

## **Preparing for the Future: Full Day Kindergarten in British Columbia Summary of Discussions**

On October 2, 2009, the Ministry of Education held a forum for discussion regarding the implementation of universal full day kindergarten in British Columbia by September 2011.

Over 80 individuals participated, including kindergarten teachers and principals, school district staff, superintendents, independent school teachers, researchers, representatives from stakeholder organizations, staff from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and the Honourable Margaret MacDiarmid, Minister of Education and Minister Responsible for Early Learning and Literacy.

The forum was organized around three main themes: leadership and planning, program quality and standards, and full day kindergarten for Aboriginal and English as a Second Language (ESL) students and children with special needs.

The participants responded positively to having this opportunity for discussion and the dialogue was thought provoking and open. According to the participant evaluation results, 95 percent of attendees indicated the forum was useful and informative. Attendees identified many positive opportunities, challenges and ideas for successful implementation of full day kindergarten across British Columbia. They also requested that the Ministry of Education summarize the discussion and make this information available to districts and independent schools to support planning and implementation. In response to this suggestion, the discussions and ideas from the forum have been collated and summarized below. Further, a new website on [full day kindergarten](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/full_day_kindergarten.htm) is now available on the Ministry of Education website, ([www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early\\_learning/full\\_day\\_kindergarten.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/full_day_kindergarten.htm)).

### **Planning & Leadership**

Provincial, district and school level leadership for early learning was identified as essential for the successful implementation of full day kindergarten. Many cited that leaders are needed at all levels to create early learning programs that support children's optimal learning and development.

To support a seamless continuum of learning with high quality programs and developmentally appropriate practice, participants felt that districts and independent schools should consider establishing coordinated early learning policies for children aged 0 to 8 years. Two other strategies suggested for planning and leadership included: setting clear roles and responsibilities at the district and school level and working with early learning/early childhood development, Aboriginal, First Nation and Métis partners to recognize and consider each group's important role in the planning and implementation of full day kindergarten.

A common theme throughout the forum was the important role that school principals play in supporting early learning programs. Regular communication with teachers, staff, parents and community members about the provincial and district level implementation plans was strongly encouraged. Further, principals and school staff were encouraged to share information with

parents about the importance of play in learning and the risks of a narrowly focused academic approach in kindergarten.

With respect to year one of implementation of full day kindergarten, participants suggested that school districts and independent schools determine locations for year one using the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and/or the Community Link Index which are indicators of neighbourhood level child development. Topics that districts and schools will need to address were discussed, including school space, scheduling, and use of school resources, for example gym, library and computer time.

A range of considerations for schools setting up a full day kindergarten classroom were identified, including adequate room size, access to sinks in the classroom, proximity to washrooms and other primary classrooms, age appropriate shelving, extra storage and space for “quiet time.” Other considerations mentioned to support successful implementation included collaborating with a StrongStart BC early learning program, if located in the school, offering gradual entry to the full day program for children who need it, and providing opportunities for public health to carry out [Early Childhood Screening Programs](#).

With the expanded program, participants noted that many school districts and schools will need to review supervision at recess and lunch, and management of transportation services (e.g. school bus routes for eligible children).

With regard to before and after school child care, many noted the importance of keeping and/or establishing child care in schools, which are increasingly serving as community hubs or neighbourhoods of learning. Open communication and coordination with local child care providers was considered by many participants as essential to creating a seamless day for children and their families. To reduce barriers to creating more before and after child care, it was recommended the [Child Care Licensing Regulation](#) be aligned with the *School Act and Independent School Act*. Many recommended that schools work with child care providers to create a seamless day of learning for children, recognizing that children are learning all the time.

## **Human Resources**

Hiring qualified, experienced, and dedicated staff to teach full day kindergarten, particularly in year one of implementation, was raised as another key consideration for success. Forum participants recommended that school districts and independent schools work with the [British Columbia Public School Employers Association](#) and local unions to ensure highly qualified kindergarten teachers are employed. For example, job postings could require certification or expertise in early childhood development or early childhood education.

Participants discussed the important role that post-secondary institutions play in the training of new teachers to support quality full day kindergarten. As well, specific training and professional development was recommended for existing teachers who will be delivering the full day program. Participants felt that school districts and independent schools should support the professional development of staff by hosting summer institutes on early learning for teachers, and/or encouraging participation in certificate and diploma programs at post-secondary

institutions. Hiring and developing qualified teachers to work with Aboriginal children, students with special needs, and English as a second language students in full day kindergarten was strongly recommended.

Mentoring was a commonly mentioned theme at the forum. Many attendees recommended that a network be created among full day kindergarten practitioners. A dedicated website, online blogs, site visits, and partnering new teachers with experienced teachers were suggested to facilitate ongoing dialogue. It was recommended that staff implementing the program in year one share their experiences and lessons learned with staff implementing in year two.

### **Full Day Kindergarten Program**

Attendees at the forum noted that a full day will provide more opportunities to support student success. Specifically, the full day schedule will enable more time to be dedicated for:

- teachers to meet the individual needs of all children,
- children to interact with their peers,
- greater access of school facilities (e.g. gym, library),
- increased physical activity and outdoor play,
- extended project and problem-based learning,
- more music, drama, art, dance, and information technology; and
- greater involvement of parents, families, and elders.

Discussion also focused on preserving the positive aspects of the existing full day kindergarten programs. Many recommended maintaining culture and language in the full day kindergarten program, particularly for Aboriginal and English as second language (ESL) students, to foster a sense of belonging in their community and school. Inviting and collaborating with First Nations elders to discuss how to support children's learning was identified as a successful practice in many districts and independent schools. Many noted that the language rich environments that exist in full day ESL programs benefit all children, and mentioned the importance that classrooms be designed to support the individual needs of children.

Most notably, participants and presenters stated that a rich, play-based kindergarten environment supports oral language and emergent literacy development, creativity, problem-solving, social interaction—all critical for success in Grade 1 and beyond.

Participants were asked to generate ideas and discuss important considerations to be included in a program guide for full day kindergarten. The ideas generated will be used to guide the development of that resource. It was recommended that the Ministry incorporate the new program guide into the existing [Primary Program: A Framework for Teaching](#) document. The [British Columbia Early Learning Framework](#) was also identified as a useful resource, as well as the [Making Linkages](#) document which identifies the connections between the *BC Early Learning Framework* to the *Primary Program: A Framework for Teaching*. Many recommended using the [Kindergarten Learning Project](#) assessment and support materials that offer tools and strategies to help kindergarten teachers, parents, and school administrators support children's learning.