ▶ SD 49 (Central Coast) offers a preschool/child care program for 4 year olds that is operated by the school district. The program runs for the full school day through the school year. The program is licensed through the local health authority under the *Community Care and Assisted Living Act* (Child Care Licensing Regulation). The program is licensed for 16 children (8 to 1 child to educator ratio), and has high participation. There is no fee to parents as CommunityLINK funding covers the cost. The StrongStart BC coordinator spends the afternoon in the preschool program working alongside the preschool staff and providing additional support. Children arrive and leave on the school buses with older students.
- ▶ SD 93 (Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique – CSF) has a number of child care programs in their schools across the province. Where space exists, it is made available to the community. The CSF places a priority on early years, in particular to support language acquisition. All child care programs are licensed and run by la Fédération des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique – the francophone provincial Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) . The francophone PAC supports the start-up of the child care program and offers training.

Child care policy examples:

- ▶ SD 71 (Comox Valley): <http://tinyurl.com/gkq3f7c> Administrative Procedure 8001 MR3: *Daycare Centres and Before and After School Programs*
- ▶ SD 39 (Vancouver): <http://tinyurl.com/jkrgjyt>
- ▶ SD 41 (Burnaby): <http://tinyurl.com/jdcfopn>
- ▶ SD 84 (Vancouver Island West): <http://tinyurl.com/jn89tvc>

Early Years Programs and Services in Schools

School districts often have access to space/facilities that are ideal for community early years programs/services, as parents and caregivers are already in attendance dropping off older children. Schools are usually in the neighbourhood where families live. Collaborating not only at the program level, but sharing physical space and resources, provides many opportunities to deliver services to young families in a comprehensive way. Joint planning and delivery of programs/services can reduce the duplication of services and thus enhance the early years system. While not meant to be a cost-savings exercise, the coordination and collaboration between services can effectively leverage existing resources to improve and/or enhance the delivery of programs for the benefit of children, families and communities. Collaboration enables a community to plan based on the existing early childhood service assets, consider the overall system and rationalize programs to most effectively meet the community needs.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 19 (Revelstoke) is a partner in the local Early Years Centre which is co-located in an elementary school, and brings together all the early childhood services under one umbrella to improve access for families <http://tinyurl.com/jhdo9sl>.
- ▶ SD 35 (Langley) is a partner with the Willoughby Early Years Centre. The district provides the space in a school wing. Preschool, child care and StrongStart BC is available onsite. The hub has the option of providing programming seven days a week year-round and involves many community service agencies. <http://tinyurl.com/holuap4>.
- ▶ SD 36 (Surrey) has implemented Play, Connect & Learn summer sessions at specific sites for children who have not previously had group learning experiences (e.g. preschool, StrongStart BC). During the Kindergarten registration process, parents are asked about their child's previous experiences, and invitations are extended for children who would benefit from this opportunity. A StrongStart BC facilitator and a Kindergarten teacher are hired to jointly plan and implement the program, focusing on oral language and play-based learning experiences. Some of the sessions are offered to students in catchment at specific sites. The district also offers the opportunity at two sites in partnership with community agencies. One partnership (with First Steps) offers support for refugee children and their families, and the other partnership (with Awahsuk Head Start) helps to bridge the transition from Awahsuk to the schools.



- ▶ SD 39 (Vancouver) has partnered with University of British Columbia's School of Nursing, to have nursing students in all StrongStart BC programs as part of their practicum placements. The presence of the student nurses benefits both the parents and nursing students. StrongStart BC parents benefit from asking questions about their young children's health and development, and the nursing students gain experience in working closely with parents.
- ▶ SD 43 (Coquitlam) established a partnership with the city's parks and recreation department to deliver a preschool in the afternoons following StrongStart BC. The program takes place twice a week in a community with limited access to preschool programming. The district also offers use of StrongStart BC early learning centre space for community programs to use such as Mother Goose and Nobody's Perfect.
- ▶ SD 45 (West Vancouver) has worked with the community to establish a community/family services hub. The Properties Family Hub Society (PFHS) offers multi-generational, flexible community health and education programs for families, seniors, singles and children. The hub creates meaningful connections among local residents to foster a culture of active, engaged citizens through partnerships with local community groups. PFHS is located at Chartwell Elementary school and offers a range of recreational, language and community programming for all age groups, along with an onsite district-operated preschool. Independent non-profit service providers operate through the centre from across the North Shore, in cooperation with West Vancouver Schools: <http://tinyurl.com/jbmez3c>
- ▶ SD 53 (Okanagan Similkameen) operates the Oliver Elementary School Hub. The "Hub" is a central resource and referral centre for family support services in counselling, parenting, health and early childhood development. The Hub is located in a room at Oliver Elementary available for use by community service providers. Families are able to access settlement workers and translators, mental health counselling, literacy services, financial assistance and much more. The school district hopes to partner in other communities to use excess space to expand this concept. <http://tinyurl.com/j5n3bcq>
- ▶ SD 60 (Peace River North) offers two licensed preschools (under *Community Care and Assisted Living Act*, Child Care Regulation) during the afternoon in their StrongStart BC spaces. StrongStart BC programs operate during the morning, which provides space in the afternoon for the preschool programs.
 - ◆ 2015/2016 the two preschools were open for four cohorts, each operating two afternoons per week (Monday/Wednesday & Tuesday/Thursday; \$120 month/child).

- ◆ In 2016/2017 the two preschools will continue to operate four cohorts – three two-day (1 – Monday/ Wednesday \$120 month/child & 2 – Tuesday/Thursday \$130 month/child) and one three-day (\$170 month/child).

The district uses the BC Early Learning Framework as the curriculum for the program and Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) create pedagogical narrations to help invite inquiry and make learning visible. These narrations are shared with parents: <http://tinyurl.com/zgocvdh>

Opening StrongStart BC spaces for preschool in the afternoon has increased employment of StrongStart BC facilitators, increasing ECE retention and weekly hours for the educators. The programs are revenue-neutral for the district. Some children who attend are eligible for child care subsidy through MCFD.

- ▶ SD 69 (Qualicum) is affiliated with the Building Learning Together (BLT) initiative. BLT supports early learning and literacy for children and their families as well as many youth, adult and senior programs. Currently BLT projects reach into every corner of the community through Munchkinland, Storybook Village, the WOW Bus, Technology Learning Centre and BLT2Go Bus: <http://tinyurl.com/hy7s79u>



- ▶ SD 85 (Vancouver Island West) operates what they refer to as a 'Kindergarten school' that functions as an early years/early learning centre. The school is the community early years hub and is a short walk from the neighbouring Grade 1-7 elementary school. Areas of the school are currently leased out by the school district to community groups, and work is in progress to increase community use at the school. The youngest children in the Port McNeill area are in one school, alongside child care and StrongStart BC programs, creating a bridge into the school.
- ▶ SD 91 (Nechako Lakes) in communities where there is no StrongStart BC program the district has three remote centres and two mobile centres. The mobile centres involve a community partnership with a donated bus – the Words on Wheels (WOW) bus is a mobile StrongStart BC Centre. The WOW bus goes into one community on the same day as other services to outreach to families so that they are able to access all the services on the same day. The district also coordinates with other community partners to provide a toy lending library and food bank services.

Identifying Community Needs and Barriers and Planning Programs

Information is crucial in understanding local issues, creating awareness, providing targeted support, prioritizing planning, and reducing barriers to participation. Many districts utilize data including the Early Development Index (EDI) and attendance (for StrongStart BC programs). This data, when combined with community demographics and parent input, can be valuable in recognizing changes in community over time and across geographic regions, understanding program utilization and responding appropriately to identified community needs.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 37 (Delta) along with community partners (DeltaKids) created a child-friendly community survey to garner community input on Delta's level of child-friendliness. The district used the domains from the Society for Children and Youth of BC (SCYBC) <http://www.childfriendlycommunities.ca>. The surveys included:
 - ◆ A parent survey: <http://tinyurl.com/jxgda63>
 - ◆ child surveys for 3-5 year olds: <http://tinyurl.com/z3xse7t>
 - ◆ (adult interview of child) and 6-12 year olds: <http://tinyurl.com/j9xbm6w>

DeltaKids chose to include the child interviews because including the voices of children and youth is a key part of being a child-friendly community. Demographic questions were included to enable the group to break down the data by neighbourhood (used EDI neighbourhood boundaries).

- ▶ SD 45 (West Vancouver) surveyed families regarding their StrongStart BC programs. Based on the input, the district is restructuring StrongStart BC programming for the 2016/17 school year. They are now offering a one-day per week pilot StrongStart BC program to explore increasing demand on the east side of the district. Based on parental feedback and high participation levels, they will offer a shared StrongStart BC program between two school sites on alternating weekdays to better service young children and families in West Vancouver. As a result of feedback and pilot participation, a third StrongStart BC site will operate on a two days/week model which will complement the current programming on the east side of the district and address increasing demands, while ensuring the west side StrongStart BC program is not compromised and will maintain a three days/week model.

Outreach and Relationships with Families



Parent involvement in children's early learning has been shown to have a lasting impact on positive child outcomes. Research shows that when parents are involved in their child's early learning they continue to be involved as their child goes through school, they develop greater knowledge of the school system, understand their own child's needs, and are more likely to continue to support their child's learning at home. Parents participate when they feel successful and their participation is valued.

A number of school districts are establishing innovative approaches to engage parents. StrongStart BC programs have created a bridge into schools and are helping schools connect with parents/caregivers of children much earlier.

In rural and more remote communities, attendance at programs by families may be challenging due to travel time, lack of transportation or associated travel costs. StrongStart BC Outreach is designed to connect to hard-to-reach and isolated families and to reduce barriers to participation. These additional efforts are needed in many communities, including those where families are new to Canada, have English as a second language, are refugees, and for First Nations,

Métis, and Aboriginal families. Targeted outreach and careful consideration of culturally-responsive programming is important in ensuring families feel welcomed, see themselves reflected in the programming and are included in meaningful ways.

One of the ways districts are reaching out to families, alongside community partners, is through community fairs. Some of the fairs include early childhood screening opportunities (e.g. vision, dental, hearing, speech and development), in other models the fairs are fun family events that bring the community together and share information. The fairs may include Aboriginal partners, Public Health, Child Development Centres, literacy organizations, emergency services, MCFD and numerous other partners. In some communities, the fairs are held in local shopping malls to connect with new families. Some districts have worked with partners to provide mobile programs on buses, and may include book and toy-lending libraries. The buses are able to travel to more remote communities on a regular basis to connect with families, and provide programming for young children.



Examples of Promising Practices

Support for School Success

SD 39 (Vancouver) has been working in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health, Provincial Health Services Authority (RICHER Team) and Ray Cam Co-operative Community Center to provide safe and accessible health screening to children who are at risk for significant developmental challenges at school entry in Vancouver's downtown eastside. The primary goal has been to establish an innovative process of recruitment and service delivery that engages hard to reach families whose children have had little or no access to health assessment and have developmental vulnerabilities that could negatively impact their learning experiences if unaddressed.

Through a collaborative process of history gathering, assessment, interdisciplinary case discussion and reporting, care is coordinated in a way that sets children, families, teachers and classrooms up for positive and successful learning experiences. Children are referred through a variety of means (child care providers, health professionals, community agencies, and self-referral) to take part in a one-day screening event held at Ray Cam Co-operative Community Center. A multidisciplinary team (dental, vision, hearing, Occupational Therapist, Speech Language Therapist, Nurse Practitioner, Public Health Nurse, Pediatrician and Developmental Pediatrician) along with parents/guardians walk through a comprehensive screening process using the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire* (ASQ) and other specialized screening tools. If concerns arise during the screening, the pediatricians are on hand to perform more comprehensive evaluations and in some cases are able to provide a diagnosis. At the end of the screening process, families are provided a summary of the findings, and are connected with a medical professional who will support the family in follow up appointments if required. Further to this, the school district receives a copy of the report which then allows the district to mobilize support services for the child prior to Kindergarten entry. Children and families are provided food, bus tickets (if required), summer program information and participatory gift bags. Peer volunteers are on hand to support parents if needed. Screening occurs bi-weekly in the spring over 7-8 sessions and families receive all multidisciplinary services on the same day. *Support for School Success* participation is voluntary and has informed consent from parents/legal guardians. The project is jointly funded through the Ministry of Education CommunityLINK annual grant and MCFD. All partner agencies provide significant in-kind contributions.

- ▶ SD 10 (Arrow Lakes) has initiated an evening StrongStart BC program to meet the needs of families in their community

- ▶ SD 22 (Vernon) “Fireside Chats” are parent learning sessions for parents with children in K-7. Parents receive a dinner with free babysitting. Each session focuses on a parenting/learning concern. Topics include: early literacy strategies, numeracy games, healthy lunches, mindfulness and ways to help self-regulate social emotional challenges. Also included are community sponsored parenting sessions from the North Okanagan Youth and Family Services (NOYFS) on school routines, readiness, and sleep patterns etc. In 2016/17 the district plans to target their most vulnerable students in literacy with personal invitations to parents, to provide specific reading support skills that they can do with their child at home. The district has received a lot of positive feedback from parents and community members for this initiative and usually has 30-40 parents in attendance.
- ▶ SD 23 (Central Okanagan) has 15 preschools nested in their schools through their preschool partnerships, as well as eight StrongStart BC programs.
- ▶ SD 51 (Boundary) and Boundary Family Centres and Early Years Fair is an opportunity for parents, grandparents, caregivers and preschool teachers to meet service providers and find out what programs are available for children in the area: <http://tinyurl.com/jumbptr>



- ▶ SD 57 (Prince George) has ten Aboriginal Education Workers who deliver the Roots of Empathy program, a classroom-based program that works to raise children's social/emotional competence and increase empathy. Facilitating the program creates a connection to new families as well as connections to students, teachers and administrators within the school. The district is also embarking on a journey with Aboriginal Education workers that would include early years in their role. A pilot of six elementary schools during the 2015/2016 school year was successful and they will be rolling this out across the district starting September 2016.

The district has also created a role of Aboriginal Education Worker specific to the Early Years (birth to 5). This began in 2014 with two schools, and is now a district-wide position. The Aboriginal Education Worker collaborates with local Aboriginal Head Start programs, the Native Friendship Centre, Central Interior Native Health, and community Aboriginal groups, bridging the gap to StrongStart BC and the public education system.

- ▶ SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) is working with six local First Nations bands, and developing an Aboriginal outreach strategy for their StrongStart BC programs. The district has changed hours to include evening and dinner to try to encourage families who might not be able to attend during the day. The district has purchased culturally specific toys and books to increase cultural diversity and representation of the diverse community. First Nation Support Workers visit the StrongStart BC programs and share stories and drumming. StrongStart BC program participants attend the district Pow Wow. Information is distributed at the First Nations Early Years Health Fair, as well as to Band agencies to encourage attendance. StrongStart BC facilitators are available to meet and greet any family who is nervous or unsure about attending so that they can be made to feel more welcome and at home at all StrongStart BC facilities.
- ▶ SD 60 (Peace River North) has provided resources to offer StrongStart BC Outreach programs in five of the district's rural communities. Outreach centres are open weekday mornings and vary in delivery from 2 days/month to 2 days/week. Outreach programs are unique in that they are delivered in a space shared by the rural school and StrongStart BC Outreach.
- ▶ SD 61 (Greater Victoria) and SD 62 (Sooke) both partner with Hulitan Family and Community Services Society in the delivery of Journeys of the Heart Cultural Learning Program (JOH). JOH is a ten month program for Aboriginal children aged two- to five-years old and their families. The program is designed to nurture children's cultural identity while preparing them for the education system. <http://tinyurl.com/hf5zryg>

- ▶ SD 69 (Qualicum) has worked over many years to create community partnerships to create quality early learning programs. A new relationship is being forged with a local Indigenous community to encourage cultural awareness and partnerships. This will include cultural workers in the StrongStart BC Outreach program and cultural play boxes in the other StrongStart BC programs. The StrongStart BC Outreach program is offered on a Word on Wheels (WOW) bus. The bus has visited First Nations communities as well as outlying areas of Oceanside. One of the StrongStart BC programs remain open one morning per week over the summer and is open on Saturdays for periods of time in the winter. Both StrongStart BC programs spend one day per week in the fall and spring sessions in local outdoor forests. The identified EDI vulnerabilities for the area inform and guide the intentions of the programs.
- ▶ SD 70 (Alberni) provides one day of release time each month for StrongStart BC facilitators to go into the community and outreach to new families. The facilitators go out to other programs and help to foster relationships.
- ▶ SD 82 (Coast Mountains) provides time for StrongStart BC facilitators to go out in the community once each week on outreach days. StrongStart BC takes place in the mall which enables the program to reach families who would not typically attend the program.
- ▶ SD 91 (Nechako Lakes) All elementary schools in the district participate in the Welcome to Kindergarten and hold Ready, Set, Learn events. In Vanderhoof there is a program called [Getting Ready for Kindergarten](#) for 4 year olds. One day each week there is a half-day program throughout the entire year prior to school start. The program is offered in a school setting and some outreach centres, and is run by the Carrier Sekani Family Services. The school district donates the school space for the program. They also provide a range of early learning services including a newsletter and Facebook page to announce special events and ongoing services



Supporting Aboriginal Children and Families

An important aspect in improving outcomes for all Aboriginal children is ensuring Aboriginal children and families have access to a range of culturally-responsive quality early years programs and services that recognize the diversity of Aboriginal peoples in BC. Understanding and acknowledging the impacts of residential schools on Aboriginal children and families, particularly with regards to the education system, and recognizing the intergenerational effects of colonization is crucially important in considering future planning, program delivery, outreach and engagement.

British Columbia is home to almost 200 First Nations, speaking more than 34 ancestral languages, and up to 52 languages when including dialects, along with



languages associated with Métis, Inuit and Aboriginal peoples from other parts of Canada and the world. Many Aboriginal communities are in a process of social, economic and political transformation, as well as cultural and linguistic revitalization, in which early learning is recognized as critically important. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), Call To Action, under the recommendations related to education specifically calls "...upon the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally-appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families."

In the 2011 National Household Survey¹ 4.3% of the total Canadian population identified as Aboriginal. The median age was much lower for the Aboriginal population than for the non-Aboriginal population, with Aboriginal children between 0-14 years accounting for 28% of the Aboriginal population overall compared to just 16.5 percent in the non-Aboriginal population. These children live in a variety of settings, including urban, rural, remote, on-reserve and off-reserve communities.

School districts working with local Aboriginal communities are working to support and build relationships to improve Aboriginal student success, and overall outcomes. Some examples of innovative partnerships include Indigenous Cultural Competency training for educators and StrongStart BC facilitators, working with Aboriginal Elders to share language and cultural traditions, language nests that support the acquisition and revitalization of Indigenous languages, and through the integration of FPPL into curriculum.

¹ Statistics Canada: <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/subject-sujet/theme-theme.action?pid=10000&lang=eng&more=0&HPA=1>

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 36 (Surrey) offers a Bannock and Books program where Aboriginal families are invited to participate in an afterschool play-based, culturally responsive family literacy program which includes bannock and nutritious snacks. Parents bring their preschool and Kindergarten-aged children and their siblings. Parents are active participants with their children and families are gifted with a bag of books at the end of the event.
- ▶ SD 47 (Powell River) jointly runs a preschool on First Nations land (Tla'Amin Chi Chuy Preschool). The school district holds the preschool license and provides curriculum supports (including literacy/numeracy). The district takes direction from the band, and works in partnership with the community to deliver the preschool program. This is a school district partnership with the Tla'Amin First Nation that has been in place for several years.
- ▶ SD 57 (Prince George) has a StrongStart BC at Nusdeh Yoh (Aboriginal School of Choice), which has cultural specific learning. Visits to the StrongStart BC program by the Aboriginal Culture and Language teachers bring the Carrier Language, music and drumming to the children and their families. The district Aboriginal Education Early Years Worker goes into the community and connects with families and students.
- ▶ SD 63 (Saanich) has been working at building linkages with several local Aboriginal communities. They are exploring an Elder-in-residence for Kindergarten. The district is also working closely with the new Early Years Centre to offer services specifically for the Aboriginal community.
- ▶ SD 71 (Comox) has an Aboriginal Primary Program at one elementary school. The program is rooted in the traditional values of Listening, Mutual Respect, Speaking from the Heart and Kindness and Cooperation. The multi-aged grouping environment provides a supportive family environment which nurtures and feeds learning relationships. Students study an Aboriginal curriculum of learning from "Place", the land and territory protocols of the K'omoks Territory. Play-based learning coupled with individually initiated learning inquiries form the basis for student discovery. Assessment as learning is modelled and practiced in assisting students in self-regulating their learning.

- ▶ SD 84 (Vancouver Island West) is a partner with the Nanaimo Aboriginal Centre (NAC) a community organization with a focus on early childhood development that acknowledges the critical importance of supporting healthy human development in the early years. The Nisaika Kumtuks Elementary Centre opened September 2014 and is a joint venture by the Boys and Girls Club of Central Vancouver Island, Mid Island Metis Nation, Nanaimo Aboriginal Centre and SD 84. The centre also offers a child care program and Home Instruction for Parent with Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), a free in-home literacy program. <http://tinyurl.com/h82lc6y>
- ▶ SD 87 (Stikine) provides support to the Tahltan Nation in implementing two Language Nests with a third set to start in the communities of Dease Lake, Iskut and Telegraph Creek. The Language Nest brings children from 0-5 into a setting where the children are immersed in the Tahltan Language alongside elders fluent in the language. This initiative is the result of the Tahltan Language Revitalization Committee's effort to resurrect the local language. In addition, the Nation has partnered with SD 87 to develop a K-12 Tahltan Language Integrated Resource Package that will allow the students to continue learning their language and about their culture once they begin school.



3 Quality Early Learning Environments

Ensuring programs and services are high quality and evidence-based.

Program quality (including structural elements such as staff ratios, space and learning environment, as well as process elements that include pedagogy, educator responsiveness, educator training, program curriculum and materials) is identified as a core determinant of children's outcomes. Good quality programs have been shown to create positive learning and developmental outcomes while poor quality programs have detrimental effects. Some school districts are working with community partners to enhance the quality of early learning programs in their school and community.

Within collaborative early years programs, strong linkages between programs enhance quality and include consistent policies across program types, aligned programming and curriculum, as well as opportunities for joint (cross-sectoral) training and professional development.

Curriculum Framework and Pedagogical Approach



Play is central to the pedagogy promoted in BC's *Early Learning Framework* and the *Full Day Kindergarten Program Guide*. The value of play for young children is well documented. Play-based exploration and inquiry is considered the central activity of early childhood education. As children move into the primary grades, play continues to be a valuable activity in creating optimal learning environments for children and supporting inquiry-based learning. Play challenges children and contributes to a full array of competencies including communication, collaboration, critical thinking, social responsibility, personal responsibility and overall well-being.

Children's learning begins at birth. Early learning provides the foundational skills and understandings on which future knowledge is built. By carefully considering and planning the transition from early years/early childhood programs into Kindergarten, children can experience quality learning opportunities. Utilizing coherent curriculum and pedagogical approaches ensures that the experiences provided are based on the most current knowledge and research that inspires learning.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 41 (Burnaby) began a Building Bridges Project as a way to build connections and deepen the relationship between StrongStart BC facilitators and Kindergarten teachers. The goal was to promote reflection on how to create places and experiences where children, families and educators explore, question and learn together. The early years team set out to act on a strong image of children and families. They have continued to collaboratively inquire into an area of particular interest to their work and to make learning visible for families, children and each other through discussion and sharing of documentation. The shared understanding that has developed has created a greater consistency between environments and approaches that have strengthened and transformed the early years programs in Burnaby.
- ▶ SD 62 (Sooke) supports an inquiry for professional learning project which includes 35 educators (ECE and K-5) finding connections between the Early Learning Framework and the modernized K-5 curriculum. The Early Years coordinator and StrongStart BC Facilitator are co-facilitating this project. The goal is to get teachers and ECEs sharing their learning.



Continual Improvement & Enhancing Quality

Regular reflection and monitoring helps ensure program standards are consistently sustained and improved. Educator knowledge, skills and abilities are a key factor in the quality of a program. High quality, effective programs require ongoing assessment and reflection, and a willingness to continually evolve based on new learning and research evidence. Training and joint professional learning opportunities are being offered across the province and are one of the ways districts are working to continually maintain and improve quality.

The *Reflecting on Quality: Program Reflection* tool for StrongStart BC was jointly developed by Early Childhood Educators, researchers and the Ministry of Education as a way to maintain the high quality of the StrongStart BC program by supporting reflection on educator practice. The tool supports facilitators and school districts to assess, reflect, recognize, and where needed, make improvement to their StrongStart BC programs. By using the tool on an ongoing basis, facilitators and districts will be in a better position to make timely, informed decisions on improving the quality of their programs. StrongStart BC school site principals actively participate in the program and complete the tool alongside the StrongStart BC facilitator. Conversations with StrongStart BC facilitators and school district leads or principals regarding quality programming are guided by use of the Reflecting on Quality tool Action Plan.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 45 (West Vancouver) has been focusing on building relationships with early years service providers in their community. Over the past five years, they have been providing community-wide professional development for Teachers and Early Childhood Educators, inviting educators to be part of the process, and creating shared understandings about pedagogy and philosophy. The district has developed an annual Early Learning Agreement which is part of the school district lease contracts with child care and preschool program providers within their schools, to ensure consistent pedagogy, philosophy and quality within the district.

- ▶ SD 34 (Abbotsford) has thirty licensed preschools housed in schools across the city. Each preschool provider has a rental agreement with specific requirements related to quality. The district requires that all preschools follow the *BC Early Learning Framework* and each provides a year-end report, based on aspects of the Reflecting on Quality tool. An intentional conversation is maintained about quality in the preschool programs. This is demonstrated by an annual requirement for preschool educators to participate in two professional-development days. A focus for the preschools has been on self-regulation and social/emotional learning.
- ▶ SD 43 (Coquitlam) offers joint professional development opportunities with StrongStart BC facilitators and Kindergarten teachers. The district has also implemented a collaborative peer feedback cycle. Educators work with a colleague who is provided release time to go into each other's programs and observe. In staff meetings, teams share, reflect and plan together.
- ▶ SD 53 (Okanagan Similkameen) provides a professional development monthly meeting for collaboration and networking where teachers and StrongStart BC facilitators jointly reflect on practice.
- ▶ SD 93 (Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie Britannique) is implementing a pilot 4-year-old early learning program in four of their schools beginning in fall of 2016. The district is looking at implementing the program with a combined Kindergarten teacher and Early Childhood Educator model to bring together the best knowledge of teaching and early childhood practice.



Human Resources

Early Childhood Educator (ECE) recruitment and retention is challenging in a number of communities across the province. This shortage of trained, qualified educators is particularly challenging in smaller, more remote communities, and often in Aboriginal communities (on and off-reserve). The labour shortage is most acutely felt in the child care sector, but it also impacts school districts in regards to recruiting and retaining StrongStart BC facilitators, and often creates challenges in finding staff for release-time and professional development.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 58 (Nicola Similkameen) – the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) college Aboriginal ECE program has asked for community/district partnerships in delivering their program. Costs of travel can be expensive, so bringing programs closer is an important goal for the community.
- ▶ Two school districts are integrating early childhood into their Grade 10 programming. Both see value in ensuring all students understand the importance of early childhood. The class also introduces Early Childhood Education to students as a potential career option.
 - ◆ SD 46 (Sunshine Coast) works with all Grade 10 students in their schools to learn about the importance of the early years. They cover topics including: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, learning styles and the importance of the early years. Grade 10 students then attend StrongStart BC programs and are buddied with children attending. The value of this program is that each student who graduates understands the importance of the early years, including the value of reading and talking with young children in playful and responsive ways.
 - ◆ SD 59 (Peace River South) piloted a Grade 10 class that incorporated three sessions on child development, perspective, and communicating. As part of the class, each (Grade 10) student came through the StrongStart BC program to do a guided observation, then all went back to do an assignment debrief.
- ▶ SD 82 (Coast Mountains) Kitimat is working on bringing an Early Childhood Education (ECE) and ECE Assistant program into the community. This would be partially funded through industry, and partially funded through the local First Nations. Kitimat Valley Institute will run the program and support students. Practicums will be arranged in StrongStart BC and local child care programs.

- ▶ SD 93 (Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie Britannique) has been working with Éducacentre on including a training program for ECEs, delivered in French. The program is offered by Northern Lights College in collaboration with the Éducacentre, and meets the requirements of the province to obtain the license to practice in Early Childhood Education. In addition, the district is working on a dual-credit course for grade 12, where students would get credits toward their ECE. The course provides an opportunity to inform grade 12 students about ECE as a field and hopefully recruit francophone students to ECE.

Joint Professional Development



Some districts promote joint early learning professional development for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and Kindergarten teachers, as well as other early years professionals. This may involve the school district including partners in professional in-service learning opportunities offered by schools and/or the district and making early learning professional development available to Kindergarten teachers.

Shared cross-sectoral learning enables educators to identify areas where their work intersects, and identify opportunities to collaborate. In addition, learning the language of the complementary disciplines – teaching and early childhood education – facilitates common language, greater understanding, and more consistent strategies.

Early years programming is well connected to the modernized K-12 curriculum in BC. Active learning concepts that have been mainstays in early childhood education for a long time are now the bases of learning – this includes play-based learning, experiential learning, inquiry and project based learning. This integration allows for a more seamless link, and offers opportunities to develop coherent practices right from the early years into the school system.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 19 (Revelstoke) professional development opportunities are offered to all early years staff and to community partners. Early years events have high attendance from Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers. Professional development days are difficult for early years program staff to attend (often a busy time in child care), so the district often adds on an evening to enable ECE staff to attend. Ongoing discussions and planning for early years programming takes place between the school district and community at the monthly Early Childhood Development committee meetings, to ensure professional development is well coordinated.

- ▶ SD 23 (Central Okanagan) has developed several early years professional learning communities. Two communities in particular focus on building understandings of how to enrich young children’s language and literacy development. One community includes daycare facilitators and preschool teachers from the community, while the other is a partnership between StrongStart BC facilitators and Kindergarten teachers. The early learning teachers gather several times per year with a professional learning focus. Some of the topics have included building upon relationships, play-based learning, co-creating a common understanding between ECE and Kindergarten teachers. This program is offered to the new Kindergarten teachers each year to help them understand the partnership/relationship.
- ▶ SD 43 (Coquitlam) in past years funded some Kindergarten teachers to participate in courses offered through the Douglas College Early Childhood Education (ECE) Certificate program. The learning was reciprocal as the ECE students fulfilled their practicum requirements in the Kindergarten teacher’s classrooms.
- ▶ SD 50 (Haida Gwaii) in partnership with the ECD table hosted the Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Early Learning forum in February 2016. Training is designed for teachers and ECEs. Professional development in 2016 was focused on self-regulation. *Tools to Create a Calm Mind* has been translated into Haida.
- ▶ SD 60 (Peace River North) StrongStart BC facilitators are currently participating in professional development related to the modernized curriculum. Starting in September 2015, facilitators were invited to attend annual kindergarten in-service as well as the curriculum implementation professional development sessions.



- ▶ SD 63 (Saanich) is supporting learning circle/learning conversations. The Documentation Project is a long term professional development model that invites educators into a deeper conversation about children, teaching and learning. By bringing together ECEs, primary teachers and StrongStart BC facilitators, the project seeks to break down the barriers that often segregate professionals in the early years, and to share the knowledge, struggles and pedagogical practices. By engaging in long term collaborative, reflective engagement educators create communities of practice, where ideas and deeper thinking is explored, and creating environments where children are invited to do the same. <http://tinyurl.com/z7ych84>
- ▶ SD 64 (Gulf Islands) as part of transitioning children into school, the school district has arranged for Kindergarten teachers to visit StrongStart BC centres and community preschool/child care programs.
- ▶ SD 70 (Alberni) is in the process of making professional development more inclusive by partnering with the local ECEBC chapter to better integrate the professional development and learning of ECEs and Kindergarten teachers. Both groups recognize that there is an opportunity to work together, and will begin meeting to talk about Kindergarten transition. In time, these professionals may choose to learn about other topics together (EDI, for example) and will make good use of supports available, including the Island Early Learning Network, the Alberni Children First Network, and the Alberni Valley Early Years Centre.
- ▶ SD 78 (Fraser-Cascade) hosts an annual district-wide professional development day. This day is supported through collaboration with the Aboriginal Education Council and begins with a welcome song and keynote address from the local First Nations Band. There is a focus in the district on integrating Aboriginal/First Nations content and learning principles in the curriculum.

All partner groups are invited to attend. The local Child Development Centre is providing training for Kindergarten teachers, ECEs, and StrongStart BC facilitators on the new 'CALM' program (self-regulation). The goal of the training is to create a consistent approach that complements existing Kindergarten training/practice.

- ▶ SD 83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap) offers many joint professional-development opportunities throughout the year, including annual early learning/Kindergarten professional development sessions that include StrongStart BC facilitators.

4 Transitions into Kindergarten

Enabling smooth transitions for children from early years programs and services into Kindergarten.

Transitioning to Kindergarten is an exciting adventure for most children, but some children have difficulty with the transition into school. A smooth transition into Kindergarten is an important step in enabling young children to be successful learners. Prior experience in early childhood programs can make a difference in supporting children to feel prepared for the transition – emotionally, socially and cognitively. By creating stronger linkages between schools and early years programs (including child care, StrongStart BC and preschool), children can



be well supported in the transition. Consistent approaches, familiar surroundings/environments, coherent pedagogical practices and curriculum, consistent expectations and behaviour guidance approaches can all help to reduce the stress of the transition on a child.

To support transitions, a family event may be held prior to starting school in September to give children opportunities to view their classroom and experience the school, and to provide opportunities for parents to visit classrooms, talk to teachers, and receive any information the school

and/or district needs to share with them. Early years programs may be linked to, or collaborate with, the Kindergarten program to help children feel comfortable in the learning environment.

For children with extra support needs there is an even greater need for smooth transitions to ensure care plans and Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) can be established and implemented in a coherent way to meet the individual learning needs of each child.

Coherent Policy and Procedures

Policies and procedures regarding Kindergarten registration and transitions can assist in guiding planning for school districts. Clear policies enable community partners to understand the requirements and needs from the school district perspective and help in establishing practices/strategies that support seamless transitions.

Policies and procedures may be established in collaboration with community partners and may include:

- ▶ Sharing of information/communication procedures with community early years/child development organizations;
- ▶ Coherent policies (e.g. behaviour management, admission for children in onsite child care);
- ▶ District-wide registration procedures for registration to Kindergarten;
- ▶ Information about documentation and identification required for registration;
- ▶ Supports available for children and families with the transition into the school system;
- ▶ Consideration of effective practices that support smooth transitions into Kindergarten; and
- ▶ Annual training for new administrators to orient them to the Kindergarten registration procedure.

Example of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 93 (Conseil scolaire francophone) has an articulated commitment/policy related to early childhood development programs. The district is working towards a goal to have early learning and child care programs in all elementary schools. They are attempting to have school Principals more connected to co-located child care programs, to create seamless linkages between programs. CSF is also developing coherent eligibility criteria between the schools and co-located child care programs.

Links between Programs and Services

A variety of staff members may be involved in supporting and planning the transition to school (e.g. Administrators, Kindergarten teachers, StrongStart BC facilitators, child care educators, Family Resource Program staff and administrative assistants). Public Health professionals and community agencies may also be invited to be part of the registration process. Joint registration provides an excellent opportunity to outreach to families who may not have previously accessed early years programs. Some districts have used this registration time to share information about community programs with parents, as well as working with partners to provide screening for children (e.g. dental, developmental, hearing) to support a successful transition.

Example(s) of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 8 (Kootenay Lake) provides an orientation to Kindergarten in June, and uses a process of gradual entry in September. Parents are invited to remain in the class until the child is comfortable, and children transition in at their own pace. The school district also provides seven hours of educational assistant support to help children transition.
- ▶ SD 20 partnered with the local Family Action Network to offer screening days at schools that bring together a spectrum of school district, early childhood and medical professionals for families to learn about their child's development and to find out how they might access support should a child need it. Called Ages & Stages, these days are open to families with children up to 5 years of age.
- ▶ SD 23 (Central Okanagan) StrongStart BC facilitators now work in Kindergarten classes in the afternoons to further support transitions, and to support the learning of the whole child. This initiative has been building strong relationships and strengthening teaching practices.
- ▶ SD 33 (Chilliwack) works with a local preschool program to bring children into the school and have story time with school-age buddies. This connection with children in the school assists younger children with the transition.
- ▶ SD 36 (Surrey) has implemented the *Little Eaglet* program which acknowledges the importance of connecting schools with Aboriginal learners and their families from the very beginning of their educational journeys. The district is partnering with Awahsuk Aboriginal Head Start Preschool, Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association (FRAFCA) and Kekinow Housing with the intent of supporting the transition to the public school system for Aboriginal learners and their

families. This fosters a relationship that gives Aboriginal families a sense of care and belonging and creates a willingness to attend events such as *Little Eaglets* sessions, Ready, Set, Learn, Welcome to Kindergarten and *Little Eaglet* Summer Learning. The Little Eaglet summer learning program provides culturally responsive learning opportunities for Aboriginal children transitioning to school, and is run in partnership with Awahsuk Aboriginal HeadStart Preschool.

The district has also implemented an 'Attendance Matters' initiative, which tracks the attendance of Kindergarten children, in particular in schools with high levels of families who are vulnerable. The child is put on a caseload with an outreach worker who works collaboratively with the Kindergarten teacher. The outreach worker supports the family in getting their child to school in a variety of ways based on the needs of the family. This could include sending an early morning text to the family, transporting the child, organizing a 'Walking School Bus Program', providing nutritious breakfasts and lunches, and providing play and literacy activities prior to the beginning of the school day. CommunityLINK funding supports this initiative.



- ▶ SD 37 (Delta) provides parent workshops in spring before Kindergarten entry. This grew out of work with community ECE providers to clarify what the schools actually expect for children. The focus of the work with ECE providers was to clarify expectations for children coming into school. The district used the BC Early Learning Framework to ground this conversation in developmentally appropriate and meaningful goals for young children. The district, in partnership with the community and Kindergarten teachers, developed workshops and a brochure entitled *Preparing for Kindergarten*: <http://tinyurl.com/he8n53d>

The brochure helps parents/caregivers understand what their child needs to know/do in preparation for school, and shares with families the attitudes and abilities that have the biggest impact on how comfortable and confident children feel when they start school. It also helps to inform parents about how they can support their child through the transition.

- ▶ SD 41 (Burnaby) runs an Immigrant Parents as Literacy Supporters (IPALS) with the families from the Newcomers Centre in Burnaby. The Newcomer Program is an early childhood focused settlement service for refugee and immigrant families in Burnaby. The district invites the families who have children starting Kindergarten in the fall to attend six sessions in one of their schools. Families have the opportunity to share their experiences, participate in a variety of learning activities, visit kindergarten classrooms, the library and meet school staff. The district has found that this eases anxiety and provides the opportunity for families to get to know the school, and for staff to start developing a relationship with the families. It also gives families ideas on how to support their children's learning over the next six months by providing simple, easy to access learning materials and supplying a book for the child at each session.



- ▶ SD 45 (West Vancouver) created developmental questionnaires for completion by parents as part of the Kindergarten gradual entry intake process. The purpose of the questionnaire is to structure an opportunity for parents to share important information about their children's development and early learning experiences during the first four- to five-years of life prior to entering Kindergarten.
- ▶ SD 46 (Sunshine Coast) has initiated a SPARK! Program, designed to 'Support Parents Along the Road to Kindergarten.' Parents can sign up for the program prenatally, and are invited to attend a 90 minute session every fall, winter and spring until their children enter Kindergarten. In SPARK! families reflect on how children learn and grow. The *BC Early Learning Framework* provides the foundation for the discussion. SPARK! classes are held in the Early Years Centres which are located in school district buildings. Sessions for families with three year olds are held in elementary schools, to give families a chance to attend a SPARK! Ready, Set, Learn session in their neighbourhood school. Families are provided with materials and toys when they attend the program.
- ▶ SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) has a transition support teacher whose role is to support children and families with complex transitions. The transition support teacher works to connect with vulnerable families, help them feel comfortable in school prior to school entry and liaises with parents and child care providers. The transition support teacher is part of the social/emotional development team which is a priority area for the district.
- ▶ StrongStart BC facilitators work in four Kindergarten classes in the afternoon to provide additional support, continue play-based learning, and provide interventions for children. The facilitators also liaise with child care programs in their transitions into Kindergarten, and use an assessment form to support Kindergarten transitions.
- ▶ SD 67 (Okanagan-Skaha) has leveraged funds to support Kindergarten home visits, where teachers get to know children and their parents in their home environments prior to school-entry.
- ▶ SD 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) working with Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre created Qeq (Baby) College, a pre-Kindergarten program for vulnerable families (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). The program is supported by a full-time coordinator and uses a specifically designed curriculum. In the summer before Kindergarten, children attend Qeq College four days a week for five weeks. Indigenous worldviews are woven throughout the program and Elders have a prominent presence. The Kindergarten teacher and the Aboriginal

support worker work to build bridges between the early years sector and public education. The coordinator brings families together several times per year, and supports families to liaise with schools/Kindergarten teachers. This is a relatively new program which is still developing. One goal of the program is for the child to take a portfolio to Kindergarten and to help build a positive connection for children and families into school. Tillicum Lelum funds the coordinator, and the district funds a Teacher, ECE, food, field trips, transportation, supplies, a classroom and equipment. <http://tinyurl.com/zubuel7>

- ▶ SD 78 (Fraser-Cascade) has strong collaboration between child care and preschool programs in the district. Special Education staff and Kindergarten teachers go to preschool programs to observe children and to work with the preschool to support children in the transition into Kindergarten. Care team meetings are then established. The district provides opportunities for children to attend the school. StrongStart BC facilitators also help to introduce children to the school team and assist with Kindergarten registration.
- ▶ SD 84 (Vancouver Island West) in Gold River, the Parents as Literacy Supports (PALS) program targets children in the year before Kindergarten. This initiative is a partnership between the school district and local First Nations to engage children and their families who live on-reserve.



Seamless Transitions for Children with Diverse Needs



Planning transitions to Kindergarten for children with extra support needs is a vital component of successful school entry. Collaboration between parents, teachers and other professionals may occur months prior to school start up. These conversations allow relationships to develop while supports and services are put in place prior to school entry. Strategies that help the child and their family to get to know the school, environment and educational team, and provide opportunities to share information about the child's specific needs, can help ensure a smooth transition into school.

Many districts have created procedures to support transitions for children with extra support needs. Typically this occurs through transition meetings with parents and community supports prior to the child starting Kindergarten. The meetings enable plans and strategies to be put in place, and Individual Education Plans to be developed, so that the necessary supports are already in place when the child arrives in September.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 19 (Revelstoke) Learning Support teacher visits community child care/ preschool programs to provide additional supports, and works with the ECEs and the Supported Child Development (SCD) consultants to create support plans prior to September.
- ▶ SD 28 (Quesnel) works with their local Child Development Centre (CDC) on planning prior to Kindergarten entry for children who have learning support needs. Typically the planning takes place after December or early in the new year. Strategies are in place when the child comes into school.
- ▶ SD 34 (Abbotsford) partners with the local Child Development Centre well before Kindergarten begins. Transition meetings begin in February to make initial connections and begin to facilitate ongoing communication with families, community supports and the school. The SCD staff share information about the child's needs and educational strategies that have been most effective with the child. For some of the children with more complex needs, SCD workers may attend the Kindergarten classroom with the child initially in September until the appropriate school supports are in place. The SCD workers ensure that children have a smooth transition into Kindergarten and work through the shifting of responsibility from community supports to school support. In time, the child's programming is case-managed by the school and district learning support services.

- ▶ SD 37 (Delta) works closely with REACH Child and Youth Development, the main agency that provides support in the Early Years in Delta. Parents of children that have been receiving service in the community are encouraged by REACH to give permission for REACH to share information directly with the school district. In November, school district staff meet with the SCD Consultants to discuss transitioning students on their caseloads.

The district also learns about students requiring extra support through the Kindergarten registration form that asks if the child has any special learning needs. School district administrators encourage families to interpret that quite broadly (e.g. beyond diagnoses). If there is anything that the families feel requires the school's particular attention or awareness then they are asked to use that box to begin the proactive planning. The message to families is communication allows the district to proactively plan, and values the insight and expertise that families and community ECE professionals have about their children. As part of this personalized process the district host an information night for parents of children with support needs to answer their questions about the process and school system. The district has developed *Transition to Kindergarten: An Information Guide for Parents of Children with Special Needs*: <http://tinyurl.com/j3q79gj>

- ▶ SD 40 (New Westminister) has a similar document entitled *Transition to School: Kindergarten Entry in New Westminister*: <http://tinyurl.com/jl9tafs>

The document is a parent workbook and includes preparation checklists with timeframes for parents.

Both booklets provide information for parents of Kindergarten students with special needs, and covers topics related to registration, Individual Education Plan, transition meetings, gradual entry, transportation, designation and available resources, among other essential information.

- ▶ SD 48 (Sea to Sky) has a long-time relationship in working with Sea to Sky Community Services in supporting children and families through the transition to school process. The process begins in January of each year. Sea to Sky early learning staff liaises with families, outlining the process for transition to Kindergarten. If the parents are open to early school district involvement, an information release is signed by the parents. After the release of information has been gained, children are observed by school district staff in their preschool settings, and transition meetings are coordinated with the preschool, the school-based team, and the family. Together they take a pro-active, supportive approach in working with families with the goal of having any specialized services in place for students who need them and an overall excellent start to school for both students and families.
- ▶ SD 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) with input from community partners, created a booklet: *All Kids Go to School*: <http://tinyurl.com/jrbwn6d>. The booklet is designed to explain terms used in schools and to give parents/caregivers an idea of what's ahead. It can be a record of the parents contact with school personnel and a place to record questions and/or information they want to share.

Children's Development and Progress

As part of the Kindergarten registration process, parents may be asked to complete a developmental history/previous early years' experience form. Some districts are piloting the (new) CHEq: Childhood Experience Questionnaire (Human Early Learning Partnership). This background information helps teachers understand the child's family and life experiences, and provides an opportunity for the teacher to get to know the child and their family prior to starting school.



Many school districts working with community partners, have established screening, typically at 3 years of age. Sometimes these are connected with StrongStart BC programs, or connected with Ready, Set, Learn events. These 3-year-old screenings are voluntary, and provide opportunities to link children and their families with important services and supports at an important developmental point. The events help to identify if a child might be at risk of not meeting expected health outcomes or developmental milestones, and can provide an opportunity to make referrals for further exploration.

Examples of Promising Practices

- ▶ SD 27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin) works with the community on screening all 3-year-olds. Information cards have been distributed all over the community for parents to check development as well as flags for hearing and vision. The *Nipissing District Development Screen* (NDDS) or *Ages and Stages* have been made available throughout the community (including at Doctors' offices, Pharmacy, child care programs, StrongStart BC).
- ▶ SD 34 (Abbotsford) works with the local Child Development Center to support Kindergarten transitions. They have implemented district-wide screenings at Ready, Set, Learn sessions. At the event, the district provides information about agencies available to support parents. Members from a variety of community agencies often attend Ready, Set, Learn events in more vulnerable neighbourhoods as part of their outreach.
- ▶ SD 28 (Quesnel) is partnering with Northern Health on a 3-year-old screen, community events, literacy events, and partner with community on Kindergarten screening. Each Kindergarten student is invited to a 1 – 1½ hour session. Children receive speech, hearing and vision checks and immunizations. During the screening process the students also have a session with the school district Speech and Language Pathologist.
- ▶ SD 78 (Fraser-Cascade) At Kindergarten registration, parents can sign up for preschool speech assessments. Parents are able to participate in the screening. The majority of children being registered participate, and parents have been very receptive.

Conclusion

We would like to acknowledge the work taking place in school districts and in communities across our province in support of early learning. This document would not be possible without the many innovative ideas and strategies being implemented across British Columbia.

School district leaders are recognizing the significant return on investing in early childhood programs and services, working collaboratively with community partners, and finding ways to support families with young children prior to school entry.

Quality early learning and care opportunities provide the foundational skills young children need to enable them to be good communicators, creative thinkers, problem solvers, and curious learners who thrive both as individuals and members of society.

BC has a strong base of early years services for us to build on. Our schools and our education system are key partners in helping to create a comprehensive system that improves outcomes for all children by ensuring parents and caregivers are well supported, and young children have opportunities to acquire the skills and competencies they need to succeed in life.





Provincial Office
for the Early Years