



Update on Kindergarten Transition Supports for Young Learners

To: Program and School Services Committee

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Report No.: 10-22-4417

Strategic Directions

- Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs
- Transform Student Learning
- Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students

Recommendation

It is recommended that update on Kindergarten Transition Supports for Young Learners report be received.

Context

The early years are a profoundly important period during which experiences and environments strongly influence childhood development. Relationships are critical in the early years as it is through these relationships that young children make sense of their world.

Whether virtually or in person, the return to school after a break or starting school for the very first time is a significant transition for young children. Every child is unique and comes to school with different experiences, interests and needs. With that in mind, early years educators strive to create a school experience that honours the gifts that each child brings to school, removes barriers and considers the use of intentional strategies to ensure that every child experiences a seamless transition as they enter school.

In Kindergarten, young learners learn through exploration, play and inquiry. Active learning experiences help children develop skills and behaviours that support continuous growth in innovation, creativity and problem-solving skills. Optimal programming for young learners is through relationships that create opportunities for

such exploration, play and inquiry experiences. These core areas of early childhood are the focus of the system supports provided for educators, families and students to prepare for a new school year.

Outlined below are supports that were in place to assist new kindergarten children to transition to school in September 2022.

Welcome to Kindergarten Sessions (Spring 2022)

Welcome to Kindergarten events typically take place in the Spring each year. These events, held across all elementary schools in the system, welcome families and children to the school, and outline experiences and procedures that will support transitions. Welcome to Kindergarten sessions were planned with the recognition that our current young learners had fewer outside-of-the home experiences than previous groups of children entering school. As such, participation in many schools included community partners (e.g., EarlyON, Child Care partners) residing in schools that coordinated transition support. Welcome to Kindergarten begins to build child, family and community partnerships that support successful transitions to school and encourage ongoing communication between home and school.

Oral Language and Family Caregiver Site

The Early Years Department, in partnership with Speech-Language, has created the [TDSB Family/Caregiver site](#) which includes information related to the TDSB Framework for Early Reading and strategies to support students' oral language and literacy skills as they talk, read, play and write at home. Students' use of their oral language to demonstrate their learning is key to the work involved in early reading enjoyment and fluency. This focus on oral language as a key aspect of literacy learning builds on children's existing strengths as they transition to school and to reading and writing experiences.

Ongoing Supports for Educators

Transitions Documents

The Early Years Department has created transition support documents for both educators and administrators with suggestions to support the transition to school. Both sets of documents can be accessed through the TDSB Early Years Website.

Early Years Google Site for Educators

The Early Years Google Site has been created as a central space for educators to access information, resources and support connected to all areas of the kindergarten program (both in-person and virtual). This site is updated regularly with ongoing professional learning and key research highlights that focus on promoting the joy in learning in kindergarten as a focus in sustaining relationships and promoting successful transitions.

New to Kindergarten

Sparkling Joyful and Playful Learning in Kindergarten was a professional learning session held at the end of the 2021-22 school year and focused on supporting

educators new to kindergarten with creating engaging learning experiences for students while also considering strategies for supporting the transition to school. Educators reflected on how our youngest learners have experienced their earliest experiences through a pandemic and lockdown and how to create a sense of belonging and engagement as they consider the flow of the day, the learning environment and partnering with families and communities.

Kindergarten iPad Initiative

To honour the skills and knowledge gained during the pandemic and to bridge learning experiences and opportunities gained in different learning environments, all kindergarten spaces were provided with a set of iPads. The use of iPads enhance early literacy behaviours and support local and global literacy connections. Professional learning for educators accompanied the iPads to enrich their understanding of how digital play and connections with families are vital for students to make sense of their experiences, reconnect with peers, and promote their own well-being.

Summer Learning Experiences:

Inspired to Excel Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program

In partnership with the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, the "Inspired to Excel" Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Summer Learning program was stationed at nine different Board sites across the city, supporting 157 students. This program cultivates a sense of self-awareness, positive identity development and belonging in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students. In addition, students and families engaged in rich and culturally relevant learning experiences with community-based arts educators. Through these sessions, students learned about Africentricity and were able to extend their understanding of self by exploring methods of creative expression. Although these summer programs have been important since their inception, they have taken on extra value in supporting the transition of children who were pre-schoolers during the pandemic into school.

Summer Learning Experiences (backpacks)

Approximately 2050 Year 2 (Senior Kindergarten/SK) and 1773 Year 1 (Junior Kindergarten/JK) students, across 52 early intervention schools were provided with backpacks full of rich and intentional early years resources for students and their families that centred children's unique identities and lived experiences. Providing fun, engaging, meaningful learning opportunities where children and families have opportunities to talk and support literate play and experience joy is essential. Play is the best way for children to explore, learn and engage with literacy. The Summer Learning Backpacks supported children transitioning from home during the pandemic to school.

Summer Kindergarten Academy

This summer, over 182 kindergarten educators participated in a summer Kindergarten Institute that focused on building family-centred partnerships in order to better support the transition from home to school for children and their families.

Through the support of Apple Learning Specialists, participants engaged in using the iPad to curate stories of identity and culture and amplify the voice of their learners and honour family and community relationships. This focus on family partnerships is key to successful school transitions.

Capturing Joy in Learning in Kindergarten

The Early Literacy Intervention Team (ELIT) supported the transition to kindergarten in 52 Early Intervention Schools for the first two weeks of school. Educators were asked to use digital tools (e.g., iPads) to document moments of joy in learning in kindergarten. Noticing and naming joy in kindergarten classrooms supported transitions, promoted self-regulation and helped to sustain engagement in all aspects of kindergarten. The learning documented by the ELIT educators will be used to support the development of resources to support all kindergarten educators.

Partnerships

Intentional cross-department and inter-professional partnerships continue to be a focus for supporting transitions in kindergarten. These partnerships provide coherence of expectations and alignment of practices to support all learners. Partnerships with Professional Support Staff, French Immersion, Settlement and Community Support Workers are just some departments that will work together to ease transitions and welcome all students and families in early years classrooms.

Priorities for the current school year included classrooms focusing on learning through relationships and play and inquiry-based learning to support young learners as they transition to formal school experiences. Providing opportunities for social interaction where students can experience joy in their learning and honouring time for students to process these experiences is critical in mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on our youngest learners.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

Support of young children's learning is on-going through the school year.

Resource Implications

Continuous supports and resources are based on the approval of the budget annually by the Board of Trustees.

Communications Considerations

N/A

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

PO22: Early Learning and Care

PR 696: Kindergarten Registration Procedure

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