

## WE BELIEVE

- learning begins at birth and a child's earliest experiences and environment set the stage for his or her ongoing development, well being, and success in school and life
- all children are competent, creative, and capable thinkers, and a responsive continuum of learning from the earliest years through the primary grades supports their development
- learning happens when individuals are observing, questioning, experimenting and communicating with others
- it takes a team to educate a child and strong partnerships are essential

## PARTNERSHIPS

### Vision: Each child at the centre of responsive decision making

For over twenty years, YRDSB has actively worked to create partnerships with families, community agencies and support services to make this vision a reality.

We have:

- on-site child care in over 170 schools and strong working relationships with over 30 childcare providers
- more than 30 Regional All Our Kids (AOK), Community Action Program for Children (CAPC), Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) and Best Start Hub programs
- five Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLC) that help families gain a sense of familiarity and comfort with the school system and an opportunity to build healthy parent-child attachment and engagement

We also have a strong working relationship with:

- Regional Municipality of York
  - Early Intervention Services (EIS)
  - Children's Services
  - Nutrition Services
  - Dental Services
  - Child and Family Health Services, Healthy Babies, Healthy Children
- York Region Pre-School Speech and Language Program
- Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention Program
- Infant Hearing Program
- Positive Parenting Program (Triple P)
- Food for Learning
- Children's Mental Health
- Ontario Association of Optometrists, *Eye See, Eye Learn*
- Seneca College - Early Childhood Education

These relationships provide additional supports and services for those children and families who may have specialized needs as they transition into school. The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) plays a vital role in providing specific information, advice, and assistance to families. Also, as a member of Children's Treatment Network and York ASD Partnership, we work closely with all partners within these organizations.

The implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten brings home, school and child care together to provide young children with an integrated day of learning. Moving forward, our Early Years Strategy will continue to strengthen partnerships and relationships which benefit all YRDSB children and families.

## INTENTIONAL PLAY BASED LEARNING

**Playful** and engaging while being very well **planned** and **purposeful**. Planning begins with knowing each young learner to allow us to respond with purposeful assessment and instruction which is differentiated as needed.

- YRDSB

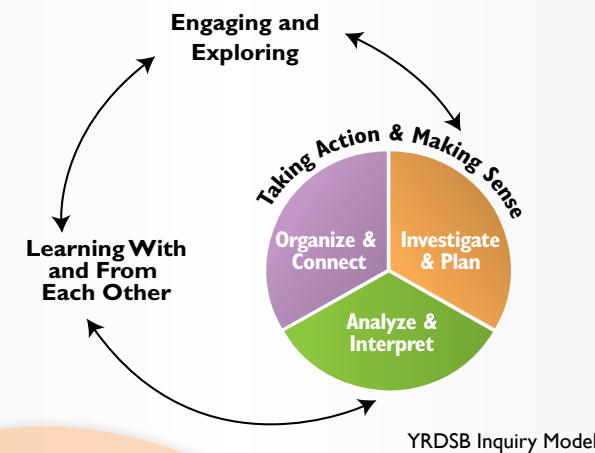
There is now evidence that neural pathways in children's brains are influenced and advanced in their development through exploration, thinking skills, problem solving, and language expression that occur during play.

*Council of Minister of Education of Canada (CMEC)  
Statement on Play Based Learning*

## LEARNING THROUGH INQUIRY

Inquiry capitalizes on children's natural curiosity and their desire to make sense of their environment. Inquiry skills are integrated and woven into many learning opportunities in the classroom.

This understanding of inquiry based learning is in alignment with our YRDSB inquiry model seen below.



## RESOURCES

To access Early Years Resources:  
**Parents:**  
[www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/parents](http://www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/parents)  
**Early Years Professionals:**  
[www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/earlyyears](http://www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/earlyyears)  
**YRDSB Staff:**  
 visit the BWW and search Early Years

**YORK REGION  
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**  
 60 Wellington Street West  
 Box 40, Aurora, Ontario  
 L4G 3H2

**P** 905.727.0022  
[yrdsb.edu.on.ca](http://yrdsb.edu.on.ca)  
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# EARLY YEARS STRATEGY BIRTH TO GRADE THREE



## VISION

Each child at the centre of responsive decision making

LEARNING THROUGH INQUIRY

**Partners** YRDSB Early Years Strategy defines the term "partners" as all those who impact the child's life. This includes families, early childhood setting staff, community and health services and support staff, and school teams – Teachers, Designated Early Childhood Educators, Educational Assistants, Special Education Resource Teachers, Board Resource staff, Principals, Vice-Principals.

# EARLY YEARS STRATEGY BIRTH TO GRADE THREE

## FAMILY IS A CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER

### Building Collaborative Culture

#### We believe that...

**If** we enhance and grow trusting relationships among all partners and we assume collective responsibility for our children's success and well-being **then** children will be well supported in all aspects of their lives.

**Research Says** "A strong and equal partnership with education supports a lifelong learning approach from birth, encourages smooth transitions for children and recognizes early childhood education and care as an important part of the education process". (*Starting Strong and Early Childhood Education and Care, OECD 2001*)

#### Building Collaborative Culture Looks Like

- All partners working together from a shared vision of success and well being in terms of social, emotional, physical and cognitive growth to support development of the "whole child"
- On-going, reciprocal communication occurring between all partners providing integrated, responsive and coordinated supports
- All partners regularly coming together to engage in dialogue and collaborative work that builds upon the unique strengths of each child

#### What We Do

- Educator teams work together, building on each other's strengths and expertise, supporting children and families as they transition across the grades
- Educator teams actively participate in collaborative study and inquiry-based research to continually improve practice
- Educator teams document learning through video, photographs and written text to make learning visible to all
- Child care partners provide quality early learning programs to support children's healthy development while meeting the care needs of families

#### Our Next Steps

- School leaders work with partners in the school building to establish shared norms and practices around the use of common spaces, resources and equipment to best meet the strengths, needs and interests of children (e.g. *develop a school based early years team to work collaboratively and share in decision making*)
- Child care, parenting program staff and school teams meet together regularly and work deliberately to strengthen collaborative partnerships focusing on the success, well-being and growth of each child
- School teams identify potential barriers to collaboration within diverse communities and then access support and develop strategies to address them

### Building Capacity, Learning Together

#### We believe that...

**If** all individuals supporting children and families have the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to meet the diverse strengths, needs and interests of each child **then** children will experience growth, success and well-being.

**Research Says** "Society's support for early child development is dependent on the understanding and appreciation among all members of society of the fundamental importance of the early period of human development." (*The Early Years Study, McCain & Mustard, p.172, 1999*)

#### Building Capacity Looks Like

- All partners sharing expertise, knowledge and information to set the stage for ongoing learning and growth
- Collaborative study and inquiry-based research being used to create new shared knowledge and expertise to continually improve teaching and learning
- Additional supports being provided in a timely and integrated fashion to ensure success for each child, including students with exceptionalities and English language learners

#### What We Do

- School leaders promote supportive environments, encourage reflective practice and participate in opportunities for school teams to learn together
- School leaders provide collaborative inquiry and other professional learning opportunities to build the school team's capacity which supports transitions to new grades
- School board provides opportunities to share new learning from collaborative inquiry across schools to build greater understanding of evidence based practices
- Speech-Language Pathologists (S-LPs) support FDK teams in their classrooms to thread oral language and literacy throughout the flow of the day in meaningful authentic ways

#### Our Next Steps

- Educators and system leaders continue to engage in research through classroom, school study and surveys to identify effective practices and support ongoing improvement in teaching and learning
- System and school leaders support educator teams in the purposeful use of a variety of tools to document and assess learning and plan next steps
- Community partners and YRDSB staff engage in shared professional learning opportunities and networks for Kindergarten to Grade Three, ensuring support for those new to the role
- Ongoing training for Roots of Empathy instructors (Designated Early Childhood Educators and Educational Assistants) to support school programs
- System leaders support school leaders in alignment of Early Years Strategy and School Improvement Planning

### Building Creative, Capable, Competent Thinkers

#### We believe that...

**If** all the worlds of the child support a strong foundation in communication, problem solving, mathematics and literacy **then** children will continue to grow as creative, capable, competent and contributing members of society.

**Research Says** Effective educators are powerful mediators of children's thinking and learning. They design learning environments that intentionally stimulate children's thinking, curiosity, creativity and engagement. (*Adapted from Salmon, 2010*)

#### Building Creative, Capable and Competent Thinkers Looks Like

- Each child using his/her innate sense of curiosity and discovery as a starting point for new thinking, problem solving and learning
- Each child communicating his/her thinking with wonder, joy and delight as he/she learns from meaningful and engaging experiences that include a variety of materials
- Each child communicating effectively through his/her interactions with responsive, attentive conversation partners who respond with intentionality to guide their thinking

#### What We Do

- Educator teams and children carefully construct the learning environment using open-ended, culturally responsive materials to promote self-regulation, creativity, active engagement and deep thinking
- Educators responsively embed authentic opportunities for literacy and mathematical learning throughout the day as the children engage in play based inquiry learning
- Educators strategically use prompts and open ended questions to support the growing development of oral language and complexity of thought
- Partners provide a continuum of early intervention supports and programs (*both board and community*) to enhance the learning of our most vulnerable students
- Educators honour diverse experiences and first languages and build upon cultural and linguistic strengths to promote engagement, deep thinking and learning for all

#### Our Next Steps

- Educator teams repeat, rethink and remove practices based on current evidence-based research
- Educators and parents engage in differentiated professional learning opportunities to support oral language development, based on strengths and needs of each child
- Partners collaboratively design and construct outdoor learning spaces to support inquiry, exploration, physical growth and well being
- Parents and schools establish shared goals and participate in joint activities which promote two-way capacity building and support increasing student achievement and success



### Building Continuity

#### We believe that...

**If** we establish links and reciprocity among programs and environments and we promote continuity in the delivery of education, care, and family supports **then** all children will experience smooth successful transitions.

**Research Says** "Parents and families are the first and most powerful influence on children's early learning and development. Young children and their families live in communities that shape early experiences. Early learning programs need reciprocal partnerships with parents, families and communities". (*ELECT, 2007, p.4*)

#### Building Continuity Looks Like

- Integrating and coordinating early years settings and providing environments and services that address local needs and priorities
- All partners actively working together to develop coherence and continuity in programs, across the child's day, through ongoing, active and reciprocal communication and participation
- Intentionally planning transitions from early childhood experiences to kindergarten and from kindergarten to primary grades to promote continued success along the learning continuum

#### What We Do

- Kindergarten supported entry activities, events and multi-lingual resources (e.g. Welcome to Kindergarten Program and Building Blocks for Kindergarten) are collaboratively developed and implemented with family, parenting and childcare staff
- Educator teams across primary grades (K-3) work together with partners to maintain ongoing communication, sharing and smooth transitions
- Educator teams (K-3) collaborate with community partners (e.g. Early Intervention Services, Children's Treatment Network, Children's Mental Health) and families to provide a continuum of teaching and learning that supports each child's strengths, needs and interests

#### Our Next Steps

- Development of standard practice in use of JK/SK Parent/Guardian Questionnaire (registration) in order to provide opportunity for voluntary self-identification of First Nation, Metis and Inuit students, and accurate identifications of English language learners and students with exceptionalities
- Childcare, parenting program staff and school teams collaboratively develop beginning and end of day routines for our youngest students
- Information about a child's progress and next steps is shared at each transition
- School teams and Community Partners plan services and family supports using community EDI (Early Development Instrument) data as a starting point
- Ongoing professional learning for K-3 Literacy@School educators ensures alignment with priorities and actions
- System leaders and school leaders continue to facilitate opportunities for school staff and partners to learn from each other