The Early Development Instrument (EDI) in British Columbia: Documenting Impact and Action in Schools, Communities and Early Childhood Development
ABSTRACT

Since the Early Development Instrument (EDI) was implemented in British Columbia in 2001, many early learning initiatives have been undertaken with significant financial investment and intersectoral coalition effort. School districts have become involved in community coalitions by cooperatively planning and implementing new programs. Government has funded innovative school initiatives and extended the education mandate to include children from birth to age five. This study addresses the question of whether targeted community-based initiatives can reduce vulnerabilities, as identified by the EDI, prior to school entry. The study investigates neighbourhoods and/or communities in 10 school districts where EDI results have identified reduced vulnerabilities. These school districts applied to be part of the study, as each believed that newly-implemented ECD programs were responsible for the improved EDI results. The study uses narrative to document promising program practices and their perceived impact on families, child development and social issues; it provides evidence of effective practice through participatory and reflective methodologies resulting in new insights for policy makers in school districts and communities.
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Our early childhood experiences influence health, well-being, learning and behaviour for the rest of our lives. Until recently in Canada, the implications of this were left to families to cope with on their own. Since 2001, HELP has been trying to make quality early childhood experiences a public issue. We have tried to show Canadians that community and society have a role to play in helping families ensure that these experiences support healthy early child development and do not undermine it.

Our work with the Early Development Instrument (EDI) has demonstrated large, and largely avoidable, differences in the state of early child development across neighbourhoods in British Columbia. We now understand that these large differences are due to the quality of the early experiences that each child enjoys or suffers. As our work has unfolded it became clear that these differences were not solely attributable to family social and economic conditions. Some communities were simply providing better early childhood experiences than others. Moreover, providing EDI data to local communities has served as a litmus test, showing that the capacity of different communities to mobilize around early childhood varies greatly.

That is why the work described in this Report is so important. Understanding how society can best support families and children in their early years is a multi-faceted task. One of the key tasks is to work backwards from communities that are clearly making progress (based upon positive changes in EDI scores over time) and asking "why?". The ten case studies included here follow this approach and are rich in insights that help answer the "why" question. Some insights can be easily abstracted and applied other places. Others are more context-specific, but provide the reader with implicit understandings of how success unfolds in real community contexts.

I am confident that the insights in this Report will help communities across Canada provide better experiences for our youngest children.

About the Human Early Learning Partnership
The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) is an interdisciplinary collaborative research institute that is directing a world-leading contribution to new understandings of and approaches to early child development.

Directed by Dr Clyde Hertzman, HELP is a partnership of over 200 faculty, researchers and graduate students from six BC Universities:

- The University of British Columbia
- University of Victoria
- Simon Fraser University
- University of Northern British Columbia
- University of British Columbia Okanagan
- Thompson Rivers University

HELP’s mission is to create, promote and apply knowledge through interdisciplinary research to help children thrive.

Human Early Learning Partnership
University of British Columbia
4th Floor, Library Processing Centre
2206 East Mall
Vancouver BC V6T 1Z3
Tel: 604-822-1278
Fax: 604-822-0640
E-mail: earlylearning@ubc.ca
Website: www.earlylearning.ubc.ca
Mapping Portal: ecdportal.help.ubc.ca
Introduction
I am pleased to present a unique, qualitative study that chronicles the voices of school and community leaders and practitioners from ten communities in British Columbia. The study is significant for a number of reasons:

- The documented programs were specifically implemented as a result of concern about initial EDI results in Wave 1; the programs described in the study were applied in an effort to enhance early learning opportunities for young children and their families, and thereby reduce EDI vulnerability scores. The EDI data (in the 10 communities) in Wave 2 revealed a reduction in vulnerabilities in the neighbourhoods where the programs interventions were applied over a three- to five-year period.

- Most participants in the study believed that the early learning programs they initiated were responsible for a reduction in the vulnerabilities of young children in their communities – as documented in the EDI (Early Development Instrument) results.

- The study uses narrative as the vehicle for participants to tell their stories. The narrative approach to qualitative research provides an opportunity for the researcher(s) to consider and propose theories but also invites readers to engage with the narrative and draw their own conclusions.

- The stories provide compelling evidence about social change attributed by participants to the EDI data and resulting program interventions. These interventions may be replicable in other communities.

The study is the result of a partnership between the Association of BC School Trustees, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) and the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP).

I wish to acknowledge and thank:

- The Canadian Council on Learning for funding and supporting this research;

- The BC School Trustees for the efforts they have made to respond to the EDI data by collaborating with community coalitions – even before the early learning mandate was announced by the government in 2005. The policy lessons learned will be invaluable to others;

- The 10 school districts that met the criteria to be part of the study and the 13 others that applied; participating in a research study such as this brings additional pressures to bear on the system; but, it provides researchers and others with rich learning opportunities. Thank you for your time, commitment and cooperation.
Introduction (cont’d)

- Dr. Clyde Hertzman and the staff at HELP for visionary leadership in implementing the EDI initiative and, therefore, providing the data that have supported these examples of community mobilization;

- Neil Hughes, co-researcher, for ably managing and coordinating complex school district and community communications. Thanks as well to research team members Maureen Dockendorf and Pamela Quigg for their insightful interviews and resulting written narratives

Janet N. Mort  
Researcher: School-based Initiatives  
HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership)
Background
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

HELP has been collaborating with all 59 school districts in BC to implement a population-based study using the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a standardized measure of child development, which covers five key domains that strongly influence school success. Since 1999, HELP has collected school readiness data on over 90% of kindergarten children in the province and is mapping EDI results and socio-demographic characteristics for all BC communities. In response, school districts, with their community intersectoral coalitions, have been re-aligning resources and establishing new ECD programs to respond where there are high proportions of vulnerable children. This project will analyze findings from eight communities or neighborhoods where statistically significant positive change has taken place in EDI results over the three-year cycle, and where significant efforts have been made to implement programs that respond to the identified vulnerabilities.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to:

• Enter a partnership with the BC School Trustees Association to engage in the process of examining school district/community projects that appear to be enhancing opportunities for child development and therefore child outcomes in the early years.

• Engage in Change Map analysis with communities.

• Identify neighborhoods or communities where intervention programs have been established that appear to be reducing the level of vulnerability of students as measured by the EDI.

• Conduct an in-depth study of ten of those identified neighborhoods or communities, analyzing their projects to determine which interventions, parenting programs and/or care arrangements have enhanced literacy, learning opportunities, and school readiness for preschool children who are vulnerable in the five domains as measured by EDI.

CCL APPROVAL

A revised project proposal was submitted to the Canadian Council on Learning on December 8, 2006 and subsequently approved by Sonia Guerriero, Senior Research Analyst/Project Manager, CCL. An interim report was submitted to Dr. Guerriero at the end of December, 2007.
Executive Summary
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL DISTRICT</th>
<th>SUMMARY OF SITE VISITS: BCSTA PROJECT</th>
<th>EDI REDUCTION IN VULNERABILITIES: Baseline (Wave 0/Wave 1) to Wave 2 by Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD19 Revelstoke: Whole district</td>
<td>This district, although small, has highly organized intersectoral and community-based coalitions in place in support of early learning and strong literacy skills in its preschool population. Business organizations, community health, and district staff have combined to initiate and fund on-going programs for preschool children and their families. The Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy is one among many of the intersectoral organizations currently operating in this district. District staff members are fully involved in community-agency and preschool initiatives in this district. EDI findings show that Revelstoke has the lowest recorded vulnerability in its preschool population of any district throughout the province. District staff members attribute this finding to the strong community-based system already in place throughout this district in support of early learning.</td>
<td>District-wide: Phys: -0.47 Soc: -0.95 Emo: -1.62 Lang &amp; Cog: -8.36 Com: -3.87 Ever-risk: -7.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD23 Central Okanagan: Preschool connections</td>
<td>This district is committed to early-childhood development and programming. The district offers ongoing in-service and peer coaching to 13 preschools, and district personnel work directly with preschool teachers to develop effective teaching strategies and to ensure smooth transitions between preschool and kindergarten. The strong partnership between the preschool and kindergarten systems has yielded positive results: some preschool places are made available free of charge to vulnerable children, and early literacy skills are tackled in a truly developmental way in many of Central Okanagan’s preschools. Support of early childhood programming is strong enough that many stakeholders express the view that ministry funding should at least in part be directed towards preschool education. The district also has set up screening of its kindergarten population (with the use of the Early Literacy Intervention Screener Test). Preschool operators have expressed an interest in using the screener. Strong intersectoral coalitions exist in this district. CATCH (Community Action Towards Children’s Health), although only one of many interagency coalitions, is notable: this organization acts as a catalyst for collaborative community action.</td>
<td>Lang &amp; Cog: vulnerabilities have dropped in 16 out of 21 neighborhoods by as much as -19.3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Burnaby has highly effective intersectoral coalitions in place in its district. The intersectoral Burnaby Early Childhood Development Community Table steers preschool and family-strengthening initiatives, programs and services. Members of this committee include community-agency staff, MCFD, City staff, school district staff, community health services, public library, and United Way. Numerous early-literacy and family-centred programs are already well entrenched in this district, and a number of family-oriented, multipurpose hubs have been established in district schools to provide a fully integrated service model to Burnaby’s preschool population. A reduction in vulnerabilities between Wave 1 and Wave 2 findings was recorded in those areas where Family Literacy Centres had been established. District staff members are pleased with these findings, as reducing vulnerability in a district struggling to accommodate an increasing immigrant, refugee, and non English-speaking population presents challenges.

Intersectoral community-based coalitions in this district are strong and broad based. The Tri Cities Community Development Committee is an intersectoral coalition dedicated to coordinating early-childhood services and programs in School District 43. Services and programs are designed specifically to target the needs of refugee and immigrant populations in the Burquitlam Corridor. Mountain View Elementary School has become a dedicated ECD hub, providing comprehensive community-based services to families and preschool children in the Burquitlam Corridor area. Many children in this area are not literate in either their first language or English, and most require extensive support. SHARE partnered with ISS (Immigrant Services Society) to provide services and programs for immigrant and refugee families.

The Tri Cities Integration Project was initiated in 2007. It is a highly cooperative and collaborative organization concerned with assisting government-assisted refugee families living in the Burquitlam Corridor. District staff responded vigorously to Wave 1 EDI findings, and immediately put in place the services of literacy-support teachers in those schools identified as vulnerable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SD43 Coquitlam (cont’d)</th>
<th>MCFD, Fraser Health, CCRR, SHARE, and SUCCESS all worked collaboratively to establish early-childhood initiatives and programs throughout the Burquitlam Corridor. EDI findings in Wave 2 showed reduced vulnerabilities in children registered in schools throughout the Burquitlam Corridor. However, maintaining sustainable funding is still an issue that needs to be addressed. The Board of Education is seeking clarity from the Ministry regarding preschool funding and utilization of school space.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD46 Sunshine Coast: Whole district</td>
<td>The School District plays a significant role in early childhood programming throughout the Sunshine Coast. A literacy support teacher, employed by the school district, offers a wide variety of programs for pre-natal through to kindergarten-aged children. In collaboration with inter-sectoral groups, multiple offerings are provided in many venues. Key programs include the development and implementation of a continuum of support for parents of children from birth to age five. Programs include Supporting Parents About Readiness for Kindergarten (SPARK!), kinderSPARK!, and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. There is a very high level of parent and child involvement in all programs offered throughout the Sunshine Coast. District-wide, the EDI indicates a drop of vulnerability for four of the five domains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD 51 Boundary: Whole district</td>
<td>This is a fairly small, rural district. It has had a strong inter-sectoral and multi-agency system in place for the support of early childhood learning for a number of years to date. Both local community agencies and district staff are fully committed to early learning initiatives and to the development of strong literacy skills in the district's preschool population. Early learning initiatives and programs are coordinated under the auspices of the Boundary Integrated Service Model Community Table, or BISM. BISM was established in 2001 and assumes responsibility for the integration and operation of numerous community, preschool, and early-learning programs. The district is a core partner with BISM, and provides space and funding for BISM programs and initiatives. Each school in this district has a family centre, or “HUB” in full operational service.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| District-wide: | **Phys:** -1.04  
**Soc:** -2.84  
**Emo:** -0.61  
**Ever-risk:** -4.27  
| **District-wide:** | **Soc:** -0.91  
**Lang & Cog:** -1.98  
**Ever-risk:** -0.88  
While the improvements appear to be small, this district is 4th lowest in vulnerabilities and 4th highest in achievement in spite of a very low SES. **Geographically this is the only community embraced by green.** |
### SD 51 Boundary (cont’d)

Hubs run health classes, parenting courses, play centres, childcare, literacy programs, and extensive library facilities. Hubs offer fully integrated educational, health, social, and family services. Wave 2 of EDI findings show low levels of vulnerability for the Boundary preschool. (The District is 4th lowest in vulnerabilities in the Province.).

### SD 71 Comox: Glacier View neighbourhood

Numerous, strong coalition partnerships exist in this district. Two examples of coalitions are the Comox Valley Child Development Association and Pacific Care. Both of these organizations provide education, family support, community activities, and early-learning programs to preschoolers and families throughout the district. Childcare and preschool agencies operating in the Glacier View neighbourhood are thought to be a significant contributor to the reduction of vulnerability noted in the EDI results.

The district also supports an outreach program, in which an outreach worker visits families in outlying areas to provide support, counseling, and information regarding available programs. District staff members work closely with all community agencies in this district. The Comox Valley Literacy Advisory Council combines both district and community actions into one united service. District 71 used EDI findings to help generate early-learning initiatives.

District staff members now create educational profiles for each child entering kindergarten. Results of combined district and community efforts are encouraging: a 26.21% overall reduction in vulnerability has been recorded at Glacier View Elementary, and a 16.5% overall reduction has been recorded in the Glacier View neighbourhood.

### SD 75 Mission: Interagency HUB at West Heights

Mission has highly effective and committed coalition partnerships in place in support of early-learning and early-literacy initiatives and programming. District staff members are fully involved in community-based coalitions and inter-agency programs. The hub already in operation at West Heights is an inclusive, neighbourhood-based organization that offers health and education services, family and childcare programs, and early learning and literacy programs. “Hub on a Bus” is a mobile, inter-agency program designed to reach and support hard-to-reach families in outlying areas.

### Glacier View neighbourhood:

- Phys: -8
- Soc: -24.7
- Emo: -2.9
- Lang & Cog: -24.6
- Comm: -2.2
- Ever-risk: -16.5

### West Heights neighbourhood:

- Phys: -5.8
- Soc: -2.7
- Emo: -0.8
- Lang & Cog: -1.4
- Ever-risk: -11.3
### SD75 Mission (cont’d)
Mission put concrete programs in place following the results of Wave 1 EDI findings, and a clear reduction in vulnerabilities was subsequently seen in Wave 2 findings. (A reduction in all five domains was noted.) Active members of all community-agency coalitions have recorded increased parental interest and support of early-learning initiatives and literacy programs, and kindergarten teachers in this district are also fully involved in preschool and inter-agency literacy initiatives and programming.

### SD79 Cowichan Valley: Lake Cowichan neighbourhood
This district is geographically widespread, with 63% of its population living in rural areas, and many of its children requiring transportation to reach schools. After Wave 1 EDI findings were published, the provincial government requested that Lake Cowichan neighbourhood instigated some reform in the coordination of its community-based initiatives and the delivery of its early-learning programming. Subsequently, this neighbourhood established a strong outreach system, in which community-agency personnel were assigned to visit schools and outlying families, and to work proactively within preschool settings. School District personnel are very supportive and fully involved with community-based intersectoral coalitions, and strong early-learning programs are now in place in this neighbourhood. Two (among many) coalitions in the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood are KAATZA Health and Lake Cowichan Community Services. A draft Memorandum of Understanding, along with the work of the district’s Early Learning Liaison Teacher, have played a significant contribution in providing efficient and responsive services for preschool children and families in the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood. Considerable reductions in vulnerabilities have been noted between Wave 1 and Wave 2 of EDI findings in the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood.

### SD 85 Vancouver Island North: Whole district
Large geographic distances separate this district’s small communities, but extremely strong coalition partnerships unite them. District staff members participates fully in these coalitions: the district provides in-kind and other funding, has hired both a Literacy Support Teacher and an Early Learning Support Teacher, and meets regularly with all coalition partners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lake Cowichan neighbourhood:</th>
<th>District wide:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phys: -11.1</td>
<td>Phys: -10.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emo: -14.3</td>
<td>Emo: -11.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang &amp; Cog: -7.1</td>
<td>Lang &amp; Cog: -5.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com: -5.1</td>
<td>Com: -3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever-risk: -17.9</td>
<td>Ever-risk: -13.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD 85 Vancouver Island North: (cont’d)</strong></td>
<td>District staff members also work closely with First Nations Band personnel. One major coalition partner is the Mount Waddington Family Literacy Committee. Numerous community agencies participate in this committee, and funding is managed and disseminated fairly. Committee emphasis remains grounded in the development of early literacy. Another significant coalition partner is the Stepping Stones Centre. Government as well as local community funds support this organization. All coalition partners in this district share the Literacy Bus, which brings a mobile literacy program to outlying communities. Currently 96% of grade-three students in this district meet expected literacy levels. Vulnerability, as measured by the EDI has dropped in all five domains.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology
Methodology

Initially, the research team intended to use case study methodology as the preferred way to investigate and report the results of the study. Once the investigations were underway it became apparent, however, that narrative inquiry and analysis would be the most appropriate method to reflect the compelling and personal stories that the participants described in interviews – for the following reasons: Narrative is a method that is meant to communicate life’s experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways; narrative reflects a point of view within which the narrator describes a plot – configuring a series of actions, events and experiences as they have lived them. The subject of the research becomes the narrator as a connective medium (de Marrais and Lapan, 2004).

For these reasons, the researchers have chosen to report the narrators’ stories with minor edits so that the reader can interpret the described experiences themselves, as well as consider the interpretations provided by the researchers.


STAGE 1: Quantitative Data (Year 1)

The research base was the EDI assessment results for over forty school districts that have completed two cycles of the EDI instrument over a period of at least three years and the related maps that have been developed in each cycle. (Wave 1 included the results of 43,827 kindergarten students in 1,236 schools and Wave 2 included 36,407 students in 1,155 schools.) Of particular importance was the Change Maps that were completed in November 2006 by the HELP mapping unit. They showed changes in degrees of vulnerability in the course of the three years for each of the five domains: physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills.

STAGE 2: Qualitative Data - Survey (Year 1)

All districts in the province were surveyed and invited to participate in the project. If a significant reduction in vulnerability scores from Wave 1 to Wave 2 of the EDI occurred in any of the five domains, District personnel were asked whether they could propose an explanation for the change. (The change could occur in a neighbourhood, a part of the district or the whole district.) The survey was conducted by email and was followed by telephone interviews to establish details about perceptions of the reasons for the change. All explanations for change were noted (socioeconomic, immigration patterns, housing changes, etc.) but specifically the survey sought to identify communities or neighborhoods where program interventions were applied after Wave 1 in an effort to positively affect the vulnerability scores.
**STAGE 3:** Selection of ten sites by Consultative Process (Year 1)

A consultative process was formed to secure advice from members of the BC School Trustees Association to assist in the analysis of the information gathered in stages one and two. The purpose was to initially identify 10 districts/communities and specific neighborhoods where it appeared that promising practice in program development is addressing the needs of, and having a positive impact on, vulnerable children as indicated in the EDI Change Maps.

**STAGE 4:** On-site Visits and Telephone Interviews (Years 1 and 2)

Observations, Interviews, and Focus Groups: The sites selected were asked to participate in a two-year analysis of their program(s). Sites that agree to participate were required to engage in an interview process prior to formal agreements being signed, in order to establish a clear understanding of the parameters of the study, including ethics approvals through UBC. Once initial data was collected, a team of two researchers visited each site for two days for the purpose of observing programs, conducting interviews and focus groups with participants, and to collect data, including the results of other assessments than EDI that have been applied. Typical target groups for the research study on-site will include school district staff, and representatives from involved community agencies. Research questions addressed multiple perceptions and quantitative data was collected where it is available.

For school district staff and members of community agencies the research questions:

- Examined and monitored program implementation in the classroom, offerings to children and their families, the quality of offerings, and the impact of the program.
- Engaged staff (ECD staff, kindergarten teachers, administrators, district staff, librarians etc.) in reflective ways about their roles in the program.
- Elicited staff views about changes in the readiness of children who attend the program.
- Encouraged internal as well as external input from other agencies.
- Examined possible impact on school policies and procedures.
- Examined facility/equipment provisions.
- Explored the impact on the school and its relationship with services offered by the school district, the local community, and other agencies operating in the community.
- Documented interactions with community groups and the changes that occur as a result of any integration or co-location of services.
- Questioned insights about future policy development.

During the on-site visit, the team sought to identify additional data that needed to be collected in order to support findings.
Changes to the methodology from the original proposal included the following:

CONTACT WITH PARENTS AND CHILDREN:
These groups were not part of the proposal. Although the researchers thought they might be able to get some perceptions from these groups, they were not attempting to analyze satisfaction levels of parents and children. Due to geographic locations of selected sites, and cost of travel to the sites, the researchers had to reduce visits from three days to two days and, therefore, were not able to spend the time interviewing parents and caregivers.

SELECTION PROCESS:
Although the researchers had originally intended to engage scientific support from HELP, only ten districts indicating an interest in participating in the project met the criteria in the selection process. The researchers did, however, consult with a number of the mapping staff at HELP who provided Change Maps.

CONSULT WITH BCSTA AND HELP:
The project was discussed informally with personnel from both organizations.
Data Gathering and Analysis Plan
5 Data Gathering and Analysis Plan

**STAGE 1:** Quantitative Data (Year 1)

The Mapping Team from HELP was asked to meet with the lead researchers early in the process to ensure that the quantitative data resulting from the EDI analysis is clearly understood by all.

**STAGE 2:** Survey (Year 1)

The first stage of the data-gathering process – detail about program offerings in the province – was undertaken with funding provided by HELP and the Ministry of Education. It consists of a request for a description of programs that are being provided in school sites for early learners (aged 0 to 5) in four key program areas. Funding was also secured for the second step of this process, which was the follow-up interview by a highly skilled educator. A template of the information required guided the questioning and included: a description of the program and its participants; the objectives of the program; efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of the program; funding for the program; the match between the program description and objectives with the literature review and the purposes of this proposal. The descriptions of these programs were analyzed by the research team in determining the selection of the 10 sites.

**STAGE 3:** Selection of 10 sites (Year 1)

The researchers examined and discuss the EDI data and related Change Maps and analyzed the possible connection to the analysis of the program descriptions.

It was intended that initially 15 sites would be selected and ranked in order of priority for the research study. It was expected that every effort would be made to create a balanced selection by taking into consideration the following factors: geography; socio-economic data; cultural/ethnic considerations; and urban/rural issues. The ten final districts selected were invited to participate in the project. If any declined the invitation the next in the ranking was to be approached. However, all ten of the selected districts agreed to participate in the project.
**STAGE 4:** Analysis During On-site Visits (Years 1 and 2)

A telephone interview was conducted prior to signing of the formal agreement and subsequent on-site visits to ensure there was clarity with respect to the following: understanding the conceptual framework of the study; focusing the study for that site; clarifying purpose; setting boundaries; and developing the basis of the individual plan to address the unique circumstances of each site. In certain circumstances, a centralized meeting was held at the outset of the project for the lead persons from each site.

Qualitative data analysis was employed throughout the data collection process in an inductive way to begin the process of determining key findings or generating theory. An interviewer’s log documented initial and growing impressions throughout the study, emerging themes, summaries of collected data at periodic times and unanswered questions. Participants were asked to respond to emerging interpretations, themes and relationships to help clarify thinking as the analysis took shape.

Notes, tapes, documents and other data were coded into meaningful categories related to the central purpose of the research in order to identify patterns and relationships.

**STAGE 5:** Analysis

The research team attempted to gather all relevant data related to the socio-economic variables, economic conditions, immigration patterns, census reports, etc. that might explain the changes in EDI scores in order to attempt to disentangle program content effects from other potentially influential factors. These factors were also discussed with knowledgeable community members and the local coalition to explore views of local conditions that might affect EDI results. The results of all of the data analysis were presented to a HELP and BCSTA representative for review, discussion and final interpretation.

**STAGE 6:** The Final Report(s)

The results were documented in a formal report and distributed as outlined in the following plan. Once the data had been collected, the researchers determined that the narrative approach would be utilized to report findings.
Quotes from *Foundations of Research: Methods of Inquiry in Education and Social Sciences* (2005):

“As a research approach, narrative inquiry is an appropriate way to gather data about lived experience. Narrative itself is one way to order and give meaning to experience. The stories told to you illustrate the relationship between one’s life and one’s stories. Aware that the story you hear is constructed, as a researcher using narrative inquiry, you accept the story ‘as told’. The story as told, as it is constructed, becomes the object of analysis in narrative inquiry.”

“You as researcher give authority to the storyteller, who you acknowledge as living the truth.”

“In narrative inquiry you are committed to describing the phenomenon not explaining it.”

The researchers made every effort to capture the experience narrated, using the language of the participants, inflection, the story itself and the articulate themes revealed *within* the stories. The researchers attempted to capture the lived experience – a human story. Quotes were employed wherever possible to reveal the language of the narrators.
Findings, Results and Discussion
SECTION 6.1
DATA GATHERING: NARRATIVES
Intersectoral coalitions and support systems for families are both complex and fluid. The chart provides a sample of the intersectoral partners, interactions and programs in this district and is not necessarily all-inclusive.
FINDINGS: PROGRAM NARRATIVES, SCHOOL DISTRICT 19 REVELSTOKE

NARRATOR 1

**STORY:** I think it is very important for School Districts to establish a level of transparency. Being transparent is an important factor when you are building relationships and levels of trust. ................................................................. 40

NARRATOR 2

**STORY:** What is happening for children from birth to five finally matters. ............................... 41

NARRATOR 3 and NARRATOR 4

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NARRATOR 1:
Narrator 1 is an administrator for SD 19 and a provincial leader in Early Learning. She believes that high-quality early learning experiences that successfully foster early language and literacy skills and social skills lay a critical foundation for children’s successful future.

Story: **I think it is very important for School Districts to establish a level of transparency.**
Being transparent is an important factor when you are building relationships and levels of trust.

Narrator 1 began her story by referring to research as she said: “We know that children who attend high-quality early learning programs are more likely to be successful in the primary grades and have a higher completion rate in Secondary Schools. We know that we have to come together and work together as a whole community – the ECD Committee and the School District. We work collaboratively to put the supports in place. We identify what’s needed for individual children and their families. There are community professionals sitting around the table – giving input as to ways we can offer support. We have an umbrella of services and we rigorously look at what services families are not accessing. We offer universal programs to all children.”

The Narrator continues: “There are typically developing children who also need support. Our community is small enough that we know almost every child. We can now say procedurally, placement and money wise - what services and/or programs do we need to put in place to support a specific child? For example, we know a family that really needed three hours a day child care. We came together and made it happen. Here is another example: we know a little fellow who needs to go to a preschool program. The ECD committee pays the fee because we know the family can’t afford it. We have families who are the working poor and don’t qualify for support. We issue them bus passes. Whatever it takes we make it happen without the bureaucracy.”

Together we provide leverage – the ECD Committee and the School District. We are focused on reducing barriers for these families. We consolidated our funds and contributed $3,000.00 to an “Access Fund”. We use the funds to support families and based on the needs of the specific family. For example, we had a single dad with very little money. He had just moved to our community and was just getting started with a new job and the pay cheque wasn’t going to appear for two weeks. We gave gas and snack money, which helped him to feed his two kids and get them to childcare. We collectively eliminated the bureaucracy.”

Narrator 1 gave us further examples of the ways the Intersectoral Coalition supports individual families and children. She stated: “In April, we discovered that a four year old child that was not registered for Kindergarten in the fall. The same family had not benefitted from programs and services in the past.”
MCFD was approached and we were able to get him to preschool. We collaboratively put a team in place to make sure the child and the family received the help they needed. This included childcare, which required one-to-one support. The point I’m making is our community philosophy is to work together as service providers to ensure we are improving life chances for these kids before they get to school.”

“Another example of the community working together is a Parks and Recreation story. We discovered many families who could not access our new Aquatic facilities. The city has issued free pool passes to any family who is below $30,000 yearly income. This has changed the life of the community. These kids are now swimming, socializing with other kids, involved in programs such as Water Books. It is a community philosophy for all service providers to offer in-kind services to vulnerable families and their children.”

As Superintendent, I asked myself - how much could I accomplish if I eliminated the forms and bureaucracy. I make myself completely available to the ECD team. It is so important that we model for the system, what we value. As Superintendents, we make decisions about what we delegate and what we keep in our portfolios. I keep the portfolios of ECD, Early Learning and Literacy. I delegate other responsibilities which means I have time to focus on what I deeply value: improving life chances for young children and their families - let’s create the work where it is needed.”

“Finally, I think it is very important for School Districts to establish a level of transparency. For example, when we were implementing StrongStart, the ECD Committee all knew what the budget was. I try hard to show the money in exact dollars so that everyone has the information. Being transparent is an important factor when you are building relationships and levels of trust.”

The Narrator concludes: “We are enjoying significant success in early learning, highlighted by the most recent Early Development Indicators (EDI) data from the Human Early Learning Partnership. The district continues to provide support and leadership wherever possible to the Early Childhood Development Committee in Revelstoke and to other districts in the province.”

Narrator 2 is the chair of an intersectoral committee.

**Story:** What is happening for children from birth to five finally matters.

Narrator 2 gave an historical perspective on working together with the School District. “As a community, we were feeling decimated in our forestry, parks, and social services. Our challenge was to put our money together and spend what little we had smartly. We sustained programs through grants from the Columbia Basin Trust and many in-kind donations.”
NARRATOR 2 (cont'd)

We had very little money on the table and we worked for a year to build relationships and trust. Then when there was money on the table, we could make decisions. Another key was the informal relationships and networks. We were conscious of who was missing at the table and we didn’t make major decisions without them. Thirdly, we respect that everyone brings something to the table.”

“In 2004, when the School District came on board with the work in early childhood we had been doing through Success By Six, we began to work closer together. We renamed group and called it the Early Childhood Development Committee. We are a coalition of service providers, parents, and business interested in creating the best environment possible for the children of our community. We were open to any concrete steps that would help the intersectoral coalition. We are way better together.”

“In the 1990’s, the School District was our landlord and they were at arms length. Interestingly enough, the School District has the largest impact in our community and they don’t receive the children until they are five. There historically hasn’t been a lot of respect in our community for the work we were doing from zero to five. What is happening for children zero to five finally matters. It was a pivotal moment when the School District, led by the Superintendent, got involved with Early Childhood. She valued it and it shifted the culture in our community. It is now the norm to be involved in universal ECD programs. It blurred who is providing the services. Another pivotal event was when Clyde came to Revelstoke. He gave us momentum and validated what we were doing by working as an Intersectoral Coalition and creating a hub. We’ve worked hard to sustain what we have.”

“We worked with the School District and the Intersectoral Coalition to relocate service providers to a closed Elementary School. The co-location of services was pivotal in the beginning of a hub in Revelstoke. In the same building, a family could see the Speech Language Pathologist or the Literacy Coordinator and then walk across the hall to access other services. Families started to come because they could access all kinds of programs and services in the same location.”

NARRATOR 3 and NARRATOR 4:
Narrator 3 is the StrongStart Facilitator; Early Childhood Educator; and the School District Early Learning Coordinator. Narrator 4 is the ECD Coordinator and the Family Literacy Coordinator.

**Story:** The ability to break down the isolation some parents feel in our community has made the biggest difference.

Narrator 3 talked about Revelstoke as the first School District to open a new StrongStart Centre in the Province. The centre was opened as another early learning program and she talked about the benefits to children and families.
"StrongStart provides a rich environment and experienced educators to model for parents and caregivers. We had many families register. We also extended the access to have it open on Saturdays. The kids attending the StrongStart program say: This is our school! It has really helped to change the views of Early Childhood in the school system. They now think it is okay to have change tables in schools. The students attending the school just love the babies."

Narrator 4 continues: “As an ECD Community we asked ourselves: How can we use this StrongStart Centre in other ways? We talked about other service providers having access to the space and resources such as outreach, speech and language or the Infant Development Consultant who could bring a family here for two hours when it is not being used for StrongStart. We began to conceptualize possibilities to extend the use of the facility. We also believe that we as a community we have to own these early learning programs. We consolidated and amalgamated our efforts and our services to make it happen."

“We actually did enhance the use of the StrongStart Centre. Ministry of Health uses the centre to host “Baby Talk” one afternoon per week. The Community Connections Society uses the facility one afternoon per week to co-host a post-natal “Baby Steps” program with the StrongStart Facilitator. MCFD-Revelstoke Child Care Society uses the facility two mornings per week in partnership to deliver a licensed preschool program. And finally the School District expanded the StrongStart to include Leap Land. This is an indoor play space used for children’s gross motor development and the implementation of the Healthy Opportunities for Preschoolers initiative."

Narrator 4 again reinforced the benefits of working together. “I work with the StrongStart Facilitator to talk to parents about Literacy. We have a book exchange in the StrongStart Centre. We invite parents to take books home and return them when they are finished. I go into the StrongStart Centre once every two weeks. The ability to break down the isolation some parents feel in our community has made the biggest difference. They now have a place to come every day. As individual providers we have the ability to transport parents and their children to StrongStart. It’s as simple as giving them a taxi voucher. I go and pick up families and sometimes help them get ready to come to the programs. It is a very respectful process we established - the key is to work collaboratively. We were careful and transparent about the process to set up the early learning programs. All voices were heard before we opened the program.”

NARRATOR 5 and NARRATOR 6:

Narrator 5 is a Speech/Language Pathologist; the Vice-Chair of the ECD Committee; Vice-Chair of the Screen Smart Committee; Vice-Chair of the Literacy Action Committee; and Chair of the Child Care Society. Narrator 6 is the Infant Development Consultant.
NARRATOR 5 and NARRATOR 6 (cont’d)

**Story:** There is a ‘social distance’ between people who feel isolated and other adults attending the program. There is a ‘social hierarchy’ and they feel it.

Narrator 5 and Narrator 6 talked about the importance of connecting with vulnerable families and supporting them in getting to the early learning programs. They told us these families are often isolated from the community. In their roles, they are meeting the families and working with them in initial consultations. Narrator 6 works specifically with families who have at-risk infants from zero to three years. “I visit the home and many of these families who feel extremely isolated. The goal is to get the families to the programs, especially the drop in programs, as they are easily accessed and there is no cost. I drop off calendars to them, as many of them don’t have cars. We take families to the programs – we literally pick them up and depending on the situation, we will stay with them until the program is over. There is a ‘social distance’ between people who feel isolated and other adults attending the program. There is a ‘social hierarchy’ and they feel it.”

NARRATOR 7
Narrator 7 is a Kindergarten Teacher and the EDI trainer in the School District.

**Story:** The EDI results are really validating the work the ECD Committee and the School District have been working collaboratively to achieve.

Narrator 7 talked about the EDI results as very supportive of what they already knew. “The EDI results are really validating the work the ECD Committee and the School District have been working collaboratively to achieve. More children are attending pre-school and Early Childhood Programs. We have the lowest level of vulnerability in the province and it is because of the focus we have taken to enhance services and programs for zero to five children and their families. The early learning programs and services we have in place are impressive. I’ll list some of them:

- Leap Land Indoor Playground
- Stepping Stones Child Care
- Toddler Time and Cool Kids Preschool Programs
- Early Learning Resource Library at the Revelstoke Child Care Society
- Ready, Set, Learn
- Baby Talk
- Toddler Talk
- PACT (Parents and Community Together)
- Regional Library Programs: Tiny Tickle; Story time; Tales for Tots
- Family Night Out
- Jumping Jacks Preschool
- FARWELL early learning hub
- PALS
- POPS
- StrongStart Centre
- Baby Steps
- Expectations Pre-Natal program
- Revelstoke Family Literacy
- Screen Smart
- Family Literacy Day
Narrator 8 is a Public Health Nurse.

**Story:** This is just a part of a much larger initiative in our community to focus on children birth to five.

Narrator 8 described one of the programs she coordinates to support families. “Interior Health sponsors a “Three year Old Spring Fair” focused on children who are three because we were missing children as immunization was at 18 months and 5 years. We used the Ready, Set, Learn funding to sponsor the fair. Service providers have stations and every station has an activity and something they are giving away. Everyone receives a passport and a bag to fill with goodies, handouts and resources. “There are stations focused on Nutrition; Screen Smart; Public Health/Nursing; Speech-Language information; Revelstoke Community Childcare Society and Lending, Referral and Resource Centre; Dental; Family Literacy/Early Childhood Development; Vision; Regional Library; Community Connections (infant Development); and the School District. This is just a part of a much larger initiative in our community to focus on children zero to five.”

Narrator 9 is a School Trustee and Chair of the Board of Education.

**Story:** We need a more equal playing field for all kids. The earlier we can get involved to support families the better it is for society.

Narrator 9 recognizes the early years as extremely important for children's social, emotional, physical, cognitive and language and literacy development. He also believes in universal access to programs and services. “I believe it is important to reach young children who need support. I think the programs, such as StrongStart, have helped identify these kids. We need to have early learning programs in our schools as just getting used to being in a school makes it more welcoming for families and children. The school also benefits. They establish relationships with new families coming to their schools. And capacity is not an issue with declining enrollment.”

The Narrator talks about the culture of the community: “Our culture in Revelstoke is unique. It is all about interconnectedness partly because we have to be – we are a clearly defined geographical community. What you see in the ECD Community, is a reflection of the culture in our community. I also believe we need to continue our commitment provincially to early childhood. We need a more equal playing field for all kids. The earlier we can get involved to support families the better it is for society.”
“One issue I’ve been thinking about is the quality of programming. I think we need to continue to support the paraprofessionals with professional development if we are going to grow the programs for three and four year old children in our schools.”

The Narrator concluded: “We have very supportive School Trustees who want to see early learning programs and services located in our schools. We should have a policy statement about our values and beliefs about early learning. We continue to be concerned about an ongoing commitment to fund the Early Learning programs – we need to know that the funding, such as the Early Learning Grant or the Innovation Grant will be ongoing. We need a commitment from the Ministry.”
A. EMERGING THEMES

1. The School District and the ECD Community have developed supports to individual children and individual families as a result of broad-based collaboration. Bureaucracy has been minimized to ensure families are receiving the immediate action they require to move forward.

2. The Intersectoral Coalition, including the School District, recognizes the importance of language and literacy experiences in early learning programs as subsequent to school achievement.

3. The School Trustees are committed to quality early learning programs located in the Elementary Schools. This includes appropriate preparation, certification and continual professional development for preschool educators.

4. The School Trustees would like the Ministry of Education funding for Early Learning Programs to be ongoing and sustainable.

5. Providing no-cost registration and transportation to programs assist in reducing the barriers to access for families.

6. The whole community, inclusive of the City Council, embraces the focus on zero to five children and their families. For example: free pool passes have been issued to low-income families; A Revelstoke Community Centre Children’s Bulleting Board (ECD Information Board) exists in the Community Centre; the trail system has been renovated to accommodate buggies.

7. ECD programs and services have flexibility and responsiveness based on the needs of the individual families and children.

B. BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS

1. Revelstoke struggles with declining enrolments: there has been a decline of 660 registered students over the last 12 years, which represents a significant 37% drop in overall enrolment. This presents the Revelstoke Board of Education with a number of funding and program-sustainability challenges.
1. LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The Revelstoke School District is located on the Trans Canada Highway and is geographically close to both the Okanagan and Kootenay regions of British Columbia. It is a small school district nestled in a mountainous area, with each of its schools located within the Revelstoke city limits. Revelstoke serves a community of 8,700 inhabitants, of which approximately 1,110 are elementary and secondary school students, and 300 are preschoolers. There are four elementary and one high school in the City of Revelstoke. 7% of students enrolled in Revelstoke schools have diagnosed learning disabilities, and 10% are of Aboriginal descent (although most are designated as non-status Aboriginals). Revelstoke struggles with declining student enrollments: there has been a decline of 660 registered students over the last 12 years, which represents a significant 37% drop in overall enrollment. This presents the Revelstoke Board of Education with a number of funding and program-sustainability challenges.

2. INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Interagency community coalitions are numerous and very well established in this school district. Coalitions are supported by cross-sectoral representation from parents, MCFD, the municipal government, School District 19, Interior Health, local business organizations, financial organizations, early-childhood educators, and community-service agencies. These coalitions are built on a strong community belief in the value of universal preschool programs and services, early intervention for at-risk preschoolers, and full integration of community services. Intersectoral groups meet regularly to discuss common issues, program directions, and potential problems. Meetings are focused in a philosophy of collaboration and transparency, as participants believe that this philosophy reduces potential conflict between agencies and service providers.

The provision of fully integrated services provides extensive cross-referencing throughout the preschool support system in this district. Intersectoral coalitions are numerous and include: School District 19, MCFD, the Ministry of Health, MCFD/Child Protection, Success by Six, Revelstoke Credit Union, Children First, the Revelstoke Early Childhood Development Committee, Revelstoke Parks and Recreation, Okanagan College, the Child Care Society, the RCMP, Okanagan Regional Library, the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy, Literacy Now, Revelstoke Literacy Action Committee, Infant Development Program, Community Connections Society, and the City of Revelstoke.

The Early Childhood Development Committee is particularly influential in coordinating community efforts and initiatives. This committee strives to ensure that funds are shared fairly, and that universal access to services is available to all children. The City of Revelstoke very much supports universal access: one example is the city’s provision of pool passes to all children living in low-income households. The city also provides considerable in-kind support for preschool programming.
INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES (cont’d)

The Ministry of Education, with the support of the Revelstoke Board of Education, funded the establishment of Revelstoke’s StrongStart Centre. This centre was opened in 2006, and its success is attributed to the work of an effective intersectoral, community-based coalition. It is viewed as a district program, although it is grounded in the collaborative efforts of a multiplicity of organizations. Many longstanding community programs supplement the StrongStart Centre’s programming: speech and language development, family literacy development, parent education, and health intervention for newborns and toddlers.

The Farwell Early Learning Hub also operates through an intersectoral, community-based coalition and offers coordinated health services, parent education, early learning programs, and family literacy programs. Farwell staff members use the language of "introduction" (never "referral") in order to attract, rather than discourage, vulnerable or insecure parents.

Speech and language pathologists work in unison with teachers to ensure smooth transitions for children from preschool into kindergarten. The Revelstoke Literacy Action Committee also works closely with the school district to promote early-literacy development in preschool children with vulnerabilities.

Many interagency coalitions in the Revelstoke District work to publish and disseminate information to families with preschool children. The Revelstoke Child Care Resource and Referral organization is funded by MCFD. This organization publishes monthly, informative newsletters regarding community events, available services, childcare workshops, and family learning programs. The Revelstoke Early Childhood Development Committee produces a booklet that lists and describes all its interagency programs, family education offerings, early-literacy screening, and available health services. Of the 300 preschoolers in Revelstoke, very few fail to access early-learning services prior to entering kindergarten: 90% of preschoolers are enrolled in at least one early-learning program, whereas only 40% - 50% of preschoolers were enrolled a few years ago.

3. SCHOOL DISTRICT ROLE

a. Early Learning

School District 19 is heavily involved in both promoting and implementing early-learning initiatives. The district publishes and disseminates a booklet for parents regarding timelines, expectations, before-school opportunities, kindergarten orientation, and special-needs awareness. School District 19 sees its role as grounded in a strong philosophy of community spirit. District staff members also believe in the value of early intervention in the preschool years and in the provision of universal, equal-access programs. The Let’s Learn Together booklet produced by School District 19 provides parents and caregivers with information regarding performance indicators, kindergarten readiness, speech and language services, and age-appropriate literacy skills. Early identification and program initiatives were established by this district as far back as 2000. The District Literacy Committee is led by teachers. School District 19 believes it has a role in both the identification of at-risk preschoolers and in the provision of interventions for children as young as two to three years of age.
SCHOOL DISTRICT ROLE (cont’d)

b. School District Planning

School district staff members view district plans as visionary, and community stakeholders believe that school-district leadership has proved invaluable.

The District Literacy Committee’s major goals are to improve grade-school reading standards and to develop effective early-literacy interventions. Bureaucratic paperwork is very much avoided by district planners. The superintendent maintains a “Big Picture” portfolio, in which items of immediate concern are listed and prepared for quick, effective action.

c. Tracking of Student Progress/Data Collection

Classroom teachers participate in the District Literacy Committee. These teachers assume much responsibility for administering the assessment of kindergarten and grade-one students’ early-literacy skills. Assessments also seek to alert staff to learning disabilities in young children. Assessment tools are used for the ongoing monitoring of individual literacy levels in grade-one through to grade-three students. Assessment tools employed include D.I.B.E.L.S., PM Benchmarks, and G.O.R.T.

District teachers, preschool educators, and community agencies have all relied heavily on EDI findings when discussing initiatives and implementing programs. Wave 1 EDI findings were the catalyst that inspired a concerted community response to early-learning needs in the Revelstoke District.

4. EDI FINDINGS

EDI Reduction in Vulnerabilities

EDI findings are used by all intersectoral groups. Wave 2 EDI findings show that Revelstoke students are now among the least vulnerable in the entire province of British Columbia. Wave 1 findings galvanized community agencies and intersectoral coalitions to take firm action: new directions and programs were put in place following EDI Wave 1 results.

Baseline (Wave 0/Wave 1) to Wave 2 by Domain District-wide:

District 19 Revelstoke:

- Phys: -0.47
- Soc: -0.95
- Emo: -1.62
- Lang & Cog: -8.36
- Com: -3.87
- Ever-risk: -7.10
5. FUNDING SOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Funding sources include MCFD, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Success by Six, Revelstoke Credit Union, Early Childhood Development Committee, the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy, and the City of Revelstoke. However, funding issues threaten the implementation of new programs.

Early Childhood Development Committee funds ensure that all children have access to interagency services. For example, bus passes are provided to all families with needs, in order to ensure that at-risk children have full access to early-learning programs. Bureaucratic red tape is not allowed to impede the quick dissemination of funds. The Ministry of Education’s Early Childhood Grant of $106,000 has also proved invaluable in the implementation of new programs.

The Revelstoke Child Care Resource and Referral organization is funded by MCFD. Various community partnerships provide funds for early-learning initiatives, and numerous in-kind donations assist in maintaining program sustainability. The Columbia Basin Trust provides funds for early childhood initiatives. School District 19, MCFD, Ministry of Health, and MCFD/Child Protection are the funding sources behind the establishment of Revelstoke’s StrongStart Centre.
Intersectoral Coalition Map

BCSTA Project: SD23 Central Okanagan Intersectoral Connectedness Chart

Intersectoral Group Membership:
Intersectoral coalition partners include SD23, MCFD, CATCH (Community Action Towards Children's Health), Kelowna Child Care Society, the Okanagan Child Development Centre, Interior Health, and Success by Six.

Central Okanagan School District

- 10 PALS sites
- 13 Preschools
- StrongStart sites
- 2 (Sen. Sec)
- Playschool at Rutland

Arrowheads = The flow of activity
Some interaction but not collaboration

Summer Institute for Early Childhood Educators

Programs
- Blue: Programs in Schools
- Red: Preschool Programs
- Yellow: Childcare Programs
- Green: Family Programs

Committees/Services/NGO's/Societies
- Orange: Family Resource Programs
- Green: Aboriginal Services
- Yellow: Other Referral Agencies
- Light Blue: Collaboration

Kelowna CCRR
Interior Health
MCFD

Schools

Intersectoral coalitions and support systems for families are both complex and fluid. The chart provides a sample of the intersectoral partners, interactions and programs in this district and is not necessarily all-inclusive.
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NARRATOR 1:
Narrator 1 is a senior school district staff member who has been involved with multiple projects in the primary and early learning area. She has played a significant leadership role with other district staff, school administrators and community especially preschool and childcare groups.

**Story: A Buffet of Offerings**

1. **Achieving a Necessary Future – Five years later.**

   Narrator 1 reported that five high-needs schools were selected for a reduction in primary class size (n=<18) at the kindergarten and grade one level for September 2001. Class sizes in grade 2 for these schools were reduced in 2002 and in grade 3, 2003. All classes, in all grades, would be 18 students or less with students being randomly assigned. No primary split classes were established. To support instructional efforts, a standardized literacy-training program was provided to all primary teachers in the five schools.

   The five schools in the pilots were selected based on the following criteria:
   - Historical, and current low performance on standardized tests
   - High incidence of both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ special education students
   - Must have a school meals program
   - Must have a high incidence of students from low socio-economic families

   Program effectiveness would be judged by comparing the five-year FSA average by school and by cohort and by comparing specific subject and school benchmark data from kindergarten to grade four. Additionally, it was expected that referrals and staffing levels of learning assistance and special education programs would be reduced. Project results are still under scrutiny through 2008.

2. **Implementation of preschools where owners/operators were not school-district employees.**

   Narrator 1 reported that the school district hosts 13 private preschools at school sites. She commented that when they chose the sites they were influenced by the EDI results to identify and choose the schools that were most vulnerable. Five would be considered very vulnerable, five of the others quite vulnerable and one was in a quite affluent neighbourhood where there was considerable parent demand. One issue the narrator commented on was that the school space had to be available and sustainable for at least three years. The Board funded renovations for licensing issues and charged operators $300 a month rent. However, two spaces in each program were kept available for clients with an inability to pay. The community now has enough pre-school (3 and 4 year olds) spaces for children requiring space and is now considering how to alleviate the childcare space crisis.
NARRATOR 1 (cont’d)

(The District is starting to track the experience of children prior to school. 2007 data indicated that 96% of the children attending preschool programs hosted within School District 23 schools registered for kindergarten in a school district school.)

Narrator 1 observed that the level of skills of these kindergarten children had greatly increased. Narrator one reported that the district wants to establish meaningful partnerships with the preschool programs resident in their schools where:

- Transitions between programs within buildings are seamless
- Where parents are provided with even earlier opportunities to become involved in their children’s educational environments
- Where commitments of the government’s strategic plan is to ensure that more children are ready for success when they enter kindergarten is fulfilled
- Finally, where professional development is stimulated and promoted in keeping with our district’s motto: “Together We Learn”

There was some initial tension with the school system becoming involved in ECE but in the second year the Board began to ask “what can we do to support you” and both groups started to examine how to work together. As a result, four preschool operators worked with the school district to start the mentorship program and have now become a learning community that has expanded to 11 out of the 13 preschools. Extensive professional development is provided for preschool personnel.

Narrator 1 described the high respect that school district staff has for the preschool operators. The district provides professional development offerings for all preschool staff. For example, in the summer of 2008, 66 preschool and childcare staff members presented workshops for each other; the event was hosted, organized and partially funded by the school district. During the school year, school district staff members visit in the preschools to offer assistance and support.

**Story: Mentorship Program**

Narrator 1 reported that due to the success of the preschool summer program four preschool teachers from existing preschools were selected to begin a mentorship program of learning how to incorporate literacy-based age-appropriate experiences into their preschool programs (coordinated by Narrator 1). The preschool mentorship program has been expanded to include all preschool teachers within school district buildings. The mentorship project requires that two school district early learning staff (Narrators 2 and 3) be assigned .5 of their full-time assignments, to work with the preschool teachers.
**NARRATOR 1 (cont’d)**

Duties include:
- Organizing three summer in-service days
- Organizing 15 evening pro-d sessions (including evening and day sessions)
- Providing approximately 100 preschool and StrongStart coaching visits
- Organizing 44 evening parent sessions
- Creating and production of a preschool mentorship manual

Pre and post screenings are being implemented in each preschool and student data will continue to be collected until third grade using the early literacy screener.

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**Story: Other District Support**

Narrator 1 reported other types of district support being offered:
- PALS (Parents and Literacy Supporters) is supported by the District
- The Young Parent Program that focuses on the Hanen Language Program: “You Make the Difference”.
- A playschool program offered at Rutland Senior Secondary.

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**Narrator 2 and NARRATOR 3**

Narrators 2 and 3 are the leaders of early learning initiatives. The narrators have extensive experience in the field of early childhood. They come from diverse backgrounds and have varied educational experience and training.

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**Story: Beyond EDI: Kelowna’s Literacy Screener and Implementation**

Narrators 2 and 3 were excited about a literacy screener that has been developed by the district over the past 8 years. It measures early literacy development to determine the risk level of children entering the primary years. “One of its successes is that a teacher’s awareness of individual skill vulnerabilities has been heightened. All children are screened in kindergarten through grade 3.

Initially it was piloted in four schools but is now mandated in all schools. Some teachers have not liked that it has been mandated but it does keep a district-wide integrity in managing skill development. It has taught the latest information on the foundation of early learning such as areas of language development and phonological awareness. For example, the district discovered that at grade one 50% were at risk in the area of phonological awareness.
NARRATOR 2 and NARRATOR 3

As a result of analyzing the screener results at a district level and implementing targeted professional development in the area of phonological awareness, the results have now dropped to less than 1% of students at-risk in phonological awareness. It’s a teachable skill and also a necessary skill for students to acquire literacy skills”. Eight years ago, the teachers would not have been aware of this.” The narrators referred to this as “language for literacy”.

The district has provided a significant amount of professional development training for teachers. Narrators 2 and 3 commented, “What can be measured or identified can then be taught directly.” The narrators continued by posing a series of questions: 1. “What do children need to know? (That is: what is developmentally appropriate?)” 2. “Which children don’t know what they need to know? (That is: which children do we target?)” 3. “How do we teach them the skills they require? (That is: How do we implement a developmentally appropriate program for children at risk?)”

Narrator 1 reported that she uses results from the screener project to determine what teachers need in the way of skill development. She commented that teacher attitude towards the screener has changed. Teachers said in the beginning, “I already know my children and what they can and cannot do” but many experienced teachers described that they had “ah-ha” moments. She also reported that critical to the success of the screening project has been engaged and enthusiastic principals leading the way.

**Story: Mini Summer Project**

Narrators 2 and 3 described a two-week project lasting 2 ½ hours a day targeting vulnerable preschoolers. The program was located in a geographical area where EDI vulnerabilities were high. The Peabody and PALS (University of Virginia) screeners were utilized to identify 22/60 vulnerable preschoolers. 14 of the 22 identified children attended the summer sessions and a comparison group was identified for research purposes. “We created an intensive summer play-based program with an immersion in early language and literacy activities.” For example, we taught phonological awareness through physical play activities on the field. Three education volunteers assisted a teacher. After two weeks of focused activities, and a repeat of the same measure at the start of school, there were significant gains for many children.” The narrators found that “the children in the summer camp showed significant growth in skills that were targeted while the non-participant group stayed the same.”

**Story: Taking lessons learned from the Summer Literacy Camp and sharing the knowledge with the ECE colleagues!**

The School District established a coordinated plan that allowed the two facilitators to facilitate a professional development program in the area of Early Language and literacy Development. This professional development was offered to four preschool educators located in the elementary schools.
There were three days of summer sessions and four more evening dinner sessions throughout the year, as well as four classroom visits by the facilitators. They focused on language development and early literacy development with a focus on phonological awareness, concepts of print, alphabet recognition, oral language, and early writing. The preschool teachers were so enthusiastic about what they learned and implemented into their programs, they wanted more of the professional development for the next year. The program continued to expand and is now offered to 30 Early Childhood Educators in 15 programs both in the school district, as well as in the community. The narrators reported that they were very careful never to impose but rather to inform preschool teachers about latest developments in numerous areas and then respond to their interests and requests. As a result, four of the preschool teachers have emerged as strong leaders in their own group as a result of the coaching. “The bottom line is we are building ECE capacity! We are now being asked to do the same thing with the childcare workers. They are becoming empowered and confident.”

NARRATOR 4:
Narrator 4 is a senior district official.

**Story: Purposeful Planning for Success**

Although Narrator 4 is not directly involved in early learning programs, when asked what the key to success was for the district, he responded, “It’s how we make our decisions. We have limited resources and limited time. We have to purposefully direct people and we have to evaluate whether what they are doing is making a difference. We target staffing, resources, special education, learning assistance and early learning. We have a 20-year strategic plan with a regular cycle of evaluation of intervention programs to see if they are making a difference. We come back to the data to help with future decision-making. We use information to seek interventions; for example, we provide extra staff to eight vulnerable schools to update their programs.”

He described an example of how the graduation rate had been stalled for years at 2% below the provincial average. As a result of the structured strategic plan, the school district’s graduation rate has now gone up to 82%, up 6.3%; aboriginal graduation rates are up by 8%. “We need to keep that going, track the cohort groups, to help us make better decisions.”

**Story: Policy Issues**

When asked what advice he would give to other school boards around policy issues, he responded, “Make sure your district:

- Has a process and plan in place to evaluate what it is doing
NARRATOR 4 (cont’d)

• Prepares guidelines, structures and processes to evaluate your programs and create indicators that trustees can look at to make better decisions
• Helps trustees understand where you are and where you need to go then they can shape governance with policies
• Understands everything needs to be guided by data
• Targets where you want to go and changes policies and budget accordingly
• Has a board that believes this is the right thing to be doing
• Accepts that staff has to be freed up to put programs in place - financially, time wise, and with decision-making power
• Eliminates all negative policies that limit staff so that they can draw new boxes driven by other things."

Narrator 4 continued, “School board direction needs to be clearly mirrored in its policies.”

When Narrator 4 was asked what gets in the way, he responded about concern whether initiatives are sustainable - such as StrongStart, new preschools, and other programs dependent on outside resources. He expressed a hope that early childhood initiatives would be block funded sometime in the future. He felt strongly that government needs to recognize early learning spaces as legitimate. He used as an example the fact that Kelowna’s space utilization specific to school sites is 107% (Portables are utilized to provide the additional space required.) “It wouldn’t take much of a shift to eliminate 13 preschools from our school sites.”

NARRATOR 5:
Narrator 5 is a long-standing school trustee.

Story: Pride at all levels

At the outset of the interview, Narrator 5 expressed great pride in the excellent preschool programs, the literacy screener and the growing evidence of success, including the new StrongStart program, where he takes his grandchildren, and the use of empty school spaces to enhance the partnerships between the school district, the preschools and other community groups. Narrator 5 described the preschool mentoring program as key to much of the success they are experiencing.

He described, however, that the progress had not be without its hurdles: private preschool operators who sometimes want to be subsidized, and debates between the municipality and the school board over school use. He expressed concern that the system not becomes too bureaucratized with paper work such as the Ministry Achievement Contract, which requires so much staff time.

Narrator 5 believed it was critical that school boards be involved to support communities with early learning needs, that parents need access to quality childcare and preschool structures and programs.
NARRATOR 5 (cont’d)

“The community wants these programs and school districts are the logical organizer”. He described the need to “streamline the process.” He described that as the biggest challenge with so many different interest groups trying to preserve their turf.

Narrator 5 indicated that time was one of the biggest roadblocks and that the early learning initiatives needed a school district coordinator; that district staff had multiple duties and a lot on their plate already.

He expressed certainty that the district was making great strides with literacy but he believed that the social, emotional and physical domains needed more effort at this time.

When asked about whether demographics had changed in the Kelowna area, he was uncertain. Narrator 5 said that he though young families were more literate now and more knowledgeable, and he thought that the community could take credit for that due to the multiplicity of programs and the many available preschool spaces and high-quality programs for young children. He was quick to point out that the school district was involved with the local coalition, but only offering a partnership and not managing the programs.

When asked what would help for the future, he had a quick response. “Sustain the funding, so we can stop looking over our shoulder!” When asked if he had advice for school boards just getting involved in early learning, he responded, “Get something going: the statistics are out there; parents are thirsting for this information. A lot of school boards don’t know what to do but they really want to do their best.”

NARRATOR 6:

Narrator 6 works for an intersectoral partner.

Story: Programs for everyone

Narrator 6 expressed a great deal of pride in the many offering provided to the community for preschool children and parents. “The EDI has been used extensively to guide funded projects and to provide “insight” on what to fund”. Programs developed include:

1. Nutrition Program. The Narrator indicated that the program provided a newsletter for parents and warm lunches and snack packs for some families. (During the September 2007 - April 2008 period 7500 snack were provided. Over 200 children benefitted from the packs.)

2. Wellness Program. Narrator 6 outlined the support of her organization for over 100 children at 5 daycare centres. The children were provided with healthy snacks and physical activity. The children are “actively engaged in programs” rather than being disorganized. “The result for the children attending the centres was fewer discipline problems and fewer children going home.”
3. **Literacy initiatives.** Narrator 6 indicated her organization ran PALS programs at five centres throughout the region. Each PALS program ran for 6-10 sessions. At each session, literacy stations were set up for the participants.

4. **Drop and Play.** Eight families use the drop and play sessions held at the YMCA. The sessions are designed for families with children aged 18 months to three years.

5. **Parent Talk.** The Narrator spoke of four sites for “Parent Talk” sessions. Each of the sites targets a different age. Parents determine what happens at each session. Guests are brought in to help. The sessions are help weekly and about 40 families use this service.

6. **Attachment.** The Narrator spoke of a “Mothers and Children Bond Group” that helped families bond with their children. “Although small, the sessions served an important function”. Métis families also held a playgroup with 12-13 families involved. Home visits were combined with modeling and visits to a centre. The West Bank First Nations ran a small program called “Make a Connection” where self-esteem and bonding were focuses of the sessions. Elders played a role and made a “huge impact”.

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**Story: Together Making a Difference**

Narrator 6 talked about the very extensive integration of the intersectoral partners throughout the Kelowna region. The school district was fully involved through the intersectoral committee structure and was a member of many committees sponsored through her organization. “By Wave 2 of the EDI, all partners, including the school district, were more committed to early childhood education and teachers were better prepared”. Narrator 6 concluded her interview stating that “the EDI adds a knowledge base and validated other measures in the discussion of providing services to younger children”.

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**NARRATOR 7:**

Narrator 7 works for an intersectoral partner and has an education background.

**Story: We Have a Partnership That Works**

Narrator 7 enthusiastically endorsed the direction that the school district and intersectoral partners had taken with respect to supporting early childhood. Narrator 7 believed the partnership was enhanced following a three-day workshop offered by school district personnel.
Before this event, early childhood education had been very practical in nature, but the session with the school district personnel offered an early childhood “research base” and was at a “sophisticated level”. The Narrator felt the workshop was a “fantastic partnership” and very beneficial to people working in the field of early childhood. The focus on the sessions was “play with purpose through centres and play-based activities.” The narrator felt that “resentment that the school district is taking over and making kids little pupils” was “totally unfounded”. Narrator 7 recognized that “fear in the ECE community is that the school district will move away from a play-based program.”

Narrator 7 recognized the population in daycare settings was extremely important as more students were enrolled in daycare settings than preschools. Her organization hoped to focus on more structured activities for daycare children including pre-reading. Parent involvement was also encouraged through family evenings sponsored by the organization.

Narrator 7 spoke to the wide range of offerings for young children that included out-of-school, preschool and daycare. PALS training was also provided.

Narrator 7 was very supportive of the leadership proved by both her organization and SD 23.

NARRATOR 8:
Narrator 8 was an administrator of an intersectoral partner.

*Story: Rich professional development*

Narrator 8 spoke of the challenges of providing preschool offerings in the Kelowna region. “While there are a lot of preschools in the region, there is still a need for daycare to be addressed”.

The story told by Narrator 8 recounted the very high level of professional development offered by a partnership between the intersectoral partner and the school district. “The school district has provided rich, higher-order professional development opportunities for early childhood educators.”

*Story: What about daycare?*

Narrator 8 also recognized some barriers existed. These barriers included a recognition that the “daycare population needs to be reached much better!” In particular, Narrator 8 noted that, “daycare in general is really neglected with respect to professional development” and “courses for daycare operators were very weak.” Part of this problem was the perception that “daycare workers were less valued than preschool teachers. Daycare worker is a very stressful job.” Narrator 8 also cautioned that, “The gap between daycare and preschool may become wider.”
NARRATOR 9:
Narrator 9 is a school district kindergarten teacher.

**Story:** I see a difference!

Narrator 9 spoke of the differences she had observed with kindergarten students who had attended preschool programs and those that had not attended. In her current classes, all of the a.m. class had attended preschools, but only four of the p.m. class had attended.

Narrator 9 noted that, “there was an incredible difference between the a.m. group and the p.m. group.” Using the school district screener as a measure, the teacher noted “almost all the a.m. group met expectations while in the p.m. group 80% did not meet expectations.” Narrator 9 also recognized positive changes that had taken place over the past several years including a closer relationship with the preschool staff members.

Discussing the two classes taught by Narrator 9, other similarities and differences included the a.m. class had greater exposure to preschool and many had also attended kindercare. This group was interested in books, rhyming and other related learning activities. The p.m. class was “less interested in these activities.” Narrator 9 commented on the fact that social skills were the same.

Narrator 9 participated in PALS sessions. 18 of the 36 kindergarten children were participating in PALS programs, but 18 were “still being missed.”

Narrator 9 also praised the screening of preschool children and the EDI as “making a difference”.

NARRATOR 10:
Narrator 10 is a school-based administrator.

**Story:** Preschool partnerships paying off

Narrator 10 talked about the programs provided to the preschool population that were having a positive impact on the school population. She worked at a school that had been one of the first to participate with the school district in a preschool initiative. A wide range of support had been provided to the school and the narrator felt that a positive impact had been observed on kids entering kindergarten. Some of the highlights of the preschool-school partnership were: in-service provided for preschool teachers; a much better transition between preschool and kindergarten; “peer coaching” and team teaching of PALS nights for preschool and kindergarten families. (Approximately 20 of 36 possible families attended PALS).
A. EMERGING THEMES

1. The School District is involved with the training of preschool teachers, particularly in regard to higher-order professional development.

2. A culture exists in this school district that recognizes the relationship of early-childhood learning to later success in school. This cultural attitude was found throughout the district and was supported by trustees, administrators, and intersectoral coalitions.

3. District-wide mandated tracking (utilizing the Early Literacy Intervention Screener) is used to determine student success and placement in programs.

4. Preschool/school-district partnerships exist in this district that are mutually respectful and value each other’s contribution.

5. School District 23 recognizes the importance of daycare and the need to address daycare as well as preschool issues.

6. Trustees in School District 23 support preschool initiatives and recognize the importance of early-childhood education and childcare as part of the general well-being of the community.

B. BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS

1. There is some overlap and fragmentation of services in the Central Okanagan area, and in many cases parents are unclear about where to go when seeking coordinated information. One trustee commented that: “Parents are thirsting for information”, and he hoped that the Board of Trustees would “get something going”.

2. Participants in child-development programs expressed a need for a district-appointed coordinator of all programs and services. Participants also expressed a need for the streamlining and coordination of funding allocations. Unreliable funding in the future was viewed as a barrier to success.

3. Early-childhood educators recognize that School District 23 may require considerable time to shift its perspectives and practices, and that the move to developing clear policies based on hard-data analysis may prove a lengthy and onerous one. These time constraints may impede progress.
4. The Ministry’s lack of recognition of the need for the provision of early-learning facilities was seen as a barrier to progress. Kelowna uses 107% of allocated building space for kindergarten to grade-12 programs (including portables). The Ministry funds building space commensurate with class sizes, but does not factor in the provision of building space for preschool programs.

5. Transportation issues remain a barrier preventing hard-to-reach families from accessing services. However, it should be noted that the Family Resource Program experienced considerable reduction in barriers to access when it endorsed a mobile model of delivery. The Family Resource Program is also offered during non-traditional hours, which means that working parents are able to attend.

6. Although there are many preschools in Kelowna, enrollment often remains transient or low, as family financial issues impede access in some cases. The provision of daycare and after-school programs for school-aged children would help remove impediments to access, as parents may well find the time slots offered in these services complementary to preschool offerings. Professional development and in-service opportunities for daycare workers remain inadequate: although daycare work is stressful, it is viewed as less valuable or worthy of in-service intervention than preschool teaching. Some preschool teachers expressed an anxiety that the gap between daycare and preschool systems will widen. The District Superintendent notes that the shortage of childcare space in the district limits teen parents’ ability to complete their own schooling, and he advocates the creation of daycare space in district schools. (Memorandum: New Childcare Spaces in Schools, November 2007)
1. LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The Central Okanagan School District serves 162,276 citizens living in the four communities of Kelowna, Peachland, Lake County, and the Westside, and is situated near the midpoint of the Okanagan Valley. The student population stands at 21,850 (September, 2007) and is served by 41 schools and a budget of $163 million. There are 29 elementary schools serving 10,700 elementary students.

Although the regional adult population is growing, the number of new students entering district kindergartens has declined over the last 10 years. The movement of families to new urban developments on the fringes of the school-district region has created challenges.

The median family income stands at $51,136 (which is below the provincial income average). Only 11.6% of adults have university degrees in this district (which is also below the provincial average).

2. INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Intersectoral coalition partners include SD 23, MCFD, CATCH (Community Action Towards Children’s Health), Kelowna Child Care Society, the Okanagan Child Development Centre, Interior Health, and Success by Six.

Very strong coalitions exist in Kelowna between privately operated preschools and school-district kindergartens. The district offers ongoing in-service and peer coaching to 13 preschools, and district personnel work directly with preschool teachers to develop effective teaching strategies and to ensure smooth transitions between preschool and kindergarten. The strong partnership between the preschool and kindergarten systems has yielded positive results: preschool places are made available free of charge to vulnerable children, and early literacy skills are tackled in a truly developmental way in Kelowna preschools.

CATCH (The Community Action Toward Children’s Health) coalition is a partnership of individuals and organizations in the Central Okanagan area. CATCH promotes ongoing community dialogue, much of which is focused on initiatives that are based on EDI findings. CATCH members also participated in producing the Kelowna Child Care Report and in formulating the Social Marketing and Communications Plan. CATCH lists six essential community aims as the basis of its mission:

1. To provide access to stable and affordable childcare options.
2. To develop central places in the community dedicated to meeting the needs of young children and their caregivers.
3. To provide recreational opportunities for young children and their caregivers.
INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES  (cont’d)

4. To promote civic planning that enhances the “livability” and inclusiveness of the community.

5. To provide support for vulnerable families, including support for lone parents, young parents, and fathers.

6. To educate the community regarding the importance of early learning from conception to age six.

CATCH views its future role as a catalyst for identifying and establishing community-driven solutions to early-childhood deficits in the Central Okanagan area. CATCH is fully committed to planning, researching, facilitating, coordinating, and monitoring collaborative early-childhood initiatives. CATCH and the school district have established an integration team that is assigned to facilitating smooth transitions from preschool to kindergarten entry.

The Kelowna Preschool Partnership Committee is another coalition partner in this district. Committee members (along with district personnel) created the Early Learning and Development Framework. This framework lists best practices for preschool teachers. The Preschool Partnership Committee has also produced the “What Should Your Child Be Doing?” publication and the annual Okanagan Parent Magazine.

The Central Okanagan Family Resource Program also operates as part of school district/community coalition efforts. This program was made possible by MCFD funds as part of the Early Childhood Development Strategy. Since the program’s inception in June 2003 until March of 2004, a total of 933 children and 636 adults participated in the program, and between April 2004 and March 2005, those numbers increased to 1351 children and 918 adults. The number of participants continues to grow: between April 2005 and March 2006, 2081 children and 1516 adults attended 84 playgroups. The program is mobile and therefore reaches outlying areas of the community: drop-in opportunities are provided at large community centres, rural community halls, churches, and the public library. Family Resource Program activities are readily integrated throughout the community, as they are closely allied to the activities and services of other child agencies, government services, and community organizations. The partnership between the Kelowna Child Care Society, the Okanagan Families Society, and the Okanagan Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs is the major coalition force supporting the Family Resource Program.

The Bridge Youth and Family Services Society is a non-profit organization providing youth and early-childhood programs for families throughout the Central Okanagan area. The Bridge Parent Place provides parent education programs, parent support groups, and a parent resource library. Bridge parent-education classes include: *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen* and *Prenatal Wellness Education*. Bridge parent-support sessions include: *The Family Resource Program, Tots Making Tracks,* and *Special Deliveries Pregnancy Nutrition Program*.

The Clubhouse Childhood Centre is another local coalition partner providing daycare and early-learning programs. The Clubhouse Centre plans to promote an increased focus in home or school reading and literacy initiatives in the immediate future.
The YMCA, the Aboriginal Family Learning Centre, and the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs are other community agencies that assume an active role in support of early-childhood initiatives. Clubhouse and the Boys and Girls Clubs have partnered to sponsor professional development activities for preschool teachers, and four preschools are receiving professional development in-service from the school district. “The school district has provided rich, higher-order professional development opportunities for early-childhood educators.” (School district staff member)

Bankhead Family Place is a preschool coalition partner that operates as a family resource centre. Funding from MCFD supports this operation. Bankhead features a two-way mirror system that allows parents to observe the behaviour of their children, while also receiving instruction from qualified educators.

3. SCHOOL DISTRICT ROLE

a. Early Learning

Central Okanagan is a rapidly growing area, and school district demographics are under constant review. School District 23 believes it has an important role to play both in community-based, early-childhood development and in providing parents with effective skill sets. One trustee stated that where closer ties exist between intersectoral groups, duplication of roles might be avoided. The Board of Education has assembled a committee of parents, trustees, administrators, teachers, service agencies and community business leaders under the auspices of the Preschool Partnership Committee. The committee’s mandate is to promote and develop early-childhood learning opportunities within local preschools, kindergartens, and out-of-school programs. (See Policies and Procedures, Section 7: Community Partnerships, September 2005.)

The school district recognizes the importance of early-childhood intervention and has worked in recent years to eliminate the “disconnect” between preschool education and subsequent engagement in schooling. The district works in close unison with 13 private preschools that operate within district elementary schools, and each of these preschools offers district-subsidized places to needy children. “There is a major attitude shift in the district towards a seamless transition between preschool and kindergarten.” (District staff member)

School District 23 has developed an Early Literacy Intervention Screener, and all kindergarten to Grade 3 are tracked utilizing this screener, which identifies at-risk or vulnerable children. Data and recommended strategies follow each child. The subsequent Intervention Screener tracks student progress from kindergarten through to grade three.

School District 23 has also established a district Aboriginal Parent Education Council and has increased professional development in-service to educators working with the Aboriginal population.
a. Early Learning (cont’d)

Notably, some district personnel indicated that a number of governmental policies impede early-learning initiatives, and that the role of School District 23 should perhaps include a revision of current school-district policy in the near future.

b. School District Planning

School District 23 wishes to avoid intractability in its planning and policy setting, and believes that excessive bureaucracy may hinder adventurous and advantageous planning. The district also wishes to avoid implementing plans that “load up staff time with excessive reporting” and instead hopes to establish plans in which “work must be meaningful.” District personnel stated that planning will remain focused in strategic, rather than non-strategic, initiatives. Plans include purposeful direction of resources and the placement of staff provisions in vulnerable areas. Plans also include intensive tracking of student achievement in order to evaluate program effectiveness. A multi-year plan has been devised, in which a differentiated staffing model will address the needs of 8 specific schools deemed vulnerable. Tracking and data analysis will be employed extensively, both when making decisions and when creating and driving plans. The district plans to adhere closely to a model in which trustees examine data analyses and related evaluations before they determine policies or allocate budgets and staffing ratios.

District plans for early learning initiatives are focused around a central aim: ensure that 95% of district students will meet expectations according to the Early Literacy Screener from kindergarten through to grade 3. In 2003, the Board committed to creating and supporting a number of preschool partnerships, and this commitment has now expanded to the hosting of 13 preschools in district elementary schools. The district hopes that funding will support extended preschool partnerships in the future.

c. Tracking of Student Progress

The school district has a comprehensive plan in place to track student progress. The progress of individual students from kindergarten to grade three is tracked utilizing the District’s Early Literacy Intervention Screener. This is a tool that is mandated by the district. The district believes that the use of this locally produced data ensures that:

- Teachers know in which specific developmental areas students are at-risk
- Overall areas of strength and weakness are addressed by district professional development initiatives
- Educators at all levels are able to judge the effectiveness of current and past work

Source: SD 23 Achievement Contract 2007 – 2008
c. Tracking of Student Progress *(cont’d)*

In addition, the school district uses the Canadian Achievement Test (CAT-3) from grade three onwards to track student progress.

The following data was gathered by the school district and details findings from tests of kindergarten students in eight schools deemed “vulnerable”. The schools were part of the “Achieving a Necessary Future” initiative.

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<th>NAME</th>
<th>PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS VULNERABILITY</th>
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<th>LANGUAGE EXPRESSIVE VULNERABILITY</th>
<th>LETTER RECOGNITION VULNERABILITY</th>
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<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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4. EDI FINDINGS

EDI Reduction in Vulnerabilities

Baseline (Wave 0/Wave 1) to Wave 2 by Domain District-wide:

Lang & Cog: vulnerabilities have dropped in 16 out of 21 neighborhoods by as much as -19.3.

5. FUNDING SOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Funding sources include the Ministry of Education, the Early Literacy Grant, and Community LINK. Success by Six provides $240,000 in yearly funding.

Preschool educators in this district expressed a need for the coordination of funding allocations. Future funding sources were often viewed as unreliable. Year-to-year grants are problematic, as programs must be eliminated where funding sources are not renewable. Funds for both district and non-profit preschool programs often depend on outside sources. Preschool administrators expressed a preference for ministry block funding in support of early-learning initiatives, in order to ensure that funding remains constant.

One other problem is that the district is under some pressure to sell school properties in order to generate funding. However, preschool initiatives require increased property space, rather than the elimination of existing facilities.

There is a strong district consensus in this area that district funding sources should be shared with preschools: “We work together; we share resources with all community partners.” (District staff member)
Intersectoral Group Membership
MCFD, SD 41, Community Living BC, Fraser Health, the City of Burnaby, Family Services of Vancouver, Health Canada, Burnaby Parks and Recreation, the Burnaby Public Library, Burnaby Family Life, United Way, East Burnaby Family Place, South Burnaby Neighbourhood House, CCRR, SFU Childcare, Cameray, St. Matthews, St. Leonards, Information Children, Deaf Children, Purpose, Spirit of the Children, Aboriginal Development, Piaget Centre, Big Brothers, Association for Community Inclusion, Centre for Ability, Red Cross, CORI, SUCCESS, ISS, Multicultural Family Support, the Association for Community Education, Parents Together, Burnaby Hospice, Dixon Transition and the Edmonds MLA

Intersectoral coalitions and support systems for families are both complex and fluid. The chart provides a sample of the intersectoral partners, interactions and programs in this district and is not necessarily all-inclusive.
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## SCHOOL DISTRICT 41: BURNABY

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Narrator 1 is a Coordinator in the Community Education Services of the School District. She has been a catalyst in the creation and implementation of Parenting and Family Literacy Centres in the community.

**Story:** Yes We Can: Parenting and Family Literacy Centres offer hope to Families

“Community School Coordinators and service providers representing Burnaby’s Early Childhood Development Community Table have been working together since 2004 to create joint School District and Community Parenting and Family Literacy Centres that would enhance opportunities for children from zero to six and their families. We knew the demographics in Burnaby were changing dramatically. We were quickly becoming a culturally diverse community with over 35% of new refugees to the province locating in Burnaby. A staggering 23% of all school-aged children in Burnaby were living in poverty and over 70 different languages were being spoken in our schools.”

“The creation of the Family Literacy Centres began with a visit to Mary Gordon’s Centres in Toronto. We observed in the Family Literacy Centres in Toronto and returned from our visit inspired to write grant proposals to access funding. We wrote proposals to the University College of the Fraser Valley – Community Development fund, Success By Six, Fraser Health Authority and MCFD. In the end, all the sources of funding were granted and this enabled us to plan and implement the Family Literacy Centres. We knew this would be a good fit for Burnaby and we knew we could do it.”

Narrator 1 continues: “The short story is we established four Parenting and Family Literacy Centres in four schools in Burnaby in the fall of October 2004. The Centres are located in neighbourhoods where the need has been identified based on vulnerabilities associated with the Early Development Indicators, socio-economic data (Canada Census, 2001) and school and community input. As coordinators, we believed that if we created Family Literacy Centres to serve the needs of parents and caregivers with children zero to six, we could reduce isolation, encourage social networks, and promote literacy and learning. We looked for places where there was support in schools and space available.”

“Three out of the four Family Literacy Centres operate in a shared space environment. Other ECD programs and community service provider programs utilize the space when the Centre is not operating. Our attendance data indicates that the enrolment has increased in all programs when, with a few exceptions, programs co-locate.”

“We had very supportive principals and we hired four excellent facilitators to work at the Centres. We also asked Mary Gordon, from Toronto, to provide a two-day facilitator training session and we invited every member of the Steering Committee to attend the training for common understanding and professional development. This included representatives from Fraser Health, MCFD, Parks and Recreation and Cultural Services, Burnaby Family Life Institute, South Burnaby Neighbourhood House, School District #41, and Burnaby Public Libraries. All of these partners are members of the Burnaby Early Childhood Development Table. The sessions provided both pedagogical and practical information about the programming for the Family Literacy Centres.”
The Narrator commented on the importance of the EDI results as a conduit for conversation at the Burnaby Early Childhood Development Table. The ECD Community Table has used evidence from the Understanding the Early Years Study, the Early Development Instrument (EDI), and community and school input to inform their decisions about programming and service locations for parents and their young children.

“Over time, we were able to increase the number of Centres and expand the services to other neighbourhoods and Burnaby now has a total of eight Family Literacy Centres. Honestly we opened these Centres with minimal funding. In 2006 the Ministry of Education invited SD #41 to be one of the twelve School Districts to pilot the StrongStart Centres and we were very pleased to participate. We created a Literacy Centre in a neighbourhood with growing need and newly available space. The Ministry funding was extremely helpful to resource and staff the Centres with trained ECD Facilitators.”

Narrator 1 continued to identify key factors, which have deepened the quality service delivery in the Family Literacy Centres. There is ongoing ‘Facilitator Training’ for all eight facilitators from the Centres. Training needs are identified and opportunities are provided to come together to talk and share ideas, issues and learn from one another. The facilitators meet twice a month on Wednesday afternoons from 12:30 pm to 2:30 pm and rotate the meetings at the various Centres. She said: “We absolutely believe most of the answers are within the expertise in the room.”

The Narrator described the goals of the Family Literacy Centres, which are focused on providing affirmation, support and modelling to parents so they continue to be more confident and competent in their parenting. The programming includes time spent on validating and modeling for parents as to ways they can support their child’s learning through play. A focus for Facilitators is to foster positive parent-child interaction while they engage in meaningful and purposeful play activities together with lots of rich oral language. Because the Centres are all located within schools, it assists families in building relationships with the school staff and the school system. Parents and caregivers also establish strong social connections with one another and with the community.

“Finally, we have learned about the importance of working with all service providers so they are involved in the Family Literacy Centres on an ongoing basis. Working together as a community, from a strength based approach, is key to increasing the learning of young children in local neighbourhoods. These are neighbourhoods where there are high levels of vulnerability of students which may correspond to high rates of school drop-out and limited academic success in later years.”

NARRATOR 2:

Narrator 2 is a Community School Coordinator in an Elementary School with a Parenting and Family Literacy Centre. She played a significant role in the design and implementation of the Centres.
We asked the Narrator to identify key operational factors that were seen to be critical to the success of the Family Literacy Centres in Burnaby. Narrator 2 was one of the lead coordinators who visited Mary Gordon’s Centres in Toronto and she was part of the team that was instrumental in establishing the Family Literacy Centres in Burnaby. She replied: “As you know, there are eight Family Literacy Centres established in neighbourhoods with high levels of vulnerability of children as measured by the EDI.

I can list many important operational and educational factors – here are a few that make our Centres so meaningful to increasing life chances for young children and their families:

- Drop-in program for caregivers and children with a focus on early learning and literacy
- Operate Monday to Friday mornings on a free drop-in basis
- Within walking distance of families in the neighbourhood
- Some Centres operate in July and one is open on Saturday morning
- Focus on early intervention
- Recognize and promote the strengths of families
- Value the diversity of the Burnaby community
- Promote information and services for the early years
- Universal and integrated services
- Accessible
- Inclusive
- Promote multicultural awareness and understanding
- Provide parents with opportunities to learn about the importance of their role in their child’s development
- Provide opportunities to learn parenting skills
- Provide parents with opportunities to improve their English-language skills and develop confidence in speaking English
- Provide parents with access to Public Health Nurses who visit the centres and provide prevention and early intervention services to families (e.g., nutrition, counseling, dental screenings and developmental screening)
- Provide parents with ways to learn about community services

“I also want to mention our partnerships with public libraries and the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services from the City. The Public Libraries provide story times geared towards young children and loan tubs of books and CDs to all Family Literacy Centres which are rotated monthly. They also promote the Family Literacy Centres by referring families to take advantage of their services. The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services support the centres by loaning equipment and assigning staff to co-facilitate gym time as well we work together to provide staff participate in joint training initiatives for both staffs.” In a reciprocal way we offer afternoon space for the City to operate preschool.”
NARRATOR 2 (cont’d)

The Narrator concluded by saying: “The power in these Centres is the bringing together of families who have many strengths they often don’t realize. Imagine what can happen when you bring together a focus on children to make certain that they have everything they need to learn for a lifetime. Imagine what can happen when you support families to do this for themselves.”

NARRATOR 3:
Narrator 3 is the Early Childhood Development Coordinator.

**Story:** Collectively, there is an underlying willingness to put what kids need before what your agency needs.

Narrator 3 began by crediting the ongoing work of The Burnaby Early Childhood Development Table in lowering the vulnerability of children by using evidence to inform their decisions about how and where to locate services and programs to support families with young children (birth to 6). She described the BECD Community Table as an intersectoral committee with over 30 representatives from government and non-profit community agencies working together. They meet consistently throughout the year to share information and set priorities for programs and services. Members include representatives from various Ministries, the Municipality, health region, the School District and non-profit agencies. The Narrator told us that the coordinator’s role is to facilitate and coordinate the Table’s planning, building partnerships, and communication activities.

Narrator 3 commented: “One of the projects of The Burnaby Early Childhood Development Table was to target specific neighborhoods to help families learn more about neighbourhood resources and supports. Neighbourhood Maps were developed to distribute to parents. The maps identify community organizations, service providers and other services that are available in the neighbourhood to support families. This is to help families locate the services they need that are available in their own communities.”

The narrator continued by talking about the importance of building existing supports in the community. One major supporter has been the School District. She said: “The School District has been the champion. Specifically the Community Education/Community School Coordinators who are passionate advocates for early learning. They work hard to connect with community agencies and they have an extraordinary commitment to families.”

“There is growing respect for evidence based data to support the case for early learning and this is why the EDI and the UEY study are so important. The evidence is absolutely embraced by the ECD Community Table. For example, when the School District was going to implement StrongStart Centres, they came to the ECD Community Table for advice. We determined where these Centres would be located by using the EDI, the mapping from the UEY and community and school information.”
Narrator 4 works for the Understanding the Early Years project. The Understanding the Early Years funding comes from Human Resources and Social Development Canada. Burnaby Understanding the Early Years project is sponsored by Burnaby Family Life on behalf of the Burnaby ECD Community Table.

**Story:** We need an evidence-based approach to inform decisions about program services and location.

We asked the Narrator to describe the Understanding the Early Years Project (UEY) to us. She defined it as a research initiative that enables members of communities across Canada to better understand the needs of their young children and families so that they can determine the best programs and services to meet those needs.

The Narrator talked about the importance of examining Burnaby’s community early childhood development assets. One of her roles is to produce Burnaby’s Community Mapping report, which includes community asset maps that illustrate resources in Health and Wellness Assets; Child Development, Early learning and Family Support Assets; and Community and Neighbourhood assets. The purpose is to add to the evidence that informs how to respond effectively to emerging needs of families with young children.

Narrator 4 commented: “The evidence I gather provides the community with quality information to help make decisions about services and programs to support young children and their families. That is why the EDI is so important to communities and neighbourhoods in British Columbia. It helps to make informed decisions about where Early Childhood programs and services should be located."

“I also support the community members to work together and build capacity in services and programs for young children from birth to 6 years. Another role I have is to identify gaps in services and develop an evidence-based Community Action Plan. I hope you get a chance to look at the website we have created. The purpose is to inform families of ECD resources and continue to raise awareness of the importance of ECD. The underlying purpose is to put services and programs in place that support children and families.”

Narrator 5 is a Facilitator in one of the Parenting and Family Literacy Centres.

**Story:** Families from all backgrounds

Narrator 5 talked about how fortunate she felt to be working with so many families from countries all over the world. As we observed in this Family Centre, the facilitator was reading a story in English and a Grandma from India was translating the story into Punjabi.
In the Centre, there are children and families from all backgrounds including Aboriginal children, children of new immigrants, and children in disadvantaged circumstances. The Narrator described some of the ways the school makes connections with the Family Literacy Centre. She talked about the school principal inviting the Family Literacy Centre participants to school assemblies. She said: “The school staff gives us gym time on Tuesdays. They invite us to their school potluck dinners and we are always mentioned in the school newsletter. The principal includes advertisements for the Family Literacy Centre and lists the special events or speakers that may be in the Centre that week. We are also connected to the school website. The principal does everything she can to connect us to the school community and make us feel welcome as part of the school community.”

The Narrator continues: “I think it is important as a facilitator to have skills and training, especially in Mary Gordon’s model that we have received training in her methods of facilitating in the Centres. I also think you have to have a warm personality that doesn’t judge others. Welcoming and including all families is extremely important to ensure they keep coming. Many people that attend may be isolated by language or income. These families count on us having routines in our programs and we work hard to develop relationships and networks between the adults that attend the programs. You also have to be flexible to meet the diverse needs of participants.”

NARRATOR 6:
Narrator 6 is an administrator working for the School District at an Elementary School with a Parenting and Family Literacy Centre.

Story: Making Connections between the School Community and the Family Literacy Community

Narrator 6 talked about the importance of the Family Literacy Centre and highlighted how it has broadened the school and community. She said: “I have observed the many benefits of groups of people being comfortable in and around our school. I have offered everybody on staff the opportunity to visit and observe in the Family Literacy Centre. I spelled off the teachers by simply saying: I’ll cover your class – here are the times I’m available and you are welcome to sign up for a visit to the Family Literacy Centre. I’ll cover classes so you can observe what is happening in the Family Literacy Centre.”

She continued: “This helped to make connections between staff in the Family Literacy Centres and the teachers. The music teacher visits the Family Literacy Centre once a term and leads an Orff music lesson. We have two rotational gym blocks dedicated to the Centre. It was the staff that agreed to dedicate one block of gym time once a week to the Centre families and their children. We also have one portable available for special events that the Family Literacy Centre can book as well as teachers. Sometimes the Kindergarten teacher and the Family Literacy Centre staff have combined sessions such as the time we had a fabulous story teller and all the kids were invited.”
When asked about the benefits of the Centre in a school setting, the Narrator replied: “There is no question for us as educators, these Family Literacy Centres are preparing young children as life long learners and these children are coming to Kindergarten with well developed skills in many areas. We see improved literacy, numeracy and social skills. We especially notice the enhanced oral language development in kids that have regularly participated in the Centre. For many children in our neighbourhood, they come from families where English is the second language. The centres have helped them to develop English language skills. Most importantly, kids have a comfort level in our school setting. They are used to circle time and a routine for learning.”

Narrator 7 referred to the research, which demonstrates that Parenting and Family Literacy Centres are making a positive difference (Evaluation of Parenting and Family Literacy Centres in SD #41). She referred to the need for the Ministry of Education to implement adequate and ongoing funding for Early Learning programs and services to ensure the sustainability of initiatives such as the Family Literacy Centres.

This Narrator said: “The Ministry needs to make sure Districts are supported and often policies tend to box a district in. The Ministry has to have a plan and simultaneously they need to make room for innovation. One of the key issues is sustainability of funding. We have an extremely supportive Board of Education to implement services and programs that will make a difference in the lives of young children and their families. The time is now. We know that neighborhoods are increasing in refugee families and we need to support staff with training, and the Ministry needs to support Districts with funding. Staff training is essential – give us the funding to make it happen.”
A. EMERGING THEMES

1. Implementation of ongoing translation of articles and resource materials to allow all community residents access to ECD services and programs

2. Development of an Early Childhood Development Website where brochures, parenting information and flyers promote the Early childhood Development activities (www.kidsinburnaby.ca)

3. The School District and the ECD Community Table collaborate to provide joint, ongoing training for ECD workers. The ECD Community Table identifies training needs and provides opportunities for networking education and professional development to providers

4. School-community partnerships ensure enhanced coordination and delivery of services by schools and service agencies and also act as a support to refer families who need assistance.

B. BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS

1. Vulnerable families are still often hard to reach. Language barriers often hinder parental access, as non English-speaking parents are sometimes ill informed of the programs available to them. (However, two neighbourhood outreach workers, for families with children 0-5 years, inform hard-to-reach families of currently available services.)

2. Limited family incomes discourage families from traveling to centres. (However, free bus passes are available to families on income assistance April-June 2008 as a pilot project of MIEA)

3. Funding for early-childhood initiatives remains insecure and unstable.

4. Childcare in Burnaby is currently regarded as being “in crisis”, due to inadequate funding and a backlog of placement requests. Only 900 childcare places are currently available. At present, 350 children are waitlisted for SFU childcare places.

5. A shortage of spaces in childcare programs is partly attributed to the prohibitive costs of liability insurance for buildings and programs.
1. LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The Burnaby School District services an extensive and highly diverse population base. Almost 7,500 children between birth and five years are supported by district programs. 23,000 school-aged children are enrolled in 40 elementary and 8 secondary schools. District programs enroll nearly 800 Aboriginal children. District enrollment is currently stable, although a slight decrease was noted in the 2008 - 2009 school year. District 41 also operates the Provincial School for the Deaf and a number of alternative programs. 2006 census: 25.8% of children five and under are living in poverty in Burnaby - up 2% since 2001.

Burnaby is a multi-ethnic community: it is rich in cultural diversity, and a total of 79 languages are currently spoken in local communities. ESL programs are in place to service more than 4,100 students. Burnaby is located on the southwest coast of B.C. It is bordered by Burrard Inlet, the City of Vancouver to the west, the Cities of Port Moody and Coquitlam to the east, the City of New Westminster to the southeast, and the Fraser River. Burnaby is the third largest municipality in B.C. Its population is expected to exceed 246,227 by the year 2015.

2. INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Intersectoral partnerships are numerous in the Burnaby School District. The Burnaby ECD Community Table is supported by an extensive list of participating members, including: MCFD, SD 41, Community Living BC, Fraser Health, the City of Burnaby, Family Services of Greater Vancouver, Health Canada, Burnaby Parks and Recreation, the Burnaby Public Library, Burnaby Family Life, United Way, East Burnaby Family Place, South Burnaby Neighbourhood House, CCRR, SFU Childcare, Cameray, St. Matthews, St. Leonards, Information Children, Deaf Children, Purpose, Spirit of the Children, Aboriginal Development, Piaget Centre, Big Brothers, Association for Community Inclusion, Centre for Ability, Red Cross, CORI, SUCCESS, ISS, Multicultural Family Support, the Association for Community Education, Parents Together, Burnaby Hospice, Dixon Transition and the Edmonds MLA.

Community-based coalition programs found throughout Burnaby School District offer family resource programs, family support services, parenting workshops, prenatal and health services, ECD recreation programs, library and literacy services, and preschool programs. Family drop-in programs currently in operation include Family Literacy Centres, the Burnaby Family Life Institute, and South Burnaby Neighbourhood House Family Resource Programs and Community Kitchens. Nearly 800 Aboriginal children are supported by a strong coalition of community agencies and the Aboriginal Education Support Team. The ESL Welcome Centre supports new Canadian families and their children.
INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES  (cont’d)

Eight Parenting and Family Literacy Centres are fully operational in this district. They are comprehensive, school-based programs designed both to facilitate early learning and to offer guidance to parents and caregivers. Parenting and Family Literacy Centres were initially established in four Burnaby community and elementary schools in 2004. There are now eight Parenting and Family Literacy Centres operating in this district, three of which have become funded as StrongStart centres, and each is managed under the auspices of extensive community-agency coalitions. The eight centres are located at: Edmonds Community School, Maywood Community School, Second Street Community School, Stride Avenue Community School, Cascade Heights Elementary, Forest Grove Elementary, Morley Elementary, and Twelfth Avenue Elementary. Drop-in attendance at Parenting and Family Literacy Centres in 2006 was extensive: a total of 2469 adult visits and a total of 3198 child visits each month.

Community agencies in this district have come together to pool their resources. They have also developed a common language with which to interact with parents. A concrete example of this is the Burnaby Health Unit’s creation of a list of expected performance criteria from birth to the age of five years (presented in a moveable cardboard wheel). Burnaby Family Life has produced a number of informative pamphlets designed to educate parents, and the Burnaby ECD Community Table hosts the website kidsinburnaby.ca. Staff training programs have also been established in this district in a number of interagency programs. One example is current staff training in the use of common developmental screening tools, such as the Nippissing Developmental Screening tool. This screening tool is employed in collaboration with parents. Interagency teams meet frequently to discuss new program initiatives and to share perceptions of existing program needs.

3. SCHOOL DISTRICT ROLE

a. Early Learning

District 41 plays a significant leadership role in the development of early-literacy initiatives throughout local communities. District staff members are supportive of early-learning initiatives and work closely with community coalitions and early-learning educators in the district. The Board of Education is strongly in support of special program initiatives designed to meet the needs of immigrant and refugee populations. Notably, one trustee questioned the validity of the EDI to measure vulnerabilities in Aboriginal, ESL, or refugee populations, especially with regard to cultural differences.

b. School District Planning

Burnaby trustees express the need for a “ministry-enabling” provincial plan for ongoing, early-learning initiatives. Trustees believe such a plan would provide incentives to local school boards to implement new programs. One trustee commented that refugee school populations require sensitivity and special consideration, and that the district should seek out information and feedback from local communities when planning for the future.
b. School District Planning  (cont’d)

The Burnaby Community/District Literacy Plan was developed hand-in-hand with the School District Literacy Plan. The overall goal of district plans is to extend and develop support for immigrant families, ESL students, and Aboriginal students. District plans are focused in the building of community strength and capacity through the establishment of coalition and family-oriented programming.

District plans are specific and aim to target the following groups: Aboriginal students, male low-performing students, early learners, ESL students, and refugee students.

c. Tracking of Student Progress/Data Collection

A district-appointed Student Information Officer assists schools with the analysis of recorded data. Data findings are used by school staffs to determine policies and future programs. Schools and district personnel collect performance-standard data in the areas of language arts and social responsibility.

In 2008, the Burnaby Community Mapping Report was completed by researchers working under the auspices of the Understanding the Early Years Project. This report includes detailed maps of the following: socio-economic and multicultural variables found in specific locations, linguistic variables found in specific locations, and the precise locations of early-childhood support centres, family centres, and neighbourhood centres.

Data (in areas of reading and writing) is collected at both district and classroom levels in the Burnaby School District. Data sources include the Burnaby Kindergarten Assessment Summary, Reading and Writing Performance Standards, and Language Arts Performance Standards. District 41 places considerable emphasis on evidence-based information when planning program initiatives, and the ECD Table uses evidence-based data and EDI findings in order to identify vulnerable areas and to provide program guidelines. The ECD table not only examines data closely, but it also disseminates findings to all interagency coalitions.

4. EDI FINDINGS

EDI Reduction in Vulnerabilities

Baseline (Wave 0/Wave 1) to Wave 2 by Domain:

Neighbourhoods with family literacy centres:

- Burnaby Mt: Soc: -6.1; Lang & Cog: -12.6; Com: -4.4; Ever-risk: -13.0
- Cascade Heights: Phys: -3.9; Soc: -2.0; Lang & Cog: -3.7; Ever-risk: -3.5
- Metrotown: Phys: -3.1
- Stride Avenue: Soc: -0.6; Emo: -7.9; Lang & Cog: -8.2; Ever-risk: -7.6
- Middlegate: Ever-risk: -3.8
- Edmonds/12th Avenue: Phys: -8.0; Lang & Cog: -1.7; Ever-risk: -3.7
- Burquitlam Corridor: Phys: -6.1; Emo: -0.2; Lang & Cog: -4.0; Ever-risk: -6.2
5. FUNDING SOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Funding sources include federal government funding, MCFD, Public Health, United Way, Vancity, RBC, G&F Financial Group, HRDC, Scotia Bank, Burnaby Firefighters, the Alexandra Foundation, the Empty Stocking Fund, BC Gaming, Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women’s Services, the Burnaby Rotary Club, Metrotown, the Vancouver Foundation, CKNW Orphans’ Fund, and Coast Capital Savings.

Trustees believe the Ministry must recognize and officially fund early-learning initiatives. Ministry funding in SD 41 is mainly allocated to cover start-up costs, and trustees believe that funding must instead cover ongoing program costs. Grant-driven funding is highly valued, but it is not sustainable and therefore unreliable. Trustees also questioned the likelihood of available funding for future full-day kindergarten programs.

Understanding the Early Years programs are funded by the federal government, and Children First is supported by MCFD funding. Numerous in-kind funds support a variety of community-based programs, but finding reliable funds to support non-profit programs on a continuous basis presents problems. United Way is a particularly committed contributor to early childhood initiatives in this district. However, non-profit associations are constantly in search of additional and much needed funds.

Government three-year funding is often viewed as “top-down”, or as largely inattentive to small, locally generated programs. Government funding tends to target specific, in-place programs and is rarely tailored to emergent needs. Licensed childcare is at risk in Burnaby District, as government funding for licensed childcare is at times diverted to other programs. Only 900 childcare places are available, and the waitlist continues to grow.
Intersectoral coalitions and support systems for families are both complex and fluid. The chart provides a sample of the intersectoral partners, interactions and programs in this district and is not necessarily all-inclusive.
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NARRATOR 1:
Narrator 1 is the Tri-Cities ECD Community Development Coordinator.

Story: We are of the view that services and programs need to continue to be supported, not reduced in the face of improving EDI results.

Narrator 1 coordinates the ECD services and programs in the School District. She also facilitates the Intersectoral ECD Community Table. Her story begins with a historical perspective commencing in 2003: “When the community received the 2003 EDI results, Burquitlam was cited as the most vulnerable neighbourhood in the District. SHARE Family and Community Services (SHARE) had been delivering services in the neighbourhood for many years, through a long-standing Family Resource Centre in the Mountain View Elementary School Annex. In 2003-04, MCFD funding ($10,000) enabled SHARE to enhance their pre-existing Parent & Tot Drop-In program by adding a part-time Early Childhood Educator and expanding some of their ECD services. The Tri-Cities in general was and continues to be, under resourced compared to other communities in the Fraser Region, such as Burnaby and Surrey.”

“In 2004, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) implemented “Children First”, a community development initiative, whose intention was, and I quote: ‘to form a community partnership that brings together all sectors of the community to determine an integrated and comprehensive system for early childhood development.’ In the Tri-Cities an Early Childhood Development Committee had existed as part of other community development work, such as the Fraser North Council for Children and Youth and The Understanding the Early Years Initiative in 1999.”

The Narrator continues: “The 2004 implementation of “Children First” built upon the good work that was already underway. The existing committees had identified the lack of resources in the area as well as the vulnerability that existed in particular neighbourhoods, especially the Burquitlam Corridor. Prior to 2004 there was a Family Resource Centre (FRC) at Mountain View that was primarily operated by volunteers. SHARE had also engaged in a series of consultations with the residents in a low-cost rental housing complex, to work on several community development initiatives. Funding became available for the ECD Committee to hire a part-time Early Childhood Educator. This funding also provided money to operate the ‘Nobody’s Perfect Parenting’ Program and ‘Mother Goose Program.”

“The ECD Committee was granted additional funding and in 2005, I was hired as a full time Tri-Cities ECD Coordinator. The ECD Committee has continued to recognize the challenges that the Burquitlam neighbourhood faces and to learn from its successes. As an Intersectoral Coalition, with its roots in the ECD Committee, many services and resources were dedicated to the Burquitlam Corridor. The ECD Committee through its work on the “Hub Model” of service delivery has recognized Mountain View as an ECD Hub. It is true that the EDI 2006 results showed a vast improvement in the Burquitlam corridor because of all the Early Learning services and programs the intersectoral collation put in place, but we are also cognizant that this neighbourhood continues to face challenges and continues to need the programs and services offered there.”
Over the past 3 decades, the demographics of the neighbourhood have changed, and it’s now home to large numbers of immigrant and refugee families from a variety of countries including Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Korea, China. Their skills and abilities are diverse: some newcomers are well-educated and highly skilled while others are illiterate in their first language, some communicate easily in English while others do not.” “In addition, the ECD Committee was pleased that a StrongStart Centre was established at neighboring Roy Stibbs Elementary School in 2007, which is also a school in the Burquitlam Corridor. Very recently the ECD Committee was approached by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, to partner in the establishment of a program for young children (birth to six years) and their families that are Government Assisted Refugees. The Tri-Cities Family Integration Project is slated to start in November of 2008 and will help address gaps in the service delivery model in this neighbourhood.”

“By 2008, the hub at Mountain View Elementary is so busy, that there is limited availability to book in new programs or activities. Along with the ECD programs that have been established at the site, SHARE has also formed partnerships with ISS (Immigrant Services Society of BC) and S.U.C.C.E.S.S., to provide various programs and services for immigrant and refugee families in the area. Fraser Health also uses the site to operate its Healthy Babies program, which is funded by the Federal CPNP (Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program) dollars.”

The Narrator concludes her interview with this final statement: “From the ECD Committee’s perspective, collaboration, communication and sustainability are all key factors in the continuing success of the service delivery model in Burquitlam. We are of the view that services and programs need to continue to be supported, not reduced in the face of improving EDI results.”

NARRATOR 2:
Narrator 2 is Sheila McFadzean, Supervisor of Community Development, SHARE Family and Community Services.

Story: Community engagement and collaboration are key factors in supporting families.

The Narrator begins the story: “SHARE has been actively developing programs and services in the Burquitlam corridor over the past 30 years. From the outset, the engagement of community members has been integral to SHARE’s community development approach, and we have collaborated with local residents, service providers, and other community members to strengthen family and community capacity-building. A current example of this process is the “Schools and Communities Together” initiative through which we have worked with local families, 3 local elementary schools, Immigrant Services Society, Coquitlam Leisure and Parks, and other partners. From the community meetings which have been held to date, we have developed plans for an After-School Program at the 3 schools, and a variety of other activities – many of which will be volunteer-led.”
“The Burquitlam neighbourhood includes several large housing complexes: the more affordable housing and larger apartments they offer has historically attracted many families with young children. Over the past 3 decades, the demographics of the neighbourhood have changed, and it’s now home to large numbers of immigrant and refugee families from a variety of countries including Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Korea, China. Their skills and abilities are diverse: some newcomers are well-educated and highly skilled while others are illiterate in their first language, some communicate easily in English while others do not.”

“In order to engage with and support local families, we have recruited staff, volunteers, and community residents who speak a variety of languages, and we continue to partner with organizations like Immigrant Services Society and S.U.C.C.E.S.S. who can assist us in reaching out to families in the neighbourhood. We are constantly reviewing the programs and services being delivered at our Mountain View Family Resource Centre (adapting program content, delivery methods, etc.) to ensure our programs are inclusive and culturally appropriate. We visited the Mountain View Family Resource Centre with her, and observed many of the programs in operation.”

She continues: “Many partnerships have made this a successful Hub for families and children and most certainly the programs and services have contributed to reducing the level of vulnerability in children. SHARE implemented programs and services in this corridor 30 years ago, beginning with a Thrift Store and Food Bank, and later developing the Family Resource Centre which included a volunteer-run Parent & Tot Drop-In, family support programs, and family counseling. As the demographics of the Burquitlam Corridor have changed to include a large population of immigrant and refugee families, we realized we needed to work with other service providers to meet the changing needs of the families.”

“The partnerships are key and represent the multicultural neighbourhoods in which we are working. Mandarin, Cantonese, Farsi, Korean, and Russian are just a few of the languages spoken in the Burquitlam Corridor. SHARE has partnered with ISS to provide services and programs in other languages. As a result of the physical location at Mountain View Elementary School, more families are coming to the Hub for a wide variety of reasons. Fraser Health runs a ‘Healthy Babies Program’: A Public Health Nurse, a Nutritionist and a Group Facilitator meet with mothers and children up to 6 months of age, over lunch and distribute vitamins.”

SHARE also partners with the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Multicultural ECD Team: their Chinese, Korean and Farsi workers have been a great asset to SHARE programs. SHARE has also partnered with Fraser Health to offer a 3-session “Healthy School Lunches” program. The Fraser Health Nutritionist demonstrated healthy, economical lunches which children would enjoy, and he incorporated some foods common to newcomer families’ countries of origin as well as typical Canadian food items.”
The Narrator continues: “In 2000, SHARE obtained a United Way grant to support a community development process with local residents to address concerns regarding housing, crime, and access to park space. Through a series of community meetings, residents formed the ‘Cottonwood Connections’ group, worked with City of Coquitlam Leisure & Parks’ staff to redevelop a neighborhood park near their housing complex and a summer program ‘Park Pals’ which provided recreation activities for young children during July and August. The Coquitlam Community Police Station created a store front in the Burquitlam Plaza, not far from the Mountain View Hub. The strong engagement of families in the neighborhood, with support from a variety of service providers, school staff, and other community partners, has absolutely made a difference to improving the lives of families in this neighborhood. No question.”

SHARE Family Resource Centre, the Mountain View Hub, continues to offer a wide range of programs and services to meet the needs of the families. The Narrator notes that all programs are offered free of charge to the participants. Families are also encouraged to contact SHARE for information about various workshops and other short-term programs that are offered at the Family Resource Centre, and the Mountain View Hub also serves as a point of connection to other Tri-Cities community services.

The Narrator listed the following:

- Parent and Tot Drop-In - Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays (9:00 am-11:30 am)
- Parent-Child Mother Goose (weekly for 8 weeks; 2 English language programs per year at MTV, and 1 bilingual program offered in cooperation with SUCCESS)
- Nobody’s Perfect Parenting Program (weekly for 6 weeks; 1 program/year at MTV) - transportation is available, if needed
- Parent Support Circle – Tuesdays 6:00 – 8:00 pm
- Fraser Health – Healthy Babies Program – Tuesdays 11:30 am – 2:00 pm
- La Leche League – 2nd and 4th Thursdays 9:30 am – 12:00 pm
- Korean Mothers Together – Wednesdays 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm
- SHARE Community Living Program – Saturday Activity Club Saturdays 9:30 am – 3:30 pm - supports children with disabilities
- Immigrant Services Society of BC – Settlement Services
  - Provides settlement support to assist families who have recently immigrated to Canada
  - Families meet with ISS counselors by appointment, and services are offered:
    - In English & Korean - Mondays (9:00 am – 4:30 pm)
    - In English, Farsi, Dari & Pashto – Wednesdays & Thursdays (9:00 am- 4:30 pm)
- English Practice Groups – Mondays 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm & Thursdays 3:30 pm – 5:00 pm
• English Practice Groups – Mondays 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm & Thursdays 3:30 pm – 5:00 pm
• Arabic Language & Qur’an Classes for Children - Thursdays 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
  – Parent-led program to teach Arabic to young children
• Monthly Meetings with Chinese-Speaking Families - 1st Fridays 10:00 am – 11:00 am
  – Families meet the first Friday of each month with SUCCESS ECD Worker for the Chinese community

Mountain View Family Resource Centre, in collaboration with other partners and to link more closely with other Tri-Cities ECD services. We regularly arrange visits to our Parent & Tot Drop-In by resource people from other services (e.g., Public Health Nurses, Dental Hygienists, Children’s Librarians, Speech & Language Pathologists, Occupational & Physiotherapists). These visits help families link to other community resources, and obtain information and support to assist them in raising their young children. MCFD funding support for our Family Support Worker (ECD Specialist) and more recently, for a part-time Program Coordinator of Early Childhood Development, has strengthened our Parent & Tot Drop-In program, and provided additional staff resources to support parent education and leadership development. Additional parenting programs such as Parent-Child Mother Goose, Nobody’s Perfect, and Parent Support Circle, have enhanced parents’ skills. The Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) Program, which has occurred each spring at Mountain View and other schools, has helped to prepare 4-year-olds for their entry to Kindergarten. The active involvement of community residents in initiatives affecting their families, the continuing development and expansion of programs at the Mountain View Family Resource Centre site, and the increasing collaboration among service providers have all contributed to the improvements we’ve seen in the EDI scores for children in the Burquitlam Corridor schools.”

Narrator 3 and Narrator 4:
Narrator 3 is a District Early Learning/Elementary Coordinator and Narrator 4 is the District Early Learning Support Teacher.

**Story: Connecting Refugee Families with Coquitlam Schools**

Both Narrators commented on the services and programs that have been implemented in the Burquitlam Corridor between Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the EDI results. Both Narrators credited the EDI with helping service providers re-examine their programs and services for young children in the Burquitlam Corridor. MCFD, CCRR, Fraser Health, SHARE, ISS, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., and the School District collectively came together to talk about the needs in the corridor and how to collectively meet them. They asked the questions: What are the needs? What can we do to meet them? How do we reach out to the families to ensure they are getting what they need to improve the lives of young children?
They commented on the substantive work of the Intersectoral ECD Committee in making a difference to early learning for young children. Narrator 3 talked about the changing demographics in the corridor. She said: “Over the past few years the neighbourhoods in the Burquitlam Corridor have changed significantly. There is a growing population of refugee families that were not residing there in the last decade. Many of these people are third generation families born in refugee camps and coming to Canada from many parts of the world. This has had numerous implications for the three schools in the corridor. Many children are coming to school with low levels of literacy in their first languages in addition to speaking very little or no English.”

Narrator 4 said: “For many, the Mountain View Hub has become a ‘neutral territory’ for vulnerable families. They feel safe and welcome attending the various programs offered by ISS, SHARE, and the School District. There are families representing many ethnic backgrounds so programming has to be flexible and culturally sensitive. We have noticed families helping families. People learning from one another.”

Narrator 5 represents joint interviews with several representatives from the Tri-Cities ECD Table. Organizations or agencies represented at the table include: Ministry of Family and Child Development (MCFD), SHARE Family and Community Services, and S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and the School District.

**Story:** Here’s the funding – What are we going to do about the high level of vulnerable families and children? When are we going to act on what we know?

The Narrators unanimously agreed that the EDI results, which indicated a lower level of vulnerability in the Burquitlam Corridor, were a result of the intersectoral coalition that has developed over years of collaboratively working together. “We have committees that can just make things happen. We are the decision makers and we were at the table to make sure the work got done and the process was not slowed down. We put our money on the table and our goal was to look after the families that needed it most. We were determined”.

The Narrators continued to describe the services and programs that supported families in the Mountain View Hub. “A Family Resource Centre was implemented and the funding was allocated which grew the program and provided staff. Before the funding, it was mostly volunteers that made it happen. When we received the funding, it enabled the program to increase services. We were able to hire an Early Childhood Educator to coordinate the services. It made a huge difference - it not only increased the capacity of the program but having paid staff also increased the attendance substantially. They can make connections to community resources.”
The Narrators talked about the importance of ISS having an office at the Mountain View Hub especially because of the large population of immigrant and refugee families in the corridor. They said: “Immigrant Services Society of BC joined the Mountain View Hub bringing staff and resources. They worked with other agencies to reduce the barriers of culture, language, and improve communication as many families are lacking information. They offer Direct Service and Referral Services. If families are more settled, they will come to the programs. We found it was very important to have ISS staff at Mountain View so ISS workers can drop in and so can families. The ISS staff works very closely with the Public Health Nurses to translate as the ISS workers can answer questions in many languages.”

The narration continued: “We also need to mention two other funding sources that supported our cause. One was United Way and the Success by Six Funding. They supplied major funding. They had availability of dollars and they offered support through collaboration. The second source of funding was MCFD. One person we need to single out was the Director from MCFD who is now retired. She was the champion for the Burquitlam Corridor. She saw the need in the neighbourhoods and she brought the funding from MCFD and put it on the ECD table. She brought in representatives from HELP to share the EDI results. She invited the researcher from HELP to present the HELP Community Mapping and data from the neighbourhoods. The HELP 2001 data demonstrated Burquitlam was in trouble and where we needed to focus are the neighbourhood that needed services. The EDI and the HELP results were clear: the highest level of vulnerability in the Coquitlam School District was the Burquitlam Corridor. There were very limited physical sites, no libraries and no community centres. We collectively decided the corridor needed a Hub. She said: “Here’s the funding – What are we going to do about the high level of vulnerable families and children? When are we going to act on what we know?”

Narrator 6 is the current Principal of Mountain View Elementary School.

**Story:** As the years progress, Mountain View Elementary School has developed to become a hub of support for the community.

When we interviewed Narrator 6, she indicated she has been the principal at this school for two years. She said: “Collaboration between the three Elementary Schools in the corridor, and SHARE Family Services Society, resulted in a decision to offer joint programs. We decided to communicate this by hosting community meetings, involving primarily, but not exclusive to families from Miller Park, Mountain View and Roy Stibbs school and communities. The purpose and hope was to try and meet the needs of the families in our respective communities by connecting entire families to the schools and the surrounding community.
We are doing this by facilitating opportunities for families to voice their needs and concerns, and then help them access the school and/or community resources available to assist them. We felt that this way, we also encouraged leadership and ownership – guide vs. do. For example, families felt that they would like to have activities for their children after school. At a community meeting, where Parks and Recreation as well as SHARE were present, this need was noted and currently, open gym is being offered at Roy Stibbs Elementary School, and an after school program, which will run through Mountain View, is being designed and is scheduled to commence in December of 2008. Also, a Chinese Mother’s group has been meeting and the group leader is a mom from the community.”

She continued: “Immigrant Services Society (ISS) has been directly involved with Mountain View families, hosting workshops focusing on how to use a computer, creating a resume, and applying for a job. At this point, we have held four community meetings, involving the participation of various partner groups including, SHARE, ISS, Coquitlam Parks and Recreation, Coquitlam Public Library, Friends of Simon Tutoring Project, SWIS, School Based Social Worker and School Liaison Officer. Mountain View will host the next meeting in February of 2009.

As the years progress, Mountain View Elementary School has developed to become a hub of support for the community. As all schools offer support to students and families, we value the relationship that Mountain View has with its partner groups as well as with schools within the district. For many years, Mountain View families have been supported over the Christmas season. Each year, Mountain View staff gathers with former staff, administration, and interested participants, and enjoys a delicious meal, cooked by a beloved member of Mountain View’s staff. This is a unique opportunity where discussion around Christmas hampers for families takes place. We also get to relax and enjoy each other’s company as we plan for the busy upcoming month of December. This year, planning for this endeavor has directly included the SWIS workers. They have been key players in assisting us in communicating our intentions to families with sensitivity, integrity and wisdom, as they ensure that family beliefs and culture remain uncompromised.”

Narrator 7 is a senior manager for Immigrant Services Society of BC.

*Story:* If we want to make a difference in these families’ lives, we need all service providers, including the School District, to work together and focus on coordination of programs and services, outreach, early intervention, ongoing assessment, and trauma counseling. We have great hope for the Mountain View Hub.

Narrator 7 works for Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISS) and was proactive in establishing an office space and drop-in centre located in the Mountain View Hub.
There are three ISS workers and a Korean and Settlement worker that use the Hub office space as their base location in the Burquitlam Corridor. Although they are located at Mountain View Elementary School, they have outreach portfolios that encompass all of the Burquitlam Corridor. Funding is allocated on a per person basis. He said: “We know the refugees living in the neighbourhood have been born in refugee camps. We know they need resources. Two reoccurring themes that concern us are the trauma they have experienced, and the low levels of literacy, even in their first language. We absolutely need more resources for Trauma Counseling and we need more resources for transportation to ensure families can access the resources they need.”

“The Narrator reported that the refugee population in the Burquitlam Corridor is not spread out. He stated: “It is a target population. There are many Farsi and Dari speaking families that have been parachuted into one area that continues to need resources. Many service providers were not set up to receive them. Many women are not getting the prenatal care they require. 30% to 40% of the population does not have a doctor. If we want to make a difference in these families’ lives, we need all service providers, including the School District, to work together and focus on coordination of programs and services, outreach, early intervention, ongoing assessment and trauma counseling. We have great hope for the Mountain View Hub.”

NARRATOR 8:
Narrator 8 represents three School Trustees including the Chair of the Board of Education in the Coquitlam School District.

Story: Our concern is around sustainability and funding. We ask ourselves: What are the barriers to funding? Without the funding, we wouldn’t have the resources to do the quality of work.

The Narrators commented on the Burquitlam Corridor as one of changing demographics. One Narrator commented: “As more young families are moving in and older families are being replaced. It is crucial to new Canadians coming to the area, that the housing is affordable.” All Narrators agreed: “It was important for us to subsidize the rental costs of school facilities for service providers utilizing our schools to ensure access and equity for all families”.

They continued: “Our concern is around sustainability and funding. We ask ourselves: What are the barriers to funding? Without the funding, we wouldn’t have the resources to do the quality of work. For example, the StrongStart Centres. We need sustainable funding – we don’t want targeted grants or one time grant funding.”
NARRATOR 8 (cont'd)

We want to be able to count on the funding so we can continue to provide quality services and programming. We are also concerned about the utilization rate. Our schools are filled with community group usage that we subsidize. We want recognition for the usage in our facilities. This will be particularly important as the Ministry mandate has expanded to include Early Learning. Boards of Education need clarity from the Ministry around funding and utilization of space in schools for programs and services for families with zero to five children.”

NARRATOR 9:
Narrator 9 is the Assistant Superintendent of the Elementary Schools in the Burquitlam Corridor.

Story: The Tri-Cities Family Integration Project is deepening the work with the Immigrant and Refugee Families in the Burquitlam Corridor.

We asked the Assistant Superintendent to tell us more about the Tri-Cities Family Integration Project and the connection to the work that has been happening in the Burquitlam Corridor. She said: “This is deepening the work with the Immigrant and Refugee Families in the Burquitlam Corridor. We know that we, the Intersectoral Coalition, have greatly improved both programs and services offered to the families over the past few years. We are convinced that is why you see the reduced levels of vulnerability in the EDI results for that neighbourhood. We also know that there are still not enough resources in the Corridor. Within the last year, we have located Social Workers and SWISS workers in the schools in the Burquitlam Corridor to work with the families. Most recently, we worked together to apply for funding for the Tri-Cities Family Integration Project.”

She continued by describing the project: “The Tri-Cities Family Integration Project (TRI-FIP) is an amazing example of collaboration and co-ordination at its best. For sometime, the ECD Committee has been working very collaboratively on a number of initiatives. One of the finest examples has been in the area of funding allocation. In our community, the Ministry of Children and Family Development has brought all their ECD funding (Children First, Building Blocks and Family Resource Programs) to the community table for allocation recommendations. The committee decided in 2006 to develop a Funding Committee. The Funding Committee is made up by representatives from Ministry of Children and Family Development, Fraser Health Authority, School District #43, and United Way of the Lower Mainland. The ECD Coordinator supports the group through co-ordination and gathering of information from the larger ECD Committee. This group has had tremendous success in the allocation of funds to community programs, and the United Way has also started using the same group and process for the allocation of their Success By Six funds.”

The Narrator continues: “In the Spring of 2008, the ECD Coordinator was contacted by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development and asked if she thought the EDC Table could collaborate on a Refugee Project for young children and their families in our community.”
Knowing the success of the public partners in our community working together on the funding committee and the success of the collaborative work in the Burquitlam Corridor, she was confident that our community could partner on such a project. She invited staff from the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development to meet with the funding committee, and the partners immediately saw how the project could develop and be built upon the fine work already underway in the community."

“Based on the criteria for the project targeting Government Assisted Refugees (GARS), the funding committee partners referred to the ongoing work being done in the Burquitlam Corridor, and felt that we needed to base the project there. The next step was to invite the three major agencies working in Burquitlam to the table: Share Family and Community Services (SHARE), ISS (Immigrant Services Society of BC) and S.U.C.C.E.S.S. The agencies were very positive about the opportunity for continued collaboration and they genuinely felt that TRI-FIP would fill a much-needed gap in service delivery. The agencies have repeatedly had staff report to them that Refugee families’ needs were not being fully met with the current service delivery model. They were anxious to develop a new project and continue the collaboration with each other, and the public partners.”

The story continues: “In addition to in-kind contributions of staffing, both School District #43 and Ministry of Children and Family Development agreed to contribute funding. United Way also came with some substantial funding and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development agreed to fund 70% of the project. Fraser Health has also agreed to contribute in-kind staffing to the project. The three agencies met and came up with an innovative service delivery plan. SHARE will be the lead agency for the delivery of services and will sub-contract with ISS and S.U.C.C.E.S.S. School District 43 has agreed to be the stewards of the funding and has signed a contract with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development. The planning group, which was a combination of the funding committee and the three agencies, has now formed as an Advisory Committee for the Project and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development has also been invited to sit at the table.”

The Narrator concludes: “My sense is that because the infrastructure both of the ECD Funding Committee and the Mountain View Hub was in place, we were able to design a project in a very short time frame and in such a collaborative manner.”
A. EMERGING THEMES

1. There are funding and resourcing implications for service providers, including the School District, when the demographics of a neighbourhood dramatically change. The influx of new immigrant and refugee families into the neighbourhoods in the Burquitlam Corridor has demanded a new landscape for programs and services to meet the needs of new families to Canada.

2. The Intersectoral Coalition represented through the ECD Committee, has re-aligned staffing and resources and established new projects for immigrant and refugee families in schools/neighborhoods where there are high proportions of vulnerable children.

3. Partnerships between Intersectoral Coalitions and the School District play a significant role in implementing a wide variety of programs and services for immigrant and refugee families.

4. Providing no-cost registration and transportation to programs assists in reducing the barriers to access for families.

5. The Board of Education advocates for changes to the Ministry of Education’s utilization rates to include usage of community programs and services in the funding formula.

6. Trustees believe there is a correlation between strong neighbourhoods, both socially and economically, and childhood development outcomes and they are committed to fostering healthy early development in neighbourhoods such as the Burquitlam Corridor. They would also like to see the provincial funding to support the implementation of Early Learning programs.

7. A key factor to reducing the levels of vulnerability was the data from the EDI results and the HELP Community Mapping. The analysis of this evidence was the impetus for the ECD Table to realign resources, staff, programs, services, and funding to the Burquitlam Corridor.

B. BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS

1. Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Farsi-speaking immigrant populations struggle with language barriers when accessing early-learning programs. Many immigrant families experience financial challenges when forced to travel in order to reach program locations. Refugee/immigrant populations often experience physical isolation, as they do not own cars, and many single immigrant parents struggle with heavy domestic responsibilities.
Afghans tend to favour large families and often produce many children. Consequently, financial pressures and domestic responsibilities are considerable for many Afghan families. Financial constraints may hinder young mothers from accessing support.

Many immigrant families experience social and geographic isolation in the Burquitlam Corridor: many need services in place in their immediate neighbourhood. Korean families especially deal with social and geographic isolation, as many young Korean fathers work in their homeland, which means that young Korean mothers are often forced to struggle alone to raise their children in Canada.

Protracted time spent in refugee camps or war zones often means that children are malnourished, physically or mentally impaired, and illiterate. These children require extensive and specialized support and place stresses on an already stressed system.

Immigrant children are often used as interpreters for their parents and therefore are forced to miss essential schooling.

Illiteracy carries a stigma, and therefore immigrant populations often fail to admit to deficiencies and to access information.

“Invisible” populations are often neither identified nor served: customized ways of reaching people are needed in order to access “invisible” populations.

Elementary-school closures have brought some early-learning programs to a rapid halt.

Lack of available space in school facilities concerns community educators.

Ministry funding often targets one-time grants: sustainable, reliable funding is needed to cover ongoing costs, in order to ensure quality performance.
1. LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

District 43 (Coquitlam) is situated in an area known as the Tri-Cities region. Its population is close to 200,000, and although most families live in densely populated urban or suburban neighbourhoods, some families live in outlying rural areas.

Population demographics in this district present planners with challenges. Overall population is increasing, but school enrolment is decreasing. Elementary-school closures have brought some new and much-needed early-learning programs to a rapid halt.

Changes in population demographics show a considerable increase in vulnerable ESL populations, many of whom have arrived from war zones or refugee camps. Many demonstrate high rates of illiteracy. A large influx of immigrant refugees is expected to flood this region in the foreseeable future.

Coquitlam scores higher than the provincial average for measures of poverty, income assistance, seniors’ support, and unemployment benefits. Enormous discrepancies exist between the wealthy inhabitants of this region and those who live in poverty. Coquitlam now has the highest rate of foreign-born residents living within the Metro-Vancouver area. Languages commonly spoken in this area are numerous and include: Arabic, Cambodian, Cantonese, Chinese, Croatian, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Farsi, Polish, Punjabi, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, Ukrainian, Urdu, and Vietnamese. Many residents do not speak English: 11.5% of students enrolled in District 43 schools require ESL support.

2. INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Intersectoral coalitions concerned with promoting early learning and literacy skills in the Burquitlam Corridor are numerous. They include: SD 43, MCFD, the City of Coquitlam, a number of regional public libraries, Douglas College, the Immigrant Services Society (ISS), SUCCESS, SHARE, Family and Community Services, Simon Fraser Health, the Simon Fraser Society for Community Living, Spirit of BC Committee, Step-by-Step Child Development Society, Community Development Services, the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce, the Tri-Cities Early Childhood Development Committee, YMCA Child Care Resource and Referral, and the Rotary Club.

SUCCESS is one intersectoral community-based organization that is particularly influential in this area. SUCCESS operates to bridge language and cultural dissonance between indigenous and immigrant populations: the SUCCESS multicultural team reaches out to serve Afghan, Korean, Cantonese, Chinese, and Iranian populations, and provides transition programs and translation services to a vast array of new immigrants. Under the auspices of SUCCESS, Multicultural Early Childhood Development Services provide sociocultural and language support to preschool children who speak Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean or Farsi.
SHARE Family and Community Services offer numerous community-based programs: drop-in centres, parent-support groups, literacy and language programs, and English-practice groups. SHARE is a non-profit, community-based coalition that is supported by MCFD, Community Living for Children and Youth, the Immigrant Services Society of B.C., Tri-Cities, and Early Intervention Therapy Services. The ECD Committee and the ECD Hub Sub-Committee are participating members of SHARE. These two committees work collaboratively to identify community needs and to plan subsequent programs. One example of a program implementation that is designed to meet a specific community need is the Korean Mothers Together program, which facilitates friendship and support networks for young Korean women with small children. SHARE and the Immigrant Services Society work closely to provide support to the Afghan, Farsi-speaking, Korean, and Chinese communities of District 43. Program offerings include parenting courses, English language training, and support groups for seniors who act as caregivers for their families.

The Ministry of Settlement and Multiculturalism collaborates with district staff to create and disseminate informative handouts, pamphlets, and brochures to immigrant families. Materials are printed in multiple languages and provide information regarding expected performance standards for early-childhood development. One example is the Immigrant Children and Youth Settlement Continuum publication, which provides immigrant parents with information regarding the behaviours and performance standards they may reasonably expect from their preschoolers. Immigrant Support Services also conduct instructive and interactive workshops in the Coquitlam district for immigrant families.

There are a number of school-based, early-childhood programs in place in the Burquitlam Corridor, including the StrongStart Centre at Roy Stibbs Elementary funded by the Ministry of Education, and the Family Resource Centre Hub at Mountain View Elementary. Community agencies came together to create and fund the Family Resource Centre Hub. These agencies make decisions regarding program needs, guidelines, and directions.

Local Parks and Recreation organizations support a number of community-based early-learning programs, many of which are presented under the umbrella Parks Play Service. Coquitlam Mall hosts numerous community family-literacy and early-learning events, and along with local libraries offers ongoing reading and literacy programs throughout the school year. Community collaboration is strong in School District 43, and is grounded in a fundamental shift in recent years towards more socially structured community action.

3. SCHOOL DISTRICT ROLE
   a. Early Learning

   The Coquitlam School District has identified its role as one geared towards strengthening liaisons between intersectoral agencies engaged in early learning initiatives. District staff members are committed to providing a broad regional and provincial framework of collaboration aimed at promoting early childhood development and preschool literacy.
Early Learning  *(cont’d)*

School District 43 also wishes to play an increasing role in the implementation of early learning and family-literacy programs, and an equally strong role in raising public awareness of early-learning needs in the Tri-Cities area. District staff members express a wish to work within local municipalities both to implement and promote early-learning initiatives. They hope to use advertisements, community-awareness events, or other forms of publicity to reach and inform local populations. Overall, the district sees its role as that of a supporter, or enabler, of intersectoral early-learning activities.

**b. School District Planning**

District 43 has identified its highest priority as that of improving students’ literacy skills, and has committed both a substantial part of its budget, along with additional ministry funds, towards achieving this goal.

Another priority is the support of early learners and their families. Support of the whole family is seen as a major target when formulating plans.

The district has also put in place a five-year Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. This agreement is a plan that emerged from intensive district, ministry, and Aboriginal community collaboration. The plan aims to improve the literacy skills of Aboriginal students in the Coquitlam School District.

The district also intends to develop one, single, coherent literacy plan for all local communities, and to ensure that all future planning is jointly undertaken, in order to avoid duplication. The district plans to include all community players when formulating new directions or coordinating activities and programs. Plans also include establishing Strong Start centres in needy areas, providing an Early Learning Support Teacher in all schools deemed vulnerable, and ensuring an increase in the number of children fully prepared for kindergarten entrance.

District 43 plans to place considerable future focus on ESL adult literacy, family-oriented learning, and further development of measurable criteria for tracking student progress. The use of increased technology (including video and audio) to reach non-readers and immigrant families is also a priority in this district. District staff members are aware of the need to implement effective strategies for supporting families who are geographically, socially, or culturally isolated. District plans include the implementation of innovative structures designed to bridge the gap between refugee/immigrant populations and the support services available to them. Plans are underway to increase the number of parent “ambassadors” in the district. Ambassadors who are fluent in English and Mandarin have so far proved highly effective.
c. Tracking of Student Progress/Data Collection

Classroom assessment tools are varied and employed extensively in this district. Findings are used to create program initiatives and to direct the dissemination of funds. In 2004, 74% of kindergarten students met or exceeded expectations, and in 2007, 79% met or exceeded expectations. Fluctuations in scores are thought to reflect fluctuations in the influx of refugee populations to the District.

Teachers in the Burquitlam Corridor schools gathered the following evidence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Assessment</th>
<th>2004 - 2005 % Meeting expectations</th>
<th>2005 - 2006 % Meeting expectations</th>
<th>2006 - 2007 % Meeting expectations</th>
<th>2007 - 2008 % Meeting expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten literacy</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 reading</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2 writing</td>
<td></td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. EDI FINDINGS

District staff members responded vigorously to Wave 1 EDI findings, and 13 literacy-support teachers were immediately instated in those schools identified as vulnerable. In 21 schools, the results of initial EDI findings showed that 20% of students were designated as “vulnerable”, and 11 of these schools were subsequently selected for the Early Literacy Project in 2004 – 2005. An additional 10 schools were selected for additional support the following year. Wave 2 EDI findings showed considerably reduced vulnerabilities in students enrolled in the targeted schools.

HELP and EDI findings were viewed as influential in bringing about a reduction in vulnerabilities in this district. MCFD funding was put in place after Wave 1, and this support is seen as essential to subsequent reduction in vulnerabilities. “Burquitlam is in trouble” was a commonly expressed theme following Wave 1, but expressed views have changed considerably since then. Mountain View Hub Centre has since been established and is fully supported by a large number of community-agency coalitions.

EDI Reduction in Vulnerabilities

Baseline (Wave 0/Wave 1) to Wave 2 by Domain:

Burquitlam Corridor:
- Phys: -6.1
- Emo: -0.2
- Lang & Cog: -4.0
- Ever-risk: -6.2
5. FUNDING SOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY

MCFD now provides three-year (rather than one-year) funding, and this has created stabilization in planning and sustainability of programs. Health funding has not increased in tandem with MCFD funding. Collaborative interagency efforts and the related pooling of available funding have proved influential in bringing about changes in this district. The ECD Table was central to accomplishing this goal: its members worked consistently to convince all key players that pooling district, city, SHARE, Fraser Health, MCFD, and other agency funding would prove powerful. A collaborative effort made this plan a reality. The publication of Wave 1 findings inspired and united subsequent collaboration, and a joint, galvanized effort was instigated to eliminate interagency competition and to replace it with collaboration.

United Way funding has proved invaluable. A shift between 2003 and 2005 in the allocated dissemination of United Way funding meant that funding was subsequently directed towards the support of collaborative ventures rather than isolated or specific ventures. United Way funding now allows a Community Development Worker to operate more extensively throughout needy areas in the district.

District educators express the view that the Ministry of Education must recognize utilization rates, and include community programs, preschools, and daycares in its assessment of facility usage. Realistic recognition of early-learning programs and increased funding for these programs is viewed as essential. Many educators believe that StrongStart and Hub Centres should be allocated funding to support administrative costs and the hiring of support staff, and that increased clarity is needed regarding district funding responsibilities. Some funding is generated by international-student grants, but access to sustainable block funding is viewed as essential in order to keep early-learning programs afloat. Ministry funding often targets specific grant allocations. Without sustainable, ongoing funding in place to cover the costs of early-learning programs, the quality of these programs will perhaps be steadily eroded.
Focus: Whole District
Intersectoral coalitions and support systems for families are both complex and fluid. The chart provides a sample of the intersectoral partners, interactions and programs in this district and is not necessarily all-inclusive.
NARRATOR 1  
*STORY:* Supporting Parents as the most important teacher of their children  

NARRATOR 2  
*STORY:* Children coaching Children  

NARRATOR 3:  
*STORY:* Programming and support needs to be seamless between agencies  

NARRATOR 4:  
*STORY:* Connecting Families with School through our Early Learning Programs  

NARRATOR 5:  
*STORY:* Our best chance to make a difference in the lives of young children  

NARRATOR 6  
*STORY:* A focus on Early Learning is integrated into the culture of our district  

NARRATOR 7  
*STORY:* You have to go out to the community - you can’t wait for the community to come to you.  

CONCLUSION  

a. Emerging Themes  

b. Barriers to Access and Challenges to Success  

SCHOOL DISTRICT 46: SUNSHINE COAST  

1. Location and Demographics  

2. Intersectoral Coalitions and Community Agencies  

3. School District Role  
   a. Early Learning  
   b. School District Planning  
   c. Tracking of Student Progress/Data Collection  

4. EDI Findings  

5. Funding Sources and Sustainability
Narrator 1 is a District Teacher of Early Learning in School District 46. She works throughout the Sunshine Coast.

**Story:** Supporting Parents as the most important teacher of their children

Narrator 1 begins her story by talking about the beginnings of the SPARK! early-learning initiative. She said: “A few years ago, we began to look at what else we could do to support the families of young children, so that students enter school ready to learn. Our district has provided strong leadership in this area and began implementing programs for families with 4 year-old children almost a decade ago. However, we felt strongly that we wanted to work with families much earlier - we needed to put services and programs in place for parents and children from birth to five. We knew the research - the key learning takes place in a child’s first five years. So we started to look for programs that already existed and through our research we discovered the “Ready! For Kindergarten” program from Washington State. We negotiated the terms to use the program and changed the name to SPARK! (Supporting Parents about Readiness for Kindergarten) which reflects the importance we place on helping parents to kindle their child’s interest in learning.”

The Narrator continues: “We imagined a program that would be an extension of the wonderful work the Public Health nurses and the prenatal programs had established working with parents of newborns. We talked with Public Health nurses about the possibility of inviting the parents attending prenatal classes to enroll in the SPARK! program. The Public Health nurses agreed and we now partner very closely. I attend the baby ‘reunion class’ of every prenatal session offered on the Sunshine Coast. At this class I meet the parents, tell them about the SPARK! program and sign them up for the next SPARK! class. Public Health data indicates that 71% of new parents in our community have attended prenatal classes so it is our number one way to promote the program. That, and parents talking to one another about SPARK!”

“As I said, SPARK! is a program for parents and their children from birth to five years old. SPARK! provides practical ideas, which are all supported by research, to help parents engage their children in learning. The classes are ninety minutes and we offer sessions at various locations in fall, winter and spring, every year until their child enters Kindergarten. There is an additional half hour offered in the first session to parents who are participating for the first time. Our goal is to have every parent in our community attend SPARK! so every parent is aware of the important role s/he plays in supporting his/her child’s learning. We provide free childcare in another classroom during the SPARK! sessions so parents who need the childcare have access to it. Parents who attend SPARK! are offered the opportunity to have an age-appropriate book mailed directly to their home in their child’s name once a month, again free of charge. This is thanks to the partnership between our school district and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library Program.”
The Narrator reported that all parents with young children birth to age five are welcome to participate at no cost to the family. They register in a class with parents who have children the same age as their child. Each class provides information to parents about what children learn at each stage of development. She said: "I model the activities in the class, using a variety of materials and resources. The primary focus is to encourage parents to talk, sing, read and play with their children in engaging ways that really help to support skills in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional development. We also try to make sure we provide a network of support for the families. We work closely with Public Health, Community Services and MCFD. We talk about what other programs they could access in the community."

Narrator 1 continues with the description of SPARK!: “The hope is that parents will replicate the activities modeled in the class, at home with their own children. One of the advantages of SPARK! is that the participating parents go home with the same resources I use to demonstrate the activities. For example, if I’m using a puzzle or manipulatives with the activity, the parents receive the same puzzle or manipulatives to keep at home so it makes it very easy for them to repeat the activities with their child. All the materials and resources are shipped to us and the School District pays for them. The materials include toys, learning resources and handouts which are given to parents at each class.”

When parents first come to SPARK!, they are asked to complete a “Confidential Background Form” that asks about the family. It asks questions such as how many other children are in the family, the language most often spoken in the home, the parent’s level of education, how many years the parent has lived on the Sunshine Coast, family income, who is the primary caregiver, the amount of reading time with the child, the number of community programs accessed, and the child’s preference of activities (e.g., books, TV, music, outdoor play, computer). The Narrator comments: “Of course it is voluntary to fill out the form. It helps us to know about the families and to evaluate the program.”

The Narrator continued to identify other Early Learning Programs implemented by the School District that appear to have contributed to reducing the levels of vulnerability in all but one Sunshine Coast neighbourhood. She talks about the School District deepening their commitment to Early Learning by extending the SPARK! program to include a kinderSPARK! program that is implemented from February to June once a week for fifteen weeks, two hours a session. During kinderSPARK! the district’s Teacher of Early Learning screens children attending kinderSPARK! using an informal literacy and numeracy assessment tool. She talks with parents about activities parents can do at home to help support their child’s learning. In September, she screens any children that missed the screening from the previous spring. She is able to assist parents with referrals if they are concerned about the child’s development in areas of speech, hearing, language, or fine/gross motor. This service is universally accessible to all parents on the Sunshine Coast.
Additional Early Learning Initiatives include a ‘Ready, Set, Learn’ three-year old program, which is offered once a year in all Elementary Schools. Early Years Fairs are hosted for families with children from birth to five years. They are a one-day event co-hosted by Community Services, Vancouver Coastal Health, Community School Coordinators, Kindergarten Teachers, School District 46, and many other non-profit agencies and organizations.

We observed a SPARK! class where the focus was on language development. There were twelve adults attending the session, including fathers, mothers, grandfathers, and caregivers. The Teacher of Early Learning introduced games, toys, songs, nursery rhymes, and chants, which reinforced the importance of continually developing oral language skills with young children. She began the class by inviting the participants to introduce themselves and talk about their children. Then she reminded the participants of why they were here, and included activities related to literacy, numeracy and social-emotional development.

The facilitator ended with a review of the toys distributed for take home activities and talked about the skills children would be learning as they played with them. The skills were demonstrated through videos, which provided information on child development discussed at the session. The facilitator ended with a brief discussion on the Multiple Intelligences and connected them to the handouts and resources she distributed at the end of the class. One participant told us: “SPARK! has offered me many things to do at home to help my child learn. The teacher always reinforces that it should be fun. We go away with toys and resources that I couldn’t afford to buy. They are always bright, brand new, and beautiful and my baby loves them.”

Narrator 2: Narrator 2 is a Teacher at an Elementary School with a kinderSPARK! and Peer Assisted Learning Strategies Program.

Story: Children coaching children

Narrator 2 credited the School District for making Early Learning a priority through the budgeting process and through programs in schools. Her classroom is used for the kinderSPARK! program when the half time Kindergarten class is not in session. She says: “It’s a great idea to use my Kindergarten classroom as the kinderSPARK! kids are the kids that are coming to Kindergarten in the fall. They get used to the classroom and feel more comfortable with each other. A high comfort level develops with parents as they get to know one another through the kinderSPARK! program. The Public Health Nurse, the Public Librarian and Dental Assistant all visit the kinderSPARK! program.”

Another Early Learning Initiative the school district has implemented is the Peer Assisted Learning Strategies program.
It is an evidence-based program for teaching children literacy skills. She tells us that: “Students work in pairs with same-age peers. I introduce Peer Assisted Learning Strategies to the children by modeling an activity for the whole-class. I’m like the coach and the whole class participates. When I’ve finished the activity, pairs of children repeat the activity and they take turns coaching each other. My role is to observe and provide feedback to make sure the children are on the right track. I pair a stronger literacy learner with a developing literacy learner so each partnership has a learner with well developed literacy skills so they can model for their partners.”

Another Early Learning Initiative the school district has implemented is the Peer Assisted Learning Strategies program. It is an evidence-based program for teaching children literacy skills. She tells us that: “Students work in pairs with same-age peers. I introduce Peer Assisted Learning Strategies to the children by modeling an activity for the whole-class. I’m like the coach and the whole class participates. When I’ve finished the activity, pairs of children repeat the activity and they take turns coaching each other. My role is to observe and provide feedback to make sure the children are on the right track. I pair a stronger literacy learner with a developing literacy learner so each partnership has a learner with well developed literacy skills so they can model for their partners.”

Narrator 3 is a Community School Coordinator at an Elementary School with many early learning initiatives, including SPARK! and kinderSPARK!

Story: Programming and support needs to be seamless between agencies

The Narrator commented on the kinderSPARK! program at this Community School. She states: “There is energy about it - the staff and parents are involved. When you have like minds you can make anything happen. One of our goals as a Community School is to ‘Increase Early Intervention Programming’. kinderSPARK! is one of the ways we achieve this. The Teacher of Early Learning works at meeting the needs of the individual communities. She asks us: What times would work for your community? What days of the week? We fund kinderSPARK! out of the Community Link funding.”

Narrator 3 continues to describe the Early Intervention Programs offered at this Community School. She says: “We are funded though the Ministry of Education –Community Link funding to provide service to this area. The Community School Program is managed by a volunteer council, representing the broad community. The association has hired two staff that work to achieve the goals for the Community School. I’m one of them. The programs we offer include: Lighthouse Learning Network and Mentorship Program, Volunteer Readers, Parent-Tot drop in, Sprockids Bike Club, Wilderness Awareness and kinderSPARK. The Parent and Tot drop in is two mornings a week from September to May.”
"We also have a ROOTS program in our community. ROOTS is a group of parents who plan gatherings for families. Our goal is to foster links and learning among families with children from birth to five. All programs are no cost and they include programs such as gym time, story, art and science afternoons, family potlucks and playtime, or ROOTS Toddler Friendly Hikes. We also sponsor ROOTS Family Garage Sales where families can book a table and exchange clothing, books, toys and sports equipment just for children birth through school age."

The Narrator concluded the interview by saying: "My goal, as a coordinator, is to work on developing those grass roots with parents, the School District, and Community Services. My goal is to create a sense of belonging for everyone at this school because ultimately this will benefit the kids. We are child focused and community focused. We look at it from the perspective of the family. Our programming and support needs to be seamless between agencies. Our belief is that the more we offer, the more parents will know the importance of Early learning and come out to programs more often. We need to make an inclusive welcoming environment. The philosophy is similar no matter what the program."

Narrator 4 is the Principal at a Community School that hosts the kinderSPARK! program and a Community School focus on Early Intervention Programs for children birth to five years.

**Story: Connecting families with school through our early learning programs**

The Narrator talked about what he thinks is making a difference to lowering the levels of vulnerability in neighbourhoods as indicated by the results of the Early Development Instrument. He said: “I think the role of the Teacher of Early Learning has made a significant difference to bringing coherence throughout our district to programming for parents and children from birth to six years old. With one coordinator extending the availability of programs and services – they are becoming more standardized.”

"Secondly, the Board of Education – the School Trustees have made a difference by focusing school district funding on programs and services to support Early Learning Initiatives. They have also focused funding on the kindergarten to grade five system. They have made literacy learning a priority. The Board and the Superintendent had the vision to get families with young children from birth to age five into schools with meaningful programs like SPARK! They have ensured there is universal access to these programs by making them free of charge."

The Narrator continues: “At our school, the Pre-school program which is housed at our school site makes a difference to families supporting families. We invite the pre-school to attend assemblies, school presentations, and attend any event in our school. Most of these parents attend kinderSPARK! so by the time their children are of age to start Kindergarten; they know the staff and feel like they belong.”
NARRATOR 5:
Narrator 5 is a Public Health Nurse who coordinates the prenatal programs and provides presentations to the kinderSPARK! programs at the School District’s Elementary Schools.

Story: Our best chance to make a difference in the lives of young children

Narrator 5 said: “In the last few years I have been coordinating the prenatal programs out of the Health Unit. The school district’s Teacher of Early Learning approached me to ask me if I would be willing to advertise the SPARK! program in our prenatal classes.

I thought it was a great idea. I asked the Teacher of Early Learning to attend the last session, the “reunion class” to speak to the new parents after the babies were born. She describes the SPARK! program to the parents and explains the importance of brain development, language development, and social-emotional development. She discusses parental expectations of children during the early years and reinforces that SPARK! provides parents with information about how a child develops. At the ‘reunion session,’ the Teacher of Early Learning signs up parents for the next SPARK! session. These are mostly parents with first babies; 71% of new parents from the community participate in the prenatal classes.”

The Narrator continues: “We now talk about SPARK! at all of the prenatal reunion classes - we tell the parents that it is a program that you can register for at different times and locations throughout the year. We tell them: ‘You will get lots of ideas on attachment and activities you can do to have fun with your child. The SPARK! facilitator models reading with your child. Any resources used during the SPARK! session is provided to you to take home to use with your baby.’ When we have finished talking about the program, we give each family a child’s book and a SPARK! brochure and invite them to sign up for a session. Our community is working together to support parents with children from birth to five years. It is our best chance to positively affect the lives of young children.”

NARRATOR 6:
Narrator 6 is a school trustee and Chair of the Board of Education.

Story: A focus on Early Learning is integrated into the culture of our district

The narrator was asked the question: What do you attribute to the decline in vulnerability between Wave 1 and Wave 2 in your School District’s Early Development Instrument (EDI) results? The Narrator responded with the following comments: “There is not one reason, rather there are several from my perspective. To begin with, the School Trustees made Early Learning a priority in funding. We designated funds in the operating budget to be dedicated to Early Learning initiatives. This is not new for us - we began this in the year 2000 and it has been a priority for the Board ever since.”
NARRATOR 6 (cont’d)

Despite budget cuts, this district maintains Early Learning as a priority. We really welcome the expanded mandate of the Ministry of Education, even though there is some tension. We also hope the Ministry of Education will change their formulas for utilization rate. We are advocating for the funding formula to change to include the entire birth to age five programs for parents and children happening daily in our schools.”

The Narrator also reinforced the benefits of the SPARK! and kinderSPARK! programs and he believes this has contributed to the reduced rates of vulnerability in most neighbourhoods. The School District data indicates that, “the students who attended SPARK! and kinderSPARK! performed significantly better on the Kindergarten Screen literacy component.”

Finally, the Narrator attributes the positive results to the Early Childhood Development coordination through the Intersectoral Coalition of many agencies including Vancouver Coastal Health; MCFD; Public Health; Child and Youth Mental Health; ECD Licensing; Supported Child Development; Community Services; School District; and the Public Libraries. He concludes the interview by saying: “A focus on Early Learning is integrated into the culture of our district”.

NARRATOR 7:
Narrator 7 is a member of the senior administrative team of School District 46.

Story: You have to go out to the community – you can’t wait for the community to come to you.

Narrator 7 talked about knowing that the proportion of children vulnerable is lower than most areas of the province. She said: “Only one neighbourhood had an increase in vulnerability. We also know that as the Sunshine Coast increases in urbanization, we have questions about affordable housing, transportation and equity in access to all services. We have used the Early Development Instrument (EDI) results as one measure to inform our practice and we continue to increase the focus on early literacy programs and services in the community.”

The Narrator talked about the Teacher of Early Learning as playing a key role in systemically implementing Early Learning and Intervention programs in all Elementary Schools. She continued: “It’s the person – it is just amazing the connections she has made with families. She leads our SPARK! and kinderSPARK! classes and our evidence tells us that children who have attended three or more sessions performed significantly higher on the literacy component of the District Kindergarten Screen. In addition, this District got involved before Early Learning was ever mandated from the Ministry. You have to go to the community – you can’t wait for the community to come to you. We had a new coffee business open up in our community. We went to the coffee shop and handed out SPARK! brochures as we knew people would want to try out the new coffee service and we wanted them to know about the SPARK! program.”
A. EMERGING THEMES

1. School District investments in Early Learning over the past years have positively contributed to the development of foundational skills in Kindergarten children.

2. The School District and Community Intersectoral Agencies have developed supports as a result of broad-based planning at the community partnership table. As strengths and challenges are identified at the local neighbourhood level, the integrated services provide a strong system of support where delivery of programs and services are coordinated and responsibility and accountability is assumed collectively.

3. School Trustees have been leaders in early learning initiatives. The Trustees, in collaboration with Senior School District Staff, have been catalysts in creating an intersectoral coalition and collaboration between community agencies.

4. The Board of Education believes that a focus on Early Learning must be a priority. Since 2000, the School Trustees have dedicated funding in the Operating Budget to support District-wide Early Learning Initiatives.

5. The School District has implemented a District wide Kindergarten Screen of all pre-Kindergarten students through the kinderSPARK! program as an early intervention mechanism to identify children that require further support. Children, who are not screened prior to entering Kindergarten, are screened in the fall as they enter Kindergarten.

6. The SPARK! program targets parents and caregivers with children from birth to five years to provide research based developmentally appropriate, practical ideas to help parents engage their children in learning. Working in collaboration with Public Health Nurses, District staff recruits parents for the SPARK! program in prenatal classes, which are often first time parents.

7. The Superintendent is a strong advocate for outreach to the community and leads the focus on Early Learning programs for children birth to age five to be implemented in all Elementary Schools.

8. The Board of Education advocates for the birth to age five Early Learning Programs housed in Elementary Schools to be included in the facilities’ utilization rate which directly translates into District funding.
B. BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS

1. Although Public Health staff informs parents of prenatal classes, only 71% of new parents attend the classes. Public Health Nurses continue to seek an explanation for the 29% of new parents not attending. Some have speculated that rural families may find the commute to the prenatal class onerous. Others speculate that some highly educated and informed parents may feel they do not need additional guidance or support.

2. The BC Teachers Federation has expressed a few concerns regarding an expanded ministerial mandate for preschool education. Concerns are focused in the potential for much-needed kindergarten to grade 12 funding being redirected into early-learning programs.

3. Finding adequate space and facilities to support early-learning initiatives presents ongoing challenges for preschool educators in this district.
1. LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

School District 46 is located on the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia. The district enrolls 3,716 students in 10 elementary, three secondary, and one alternative school. The current enrollment generates 3,469.3125 F.T.E. students. Enrollment dropped by 130 students during the 2008 school year, and further decreases are expected in future years. Approximately 12% of this district’s students are of Aboriginal descent, with 160 students of Sechelt Nation ancestry. A diversity of economic conditions exists in District 46, and students are drawn from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

2. INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES

A number of interagency, community coalitions exist in this district and include: School District 46, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Community Services, Garibaldi Health Services, The ECD Committee, Community Links, Public and Mental Health, Family Preservation, Family Support Services, Vancouver Coastal Health, Supported Child Development, Infant Development Program, local libraries, and Parks and Recreation. An “umbrella” intersectoral group meets once yearly and is fully supported by Ministry of Children and Family Development, Public Health, and Mental Health. This annual meeting is daylong, and participants address health and early-learning issues that are of significant interest to the local community.

SPARK! (or Supporting Parents About Readiness for Kindergarten) is a major district program that relies on strong community support. SPARK! is supported by School District 46 funding. It is based on the Ready for Kindergarten Program, which originated in the City of Kennewick, in Washington State. SPARK! provides research-based, practical ways for parents to promote early-learning development in infants and preschool children. Parents enrolled in SPARK! are assigned program placements according to their child’s age, and parents registered in the program are given tools (toys) to assist them in play activities with their child. SPARK! sessions are 90-minute in duration, and three sessions are offered yearly (fall, winter, and spring). Access to sessions continues until a child enters kindergarten. SPARK! provides parent education, childcare, toys and learning aids for all children aged birth to 5 years at no cost to the parent. In order to increase participation and decrease accessibility barriers, SPARK! sessions are held in a variety of locations at a number of times including morning, afternoon and evening and childcare is also provided.

The goals of the school district’s early learning programs are focused on the development of pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills and social-emotional development. Additionally, the school district strives to build a sense of belonging and community spirit in supporting families with young children. The kinderSPARK! program is an extension of the SPARK! program and is offered to children immediately before kindergarten entrance. School District 46 initiated the SPARK! program in 2003. It is a universal program available free of charge to all parents and children in the district.
INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES  (cont’d)

Currently 50% of parents with children birth to five years enroll in the SPARK! program (449 out of 901 preschool children), and 40% of children attending kindergarten in September enroll in the kinderSPARK! program (76 out of a total of 180 children). Prevalent themes promoted by the SPARK! program are “emotional attachment” and “the promotion of learning through meaningful and relevant activities”. To realize their early learning goals, the school district engages actively with the community coalition that depends on a strong network of support demonstrated by committed, collaborative community effort. Community coalition members also involved in supporting parents with young children include Public Health, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Community Services, and Parks and Recreation.

Once a year families with children from birth to age five are invited to attend an Early Years Fair. This is a four-hour event that connects families with a wide variety of non-profit agencies in the community who provide support to families with young children. Many activities are available for the children to participate in during the fair, and families are able to enjoy a fun and informative experience while building connection to their Sunshine Coast community. The fair is planned and funded by the coalition of Success by Six, Community Services, School District 46, and Vancouver Coastal Health.

3. SCHOOL DISTRICT ROLE
   a. Early Learning

School District 46 is supportive of early-learning initiatives and maintains an active role in the implementation of new programs. District staff members are highly proactive in ensuring both coordination of programs and universal access to programs. District staff members are active participants in the Early Childhood Development Planning Table and play a leadership role in initiatives designed to target children from birth to 5 years of age. The Sunshine Coast School District supported the placement of a preschool centre at Halfmoon Bay Community School.

Local educators perceive trustees as leaders in early-childhood initiatives, and as instrumental in bringing about collaboration between community agencies. The Board of Education currently offers early-learning programs in the school district. A stated and now entrenched priority of School District 46 is that of using operating-budget funding to support early-childhood initiatives. Trustees also wish to play a role in the facilitation of inter-ministerial cooperation regarding preschool initiatives and planning.

b. School District Planning

School District 46 plans are closely tied to community needs and initiatives. District plans therefore very much mirror existing community plans. In the school year 2008 – 2009, the Sunshine Coast Board of Education devised a goal plan specifically focused in promoting early learning and preschool literacy.

The plan aims to improve early learning and early literacy in all children from kindergarten through to grade three, and was devised following examination of screening data. The plan also aims to increase the skills and knowledge of parents with preschool children.
b. School District Planning  (cont’d)

District staff and the Chief of the Sechelt Nation have formulated an Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement plan that aims to enhance achievement levels in all Aboriginal students enrolled in district schools. The Enhancement Agreement was signed on Indian Band lands.

Although policies and plans devised by district staff are also closely aligned to ministry plans, the district now more often questions ministerial prohibitive policy regarding the utilization of school facilities for preschool programs.

School Planning Councils work in unison with district staff when developing individualized school plans.

c. Tracking of Student Progress/Data Collection

The kinderSPARK! program is instrumental in the screening and testing of all pre-kindergarten students in School District 46. Any child who did not attend kinderSPARK! is immediately screened and tested upon entrance to kindergarten.

4. EDI FINDINGS

EDI Reduction in Vulnerabilities

Early Development Instrument (EDI) findings are used by all intersectoral groups. While improvements in this district appear to be small, this district is the fourth lowest in vulnerabilities and the fourth highest in achievement despite a very low SES.

Baseline (Wave 0/Wave 1) to Wave 2 by Domain District-wide:

Soc: -0.91; Lang and Cog: -1.98; Ever-Risk: -0.88

5. FUNDING SOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Funding sources for community-based coalition programs include: Ministry of Children and Family Development, School District 46, Community Services, Community Link, Family Preservation, Independent Development Program, and Success by Six. Efforts to unite funding across a variety of community services have been instrumental in achieving a smooth, collaborative model of service delivery in this district.

The Sunshine Coast Board of Education lists one of its major priorities as the provision of ongoing funds for early-childhood initiatives and program implementation. Part of the district’s operating budget is directed towards early-childhood education. This budget allocation has become an entrenched part of district policy. The operating budget funds the Dolly Parton Library Program, the district’s Early Learning Teacher, and all SPARK! toys and learning aids. Dolly Parton Library Program funding currently stands at $1200 to $1700 per month.

Ready Set Learn funding is directed towards early-learning initiatives and program implementation. Community Links funding maintains program sustainability in the district’s Community School.
Focus: Whole District
Intersectoral coalitions and support systems for families are both complex and fluid. The chart provides a sample of the intersectoral partners, interactions and programs in this district and is not necessarily all-inclusive.
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NARRATOR 1:
Narrator 1 is a senior school district staff member who has played a significant leadership role within the community and in the School District to promote healthy child development in the early years through the integration of community and School District resources and services.

**Story:** Boundary Family Centres: Where all families have better access to and relationship with the network of service providers available to them.

Narrator 1 started the conversation by saying: “I am not surprised at Boundary’s positive EDI results. Since 2001, as a community, we have explicitly focused on integrating services to lower the level of vulnerability of children and families. One of the ways we have done this is to create Boundary Family Centres in or near Elementary Schools. These Family Centres act as hubs where families can access a range of health and wellness services. They all offer a wide range of free of charge services which include childcare, library services, play centres, family support, counseling, public health services and early learning programs for both children and parents. The Family Centres have at least one classroom, their own security system and washrooms and they are open 24/7”. We asked: What do you need? Not what we could provide.”

The Narrator continues the story by explaining that: “Our Family Centres are the result of the vision and dreams of both school district staff and committed community partners. We have cross-government commitment in both policy and funding which is how we were able to create and implement the Family Centres. These partners include Interior Health, public health Nursing, BFISS, MCFD, The Phoenix Foundation of the Boundary Communities, The School District, The Vancouver Foundation and BFISS (Boundary Family and Individual Services Society). Its not about two people - it is about a team. We have worked tirelessly to work collaboratively. It is not about a meeting twice a year - it is how we do business day in and day out. We work with one another.”

In addition, the Boundary Family Centres strengthen the partnerships with Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy and Success by Six through sharing space and resources and deepening collaborative planning.

NARRATOR 2:
Narrator 2 is a Family Centres Coordinator who coordinates the activities and services at the Boundary Family Centres.

**Story:** I’m the glue that keeps it all together.

Narrator 2 described one of her main responsibilities is focused on assisting with the delivery of early childhood services and programs such as parenting, child development, social skills and Early Literacy programs.
NARRATOR 2 (cont’d)

The narrator told us that she works collaboratively with families and other service providers to develop diverse and community responsive programming that is reflective of the social and cultural fabric unique to each Family Centre community. She also coordinates the programming in all of the Family Centres by booking various programs or services into each Family Centre, based on the individual needs of the community. We asked her to give us an example of a service she would book into the Family Centres. The Narrator talked about the Dental Hygienist who visits each centre on a consistent basis throughout the year to provide service to high-risk families. She said: “I schedule the regular dental screening visits into each Family Centre where all of the children are screened for dental care. I have to take into consideration the needs of each community. I’m kind of the glue that keeps it all together.”

Narrator 2 continued by saying: “I work hard to build local capacity – to find people in the community that can take the lead in the Family Centres. We always plan in collaboration with the people who attend the programs. I also am focused on building relationships with the staff in schools and with the school principals. I act as a liaison between the Family Centres, the community and the schools”.

Narrator 2 listed the wide variety of programs that are offered at the Family Centres to support all families. They include:

- Mother Goose
- Alphabet Soup
- Music Play for Preschoolers
- Literacy Programs
- Roots of Empathy
- Baby Signs
- Ready, Set, Learn
- Cooking programs
- Early Learning Programs

The Narrator also acts as a liaison with the BISM core partners’ table, the Early Years Committee and the Early Intervention Team. “We talk about issues or questions that have been raised at the Family Centres. Our conversations with one another provide great opportunities to make sure families are looked after and that they have access to the services they need.”

NARRATOR 3:

This story represents a combined interview of several members of the Boundary Integrated Services Model (BISM) Community Table (core partners).

Story: We must be willing to let go of territory.

The BISM Community Table met with us to describe the early intervention programs that they have implemented over the past years that are reducing the level of vulnerability in children as measured by the EDI. The core partners include members from MCFD, BFISS, Interior Health, The Phoenix Foundation, Sunshine Valley Child Care and the School District. This is a strong intersectoral table that has been instrumental in creating a place not only for creating community networking, but also for creating a place to bring the voice and needs of the community to the table.
One narrator stated: “We began in 2001 and our core purpose is to identify gaps in services and provide them. We make decisions about how to distribute money to ensure the needs of the families are the top priority.”

They talked about how the School District, organizations and agencies had to work together and “be willing to let go of territory” they had defined for themselves over the years. One narrator commented that: “The power of working together has made us stronger. We have voice in a way we didn’t as separate service providers. We were silos working side by side each other with often overlapping services and sometimes competing agendas. We wanted to see one location, one site, one place where families could go and have access to the services they required. We knew we had to work together to make it happen”.

Another narrator said: “We don’t care who provides the services - we just want families to go to one place and to get services they need. BISM provides services in wise ways - it is cheaper and more cost effective. We fund family counseling services for families who do not usually qualify for funding. Even our middle class families are in extreme distress looking for jobs in these very difficult economic times. There is an increase in these families looking for supportive family counseling as many of them are experiencing loss of income for the first time in their lives.”

The School District Narrator expressed the importance of having Family Centres in every Elementary School. She said: “The whole school system is involved in the project. We were not surprised the EDI results are so low but we are curious. At this BISM table, we asked ourselves: What are the factors that are helping our families become less vulnerable? What do we want to do more of, more often?”

Another narrator reminded the group of the questions they were grappling with: “We ask ourselves are we leveling off because we can’t do any more with the resources we have - if we had more resources could we deepen our work - and lower the vulnerability even more? Do we need to work upstream more with youth so that they have skills and abilities to be effective parents - is this the next frontier for us in improving the vulnerabilities of young children?”

A voice from another service provider told us: “These are our kids and our families and we can’t depend on anyone else – we take action on things that matter – the out lying areas/regions may or may not help us – resources are thin and we don’t always get them. We are not dependent or waiting for the regions. We are a small catchment area and we will sink or swim depending on how we work together - even MCFD doesn’t have great resources that they have in other places. There is an incredible sharing of knowledge and resources. This is the real definition of community.”

Members of the BISM community table also discussed barriers that prevent families from attending the Family Centres. “We need an outreach worker, we need to provide food to families and we also need to provide transportation to get the families to the programs. We are working hard to be responsive to community needs. For example, we implemented the ‘Kids in the Middle Program’ in a community that had many single moms that had kids in the middle that just needed support to expand their repertoire of strategies for parenting their kids.”
NARRATOR 3 (cont’d)

Concluding comments from the BISM table summarized their perspectives on the intersectoral relationships they have developed over the past years: “We believe intersectoral is more work – but at the end of the day - it is better for our kids and families. We are enculturating a new way of being as a community - that includes organizations, people who are using the services. They are our children and we have to care for them.”

NARRATOR 4:
The narrator is the executive director of the board that governs the Family and Individual Services Society.

Story: 
Create synergy and multiple energy by integrating services.

Narrator 4 begins her story in 2001. “In 2001, we began meeting once every week and developed a Family Centre model as a framework with which to work together with the rural communities to address early childhood development issues. We worked collaboratively with MCFD, Interior Health and with many early childhood initiatives. We wanted to integrate children’s services. The Family Centres were founded on the principle that families own the centres. This helps with engagement and ownership – their voices are determining need.”

The School district offered their support and unused school space in the schools. The committee spent more than a year meeting weekly, planning and engaging in an intensive stakeholder consultation process. The plan included co-locating and integrating the services of the Boundary Family and Individual Services Society, Public Health Nursing, MCFD and the Boundary Child Care Resource and Referral into one building therefore creating a ‘hub model’ for delivering services.

The Narrator describes Glanville Family Centre. She said: “The families can be anonymous here and for some people, they don’t want people coming into their homes – they want a place to come to. When people come here it could be for a playgroup, a drop in group, training, education or just to socialize. We also provide some relationship counseling for some of the families that are struggling in our community. We advocate for clients who are vulnerable in our community. It is very safe for families to be here.”

Glanville Family Centre was renovated and eventually designated as a primary health centre. The Narrator talks about the importance of integrating the services into one centre: “With the consolidation of our hub offices at the Glanville Family Centre, we have been able to decrease our occupancy costs and stabilize our provision of services to our community. Our School District truly understands that if we support families in ways that meet their goals and needs, that there is not only a benefit to all kids and families, but also to the education and other systems in the community as a whole.”
The programs/services offered or located at Glanville Family Centre include:

- Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (Baby’s Best Chance)
- Community Action Program For Children
- Infant Development Program
- Children’s Early Intervention and School-aged Therapy Program
- Boundary Children First Initiative
- Child and Youth Counseling
- Community Integration Program
- Family and Youth Services
- Aboriginal Family Support Program
- Interior Health Dental Assistant
- Medical Doctor practicing out of the Glanville Centre with a specialty in mental health
- Public health Nurse
- Physiotherapist
- Speech Pathologist
- Family Centres Coordinator
- BFISS Executive Director
- Family Literacy Coordinator

We asked Narrator 4 to talk to us about issues and to offer advice to any other School Districts/Communities that may be contemplating implementation of the ‘hub model’ as a structure for continuing to reduce levels of vulnerability. She commented that: “A major issue for us is that we do not have a good day care center in every community - we need more child care. As for advice - you need big dreams, big spaces and the ability to collaborate with the funding available. It takes the whole community to reach out to the vulnerable families. You have to form and nurture strong partnerships and open your doors to the community. If you welcome people and meaningful relationships are your focus - they create the community.”

Narrator 5 is an active leader in the Peer Mentoring Program.  

*Story:* Peer mentors were once moms attending the program.  
Narrator 5 credited the Peer Mentoring Program as giving her a purpose in the community. She described this program as an outreach program to pregnant women or women with young children who are isolated from the community. They are either single moms or women whose husbands are away working for weeks at a time in another part of Canada.
Peer Mentors meet every Thursday and plan for the next week’s session, which happens every Wednesday from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm. These are young moms who have become actively involved and bring parent voice to community events, training and creating their own support circles. They participate in many training sessions. The Peer Mentor Program is focused on women supporting women as they parent the next generation of young children. The Narrator spoke to us and said: “The biggest thing I learned was the things that happen at this age are imprinted on the young child’s mind. I have learned that how I interact with my child will affect her for the rest of her life. It scared me because I didn’t know this before I came to the program. I didn’t know there were skills I could learn to be a better parent.”

The narrator described her situation as follows: “I was stuck at home, no friends, no family as we moved here from another province to get work. One day I was in line to pay for my groceries and someone who was coming to the Wednesday group sessions spoke to me and asked me to come. I guess the town is small enough people know when someone is new. I went to the Wednesday group session and I felt overwhelmed. It felt very noisy and it looked like fifty people talking at once. I kept coming because I was with other women in my situation. Now months later, I’m a Peer Mentor - I used to be one of the newcomers – now I’m a Peer Mentor and hosting is part of the role. All of us as peer mentors were once moms attending the program”. She continued: “I like helping without trying. Many newcomers don’t have anyone to watch their kids. We welcome new women to the group, get them a glass of water or show them the around the centre. Wednesday program includes caretaking, lunch, babysitting, parenting skills and socializing with kids and adults. If it wasn’t for this group, I’d still be sitting at home with Phil and Oprah.”

The Peer Mentors are now giving presentations to the large group, co-facilitating the pregnancy, combined and postpartum groups, or welcoming newcomers. They are active in developing and presenting information regarding the program, the importance of pre-pregnancy planning and FASD prevention.

Narrator 6 is a staff member of one of the programs at one of the Glanville Family Centre.

**Story:** We have a collaborative model.

Narrator 6 was surprised at the EDI results in the community that indicated that there was a reduced level of vulnerable children. She said: “I was shocked we did that well as we service so many vulnerable kids and families. I was NOT surprised because we have fantastic community participation. We have a collaborative model and we have continuity with the School District, Board members, CYC, MCFD and lots of commitments to work together. The Hub model is the only way to centralize services for families”.

Narrator 6 is a staff member of one of the programs at one of the Glanville Family Centre.
Narrator 6 cited an example of the way service providers work together: “We work in the same office so we are connected at the Centre everyday. Sometimes the Speech and Language Pathologist will go with the Occupational therapist to visit families. Referrals come from Public Health or Children’s Hospital. Public Health sees babies at two months and four months. If transportation is a problem, we can network with other agencies in the Centre to provide the transportation the families need. We integrate the services and share information to support families at risk. When we are all in the same place, it is not as threatening to families. When families are not doing well, they know it and they often feel judged and not welcome. At the Centre, many families come for many reasons so no one knows the reason for being here.”

NARRATOR 7:
Narrator 7 is a senior district administrator who articulated the importance of strong community partnership with the school district.

**Story: Boundary Family Centres as key to reducing the level of vulnerability of students**

Narrator 7 reported the importance of the involvement of the School District in all community partnerships. He stated: “We as a School District have to be at the table. Our presence and support has to be here.”

Narrator 7 described the Boundary Family Centres as key to reducing the level of vulnerability of students as measured by the EDI. He continues by saying: “We are a small community; we don’t have public buildings with additional office space. We needed a place where service providers could deliver their services together.”

The Narrator emphasized the following: “We jointly created the Family Centres and the School District has helped in many ways. For example all Family Centres have computer drops. They are on the School District System. We host Early Childhood discussions on the network. In our budget, the School District doubled the funds to support vulnerable kids by providing additional learning assistance and we implemented an Elementary Behavior Program. We rely on our partners in the Family Centres to know where the vulnerable kids are and what we have to put in place to support them. We know the Family Centres are key to our great results on the EDI. We continue to struggle with our most vulnerable families. They are often hard to reach and therefore they are often not getting the services they require. Whatever outreach we can do, honestly we do it. Relationships are so good I don’t have to try to get families to access services like I used to. Because of our hub model, we are a step away from MCFD. Our community is working at changing perceptions so service providers such as Social Workers are seen as support for families.”
Narrator 8 described the importance of providing spaces in schools to locate the Family Centres. She stated: “We have a sense of community and people in our community have a strong sense of family – we celebrate family here.”

Narrator 8 described the change in SD #51 from a five-day school week to a four-day school week as a catalyst for lowering the vulnerability of children in the community. She said: “It forced the hand of many programs, grandmas, and neighborhoods who stepped in to care for the children on the fifth day of the week when kids were not at school. Because of shift work, I saw more dads with their kids. The 2002 drop in vulnerability occurred because of the change to the four day week in schools and the implementation of the Family Centres.”

The Narrator continues: “As a Board, we weren’t interested in closing schools in little communities. Establishing the Family Centres made certain that services would continue and schools would stay open. We had supports in place for young children before they entered the K - 12 system. We also wanted to have the least number of vulnerable kids by the time they were in Grade 3 so as a Board, we dedicated resources to Primary. Our School District put forward the position that government should be focused on families with kids that are zero to age five. We also felt that there should be the same support for working and non-working families. We see the strength in families”.

The narrator explained the details of the “Trustee Initiative Grant” of 100,000 dollars, which was given to schools and dedicated to supporting vulnerable children. She told us that: “The Trustee Initiative Grant is directly related to schools growth plan and targets on vulnerable kids. Every school got it - they didn’t have to apply but they did have to demonstrate how the funds were used to help kids who are at risk”.

The Narrator articulated her belief that education is not for profit business. “I believe that our funding should be dedicated to services for kids. We believe in funding the early years. The Board entered into a formal agreement with the Boundary Family and Individual Services Society and approved funding to enhance early childhood development for the 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 school years. In our community, there is so much trust between all service providers we can work together to make a difference for these kids and families.”
A. EMERGING THEMES

1. The School District, in partnership with Intersectoral Coalitions, has increased accessibility for families by assisting with transportation issues, offering programs at a variety of times and providing welcoming outreach to hard to reach and low resourced families.

2. Partnerships between Intersectoral Coalitions and the School District have established ‘hubs’ in all Elementary Schools called Family Centres. The partnerships have worked to increase communication and awareness between the Early Childhood network and the School District, and in the community.

3. Trustees are committed to keeping small schools open to meet the needs of rural neighborhoods by locating Boundary Family Centres in all schools.

4. The integrated service delivery enhances parent and children’s relationships, connections and skills through learning and play opportunities.

5. Strong community-based committees initiate, coordinate, and implement many early intervention programs to support young children and their families.

B. BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS

1. Union versus non-union interests and issues continue to present difficulties in the implementation of new programs.

2. Inadequate telephone service (as only one system is available) presents communication problems.

3. Reaching isolated families is an ongoing challenge. Transportation issues continue to create barriers to access for some families.

4. The sharing of data and information between intersectoral groups is at times a barrier to success. More extensive computer or information-storage software systems would alleviate this problem.

5. Maintaining full integration of services offered by all participating intersectoral partners is time consuming and requires consistent effort. This is seen as a potential barrier to sustained success.
BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS  

1. Some school administrators and parents have expressed concerns regarding the diversity of people now present in elementary schools on a daily basis. Participants in Community Mental Health programs and increased adult traffic in school settings have raised some concerns.

2. School district administrators believe a ministry policy needs to be put in place that is designed to govern and control community-agency use of school space.

3. Funding is a barrier to sustaining success: the school district currently expends twice the funding provided by the Ministry for early-childhood education. This expenditure is not sustainable in the long term.

4. $900,000 is needed annually to support the family-centre hub system. This funding is viewed as potentially non-sustainable.

5. Funding for full-day kindergartens is as yet unavailable.
1. LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

School District 51 is one of six districts in the Kootenay-Boundary region of British Columbia. These six districts have joined together to form a consortium served by the Kootenay-Boundary Regional Planning Team. This team assists the six districts to formulate common goals and to set up mutually beneficial support systems.

The Boundary School District serves a population of 12,334 residents. Approximately 67% of homes in this school district are situated in rural areas. 15.3% of the population claim Aboriginal heritage, and 4.2% of the population is non-English speaking. The school district population stood at 1467 FTE in September 2007. However, this population has been in decline since 1998 and continues to decline. The school district has faced severe fiscal difficulties based on the decline in student enrolment, and it has struggled to keep rural schools fully operational.

There are 825 elementary students and 709 secondary students in the Boundary School District. Of all enrolled students, 242 are of Aboriginal descent, 26 attend low incidence/high cost special education programs, and 22 are enrolled in severe behavioural programs.

The largest community in the Boundary School District is Grand Forks. Other communities include: Christina Lake, Greenwood, Midway, Rock Creek, Beaverdell, and Big White Ski Resort.

Closure of the local mill created job losses and economic hardship in this area. Issues of substance addiction continue to trouble some families, and this problem is exacerbated where such families live in isolated areas and are difficult to reach.

2. INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Strong community ownership of early-learning initiatives exists in this district, and responsibility for early learning is assumed by both the school district and local community agencies. Intersectoral coalitions are extensive in District 51 and include MCFD, Public Health, Infant Development, Children’s Services, and Aboriginal Services.

Early-learning initiatives are fully coordinated under the auspices of the Boundary Integrated Service Model (BISM), which is a subgroup of the Child and Youth Committee. BISM was established in 2001. Community forums were already underway in the 90’s, and the BISM coalition grew out of these forums. A number of community services and agencies work together in the Boundary Integrated Service Model. They include: MCFD, District 51, Public Health, Childcare Services, the Boundary Family and Individual Service Society, Family Centres, and the Sunshine Valley Little People Centre. BISM manages funding, distributes money, and deals with gaps in services for the entire community.
INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES  (cont’d)

At its earliest inception BISM developed an integrated service model that relied on supportive liaisons with local politicians and collaborative dissemination of funding. BISM is very much a grass-roots model that is focused in community spirit and a sense of shared responsibility. The hub model was initiated by the early work of BISM collaborators. Hubs are conceived as inclusive and open to all community children and their families. They are also viewed as safe places for all those who may be in need.

Each school in the district has a family centre, or “hub”, and each centre has access to one or more classroom sites within the school in which it is housed. Each centre is equipped with a security system, which means that programs may take place in evening hours, and staff may safely enter or leave whenever they wish. Family centres offer parenting courses, on-site childcare, and extensive library facilities. Family centres grew out of a community vision that envisaged services fully integrated under one umbrella. The school district plays an integral part in the family-centre system. (One example of this is the rebates paid to family centres by the school district. Rebates are accrued from revenue gained from the rentals of school space.) The school district permits family-centre operators and participants free and full use of school facilities, including office space, counselling areas, medical rooms, and washroom facilities.

The Boundary Family and Individual Service Society (BFISS) is an organization that provides services to families and communities in the Boundary area. BFISS is incorporated under the Society Act of British Columbia and is a registered charity contracted to run Strong Start programs. The Sunshine Valley Childcare Society is another intersectoral coalition active in the Boundary area. This society runs a daycare, preschool and infant/toddler care centre. Aboriginal Services is also a strong intersectoral coalition operating in SD 51, with members drawn from Public Health, Infant Development, the Boundary Metis Community Association, and the Aboriginal Child Care Society.

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) is an interagency source for child-care information and services in the Boundary area. CCRR provides the following services to local families: free referrals to reputable and reliable child-care providers, free access to computers, access to free or minimal-cost workshops, weekly drop-in play times, and a free bi-monthly newsletter. CCRR newsletters provide information related to community services and events, schedules of playtimes and workshops, and information and guidance regarding the behaviours and speech development that parents may reasonably expect from preschool children. Other articles relate to family-play ideas and early-literacy games for preschoolers. CCRR also supports a toy and resource lending library.

3. SCHOOL DISTRICT ROLE
   a. Early Learning

School District 51 personnel are committed to active participation in early-learning initiatives and program implementations in the Boundary area.
a. Early Learning  
Administrators in the school district express the belief that district staff “must be at the table” and that they must provide hands-on leadership regarding early-learning and early-literacy initiatives in the district. School district personnel also express a wish to appear “visible” within local community coalitions, and district staff members therefore participate in numerous community activities and intersectoral meetings on a regular basis.

The school district plays an active role in the operation of family centres, which have been established in all local elementary schools. The school district provides additional funding to these centres wherever possible, in the form of rebates collected from family-centre rentals of school space. Family centres enjoy full use of school office space, medical rooms, washroom facilities, security or alarm systems, and technology equipment. The school district provides hands-on support to local community-driven initiatives through the sharing of its information technology systems. Email and Internet systems in family centres are provided by the school district, as is access to data storage and info-technology software programs.

Trustees in this school district actively support early-learning and family-literacy program implementations. One trustee expressed the view that “Support should be in place for young children as early as possible.” The Board of Education has also pledged any monetary savings that it may accrue to the support of at-risk preschoolers in the district.

b. School District Planning

School District Planning is seen as a joint project undertaken by school district staff and members of local intersectoral agencies. An example of joint planning is the formulation of the School District Literacy Plan, which was conceived and written by SD 51, the Columbia Basin Trust, and other community agencies. Between 55 to 60 participants assisted in the formulation of the District Literacy Plan.

The School District Development Committee creates and promotes plans based on a comprehensive collaborative model. Participating members include school trustees, CUPE members, and non-union participants. SD 51 is committed to full integration of services to children and families and has established peer mentorship and outreach programs designed to facilitate such integration. District plans include the development and promotion of early literacy interventions for all SD 51 preschoolers.

c. Tracking of student progress/data collection

Intersectoral coalition groups and agencies assume responsibility for screening and tracking vulnerable, or at-risk, preschool children in the Boundary area. Referrals from Public Health, Children’s Hospital, and local service providers identify most at-risk preschoolers in the Boundary area before their entry into kindergarten.
4. EDI FINDINGS

EDI Reduction in Vulnerabilities

A reduction in vulnerabilities outlined in EDI indicators was noted in Wave 2 findings. School district staff and administrators attribute this reduction in vulnerabilities to the early-learning initiatives implemented following Wave 1 findings.

District wide:
Soc: -0.91
Lang and Cog: -1.98
Ever-risk: -0.88

5. FUNDING SOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY

This school district’s population has been in decline since 1998, and the district has faced severe fiscal difficulties in recent years. The struggle to keep rural schools fully operational is an ongoing challenge. During the 2002 – 2003 school year, the school district moved to both an altered calendar and a 4-day workweek in order to reduce costs. The 4-day workweek allowed SD 51 to move from a deficit to a surplus position, which in turn allowed the district to fund early-literacy and early-learning programs. The 1% funding protection provided by the Ministry from 2006 to 2008 has also helped establish financial stability.

The Boundary Family and Individual Services Society (BFISS) is funded by the provincial and federal governments, grants, SD 51, and expense-recovery monies.

$900,000 is needed annually to support the family-centre hub system. This funding is viewed as unreliable and perhaps unsustainable. The Aboriginal Services for Families is funded by MCFD and Success by Six.

Not-for-profit funding provides considerable support to early-learning initiatives in this school district. Some funding for family centres is accrued from rebates paid to centres by the school district. These rebates are gained from monies collected for the rental of school space to family-centre operators.
Focus: Glacier View Neighbourhood
Intersectoral Group Membership:
- MCFD
- Public Nursing
- Success by Six
- Community Development Association
- ECE's
- Aboriginal Headstart
- Principal – School District
- Early Learning Support Teacher

- Comox Military Family Resource Program
- Pacific Care (CCRR)
- Stone Soup Family Drop-in Program
- Comox Valley Family Services
- Immigrant Support Family Services

Programs
- Programs in Schools
- Preschool Programs
- Childcare Programs
- Family Programs

Committees/Services/NGO's/Societies
- Family Resource Programs
- Aboriginal Services
- Other Referral Agencies

Arrowheads = The flow of activity

Intersectoral coalitions and support systems for families are both complex and fluid. The chart provides a sample of the intersectoral partners, interactions and programs in this district and is not necessarily all-inclusive.
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NARRATOR 1:

Narrator 1 is a District Administrator who articulated the importance of focusing School District resources and intervention programs in neighborhoods where there exists a high level of vulnerability of students as measured by multiple indicators, including the Early Development Instrument (EDI). He indicated that one of the key projects the School District implemented to enhance literacy and learning opportunities for young children is to differentiate staffing in schools.

**Story: Realigning Staffing and Resources**

Narrator 1 reported that staffing is realigned at the district level to support schools with the greatest proportion of vulnerable students. The locally developed Kindergarten screening assessment, information from Kindergarten teachers, and the EDI data are used to generate school by school profiles of the elementary students as they enter the system.

This information is used to provide differentiated staffing to schools based on the profile of their student population rather than strictly on numbers. Identified schools receive 1.0 differentiated staffing and educators at the schools make decisions about how the staffing is used to implement interventions to support students at risk. All other schools receive an additional .5 staffing to support students at risk. A decision about how the additional staffing is used continues to be collaborative (administrators and staff), school based, and reflective of the needs of each individual school context.

Narrator 1 described the team that visits schools to discuss the various ways staffs are implementing the ‘Differentiated Staffing Project’. He articulated the following process:

- A review team visits schools and the team includes the Superintendent, a trustee, district staff and one or two school administrators. Visiting administrators have the opportunity to learn about the interventions implemented in another school.

- The team engages in a two hour conversation with the School Planning Council and the dialogue includes the following questions:
  
  - How is the differentiated staffing used to address the needs of the vulnerable students?
  - What interventions are being put in place?
  - Who are the students?
  - What interventions are working?
  - What interventions are not working?

Narrator 1 stated: “Having the right focus on interventions that make a difference is the key to reducing the level of vulnerability in schools and neighborhood.”
NARRATOR 2:
Narrator 2 is a Principal in the School District. His story is told from a historical perspective as he retells the focused interventions that were implemented over the past few years to support the high proportion of children at risk in the neighborhood. He highlights the initiatives of the former Principal and Staff.

Story: School Staff Advocate for Vulnerable Kids and Families

Narrator 2 credited the Glacier View Elementary School Staff for continually advocating on behalf of the school community. He discussed the importance of staff advocacy, which fostered shared beliefs, a sense of collaboration and promoted cohesion among the school community. He discussed the staff goals which focused on creating a nurturing culture that embraced all families, including families surrounding their school where there continues to exist a high level of vulnerable children. He talked about the many staff that has continued teaching at Glacier View Elementary for a number of years because they believe they are improving life chances for children that are vulnerable.

Narrator 2 reflected on the former principal and his well-known reputation for advocating on behalf of the community surrounding Glacier View Elementary School. He stated that there were many initiatives the past principal engaged in with the purpose of reaching out to the community and bringing them into the school. They included:

- Door to door visits in the neighborhood asking hard to reach parents/caregivers if they had registered their preschoolers for Kindergarten and/or if they would like their children to participate in the pre-school programs or parenting programs offered in the school and community

- Realigning school resources to focus on Early Primary (e.g., designated a .5 support staff to the Kindergarten class to support early literacy development)

- Presentations to the local Rotary Club, including the EDI results, which indicated the high level of vulnerability in the Glacier View Community and he received an ongoing yearly Literacy Grant from the Rotary to purchase books ($2,500.00 per year)

- Liaising with the Stone Soup Program Coordinator and encouraged families to access the services provided at Stone Soup (weekly drop-in program for families and children 0 – 5 years)

- Inviting Stone Soup to provide Mother Goose Programs in the school twice a year (providing the space and support)

- Accompanying families that required support to attend MCFD meetings

- Liaising with Puddle Duck Integrated Child Care/Pre-School Program staff on a consistent basis, including every February to determine potential Glacier View Kindergarten students (phoned or visited the families with the registration form)
NARRATOR 2  (cont’d)

The Narrator concluded with a quote he had recorded from the former principal: “I was comfortable leading change initiatives with uncertain outcomes to address the needs of the vulnerable families in this neighborhood. My vision was to be visible every single day – whether I was knocking on doors to get kids to school, asking unwanted visitors to leave the school grounds, making room for strollers and toddlers down the halls or walking with the kids back to Puddle Duck after school – whatever it takes to connect with the hard to reach families – the families you don’t see in the school – I’d do it”.

NARRATOR 3:

Narrator 3 is a District Literacy Support Teacher and she described intervention initiatives implemented at Glacier View Elementary in response to the Wave 1 EDI results for School District 71.

**Story:  Intervention Initiatives Make a Difference**

The Narrator talked about the School District re-aligning resources and establishing new ECD programs at Glacier View to respond to the high proportions of vulnerable children as indicated on the EDI Change Maps.

The Narrator discussed the reallocated human resources to Glacier View, which resulted in additional staffing to lower the class sizes in the Kindergarten classes to 14 children in each class. She reported that there was an additional allocation of a .5 Early Learning Support Teacher specifically assigned to the Kindergarten classes.

As a District Literacy Support Teacher, she created Library Book Bins utilizing a portion of the District’s Ready, Set, Learn funding. The book bins are located in the school library and preschoolers and their families are given Library Cards to borrow the books on a daily basis. The School Teacher Librarian assists with the sign out process of books.

The Narrator, in conjunction with the principal, created a Summer Literacy Program which was implemented for six weeks in the summer at Glacier View Elementary School. This was a morning drop-in program where children had access to books and a variety of literacy activities (Wednesday mornings from 9:00 am to 11:30 am). The Summer Literacy Program focused on preschoolers and their older siblings and each child received a book to take home when the program ended. Children borrowed books on a weekly basis. Narrator 3 states that staffing the Summer Literacy Program was a challenge and unfortunately could not be sustained from year to year.

Narrator 3 concluded with the following: “The Summer Literacy Program is a great idea, the kids loved it and there were often up to forty five participants. Kids in the neighborhood walked with their siblings and really enjoyed the literacy activities. They could stay for as long as they wanted. Some came for half an hour and other stayed for the entire morning. You would see kids reading to kids, looking at the pictures, and acting out the stories. And they especially loved their books they got to keep at the end of the program. Unfortunately, we couldn’t offer it again as it really needed staffing. Maybe it could happen again in the future.”
NARRATOR 4:

Narrator 4 works for an intersectoral partner in an integrated Child Care/Pre-School Program. It is located within walking distance from Glacier View Elementary School and offers before school and after school care with a four-hour pre-school program and full day childcare.

**Story:** Connecting Families with School through our Child Care/Pre-School Program

The Narrator told us most children who attend the Child Care/Pre-School Program are from the immediate neighborhood, which includes the area’s most vulnerable children. Narrator 4 commented on the high level of vulnerability and high-risk status of many children who attend the centre. She believes there are many children who require a support worker but their needs or behaviors do not meet the funding guidelines. Narrator 4 commented that the Child Care/Pre-School Program provided stability for many families struggling with a variety of issues in their daily lives.

The narrator indicated that the centre enrolls approximately 52 children currently ranging in ages from 3 to 11 and 70% of the children are subsidized and are residing in the Glacier View neighborhood and eventually or currently attend Glacier View School. The staff maintains close contact with Glacier View Elementary Staff and local agencies for support and referral needs. It provides services on site, including visits from the Public Health Nurses, doctor, occupational therapist and speech and language pathologist. The staff walks children to school and picks them up after school, including Kindergarten children and school aged children requiring before and after school care. Narrator 4 feels that one of their most important roles is to act as a liaison between vulnerable families and the school staff.

The narrator commented: “This Child Care/Pre-School Program provides a critical link to the school for parents who aren’t available to drop their kids off or pick them up, for a lot of reasons. The staff provides a critical link between home and school as they are in daily conversation with the children’s teachers. I believe our preschool program helps the kids when they go to Kindergarten – helps them get used to routine and to positively socialize with one another which ultimately helps them learn”.

NARRATOR 5:

Narrator 5 has lived in the Comox Valley for most of her life and is well known and trusted by the aboriginal community. She is the key staff person at a weekly drop-in program, which is free to families and children 0 to 5 years, and is located in the Glacier View Neighborhood.

**Story:** Our Centre Provides ‘Neutral Territory’ for Vulnerable Families

Narrator 5 said: “This centre provides a safe and supportive learning environment in the Glacier View community. It includes a Clothing Exchange and Resource Lending Library. The neighborhood’s most vulnerable families utilize the services on a daily and weekly basis”.


NARRATOR 5  (cont’d)

The Narrator told the story of how the drop-in program was initiated by Public Health Nurses who realized Glacier View was an area that had many new moms who were single with young babies and minimal income. The Intersectoral Coalition supporting the centre include: The Host Agency: Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry; Public Health Nurses; Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists; Physicians or Pediatricians; Social Workers; Behavior Consultants; Family Resource Program; Infant Development Consultants; Child Development Association. The centre offers Parent Education programs offered in partnership with other community service providers and agencies include: Mother Goose; Learning Adventures for Parents (LAPS); Triple P (parenting program); Right from the Start (attachment course for parents of babies under 2).

The Narrator feels they collectively worked hard to develop a strong community coalition action and intervention for vulnerable pre-school children and their families. They focused on providing services to approximately 40 Glacier View families and preschoolers, of which there are an estimated 24 preschoolers. The staff made connections with a Comox Clothing Store that provides brand new clothing for the Clothing Exchange. They provide a computer so families have access to the Internet. The narrator talked about what was most important – the centre provides ‘neutral territory’ for families to meet social workers or early year service providers. She said, “Families feel safe here, they feel like they aren’t being judged but rather they feel like they are being supported.”

The narrator believes there are great partnerships in her community and mentioned that they have worked together on many projects one of which was to increase the number of Mother Goose programs in Glacier View School to include thirty families in two programs offered in winter and in the spring. She talked about the benefits to her aboriginal community that emerged from the focus on teaching parents songs, stories and rhymes that encourage early experiences with language, learning and communication.

The narrator commented that developing partnerships is key to developing trusting relationships with families that are vulnerable. She talked about the partnership with Courtney Recreation Association to offer additional Mother Goose Programs in the Recreation Centre which included 15 – 30 infants, toddlers, and preschoolers of which one third of the participants were from the Glacier View Community. The narrator talked about the intentional increased focus on developing oral language and socializing skills in young children.

The Narrator concluded with this comment: “I work really hard at building relationships with these families and many of them attend regularly. I’ve lived in the community a long time so I can provide a safe connection between families and community agencies that can help them and their children. They trust me and it really takes time before they let you into their lives. Small things make a difference – like in the clothing exchange – we managed to get brand new clothes for these families. And the school principal is key – how they welcome us into Glacier View School helps to make the school a safe place for many families that have not had good experiences in schools in their lives growing up”.
NARRATOR 6:
Narrator 6 is an administrator working for an intersectoral partner and has worked in the area of Aboriginal education for many years.

Story: Addressing a Major Barrier to Access for Many Aboriginal Families

The Narrator said, “We are very proud of our program which is a licensed preschool for aboriginal children ages 3 – 5 which operates 2 programs a day Monday to Thursday in both the morning and the afternoon. We know we have made a difference in the lives of many young children and their families just by talking and learning with one another”.

She continued by stating: “This program helps Aboriginal families to connect socially with other families. This program creates a strong network amongst participants and recognizes parents as the primary teachers and caregivers of their children. This program continues to make an effort to reduce the vulnerabilities of children and their families”.

Narrator 6 describes the goal of the program, which is to foster the Early Childhood Development of Aboriginal children in conjunction with plans and methods designed by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal People. This is a federally funded program for 3 – 5 year olds, which can service preschoolers both in the urban areas and on the reserve. The Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry currently holds the contract for the program.

Narrator 6 feels that there is a much greater demand in the community for these kind of preschool programs for aboriginal children and that the program must be expanded to meet the needs of families in the Comox Valley. It currently services 40 preschoolers in a morning and afternoon program with a wait list of 37 children, many of whom are from the Glacier View Community. The narrator articulated the concern from Health Canada about the waitlist and Health Canada may generate funds for additional programming as they recognize the need for these vulnerable children to receive extra support.

The narrator commented that the program provides free transportation and meals which acts as an incentive for families to participate. She said: “By providing transportation, meals, and there is no charge for registration, the program is addressing a major barrier to access for many families”.

NARRATOR 7:
Narrator 7 is the coordinator of an intersectoral partner that supports children to fully participate in inclusive neighborhood child care programs.

Story: Helping Families find Child Care Programs that Best Meet Child and Family Needs

Narrator 7 described ‘The Supported Child Development Program’ as an intersectoral partner that assists families that are concerned about their child’s development.
NARRATOR 7 (cont’d)

She described their services which include: helping families find child care programs; referrals to professionals such as Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists; Lending library, training and support for parents and child care providers.

The Supported Child Development Program works closely with vulnerable families from the Glacier View Community. This service assists families of children with special needs to find the child care of their choice and supports caregivers to provide childcare for children who require extra support. The Narrator said: “We work really closely as a team to determine goals and strategies to support progress towards meeting the goals for individual children and their families”.

NARRATOR 8:  
Narrator 8 is an outreach worker contracted by the School District to make connections in the community with vulnerable families that are not attending the community and school programs.

**Story: Connecting with Vulnerable Families we are not Reaching**

Narrator 8 The School District has contracted with an outreach worker to build relationships with families that are hard to reach or families that have many barriers to access. These barriers include no transportation, language issues, lack of information, or programs that cost too much. This also includes families that have trust issues with organizations or agencies, including the school system. The Outreach worker is contracted for 20 hours a week by the School District.

**Impact and Actions: Making a Difference**

- Phoned or visited every Glacier View family that had a preschooler and asked if they had heard of the Strong Start Program, Ready Set Learn Program, or the Welcome to Kindergarten program
- Drove several families to the programs if transportation was a barrier
- Contacts ‘at risk’ moms and invites them to participate in Stone Soup Program
- Interconnects families with programs and services

*I do whatever they need. I stay connected with the people who are providing services such as Stone Soup and Immigrant Services. I often ask the families: What kinds of things are you doing everyday that supports early learning? You have to take care of the adult first - then you take care of the child.*

- Outreach Worker
NARRATOR 9:

Narrator 9 is an Intersectoral Program Coordinator for a Project, which was implemented at a neighboring Elementary School, based on the Wave 2 EDI results, which indicated a high level of vulnerable children.

This Elementary School ranked 18 out of 19 in terms of highest proportion of vulnerable children and did not have the same support systems in place as Glacier View Elementary. The school has a high percentage of immigrant families with subsequent English as a Second Language issues. Although this Project is not located at Glacier View Elementary, the District Staff felt it was important to include in the HELP/BCSTA Report as it was implemented as a result of the Wave 2 EDI findings.

**Story:** Helping ESL Pre-School Kids and Families Feel Included in a School Community

The narrator said: "I think the decision makers were really concerned about the increasing numbers of kids coming to school at risk in this neighborhood and they decided to work together to do something that would help these families and kids before they come to school". The narrator described the Project Planning Committee as a broad-based community group that includes School District 71 (administration and an ESL Liaison staff member), Public Heath Nursing with experience in disadvantaged and hard to reach populations, Ministry of Children and Family Development (Child Protection), Family Services Association, and the Lead Agency: Comox Valley Child Development Association. CVCDA specializes in services to children and their families, with a particular focus on children needing extra support between birth and school age.

The narrator identified the Project as a licensed preschool that provides a quality environment to a group of children that reflects the diversity of the neighborhood. She said: “These kids can’t wait to come through the door in the morning – you saw how excited they are to be here, you saw how involved they were in the activities – it is really helping them learn songs, games, rhymes, and stories”. The narrator described this Project as a four-year-old pre-Kindergarten targeted to make a positive change in the vulnerability level of children attending the program.

The narrator articulated the following key features of the Project:

- Implemented by a broad local coalition that is rich in experience and diversity
- Supported by the Board of Education and District Staff
- Integrated into the school community
  - The principal and the staff have offered encouragement and made the Project staff feel welcomed and important in the school
- Project staff and children are included in school assemblies, special school presentations and activities
NARRATOR 9  (cont’d)

• School District provided the invaluable translator services of the ESL Liaison Staff member
• Funded by MCFD, with the hope the funding will be sustainable for more than one year and that more preschools will be established in existing elementary schools

The narrator concluded the interview with this comment: “Our Project helps families feel more comfortable in a school setting. We go to the school assemblies and no one minds if we leave early because it is too long to sit for many of our children. Our project provides the children with routines and structures and this is not what most of these children are used to. Our attendance is consistent - families don’t want to miss the program. The school community has been so welcoming and I believe these kids will enter Kindergarten ready to learn”.
A. EMERGING THEMES

1. The School District has intentionally re-aligned staffing and resources, and established new projects for preschool children, in schools/neighborhoods where there are high proportions of vulnerable children.

2. Partnerships between Intersectoral Coalitions and the School District play a significant role in implementing a wide variety of programs for young children and their families.

3. The Integrated service delivery uses a community-based outreach model.

4. Providing no-cost registration and transportation to programs assists in reducing the barriers to access for families.

5. Early Child Development programs in schools help to promote involvement and inclusion of families. They also provide transitions for families from early intervention programs into the school system.


7. Early Child Development Programs connect parents with one another in the community.

8. Innovative projects include welcoming settings and receptive conditions for the initiative.

9. Early Child Development Programs have flexibility and responsiveness that engages the intersectoral community and relies on planning based on locally identified needs.

B. BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS

1. District 71 is currently experiencing a decrease in enrollment, which is expected to continue for a number of years in the foreseeable future. The Board of Education has subsequently examined a variety of future grade configurations and has considered potential school closures. Closures will result in attendant losses of long-term facilities.

2. The superintendent of schools has noted that some parents of vulnerable, or isolated, families express a degree of fear of the school system. Such parents may choose to avoid contact with the school system until their children enter kindergarten.
A number of preschool programs are supported by interagency coalitions. However, teachers in some schools have expressed unfamiliarity with this network. Stone Soup organizers have commented that considerably more time will be required in order to develop community-generated programs fully. Stone Soup organizers have also recommended that more cohesive connections between parents and family services would prove beneficial.

Some early-learning programs sustain considerable wait lists. The Aboriginal Head Start Program lists 37 waitlisted preschoolers. (Health Canada has expressed some interest in providing support to these students.) Most affordable, available childcare centres currently sustain waitlists.

Interagency coalitions commonly list the following barriers to universal access to early-learning programs: inaccessible program locations for some families, lack of transportation, inadequate bus services, lack of “non-threatening” locations, language or cultural barriers, financial barriers, waitlists, lack of trained staff, and lack of emergency or weekend childcare.
1. LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Programs at Glacier View Elementary in the Comox Valley School District, British Columbia, constitute the main focus of this report. The Comox Valley School District sustains a 40% rural population. Enrollment is dropping in this district, and school closures are expected in the foreseeable future. 10% of students enrolled in district schools are of Aboriginal descent.

Glacier View maintains an enrollment of 230 students from kindergarten through to grade six. Students at Glacier View have been designated with high rates of literacy deficiency and identified learning disabilities. Difficulties encountered by families living in the Glacier View area include drug and alcohol addictions, poor education, and poverty. The Glacier View school population is stable, and no significant demographic changes have emerged in recent years.

2. INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Considerable interagency involvement supports the Glacier View neighbourhood. Intersectoral groups are numerous and include: MCFD, Public Health, Family Services, Pacific Care, the Early Years Interagency Council, the Child Development Association, the EDI Community Mapping Project, the Early Childhood Educators Association, Stone Soup, Success by Six, the Comox Recreation Association, Vancouver Island Regional Library, Boys’ and Girls’ Club, the Literacy Now Community Team, the Community Literacy and Learning Society, and Aboriginal Head Start and Immigrant Support Services.

The Strong Start program at Glacier View Elementary School operates with the support of strong community coalition partnerships. Coalition members include: SD 71, MCFD, Immigrant Support Services, Public Health, the John Howard Society, Pacific Therapy, Success by Six, Pacific Care, Comox Valley Family Services, the Courtney Recreation Association, the Rotary Club, public libraries, and Pharmasave. The Glacier View coalition effort was initiated in response to 2004 EDI findings, which revealed a high number of at-risk children in the Glacier View area. The Early Success Initiative program (or Teaching to Diversity) was implemented in Glacier View in response to EDI findings. Early-learning, community-generated programs centred in Glacier View School include: the summer reading program, library privileges for preschoolers, preschool education, parent education programs, after-school programs, early-literacy offerings, and whole-family educational programs. MCFD, the John Howard Society, and Pacific Therapy work cooperatively with the Glacier View Elementary staff and psychologist. Local physicians also visit the school. The Boys’ and Girls’ Club supports a breakfast club and an after-school club at Glacier View.

The Comox Child Development Association (CDA) manages the Supported Child Development Program (SCDP). The Supported Child Development Program maintains programs focused in: child development, infant development, early intervention therapy, community integration, and autism. CDA also provides multi-disciplinary assessments for children who display complex developmental or behavioural difficulties.
INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES  (cont’d)

District 71 supports an interagency outreach program, designed to access vulnerable preschoolers. An outreach worker visits families, assesses needs, and recommends programs such as Mother Goose, Strong Start, or family/parenting programs. The outreach program is specifically focused in building relationships between agencies and individual families.

Stone Soup is an interagency initiative supported by MCFD, public health, social services, and the school district. Stone Soup provides family resource programs, public-health centre-based services, parenting programs and family literacy programs. Pacific Care (Resource and Referral) provides parents of preschoolers with information, education, training and community support in District 71. Puddle Duck is another integrated childcare and preschool program that maintains close ties with local community agencies. Speech and occupational therapy service workers operate directly from the Puddle Duck facility.

3. SCHOOL DISTRICT ROLE
   a. Early Learning

   District 71 plays a significant role in promoting early-learning initiatives and program implementations. District staff members express a strong belief in the importance of preschool education and later achievement levels in grade school. District staff members participate in both the Early Years Interagency Council and a related subcommittee, the District Steering Committee for Early Learning. These groups are represented by a number of local community and service agencies.

   District 71 also plays a significant role in an Aboriginal early-development working group and participates actively in the Aboriginal Head Start Program. District 71 established the Literacy Now Committee in 2005, which was later renamed the CV Literacy Advisory Council in 2006. District staff members participate fully in this group, and play a lead role in the development of a community-wide literacy plan for all preschool children. Early learning programs in the district are administered by the Early Learning Team.

   b. School District Planning

   The District Achievement Contract maintains a focus in early-literacy development in preschool children. The District Achievement Contract aims to meet the needs of diverse preschoolers, develop early literacy skills, and develop skills and understandings across all subject areas in preschool children.

   Achievement Contract goals are now also aligned with proposals emerging from a teacher-generated Professional Partnership Program (in which teachers work in teams to develop action-research projects related to student achievement).

   The District Achievement Contract aims to engage parents as partners in preschool literacy development programs and initiatives, and to assist in the process of linking parents with available community resources.
School District Planning  (cont’d)

The District Transitional Literacy Plan supports a number of early learning programs managed by the Early Learning Team. The Early Learning Steering Committee (district staff, MCFD, public health, Success by Six, CDA, Early Childhood Educators, and Aboriginal Head Start) administers the initiatives supported by the District Transitional Literacy Plan. This committee meets monthly and aims to identify a vision for implementing fully comprehensive and accessible programs for all preschool children within district parameters. (Note: the Early Learning Steering Committee is a sub-group of the Early Years Interagency Council.)

Other district plans (drawn from the Superintendent’s Report on Achievement, 2007) include the use of kindergarten-screening assessments and EDI findings in order to generate student profiles of preschoolers entering the school system. These profiles are then employed to plan differentiated staffing ratios to schools, rather than relying only on enrollment numbers. District planning initiatives now follow Harvard Graduate School of Education findings (2006), which examine the use of test data and related initiatives designed to improve teaching and learning.

c. Tracking of student progress/data collection

Glacier View closely tracks students from kindergarten through to grade 3. EDI findings have served as the main impetus for implementing new programs designed to address vulnerabilities in the preschool population.

4. EDI FINDINGS

EDI Reduction in Vulnerabilities

District 71 used EDI findings to generate early-learning initiatives. District staff members now create educational profiles for each child entering kindergarten. Wave 2 EDI findings show a 26.21% overall drop in vulnerabilities following the early-learning initiatives and implementations that were instated following Wave 1 findings.

Baseline (Wave 0/Wave 1) to Wave 2 by Domain for Glacier View neighbourhood:

- Phys: -8
- Soc: -24.7
- Emo: -2.9
- Lang and Cog: -24.6
- Comm: -2.2
5. FUNDING SOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Funding sources for early-learning initiatives in the Glacier View area include: SD 71, MCFD, Public Health, Family Services, Pacific Care, the Child Development Association, Success by Six, the Early Childhood Educators Association, the Comox Recreation Association, Vancouver Rotary Club, Immigrant Support Services, and Pharmasave.

The early-learning grant from the Ministry of Education has been employed to reach vulnerable families, with a view to connecting parents and at-risk children to preschool programs. This grant was also used to provide training and in-service to elementary school administrators.

Glacier View Elementary School programs are funded by numerous local business organizations and service clubs: the Strong Start program at Glacier View is funded by a number of community partnerships including: SD 71, MCFD, Success by Six, the Rotary Club, and Pharmasave. Community agencies and local fundraising efforts raised approximately $25,000 to support Glacier View programs from September 2003 to June 2007.
Focus: West Heights HUB
Intersectoral coalitions and support systems for families are both complex and fluid. The chart provides a sample of the intersectoral partners, interactions and programs in this district and is not necessarily all-inclusive.
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NARRATOR 1:
Narrator 1 is a coordinator for an intersectoral coalition partner.

Story:  Just Do It – we’ll ask for forgiveness later!

Narrator 1 reported her perspective about the reduced levels of vulnerability between Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the EDI. “I believe there are three things that have contributed to the positive EDI results which demonstrated a reduction in all five domains of vulnerability, particularly in the West Heights neighbourhood. They are:

1. A focus on Social Planning by the City, particularly the Mayor
2. The establishment of an Early Childhood Development Committee in 2003
3. The relocation and implementation of services and programs as determined by evidence from the Community Mapping Study, funded by the UEY”

“With a change in municipal government, a new mayor was elected who has a background in social planning. He is child friendly and he shifted the focus from road and sewers to social development. He is a community cheerleader. He is supportive, passionate and has a vision for social development. This mayor initiated a “Social Development Committee” on Council. We are growing, developing and we need a plan in place - he is leading the planning and this is an important piece in the puzzle.”

The Narrator continues: “In 2003, the Mission Early Childhood Development table was formed and an ECD coordinator was hired. The funding was limited and MCFD was a prominent contributor. The BUS (Building United Services) is an example of a project that emanated from ECD Table. This is a real bus that will visit rural neighbourhoods where services are limited. BUS is an outreach program to take the services to the people who need them. It’s our action plan as we know we need something to connect with the hard to reach families – we need to go to them – they don’t come to you.”

“Another example of a project is the production of resource materials such as the Mission Child Development and Resource Guide and the Mission Parent Resource Quarterly so that parents know where to go to access community resources. Before the ECD Table was created, service providers were working in silos and often duplicating efforts, services and programs. The representative from Ministry of Children and Family Development had a great attitude. He would say: JUST DO IT and we’ll ask for forgiveness later. He also had the ability to make decisions and the money to make it happen. Soon the whole ECD table had his attitude.”

Narrator 1 concludes her interview with an explanation of the third factor, which she believes contributed to reducing the level of vulnerability in West Heights neighbourhood. She explained that because of the funding from the Understanding the Early Years Project, they were able to hire a researcher to provide new evidence for Mission neighbourhoods to guide the development of community initiatives to improve the lives of children in the community and enhance their development.
From the evidence included in the Community Mapping Study, they realized that services were localized and there was a need to relocate and implement new programs and services. Narrator 1 stated: “The ECD Table advocated relocating programs to meet the needs of the neighbourhoods. For example, with a great deal of encouragement, we moved the Mother Goose program to a trailer park where there was a need for the program. The ongoing conversations between service providers in the community developed a higher level of awareness and worked at breaking down the silo mentality. This is how the West Heights Neighbourhood Hub was created”.

Narrator 2 is the Project Researcher for the Understanding the Early Years Project. The Understanding the Early Years funding comes from Human Resources and Social Development Canada. Mission Understanding the Early Years Project is sponsored by the Mission ECD Community Table.

Story: They need evidence based research to support what they know.

The Narrator reminded us that the Understanding the Early Years project is a research initiative that helps communities to better understand the needs of their young children and families so they can make evidence based decisions about programs and services.

The Narrator works closely with the Early Childhood Development Coordinator and the ECD Table. She was instrumental in creating the Mission Community Mapping Study. She told us: The Community Mapping Study gives the ECD Table the ability to have evidence based research that backs up what they already know. The funding from the UEY Project gave the capacity to hire one and a half staffing positions. The funding also supports the hand delivered Mission Child Development and Resource Guide which goes to all Family Licensed Daycares, Schools, Doctors’ offices, Dentists’ offices, MCFD, community centres and churches. We deliver this resource to anyone who has anything to do with kids. Other agencies asked us if they could be involved”.

Narrator 2 continues: “As a researcher, part of my responsibility was to set up a website and start a Parent Distribution List. We are trying to access moms when their babies are in their first year. We want them to attend programs such as our “Children’s Celebrations” which we sponsor once a month. We want these young moms to be knowledgeable about services and programs. We think if we can access them early, we will have them hooked on attending programs that support parent and child development. We advertise in the Mission Leisure Guide and the media have given us great support. A professional writer was hired to create awareness in the community for the importance of literacy in all five EDI Domains. The writer publishes articles in the local newspapers and they are always connected to community events. The bottom line is we have to ensure all families have access to the services they need.”
Narrator 3 is an administrator in the Mission School District. She has been a catalyst in the creation and implementation of the West Heights Neighbourhood Hub and the West Heights Inclusive Neighbourhood (WHIN). Narrator 3 is a strong advocate for early intervention and early learning in the Province.

**Story:** EDI helps to magnify the uniqueness of the neighbourhoods

The Narrator began the conversation by stating that: “Most of the time EDI told us what we knew but sometimes it raised more questions, which is a good thing. We put concrete programs in place following the results of Wave 1 EDI findings. The results reinforced our thinking about the neighbourhoods where intervention programs needed to be established to support families who were often at risk for a variety of reasons. The results from Wave 2 EDI findings demonstrated that these intervention programs we put in place, such as those offered at the West Heights neighbourhood Hub and WHIN, appeared to lower the level of vulnerability of students as measured by the EDI.”

Narrator 3 expressed the need to continue to use evidence to support location and implementation of services and programs and to maximize resources for vulnerable families and children. She commented: “Both the EDI results from Wave 1 and the evidence from the Understanding the Early Year’s Community Mapping Study indicated that West Heights was a vulnerable neighbourhood. It is a neighbourhood that has a high proportion of single parent families, low income, unemployment, and ESL families. We knew we needed to provide universal and accessible programs to decrease vulnerabilities. This began the conversations at the School District and ECD Table to create an intersectoral hub in the West Heights Elementary School.”

“A barrier for us is getting all people to the table. We are not a big community and any work we do to support families must be community based. We need to listen to what the community needs first. Each neighbourhood has its own dynamic and we can see each neighbourhood as unique. EDI has helped us to support what we already know. For example, downtown may need more counseling; Cherry Hill neighbourhood may require more ESL services. We have to do the inverse of what we have been doing, which was: “here are all the services now come to us to receive them”. We have learned that is often why services are not being used. Rather we need to be asking neighbourhoods: “What do you need? How can we help?”

Narrator 4 is an administrator in the Mission School District.

**Story:** BUS: Building United Services! An outreach bus that services rural neighbourhoods!

The Narrator reported: “Our experience in Mission shows us that the most important factor in our community is that we need all agencies and service providers at the table. And it must be the agencies or organizations who have the funding otherwise it runs the risk of very little changing or happening.”
NARRATOR 4 (cont’d)

In the past, we felt like there was not a broad enough presence on committees. We have had difficulty getting some agencies to the table and they have very little funding to support programs and services and they viewed the School District as having the funding. The work often lands on the goodwill of the same agencies.

We have worked towards creating an interagency approach where everyone sits on the committee: MCFD, Police, Health, Success By Six, Understanding the Early Years and we are trying to build united services. We are coordinating services to support the needs of our community. One of our most recent projects is called just that: BUS - Building United Services. The concept is to purchase a bus staff it with different agencies employees and volunteers and have the bus visit neighbourhoods where services are difficult to obtain. The plans are to provide multi-agency services to areas which include services such as lending library, lending toy library, literacy bags, immunization, counseling support, computer access and dental, hearing and vision screening. The goal would be to connect services with people. Agencies and organizations will have to put the money on the table and coordinate resources to make it happen.

NARRATOR 5:

Narrator 5 is a School Trustee for the Mission Board of Education. She has been a strong advocate for early learning programs for young children.

**Story:** As a Board of Education, we have a deep belief in Early Literacy

At the outset of the interview, Narrator 5 expressed great pride in the Mission School District for taking the lead to collaboration with key community stakeholders to improve literacy within their community. The Narrator felt strongly that: “In Mission we recognized the need to focus on Early Learning and Early Literacy before the Ministry began to mandate it. This Board recognized the need for transition from preschool to Kindergarten. This Board recognized that by creating hubs like the West Heights Neighbourhood Hub, early identification would lead to early intervention. We have to continue to intervene early - it has to be a priority.”

The Narrator described some of the Early Learning/Literacy programs that started in Mission years before the new Ministry mandate for Early Learning. She said: “We have had Books for Babies, Breakfast Reading Programs and I was involved with the Little Readers Program. Parents run this program and it is a forty-five minute program that any preschooler birth to five can attend. It is offered in the schools once a week and includes reading and crafts. The parents bring the snacks. We work with the Kindergarten teachers to support the skills they are teaching in the classroom. We built ‘lending libraries’ and we say to parents just borrow the books and bring them back. We have a District Literacy Support Teacher who organizes parent sessions and brings in speakers. She also supports the Little Readers Program with books. We often have between twenty and twenty five kids and parents.”
Narrator 5 commented on the West Heights Neighbourhood Hub as making a positive difference to the children and families who can access the services in this location. She also spoke about the barriers to access. “Funding is always an issue. In the West Heights Neighbourhood Hub, the WHIN program has been implemented. This is the West Heights Inclusive Neighbourhood Project. The project offers free services to neighbourhood families through a number of program offerings such as after school care, literacy programs and ESL instruction. It is great for the families in the neighbourhood but there is minimal access for other needy families throughout the district. Transportation in Mission is an issue.”

Narrator 5 continued to talk about another focus for the School District and community agencies. She stated: “We are also concerned about the Aboriginal children and their families. Our data indicates that they don’t appear to be joining in our pre-school programs or the StrongStart programs as much as we had hoped for. We aren’t reaching these families to the degree we know we should be. We collectively have to figure out how to support Aboriginal children to have daily access to preschool programs.”

Another way the Mission Board of Education supports intervention programs to lower the vulnerability in neighbourhoods is to encourage the use of empty classrooms for preschool programs. The Narrator explained: “We reduced the rental rate for preschool programs and in return, the preschool programs donated free registration for two or three needy kids. Sometimes the more government policy you have, the more restrictions there are on what you can do. For example, these preschool programs should count towards the utilization rate. We as a Board are trying to do all the things we need to do – we have capacity and it needs to count. West Heights was on the list for possible school closure. We just couldn’t displace WHIN and StrongStart, which absolutely support successful entry for kids going into Kindergarten. These hubs and intersectoral services and programs need to count in the utilization rate, which directly translates into funding – it needs to count so we can afford to do what’s right for families and kids. The funding must be in place from the Ministry.”

NARRATOR 6:
Narrator 6 works for the West Heights Inclusive Neighbourhood (WHIN) Project.

Story: It is a barrier to always be wondering about sustainable funding. We have committed to families and we have to come through with our promises.

The Narrator talked about the beginnings of the WHIN Project, which is located in the West Heights Elementary School and is integral to the hub. “In 2004 we had a concept and brought agencies together that included the School District, Parks and Recreation, MCFD, the Aboriginal Education Department, Fraser Child and Family Development.”
We brought the agencies together to figure out what the community needs and how we would support it. We put together a proposal and took the concept forward. We created an Advisory Board, which included the agencies I mentioned.

When we began the WHIN project, we involved the PAC at this school. When we measure our success we look at how many programs we started with and how many participated compared to now."

Narrator 6 continues her story: “Within our Neighbourhood Hub, we began very small and tried to figure out what we could do to be successful. I work collaboratively with families and other service providers to develop programming that reflects the unique social and cultural landscape in the community. We asked the community what they wanted and in the first year we began with a pre-school program. We offered an after school program for children six to twelve and we offered it free. We had to cap it because we had too many kids. It runs after school to 5:30 p.m. Other programs we operate include the parenting program “Punjabi Nobody’s Perfect”, Big Brothers and Sisters mentorship program, Schools Cool, ESL classes, Family Therapist Services, and an Early Literacy Program. The school also offers Strong Start and makes available full day kindergarten for Aboriginal and ESL students. Public Health is not housed in the building but periodically offers on-site baby clinics and immunizations.”

The Narrator described some of the barriers and she identified access as an issue in regards to both transportation and feeling comfortable accessing resources in a school environment. “This community has a large population of Indo-Canadian families that were largely reluctant to come into the school. We asked the question: What do you need? “A bench to sit on” was the response so we bought benches and put them in the halls of the school and the caregivers and parents started to come in.”

The Narrator spoke of another barrier for WHIN, which is the ongoing lack of long term funding. She said: “The Ministry has a mandate for Early Learning Programs for young children but they have dedicated minimal funding to ensure new services and programs are offered in communities. We could easily implement two or three more Hubs but we don’t have the money. If we start another Hub and can’t fund it – it would be a disservice to the families.”

Narrator 7 is a school-based administrator in Mission School District.

**Story:** We have hope if we work together, we will improve the lives of young kids and their families.
Narrator 7 enthusiastically endorsed the direction that the School District and intersectoral partners have taken with respect to creating Neighbourhood hubs, which coordinate services and programs for families, and young children who are at risk for a variety of reasons. She talked about the importance of services and programs being offered in one location like the West Heights Neighbourhood Hub.

Narrator 7 continued by describing the West Heights Neighbourhood Hub as a place where: “families can access a range of services which are offered free of charge”. The StrongStart Program in our school is an example of another program that supports families and has seamlessly transitioned in the hub. This is a drop-in program for families where parents and caregivers are engaged in active learning through play with their young children. Family Literacy is taught and story and music time is a part of every drop in session. StrongStart is open Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 11:30 am. Families are free to drop into the program at whatever time meets their needs and at no cost. One of the goals of the program is to support positive transitions to Kindergarten. Parents who participate in this program talk about how it helps them feel comfortable in the school setting and really creates a positive welcoming atmosphere for children who are beginning Kindergarten in the following fall. Kindergarten teachers comment on the increased level of oral language skills they notice in the children who have participated in the preschool programs.”

The Narrator concluded the interview by saying: “I also have to credit the School District as they recognize the extra work load for Principals and school staffs that are neighbourhood hubs. They have given us extra staffing which is greatly appreciated. This is about this school belonging to the community. We have learned that doing it by yourself just isn’t doing it in this community. We have hope if we work together, we will improve the lives of young kids and their families.”
A. EMERGING THEMES

1. The School District, in partnership with the Intersectoral Coalition, has utilized the EDI results to intentionally establish a neighbourhood hub in a neighbourhood where there are high proportions of vulnerable families and children.

2. Trustees believe that there is a definite correlation between strong neighbourhoods, both socially and economically, and childhood development outcomes and they are committed to fostering healthy early development in neighbourhoods such as West Heights.

3. Early Child Development programs in schools help to promote involvement and inclusion of families. They also provide transitions for families from early intervention programs into the school system.

4. Early Child Development Programs have flexibility and responsiveness that engages the intersectoral community and relies on planning based on locally identified needs.

5. The School District has changed their approach to providing services and programs. In the past there was an assumption about what communities needed and in reflection, they believe that is why the services were often not being fully utilized. They now ask neighbourhoods: “What do you need? How can we help? We’ll bring the services and programs to you.”

6. A key factor identified in making a difference to levels of vulnerability was all agencies and service providers at the table. Further, the intersectoral coalitions need to include agencies or organizations that have the funding.

7. This Board of Education recognizes that by creating hubs like the West Heights Neighbourhood Hub, early identification will lead to early intervention. They have made it a priority to intervene early and often.

8. Neighbourhood hubs and intersectoral services and programs in schools need to count in the utilization rate, which directly translates into funding.

B. BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS

1. Finding sustainable funding for much-needed hubs presents challenges.
B. BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS (cont’d)

2. Each neighbourhood in the Mission District is unique, and each presents unique needs. District planners and educators are not always responsive to these differences, and at times fail to tailor programs to specific neighbourhoods.

3. West Heights funding is well established but not yet secure for ensuing years. Sustainable funding is also needed to establish hubs beyond the West Heights neighbourhood. Plans to establish three further hubs have been put on hold due to inadequate funding.

4. Aboriginals parents frequently fail to access available services and programs. A concerted effort is needed to reach out to isolated Aboriginal families.

5. Hubs place a great deal of additional demand on school principals. As many as 100 additional people may often be present in an elementary school when a hub is in full operation.
1. LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Mission School District overlooks the Fraser River and is situated north of the Canada/U.S. border. It is approximately 70 kilometres east of the City of Vancouver. The district enrolled 6372 students in the school year 2007 – 2008. Of a total of 22 schools, 16 are elementary schools, and one houses a provincial StrongStart site. The 2001 census showed a population totaling 33,505, with 66.1% of this population registering children living in the home. Approximately 6% of families are non-English speaking, and 8.1% are Aboriginal.

The West Heights neighbourhood constitutes the main focus of this report. West Heights demographics show high rates of single parents and of adults who have failed to meet high-school graduation requirements. Unemployment is high in this area, and family incomes remain $20,000 below the Canadian average. (See Missions Parent Barrier Report, published by Mission British Columbia in July 2007.) The West Heights neighbourhood is home to the second largest population of children in the Mission District, and 30.2% of these children are designated as vulnerable in one or more EDI domains. West Heights has a substantial at-risk population: 15.8% ESL, 10.9 non-English speaking, 16% below the poverty line, and 29.5% without high-school graduation.

2. INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Intersectoral community organizations working in support of early-learning initiatives are numerous in this district and include: SD 75, MCFD, Health Canada, Success by Six, Children First, the ECD Committee, Lifetime Learning, Mission Literacy Now/Mission Literacy Association, the Mission Public Library, University College of the Fraser Valley, Mission Community Services Society, United Way, Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Mission Parks and Recreation, and the RCMP.

The City of Mission is a particularly committed partner in support of early-learning initiatives and programming. The mayor is a fully trained social planner. Along with city councilors, he has systematically established strong coalition networks in the city. The mayor has been influential in creating a child-friendly city, and many citizens boast that the mayor values social development over sewers and road construction. The mayor attends all community-generated family events in the city, and councilors assume strong leadership roles in the planning of citywide social events. The Social Development Committee was established by city council members with a view to promoting collaboration between community agencies, and to creating a unified service model in support of the citizens of Mission.

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Committee was established in Mission in 2003, and a coordinator was hired in 2004 to promote committee goals. Funding for this coalition effort is provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development.
INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES  

This ministry has also proved influential in assisting the ECD Committee overcome any red-tape bureaucracy that may threaten to impede community plans. The BUS (Building United Services) concept was a product of work undertaken by the ECD Committee and many community partners. BUS eventually hopes to support the operation of a real vehicle, which will travel to outlying areas in an attempt to access hard-to-reach families. BUS is funded by many sources. The ECD coalition also assumes responsibility for the publication and dissemination of numerous quarterlies, booklets, and pamphlets, which are designed to provide local families with information regarding community events, early-learning programs, and expected performance levels in preschool children.

Funding supplied under the auspices of the Understanding the Early Years Project sustained the Mission Community Mapping Study. This project was based on a number of studies that collected data related to early-learning indicators in birth to 5 year-olds. Findings were disseminated to a wide variety of community groups. Responses to these findings resulted in increased public awareness regarding early-learning needs in the district, and in renewed efforts to implement early-learning programs. A number of interagency organizations subsequently came together in the Mission District and devised plans to connect parents to service providers.

The Hub at West Heights represents one of the strongest and most effective coalitions in place in the Mission School District. The West Heights Hub is funded by MCFD, District 75, Mission Parks and Recreation, and Mission Community Services Society. The West Heights Hub was established in response to Wave 1 EDI findings, which revealed multiple vulnerabilities across a number of domains in children in this region. Hub activities and programs are grounded in a coordinated, multi-agency effort to promote literacy and school-readiness skills in preschool children. Programs are also focused in parent education, support groups, and health education.

WHIN (or the West Heights Inclusive Neighbourhood project) is yet another strong coalition partner in the Mission School District. A team of professionals and paraprofessionals provide free services to neighbourhood families through a number of program offerings. These offerings include literacy development, after-school care, Aboriginal and Indo-Canadian learning opportunities, and ESL instruction. This neighbourhood’s population demographics is as follows: 15.8% ESL, 10.9% non-English speaking, and 29.5% without high-school graduation.

3. SCHOOL DISTRICT ROLE

a. Early Learning

District 75 plays a significant role in interagency, community-based early learning in the region. The Mission Board of Education plays a strong role in early-childhood initiatives and program implementation in the district, and trustees are committed to the promotion of cross-agency coalitions specifically designed to support early literacy.
Trustees have encouraged the use of school building space for community-based preschool programs, and the Board of Education discourages the implementation of any policy deemed as “prohibitive”. District 75 staff and the Mission Board of Education have expressed continued interest in promoting the early-learning needs of Mission’s large Indo-Canadian population, which was viewed as at-risk following EDI Wave 1 findings.

The Board of Education initiated a partnership program called Little Readers that provides each preschooler with 45 minutes of early learning and literacy training once per week. This program is mainly geared towards 3 to 5 year-olds, but all preschoolers are officially welcome to participate in program activities. Ten schools are involved in the partnership program so far.

District 75 has also implemented a program named The Early Intervention Program in the Kindergarten Year. This program aims to improve early-literacy standards in Mission’s kindergarten population and was established in response to community concerns regarding literacy standards noted in initial EDI findings.

b. School District Planning

Mission School District planning is committed to improving the literacy skills of all district students, and to ensuring that preschoolers are adequately prepared for entry into kindergarten. Of the 16 elementary schools in the district, 15 have implemented plans to improve the reading levels of all students registered in kindergarten through to grade seven. Mission School District planning maintains a strong focus in early learning, with the implementation of intervention programs in kindergarten particularly prevalent.

Trustees are highly committed to improving the literacy levels of Aboriginal students, and many express an interest in developing plans specifically designed to honour First Nations culture and tradition.

The Mission Community Literacy Plan states its commitment to promoting collaboration and unified endeavor between all community stakeholders engaged in early literacy initiatives. The Transitional District Literacy Plan of October 2007 is committed to facilitating coordination between key service providers in the district, to improving early literacy, and to reaching out to outlying or isolated families.

District staff members believe a thorough understanding of each unique neighbourhood is essential when formulating district plans for early-years interventions.

c. Tracking of Student Progress/Data Collection

District 75 relies heavily on district-assessment and FSA results when formulating both district and school-level planning.
Tracking of Student Progress/Data Collection  (cont’d)

The Understanding the Early Years Project funded Mission’s Community Mapping Study, which provided educators with informative data regarding the literacy levels from the Community Mapping Study when developing initiatives and implementing programs.

4. EDI FINDINGS

Mission School District put concrete programs in place following the publication of Wave 1 EDI findings, and a subsequent reduction in all five domains was noted in Wave 2 for the West Heights neighbourhood. The Indo-Canadian population of Mission School District was deemed particularly at risk following Wave I EDI findings. These findings, in part, precipitated the establishment of the West Heights Hub.

EDI Reduction in Vulnerabilities

EDI findings are used by all intersectoral groups.

Baseline (Wave 0/Wave 1) to Wave 2 by Domain:

- West Heights Neighbourhood:
  - Phys: -5.8
  - Soc: -2.7
  - Emo: -0.8
  - Lang & Cog: -1.4
  - Ever-risk: -11.3

5. FUNDING SOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY

The West Heights Hub is funded by MCFD, District 75, Mission Parks and Recreation, and Mission Community Services Society. However, West Heights funding is not viewed as entirely secure, and sustainability is therefore an issue. The Indo-Canadian population is very enthusiastic in its support of the West Heights Hub, and pushes strongly for efforts to ensure that funding remains in place. Three future hubs are planned for this district, but adequate funding to support these hubs is not yet in place.

Many local educators commented that difficulties exist with finding and “stretching dollars” to accommodate much-needed preschool programs and services to families.
Focus: Cowichan Lake Neighbourhood
Intersectoral coalitions and support systems for families are both complex and fluid. The chart provides a sample of the intersectoral partners, interactions and programs in this district and is not necessarily all-inclusive.
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NARRATOR 1:
Narrator 1 is an administrator in the district.

Story: Welcome to A Small and Unique Community
Narrator 1 met us on a snowy day in April, on Vancouver Island, saying this was most unusual for this location and time of year and apologizing for the road conditions!

She reported she has been very busy collaborating with others to develop the District Literacy Plan but suggested our visit was a most welcome distraction, indeed a celebration and endorsement of her district and community’s efforts. She was excited that her district and Lake Cowichan as a neighbourhood had been selected for this BCSTA project and noted that today’s meeting was a highlight in a journey to improve conditions for the three and four year olds in her community. She said, “I am absolutely delighted to be seeing so many positive gains in our youngest children’s lives and learning progress. I believe that what we are doing is truly making a difference to children and families before they enter school. I know this when I see the same families returning to the evening Family Literacy Mall School or to the Story Time held in our local food store.”

The narrator told us about results of an annual informal inventory check given by district kindergarten teachers that indicated an increase in skills for students entering kindergarten. She said she believes the differences are occurring because of district and community initiatives and family activities resulting from action taken following the publishing of EDI results several years prior. She was quick to credit the EDI for “shedding the light” on the vulnerability of the Lake Cowichan students. She did tell us that there had been some staff changes between Wave 1 and Wave 2 and new staff members had conducted Wave 2. She added that the change in staff did not appear to have had any impact on the way the assessment was conducted. She was very proud of the ECE (Early Childhood Education) staff and the interagency connections in Lake Cowichan and felt honoured to meet and work with these individuals. However, she said most interaction was conducted, not by herself, but through the efforts and contacts of the District’s Early Childhood Liaison Coordinator, a primary teacher.

NARRATOR 2:
The narrator is a teacher working in the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood.

Story: I Couldn’t Wait to Meet With You!
Narrator 2 opened the conversation by saying, “You know the EDI started all of this activity and I am so glad we have witnessed the changes and progress! Maybe some people were skeptical of the EDI at first but when we got those results - there it was in front of our faces. It told us what we already knew about our vulnerable families.”
We had to “step up” to address those conditions. Our challenges include having a high number of teen pregnancies, alcohol use, children with FAS and a high drug use in our community population of 3000. There is poverty and unemployment and it is scary sometimes when some children arrive at school and they have little positive social relationships with their parents. We have generation welfare that make up 35% of our population. The EDI gave us the mandate to roll up our sleeves and get to work!”

“You wouldn’t believe the number of people who care and contribute here.” Narrator 2 then went on to list and describe the extensive list of programs currently available in this community. She told us that they started to provide more pre-school spaces for students who couldn’t afford to attend the private nursery school. Additional day care was established, organized by Community Services and uniquely funded and sponsored by a Chamber of Commerce partnership.

She provided us with brochures for PALS, School Ready Set Learn advertisements, Community Recreation booklets, flyers for School In The Mall (series of Family Literacy, Numeracy evenings) to name a few. She was quick to tell us, “I even place brochures and ads in the local liquor store. I am NOT being condescending in doing this! But that is where some of my families go and they DO pick up the information there.”

“We have story time at the Village Market (local grocery store that purposefully built in a welcoming story corner, complete with fireplace). It’s the place you’ll see elderly people, preschoolers, and kids in strollers sitting down together to listen to a story.” The School District provides staff to deliver the reading once or twice a week and the Public Library holds a reading once a week at Village Market. The store offers a free healthy snack.

She did mention the demographic makeup of the Lake Cowichan community is starting to shift and change in the past two years especially. Her community offers less expensive real estate affordable to young families and many higher SES families are starting to relocate to the neighbourhood. She said these more literate families are in sharp contrast to families she knows who have said to her, “I can’t read (holding class newsletter in hand . . . can you just tell me what I need to know to help my child?”

“Our district office has an Early Success screen given by the kindergarten teachers and we are starting to see changes in our data. I think it’s a result of everything this community is offering for our youngest kids.”

Narrator 2’s final praise went to the Coordinator of Community Recreation. She said, “Do you know we now have ballet classes, that’s new here . . . and now there’s Music For Young Children and Pre-School Skating ... Before families had to drive more than half an hour to get those opportunities - guess which families went . . . the keen ones with money. Now it’s available five minutes down the road and they’ll waive the fee if needed.”

As we walked down the hallway Narrator 2 was thinking of more artifacts to give us from the Parent Resource Board.
NARRATOR 3 and NARRATOR 4:

Narrators 3 and 4 were both educators in the Cowichan Valley School District.

Story: We are serving a very vulnerable community.

Narrator 3 said, "I was really surprised that EDI results are showing improvement here in this community . . . I wasn’t expecting that at all. (We) still have these vulnerable “at risk” students, a lot of them, for a small (community). They have emotional and learning problems; we have an increase in our numbers of troubled kids."

"Down here we have old housing, rentals, single parents, welfare - lots of problems."

Narrator 3 did go on to say there are extensive programs happening in the community and the school works regularly with interagency organizations and frequently refers kids. The narrator mentioned that parents seem to enjoy sports and place a priority on hockey but less on literacy. The narrator expressed disappointment that many of the “at risks” don’t attend the programs that would help them.

Narrator 4 informed us that the results of the EDI, showing a decrease in vulnerabilities, were surprising. The narrator identified one location in the neighbourhood as having families that were more receptive to change and that might have accounted for the reduction in vulnerability.

The narrator explained that one part of the neighbourhood was “needier, (and) has a higher percentage of at risk students. They have more staff changes, and look for greater support from the district.” The narrator ended by saying some kids are hungry and not clothed well and it’s the staff that has to spend money for these items as funding cuts have hurt them even further.

NARRATOR 5:

Narrator 5 was an administrator with connections to the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood.

Story: Let Me Tell You About My Experiences

The narrator offered an historical perspective of the neighbourhood. She said in her opinion Lake Cowichan was a small community that had been poorly serviced. It was one of the small school districts that had been forced by the Ministry of Education to amalgamate with the larger neighbouring school district. Before amalgamation, Lake Cowichan was an area not well served for pre-school and had a low priority to access services like the Speech and Language Pathologist.

The narrator said that the EDI findings made people more aware of the level of vulnerability in the community. Following the publication of the Wave 1 results, things started to happen that culminated in a more focused delivery of services for the early childhood population. Before Wave 1, most kindergarteners had arrived without pre-school experiences. Three years later most had attended a pre-school. She credited the EDI with giving impetus to the district-sponsored Play and Learn, nine-week program.
NARRATOR 5: (cont’d)

She complimented the district on budgeting and receiving grant money to staff a teacher to be the Early Learning and Literacy Liaison Coordinator. She talked about the story time at Village Market, the support and funding from local service clubs, the PALS program offered in the kindergarten classroom, and the Mall School Programs. She told how the Community Day Care that already existed gave support to the parents of her school to open their own day care, suggesting cooperation over competition. She said, “I was proud to be working in that tiny community; although it had many issues, it was a tight community with a lot of cooperation and huge parent support. People there are community oriented for sure.” She further stated that some parts of the neighbourhood were not transient and acknowledged that other parts of the neighbourhood had challenges and were very transient.

Narrator 5 described close partnerships between the schools and local agencies. For example, there are a large number of single parent father families. If a school needed more counselor time it was possible to call on intersectoral help beyond the school district. They offered a pull out twice weekly program and 8 to 12 children received help from the community services counselor who came to schools to deliver sessions. The seniors’ community also had involvement with the elementary children. She finished her comments by stating that she believed her staff members were reaching their most vulnerable families and that they were open and supportive to reach the best balance for their community.

NARRATOR 6:

Narrator 5 was an administrator with connections to the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood.

Story: Find Your Champion and Gather a Pit Crew

Narrator 6 began by providing a quote from a book by author Dan Pink, titled A Whole New Mind: Why Right Brainers Will Rule the World. “Schools must focus on students’ future not our past.”

The narrator expressed a belief that it is essential to establish policy about early childhood in the school system and continued by saying it is vital to track and record progress. The narrator wishes the Ministry would count pre-school spaces in the block-funding formula stating the district already has 300 to 400 pre-schoolers that could already be counted. This would help to eliminate school closures as preschool children are “in the buildings” and utilizing space.

Narrator 6 also spoke of the success of full day kindergarten in Spain and France and suggested we should look inward and outwards as we refine best practice and move in this direction. Concerns over sustainability of funds was raised, as grant money is “soft” and there is a need for 3 to 5 year planning.

The narrator concluded by telling us, “Every new initiative needs a champion at the district level. Then informal leaders, the “pit crew”, come from the community. When these two work together, things happen.”
NARRATOR 7:
The trustee interviewed called herself a supporter of literacy and early childhood. She had made several motions to the board to establish policy statements about this area.

**Story:** Where Will Long Range Funding Come From To Sustain Programs?

This trustee was willing to meet with us prior to an important district budget meeting.

She has faithfully attended sessions in the School in the Mall, Ready Set Learn and the many other offerings to support the district’s Early Learning and Literacy Liaison Coordinator’s efforts.

She spoke about the new Community Literacy Task Group, which has a mandate to create a literacy plan for the region. This group meets regularly and supports early childhood initiatives in the local area. It has been in existence for 2.5 years. Membership includes Success by Six, Adult Education, Alternative Education, VISION, Literate Parents and other interagency groups.

She said, “Initially I was very surprised by the improvements identified in the EDI for the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood. This small community was impacted with mill closures, high unemployment and a low socio-economic base. I was concerned that the EDI was subjective and administered by different personnel for each of the Waves. Would a person’s perspective “colour” the results? Then I looked around at the wealth of offerings that had occurred and all of this activity must be credited with some of the change.”

She said she would like to see more sustainable funds being allocated for early childhood, as you can’t rely on grants. She believes in strong leadership as a necessary component to the vitality of programs as well. She referred to motions that had been brought forward to the Board of Education.

NARRATOR 8:
The narrator is an educator in the district with special interests in early childhood education.

**Story:** I Believe In The Importance of Early Childhood In the School System

Judging from the attendance at many of the early childhood offerings in the past three years Narrator 8 was not at all surprised that results were improving. She has witnessed many positive changes first hand and had heard many positive comments from district Kindergarten teachers. She serves a small area but acknowledged that the community is keen to participate.
NARRATOR 8  (cont’d)

She said, “When I feel tired I also feel so recognized . . . there hasn’t been an event I’ve planned and offered for two years that hasn’t had at least one trustee in attendance. One trustee has come out to all the early childhood offerings.” These days she hears young parents say, “There are so many things to do with our little ones...could you offer that program half an hour earlier then I can go to both?” There is a concerted effort to coordinate offerings with other groups. She told us of the TEAM approach that takes place in this small community. There is a cohesive table that meets regularly comprised of social workers, public health, RCMP, public library, high school reps, seniors’ rep, and community services.

She said, “We cross-recommend - it’s a real team approach - we support each other. They have a wonderful team and our school district is a participating member. That’s why it works so well. It’s a small community with a focused group who want to make a difference to their community.”

Demographics indicate that logging land is being sold off; subdivisions are being built, retirees and young families are moving in to the Lake Cowichan community. There appear to be more “stay at home” moms and many grandparents bringing children to local early childhood offerings. Some parents who work full time are able to take Tuesdays off to attend Play and Learn sessions offered for a nine-week period.

Narrator 8 told us that attendance at all of the organized family events is outstanding, particularly at Numeracy and Literacy Nights in the local shopping mall. Even high school students come out to volunteer to help at the mall school. There are different themes for the mall nights, e.g. multi-cultural, and science themes. There are fifteen centres to visit - all based around the chosen theme. For example, there are felt board puppet stories, journal logs, snack centre, cooking, crafts etc. There is always a free package to take home as well.

Once a family said at 8:00 pm, “It can’t be time to leave; we still want to go to two more centres!” The narrator said, “Families love attending and they’re making good connections to reading and writing for their pre-schoolers.” She said, “The story time at the Village Market is so important it runs once a week all summer long.” She was proud of the co-sponsored (school district and public library) Books for Babes project. The public health nurse takes a bag of books into the homes of newborns.

She says she is a resourceful fundraiser too: she has a budget for some books and receives a Rotary grant and support via the Times-Colonist Book Drive grant. She is in the process of making and compiling 500 literacy backpacks filled with materials: this will be a Books on the Go loaner program for pre-school families to access.

She explained that the Early Success Screen used by her district’s K teachers and collected by the school board office is correlating with the results of the EDI and showing improvements in specific areas.
NARRATOR 9:
Narrator 9 works as part of an intersectoral team in the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood.

**Story:**  I Like To Believe Our Efforts Made A Difference!

Narrator 9 was part of an informal meeting chaired by the leader, Director of Community Services.

The narrator talked about the MCFD’s contract reform guidelines that caused a great deal of dialogue in the field and, in particular, in their office just prior to the EDI Wave 1 being administered. Discussion of contract reform generated a desire for more accountability of services and suggested more of a community focus to services provision.

Narrator 9 said, “The Ministry guidelines didn’t go through but the exercise was so fruitful locally that it had a huge impact. We proceeded to go ahead locally with this work. As a community we went ahead and made our plan and instead of the Ministry telling us what to do – we charted our course and followed it.” The team all echoed the thought that they worked together to identify gaps in services and tried to avoid duplication. When the one day care was forced to move from the church and couldn’t find a location anywhere, the problem went to Town Council for solution: that’s when the leader of community services said, “We’ll house them somehow, we’ll make space!”

The community services group members wanted to maximize their potential and saw that the community wasn’t fully accessing them. So they moved outwards into the community. They went to the people - to work in school (counselors in particular), to daycares, into homes, into pre-schools. If the clients weren’t available during regular hours and couldn’t get to a specific location, the team members went into the family environment.

The community services members utilized practicum students getting a CYC (Child and Youth Care) diploma to run circle times in pre-school. They determined there was a need for infant care so they shifted the day care focus to cater to that age group. They engaged in community problem-solving largely because nearly every member of this team also lives in the Lake Cowichan community. They commented that they all have a vested, personal interest in their place. They offered Moms and Babes for first time moms in response to high teen pregnancy rate. This group offered free snack and offered, for example, parenting tips and socializing. Get-togethers were needs driven. Triple P Parenting classes were offered and free child minding was provided to boost participation. Public health nurses visit new families and make referrals to other agencies - everyone connects here.

Narrator 9 recounted that they are in an enviable position of sustainable funding for community services: they have adequate CORE funding provided largely by the township for 25 years now - so stability was on their side. Funds from MCFD need to be applied for each year and these grants can fluctuate from year to year.
They have contracts with thirteen companies and are able to run a bus to more remote areas. MCFD grants provide money for staff but not money for programs so the ELKS and Legion and service groups step up and ask, “What do you need?” They received a playground grant: they access a gaming grant of $18,000 for operating costs. They fundraise via BINGO.

Narrator 9 said the area is somewhat transient and seasonal, with lots of welfare recipients who “hide here” with no spotlight on their cash income from salal picking or mushroom picking or “pot” grows. There is only a very small aboriginal, First Nations population, and a few Métis and the cultural base is not varied.

Narrator 9’s final comment was, “We just keep adapting and changing all the time . . . we change constantly . . . we are shifting constantly and we think, yeah, we got it this time and then . . . we go along and then we see that . . . no, we don’t have it right yet. We’re always learning more about the families we serve. It keeps us moving along to get better at what we do.”

NARRATOR 10:
Narrator 10 was an educator in the district with a special interest in early childhood.

Story: Learn Through Play

Narrator 10 told us about the Readiness for Kindergarten program held in a portable for a nine-week period in spring. The portable is equipped with shelf toys, puzzles and games, craft table and messy paint equipment, meeting and story corner; it resembles an early childhood pre-school setting. We met the narrator during a clean up after a session and before a transition to the next site.

Narrator 10 told us about story time held at the mall and Village Market food store two times a week. The rotating Play and Learn is also held in the Lake Cowichan community. The narrator described the following program schedule implemented by district personnel in the neighbourhood: play to learn period of time, talk while you play, focus on language, sign in, activity choice period, carpet/story time, snack, more play and talk, clean-up, circle time and home time. Children receive a free package every time they attend to take home. Materials (craft supplies, song/poem sheets, cooking ideas) in the home pack complement goals of the program. Parents participate and coffee and tea are served for them. Narrator 10 also commented that the program offerings in Lake Cowichan are very well attended. There is no StrongStart Centre yet in this community.
A. EMERGING THEMES

1. Leadership at the community, school, and district levels is essential to the successful implementation of early-learning programs.

2. Personnel in Lake Cowichan schools play a significant role in promoting community-based, interagency coalition efforts that support early-learning initiatives.

3. Top administrative leadership in this school district has been instrumental in promoting early-learning initiatives and program implementation.

4. Trustees in School District 79 express strong support for early-learning initiatives, and are knowledgeable regarding the relationship of early-literacy development to later achievement in grade school.

5. Leaders of intersectoral coalitions in this school district support early-learning initiatives and recognize the importance of implementing early-literacy programs for the preschool population.

B. BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS

1. School District 79 funds literacy and numeracy specialists for K-12 students, and preschool support funds are drawn from these K–12 operating funds. There is a need for multi-year, truly sustainable funding for early-learning initiatives and programs.

2. Full-day kindergarten services are needed for at-risk children, but this does not appear possible at this time, due to financial constraints.

3. Aggressive intervention is needed at the community and district level to speed up the implementation of early-learning initiatives.

4. The school-district population is somewhat transient in nature, and a pervasive drug and substance abuse problem continues to trouble local health and school-district personnel. Some families resist intervention even though their children exhibit deficiencies.
1. LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

A. DISTRICT

School District 79 is located on the east coast of Vancouver Island. The district is geographically extensive, and many students use school-district transportation when traveling to school. Over the last 10 years the district has registered a steadily declining enrolment, and enrolment is anticipated to continue to drop through to 2010. The district currently serves approximately 8700 students in 33 schools. The district operating budget stands at $72 million.

Cowichan Valley District is mainly rural: 63% of the approximately 63,000 inhabitants live in rural locations. Approximately 2.5% of homes are non-English speaking, and approximately 9% of the population is Aboriginal. The school-district population is also somewhat transient in nature, and a pervasive drug and substance abuse problem continues to trouble local health services. The major industries are pulp and paper, forestry, fishing, farming, tourism and wineries. High unemployment rates followed mill closures, and many families in this district struggle with low socioeconomic standings.

Early-learning intervention systems for Aboriginal children require ongoing support. The divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal achievement scores is wide.

B. LAKE COWICHAN NEIGHBOURHOOD: CONTEXT

Lake Cowichan was originally an independent school district. It was amalgamated with the much larger Cowichan Valley school district several years ago. Severe economic conditions prevailed in the neighbourhood for several years due to the closing of the local mill. Two elementary schools were closed. The two remaining elementary schools now serving the area are Palsson Elementary School and A.B. Greenwell Elementary School. Currently, A.B. Greenwell School is temporarily located in the small town of Youbou, as the building in which it was originally housed (in the town of Lake Cowichan) was deemed unfit due to mould contamination. Lake Cowichan neighbourhood has experienced a demographic shift in recent years, as considerably more stay-at-home mothers now have children in the preschool system.

2. INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Shortly after Wave 1 EDI results were published, the provincial government requested reform regarding Vancouver Island’s delivery of coordinated, community-based early-learning programs and initiatives. (A draft Memorandum of Understanding was established for this purpose.)
INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES (cont'd)

The Cowichan Lake community responded vigorously, and changes have occurred in the community’s approach to service delivery. Community-agency staff members have worked to ensure coordination of community services and have largely eliminated duplication of services. Community-service agencies now operate “outreach” services: community-service personnel visit schools, work within daycares and preschools, and provide home visits. Community-agency counselors also now work within both Lake Cowichan schools. The district’s role is a proactive one and specifically supports coordinated community action through participation in various community coalitions.

Well-organized intersectoral partnerships exist in the Lake Cowichan School District, and community agencies are well integrated with school-district programs. Community partners demonstrate strong leadership and play a vital role in district initiatives. This has resulted in the establishment of strong early-learning programs in the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood.

Coalition partners include: School District 79, MCFD, Public Health, the Early Literacy Liaison Program, Achieve B.C., KAATZA Health, Lake Cowichan Community Services Society, the Community Services Employment Centre, the Seniors’ Centre, the Village Market, daycare and preschools, the Friendship Centre, Cowichan Family Life, the Family Literacy Committee, LEAD Partners, Success by Six, and Learning Links. Some support for needy families is provided in the form of food, employment, or emotional counseling.

The principals of Lake Cowichan’s elementary schools work very closely with intersectoral agencies, and a counselor associated with intersectoral agencies currently works in both Palsson School and AB Greenwell School. Cowichan Lake Community Services established a committee assigned specifically to promoting communication between agencies operating within the community. This team was recently put in place and includes: the schools, church, food bank, counselors, employment counselors, a social worker, recreation-centre workers, the RCMP, Public Health, daycare, and the Chamber of Commerce.

Few children were served by preschool offerings before EDI Wave 1 findings were released (only KAATZA provided services), and little early-literacy programming was available. Many parents had recreational interests focused in hockey or sports activities, but much parental recreational time is now focused in family-literacy program offerings. Daycare provisions after school are now available, and this has meant that KAAZA is now able to provide a greater preschool focus to its program planning.

3. SCHOOL DISTRICT ROLE
a. Early Learning

The Board of Education is extremely supportive of early-learning initiatives in the district.
Early Learning  (cont’d)

Trustees are keen to support the establishment of new programs and always attend early-childhood committee meetings or any community events that support early-learning initiatives. The Cowichan Valley School District has set aside funds to support the ongoing costs of employing a District Early Learning Liaison Teacher. This teacher is assigned both to work in schools with at-risk populations (such as those in Lake Cowichan) and also to liaise with community agencies in an effort to integrate community support. The district sees the family as a “learning unit” and is geared towards enhancing parental input in early literacy programming. The district offers free family literacy programs in its schools.

Future Direction of School-District Role:

• A number of district personnel expressed the continued support for a “champion” at the district level. It was felt a “champion” helps speed up the process of establishing effective early-learning programs and also works towards coordinating all resources and coalitions.

• Teachers and school-district personnel expressed a wish for continued active and informal leadership at the district level, as there was some feeling that this facilitates a speedier coordination of intersectoral partnerships and stronger support for agencies associated with preschool programming.

• Trustees are considering a future policy that states that applicants seeking to establish early-learning programs or preschools in School District 79 must adhere to the district’s Early Learning Framework of preferred practice.

• The district plans to continue tracking early-learning achievements through to the kindergarten and primary grades.

• Early-learning educators believe that the Ministry should recognize the current existence of early-learning programs for preschoolers within school facilities, and that funding for these facilities should be included in Ministry allocations to school districts.

• A number of district personnel expressed a belief that a merger should be facilitated between early learning and kindergarten programs, as a continuum of early learning would prove beneficial.

• The District sees the family as a “learning unit” and is geared towards enhancing parental input in early literacy programming.

b. School District Planning

The school district plans to play an increasingly active role in early learning initiatives in the Cowichan Valley. District personnel also believe that strong leadership at the district level is essential, and that plans should include encouraging kindergarten teachers to play a pivotal role in early learning initiatives.
Currently two ministries administer programs, and coordination of the two is seen as paramount.

There are hopes that the Ministry will begin counting available early learning program space for 3 and 4-year olds in school facilities as part of regularly funded space allocations. Local educators express the view that Ministry funding allocations must embrace early-learning support systems (such as childcare and preschool programs). There are hopes that full-day kindergartens will soon be put in place.

District planners have suggested that the Ministry is perhaps undertaking too many initiatives at this time, and that perhaps some streamlining of funding is currently needed. Transport and staffing for preschools also require funding. The school board is considering a motion that includes adherence to the Early Learning Framework (developmental practices for all preschoolers) as part of lease-agreement acquisition: “Beginning with the 2008 – 09 school year, preference will be given to licensees who incorporate the Early Learning Framework into their practice, and after 2008 – 09, only those operators who incorporate the Early Learning Framework into their practice will be allowed to operate childcare or daycares in our facilities”.

c. Tracking of Student Progress/Data Collection

Early Success Assessment screening tools are used to track student performance from kindergarten through to grade 2.

Data provided by District 79 for the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood includes the following information for kindergarten students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>AT-RISK SEPTEMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Kindergarten Early Success Data: Lake Cowichan*

4. EDI FINDINGS

EDI Reduction in Vulnerabilities

Baseline (Wave 0/Wave 1) to Wave 2 by Domain:

Lake Cowichan Neighbourhood:

- Phys: -11.1; Soc: -13.8; Emo: -14.3; Lang and Cog: -7.1; Com: -5.1; Ever-risk: -17.9
EDI FINDINGS (cont’d)

Some District personnel expressed some surprise regarding the extent of improvement in EDI findings between Wave 1 and Wave 2. Much of this improvement is attributed to the work of the Community Early Literacy Teacher and her team in conjunction with the intersectoral partners in the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood. Positive findings have been recorded in the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood where programs were put in place following Wave 1 findings.

Program initiatives implemented following Wave 1 resulted in a higher level of participation in programs for 0 - 5 aged children, and a much more coordinated approach to program offerings for the 0 – 5 aged children in the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood. Parents requested the implementation of early-learning programs following examination of Wave 1 findings, and many proactive parents visited progressive program examples in nearby Duncan. Story time was subsequently established in a local grocery store, and following Wave 1 findings, many further early-learning offerings were put in place for preschool children and their parents. The Early Literacy Support Teacher began visiting both Lake Cowichan neighbourhood schools twice weekly following Wave 1 results, and the Lake Cowichan intersectoral group began meeting regularly following Wave 1 findings. The outreach team increased the level of support it provided to preschoolers after Wave 1, and Public Health is also now running a preschool program implemented following the release of Wave 1 findings. Many attribute the reduction in vulnerability reported by Wave 2 findings to the success of the programs implemented following the release of Wave 1 data.

5. FUNDING SOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY: LAKE COWICHAN NEIGHBOURHOOD

- Federal and provincial government funding, MCFD, Cowichan Valley Regional District, Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance, Ministry of Health, Service Canada, CVRD, B.C. Transit, United Way, Success by Six, B.C. Transit, the Gaming Commission, public libraries (Books for Babies), community service groups, the Times Colonist, the Rotary Club, rent revenue, service fees and memberships, donations, and in-kind funding.

- Sustainable district funding is in place for each of the following: start-up initiatives, multi-year programs, and the training of personnel and support staff. The Ministry and School District 79 provide ongoing funding for resources and program replenishments.

- Parental fees help to support KAATZA, and a governmental playground grant, along with a gaming grant and Gaming-Commission bingo funds, provide additional funds.

- Core sustainable funding for Lake Cowichan programs is made available from local taxation revenue collected by Lake Cowichan Town.
FUNDING SOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY: LAKE COWICHAN NEIGHBOURHOOD (cont’d)

• Funding for Community LINKS was originally administered by MCFD, but this funding has now been transferred to the school district.

• The district also funds materials and specific items through its Curriculum Development funds for programs taking place in Lake Cowichan.

• The school district seeks cost recovery from preschool and daycare programs operated within its facilities and uses these funds to provide sustainable funding for early-learning programs. There is a need for multi-year, truly sustainable funding to be put in place.

• School District 79 funds literacy and numeracy specialists for K–12 students, and funding for preschool programs must be drawn from these K–12 operating funds. (The Early Literacy Teacher has allocated considerable time to the Lake Cowichan neighbourhood.)
Focus: Whole District
Intersectoral coalitions and support systems for families are both complex and fluid. The chart provides a sample of the intersectoral partners, interactions and programs in this district and is not necessarily all-inclusive.

Intersectoral Group Membership
SD 85, MCFD, Vancouver Island Health Authority, North Island Crisis Centre: Family Place, North Island Infant Development Society, Kwakiutl Band Council, Gwa’sala-Nakwaxda’xw First Nations Health Clinic, Quatsino First Nations Health Clinic, Aboriginal Infant Development, Success by Six, Mother Goose, Toddler Time, Literacy Bus Coordinator, Literacy Now, Octopus Gardens, Stepping Stones Preschool, Huckleberry House, Story Time Buddies, and Vancouver Island Regional Library.

### Programs
- Programs in Schools
- Preschool Programs
- Childcare Programs
- Family Programs
- Aboriginal Services
- Other Referral Agencies
- Collaboration
  - Some interaction but not collaboration

### Arrowheads
- The flow of activity

### Whole District
- Jen H S.D.
- Octopus Gardens Rainbow Daycare Huckleberry House (program)
- Public Library Storytime
- KKH Educational Initiative S.D. 1st Nations Principal
- Preschool’s and cooperative organizations A.J. Elliott school
- LIterary Bus (Public Library) - to isolated communities - to band school
- Many playgroups not enough ECE spaces after preschools (in schools now)

### North Island School District 85
- Stepping Stones Preschool (high school)
- ALAPS/LAPS Parenting Program in school
- KKH S.D.
- KKH Learning Support
- Success By Six Toddler Time
- Healthy kid pays into community
- Mother Goose - to homes and home cares, - to isolated communities - to Band school

### Programs
- MCFD
- Public Health VIHA
  - Parent Workshops
  - Health Kids
- Aboriginal Services
  - Head Start
  - Day Cares: Amalyas, Kwiqwis
  - Sacred Walk (Counselling)
- KKH goes to isolated communities
- RSL goes to isolated communities
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SCHOOL DISTRICT 85: NORTH ISLAND

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NARRATOR 1:
We first met with this staff member who had held multiple positions in the district. She is highly involved in community and literacy work. She identified her strength as the district’s grant writer of applications for funds.

**Story:**  **I am Proud of Vancouver Island North**

Narrator 1 told us she was one of the first early childhood advocates and leaders in Vancouver Island North. She also helped to establish and organize the Port McNeill Family Centre, a society akin to Community Services. She was a key player, along with the VIHA Nurse, in creating the Pre-School Literacy Project utilizing a large green school bus that travels to remote areas to offer Mother Goose and many other services. She expressed some surprise about the EDI results between the two areas of Vancouver Island North. She had thought one would have dropped more due to economic variables and logging demise in the area.

Narrator 1 explained that community examined Wave 1 EDI results and then targeted the most vulnerable groups. The Family Literacy Committee, which she chaired, existed before any EDI results and VIHA had been supporting and acquiring materials for the community’s most vulnerable children. After Wave 1, VIHA (Vancouver Island Health Authority) provided money for Mother Goose program personnel to be trained and then Ready Set Learn (RSL) events started.

Narrator 1 was instrumental in making literacy book bags that were loaned to parents. The narrator spoke about the literacy bus that visits outlying areas with a storyteller aboard and free books to distribute. Pre-school aged children are invited to greet the bus. Face painting and craft activities are also on board. Through the years the bus has expanded offerings and it now goes to community events, Ready Set Learn events, and health fairs. It travels to remote communities 2 to 3 times a year. The narrator said some events are now contracted out to two coordinators. The Ready Set Learn program is a series of multiple offerings not just a Fair and Open House as in many districts. She described the impact of the HOP (Healthy Opportunities for Pre-Schoolers) program that is now known as LEAP. Day care and pre-school staff are trained and they take different games and nutrition ideas to homes. 45 to 50% of the area’s pre-school students attend. The narrator worries about the children who don’t get there. One year all children received a free T-shirt to wear from the event and the following year they received sun hats. A local company does all mechanical servicing of the literacy bus free of charge. VIHA provided $10,000 a year for insurance. The narrator believes that the community values the literacy bus.

In one small community the RSL was attended by 100% of their pre-schoolers. This Aboriginal community borrows the book bags as well. The narrator has received grants to provide parenting skills workshops. Out of fifteen attendees there were eight Aboriginal participants trained to deliver the parenting course. They are localizing this program to meet cultural needs as the program was originally intended and developed for Prairie native groups.
NARRATOR 1  (cont’d)

The narrator spoke about the Aboriginal students being able to access programs on reserve. Toddler Time, a VIHA offering, takes place in the community but for a while there wasn’t much offered for the age 1 to 3 range - that is shifting now.

The narrator told us the public library offers books by mail and says library staff members make strong connections with families living in remote regions. The community has excellent library summer programs and events on Saturdays too.

The narrator noted that the community has an effective intersectoral coalition that works to avoid duplication of services.

Narrator 1 ended her interview by saying, “I see the biggest way to impact children is to make an impact on their parents. Long range we need to target parents on their parenting skills and literacy skills. Literacy is such a cornerstone to all skills. If you have better literacy skills you’ll be a better parent. This is a cooperative school district that works closely with the college - I see that as a beautiful partnership. Let’s do our best for our children by working together.”

NARRATOR 2 and NARRATOR 3:

Next we met with two district staff for a combined interview.

**Story:**  There Was A Flurry of Activity!

Narrator 2 credited the EDI with helping everyone re-examine their roles and services for young children. He was skeptical about the positive EDI results at first. He felt kindergarten teachers didn’t want their students to be seen as “low”- so this perhaps coloured the responses completing the EDI. Young and newer teachers might also gather information differently from more experienced teachers. This narrator is a Board member of Family Place - a drop in parent child centre. The narrator felt the EDI results gave new life to the Infant Development Program, Supportive Child Care, the Child Development Committee, and a Pre-School that increased capacity resulting from the EDI. Over $100,000.00 of grant money was received by the community. During the three years following Wave 1 results, MCFD increased staffing from one to six people. Ready Set Learn morphed into a project that would “go to the families”.

Narrator 2 told us that all four bands in the area have band schools and pre-schools. They are part of the Coalition table. 50% live off reserve in the district. The narrator felt policy needs to be created now for early childhood. They need a policy for bussing needy groups, as transportation is an issue. The region has a high annual rainfall so transport is important. He believes with issues such as teen pregnancy it would be great to have a Strong Start housed in the high school or one on reserve. He thinks if teens had more support the grad rate would go up. The high school could become more of a HUB in the narrator’s opinion.
NARRATOR 2 and NARRATOR 3 (cont’d)

The narrator said, “We are fortunate here our board of trustees is excellent, very open and flexible in responding to the community’s needs. They support all our events.” (In fact many trustees are former teachers here).

The narrator also wrote, “From now on, we need to point to our results as an indicator of our success. Funding agencies like to see results and we have demonstrated that we can pull together as a community and use their money effectively. When they understand that, they should be clamoring at our doors to give us money. Over the last several years, this geographical area has taken many hits; just ask a fisher, logger or miner. The times have been tough on community morale, still we have lots to be proud of and the improvement in EDI scores is something that we can be very proud of: we are doing a good job of raising our children.”

Discussing the EDI results, Narrator 3 in this interview said, “We felt congratulatory. The Pre-School Literacy Committee felt really great and responsible for these positive changes.” She also said the EDI results were quoted in all grant proposals and it helped get money to fund initiatives. With the funds they could offer training sessions for speech programs like Moe the Mouse and other parenting skills workshops. There was a flurry of activity. The one-time only Early Learning grant money ($118,000) also helped to fund an Early Learning Teacher for two years. They developed a Focus on Four Pillars concept for their district. The pillars are:

1. Providing in service for K teachers
2. Implementing KLP (Kindergarten Learning Project)
3. Purchase resources to support KLP
4. Attend Early Years Island Network Meetings and support community events

NARRATOR 4:
The narrator has an ECE background and pre-school teaching experience. She iscontracted by the school district.

Story: I Knew My Community

Narrator 4 told us her ECE background and work in pre-schools made a good fit to organize and plan Ready Set Learn (RSL). She was already well known to many of the young families in her community. Teachers are very appreciative of her leadership and coordination of the RSL events. In October and again in January there is a big advertisement in the local newspaper listing RSL times and locations. There are posters placed around town and fridge magnets with the information are distributed. These events are well attended and they target and go to the outlying areas - their outreach is very effective.
NARRATOR 4  (cont’d)

Attendance was low for the 2007-08 year due to birth rate but had been very high in previous three years. Saturday RSL is popular in some areas but not all. It is better to go to a remote village (they rent two boats to get over there) for example on a Friday when children are at school. The narrator felt strongly that more programs should be located on reserve; RSL has only gone to each reserve once a year. They are well received on the reserves and attendance is good. If energy and time permitted she would like to go to reserves for second visits. For some remote areas they rent a truck and drive in about one hour over gravel roads, they fly into another isolated Inlet for RSL.

Geography presents challenges. Every year they review RSL and present a report to the district’s principals in May.

One town does offer some evening RSL. RSL is often planned around themes and subject areas; Health personnel travel along as well and use the literacy bus, too.

NARRATOR 5:
The narrator is the coordinator of an intersectoral partner and has worked in the area for many years.

Story: Our Funds Help The Community

Narrator 5 said, “I think some time ago professionals in Port Hardy opened their eyes and saw we needed to do something more for our youngest children.” She did have a concern that the EDI results might be skewed, as some Aboriginal students didn’t participate. She did think Aboriginal participation is increasing in her community though. She oversees 50% of her funds for Aboriginal engagement. Success By Six receives $44,000 for strategic implementation funds for the whole North Island. $25,000 goes into Aboriginal programs.

The narrator lives in Port McNeill and has noticed the shift to more working mothers as fathers have been laid off in logging and mining. In addition, loggers who work only get a season of 6 to 8 months.

Narrator 5 feels there are great partnerships in her community and mentioned, as an example, the Learning and Literacy Fair held recently. It attracted 250 children and families. The narrator was pleasantly surprised at the number of Aboriginal families there. Charlotte Diamond sang and Victor Reece, a native storyteller, presented. It was a free event. She heard elders say: “It’s about the children! If we look after the children we’ll have healthier adults.”

Family Literacy, VIHA, and Success By Six partnered for a Healthy Kids Clinic for 3-year olds. They had a “Release the Salmon” lunch, which had a great turn out of Aboriginal families. They gave away 250 packages of smoked salmon as a treat to take home.

The narrator commented that visiting the communities is best and her funds help to provide draws and childcare services for example. She helps to fund “Not So Perfect” Aboriginal facilitators for a parenting skills program offered in Alert Bay.
NARRATOR 6:
The Family Literacy Committee members were interviewed. This is a dynamic group of leaders who have close ties and they work towards common goals as a team. There were several narrators.

**Story:** Idea Generators Who Get Things Done?

One narrator said: “This group does outreach work - members go to their people. They don’t talk about materials - they take the stuff to them!”

The committee members believe they are successful as a result of the following:

- They have an integrated approach to agency work - they talk and solve problems together - they don’t compete with each other.
- They have one person who acts as the coordinator and sends email agenda/minutes out.
- They make decisions together such as how to replenish book bag loans.
- They discuss events like the Literacy Fair – discussing issues such as, “do they have the money? Where can they get the money?”
- This year they hired a coordinator for the Literacy Fair when their energy was flagging. They didn’t want to damage the momentum by canceling so they hired someone to coordinate.
- They hold Book Walks similar to the Cake Walk event - Vancouver Kids Books is a resource for this event. Kids win books instead of cakes!

One narrator said, “Our community now knows who we are. The fair let people know we’re a coordinated, consolidated group. The preschool literacy committee changed as our mandate got bigger - we expanded away from school focus and into whole family focus. We recognized from the EDI that literacy learning was for the whole FAMILY.”

Various narrators talked about several other unique events they organize.

The Aboriginal counselor spoke about the First Nations Parent’s Club, (a group based in Vancouver). The club hosts a potluck dinner at the high school on the first Monday of the month. The club members have magnets, prizes and books to give away. They play games like Scrabble and Boggle as well as completing puzzles, reading books, and participating in craft activities. Parents invited grandparents to come and teach about native foods. From 5 to 30 people attend regularly. Elders also shared stories about how they gathered food long ago.

The many narrators presented a very integrated and collaborative approach to intersectoral coalitions.
NARRATOR 7:
Narrator 7 was principal of a very vulnerable school.

**Story: Opening Up Conversations**

Narrator 7 said that the “EDI opened up the conversations and then helped galvanize us as we moved towards our common goal - to improve life for our children.” He added, “we were struck at how we stood out on the radar screen of the EDI - we were surprised by this in a way.”

Narrator 7 became involved in a HUB model while working with the Infant Development Program Society to reach Special Needs kids. He is interested in early referrals to provide help ASAP.

The outreach programs and going into homes is starting to have an impact in his opinion. 17% of the narrator’s school is First Nations. The school has received some additional staffing to help with Learning Assistance needs. There is a breakfast program in the school. MCFD statistics for the narrator’s school indicate 20.9% of the school is vulnerable and a lot of the students are “in care” thus there is significant MCFD involvement. The school has 34 out of 160 designated students with special needs - a high percentage.

The narrator’s final comment was a wish for the Ministry to change their funding guidelines for special needs. He said the school “ housed” an afternoon StrongStart BC that is successful and well attended - he hopes that will make a difference.

NARRATOR 8:
Narrator 8 was a primary teacher who expressed concerns over the reliability of the EDI.

**Story: Did I Do the EDI correctly?**

Narrator 8 started by saying she had shared her concerns with HELP over the EDI and viewed this as another opportunity to share them. The narrator wanted to convey a concern that the EDI might not be so reliable. She seemed surprised that HELP could draw conclusions from such a small sample size used for the EDI. She pointed out that she never received any training to give the EDI the first time she administered the assessment. She questioned whether she might have skewed the data - maybe she could’ve done a better job – or maybe she over-rated her kids. She did acknowledge that there are a lot more things for young children to do in her area since the EDI was first administered.
NARRATOR 9:
Narrator 9 was an early learning teacher. She is in schools two days a week. She is also a helping teacher. She visits outer areas two other days a week. Her mandate is the Four Pillars approach.

Story:  I Network with the Community

Narrator 8 described the Four Pillars of her job as follows:

1. Providing in-service for K teachers
2. Implementing KLP (Kindergarten Learning Project)
3. Purchase resources to support KLP
4. Attend Early Years Island Network Meetings and supporting community events

The narrator told us she represents the school district at different pre-school events. She is a member on the Outreach table for the Family Literacy Committee. She helps out with the Literacy Fairs, RSL events and attends most events. Her work is helping her make contacts in the community and one of her responsibilities is to network.

NARRATOR 10:
Narrator 10 was the Literacy Bus Coordinator.

Story:  Board Our Bus: Literacy! Literacy and Learning for Families

The narrator told us about “literacy in motion” taking place on the north end of Vancouver Island thanks to a project initiated by the Mount Waddington Preschool Literacy Committee. The concept of a Literacy Bus began as an idea to take information, resources and a small group of professionals who work with parents and preschoolers to each of the district’s small communities. Narrator 10 recounted that rather than always expecting parents to bring their child to a larger centre for appointments, the committee wanted to take the services to the home community. The mission statement of the Literacy Committee is “literacy and learning for families” and the literacy bus project allows the committee to fulfill this goal.

When a school bus became available for sale, the committee sat down with the School District to discuss the possibility of a purchase. Once that goal was accomplished, the school bus was stripped of its seats by a class of power mechanic students at the high school under the watchful eye of their teacher. Seating for eight passengers was left at the front of the bus. The rest of the space of this 72-passenger bus was designed to suit the project needs in the north island.
NARRATOR 10: (cont'd)

The narrator explained the sequence of refurbishing the bus. The result is a bus that serves the communities visited by the bus. The narrator explained in great detail the inside of the bus. "First there is an open space, which features a long bench with a custom bright green seat for young children to sit for story time. The main section of the bus is fitted with cupboards to hold books and materials. The back of the bus is outfitted as a small office for professionals to work or speak with parents privately." A carpenter constructed much of the inside work as the walls and angles over the wheel wells had to be custom fitted. Glueless laminate flooring and pre-constructed cupboards and counters completed this interior design.

The narrator provided more details regarding the literacy bus. She told us that the bus is a project of the Preschool Literacy Committee under the umbrella of Vancouver Island Health Authority. With grants from VIHA, the Queen Alexandra Foundation and the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the cooperation of School District 85, the committee purchased a retired school bus at the beginning of 2006. The transfer of ownership went to Vancouver Island Health Authority and they take responsibility for insurance and fuel. School District 85 provides storage in a locked compound and heat during the winter to protect the resources stored on board. School District 85 also helped develop an honorarium system to pay volunteer drivers for their skill and assistance. In fact many of the drivers are part-time school district employees or retired bus drivers who are quite familiar with this vehicle.

The narrator described the converted school bus as bright green and cheerful. Once aboard the bus, preschoolers and parents can enjoy a story time and take books home in a special mini-backpack. Along with the three books is a lively puppet. Bags of books around themes are also available for parents and preschoolers to borrow. While literacy is the main purpose, when the bus pulls into town it will bring with it a variety of resources for children and parents. The goal of this program is to have the bus regularly travel to all the communities in the Mount Waddington region that are accessible by road, particularly those relying on logging roads.

NARRATOR 11:

Narrator 11 has been on the Board of Education for three years.

**Story:** Put Pre-School funding in block funding: Write some policy, too.

Narrator 11 spent her life teaching English writing skills working out of the local college. She was proud to say most of the group she taught were ECE’s and Human Services (Teacher Aids) workers. She told us she felt protective of this group who subsequently opened day cares and pre-schools in the area. The narrator said, “I am so pleased that our early learning opportunities have had an effect.”
NARRATOR 11:  (cont’d)

The narrator added this assessment: “Pre-school funding needs to be added to block funding and staffing. Don’t expect it to come from grants.” She added this school district was twice its current size just two years ago. “We are a shrinking, declining district.”

The narrator felt it was unique that they included an early childhood speaker for their professional day and did seem proud they thought to do this. However, the narrator believes they have a crisis in the North Island region in adult education. She told us they closed down the Continuing Education Learning Centre (Alert Bay) and North Island College and there are serious concerns about the future.

NARRATOR 12:

The retired manager for VIHA met with us briefly to re-trace the historical development of early childhood education in SD 85.

**Story:  Catalyst For Change**

Narrator 12 told us, “We had no capacity and no funding - just ourselves and a vision. We tried to grow our capacity and we did it.” Red tape was prohibiting quick action but as she was a Manager of VIHA she could take charge and make things happen. She purchased the literacy bus and only this year, upon her retirement it was transferred to the school district. She related how MCFD and VIHA and the School District signed an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) to work together to build pre-schoolers skills and support families in agreement. She was against ‘targeted programs’ and preferred a strength based program approach to make it available to all children - “you can overcome issues.” The narrator added: “It’s simple you get your funds and form appropriate partnerships - that gives you credibility. You try to get sustainable group learning happening. You offer innovative, well planned programs and you share them among everyone.”
A.  EMERGING THEMES

1. A partnership between the school district and intersectoral agencies initiated coordinated action in this community.

2. The Literacy Bus has proved effective in reaching isolated, rural families. Free gifts (such as RSL baseball caps and T-shirt) have also attracted a number of families.

3. Funding is expended collaboratively. Some responsibilities are contracted out to other agencies.

4. The provision of $100,000 grant funding from the Ministry of Education allowed for the implementation of new programs.

5. Strong community-based committees are proactive in School District 85. VIHA and SD 85 work closely together. All decisions are undertaken collaboratively.

6. Systems are in place to ensure access to remote or isolated areas.

7. Solutions to problems are sought that benefit both remote communities and service providers.

B.  BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS

1. Access to isolated, rural communities still presents some challenges. Transportation to outlying areas is now coordinated on specific days in an attempt to address these problems.

2. Poverty, unemployment, and a high rate of adult illiteracy contribute to high vulnerability ratings in the preschool population.

3. Finding ongoing, sustainable funding for preschool initiatives presents difficulties. Community Links funding now supports a .8 FTE teacher and a childcare worker in vulnerable schools, but additional funding is required to support other early-learning initiatives on an ongoing basis. Preschool administrators expressed a preference for ministry block funding for early-learning initiatives, in order to ensure that funding remains constant.

4. Preschool funding is needed to procure school space and facilities. Where school space is employed by preschool or daycare organizations, the district must be able to request reasonable cost recovery.
Access to isolated, rural communities still presents some challenges. Transportation to outlying areas is now coordinated on specific days in an attempt to address these problems.

Preschool funding is needed to procure school space and facilities. Where school space is employed by preschool or daycare organizations, the district must be able to request reasonable cost recovery.

Increased student population may also mean a greater need for school space in the future. Custodial services are an issue when school-district space is used for preschool programs. Some teachers and administrators felt that school trustees needed to understand more fully the need for effective early-literacy intervention. Others felt that some duplication of services still existed between VIHA and School District 85.
1. LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

School District 85 serves numerous small communities located in the north end of Vancouver Island, with considerable geographical distance existing between each small community. The two largest communities are Port Hardy and Port McNeill, with Port Hardy having the highest numbers of vulnerable preschoolers. Port Hardy demographics show high levels of poverty, unemployment, and socioeconomic deprivation in the local population. This is seen as the reason for high levels of vulnerability in the preschool population.

Rural communities face numerous challenges in servicing their populations. Transportation is a problem, as no public transit system exists in the North Island, and ferry costs remain high. Services to preschoolers must therefore be taken to small communities. The school district has undertaken this task.

2. INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Although there is considerable geographical distance between North Island’s small communities, strong intersectoral coalitions are in place to unite them. A strong coalition exists between the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA), MCFD, and School District 85. These three organizations work in unison to plan programming and transportation services to outlying areas. The Literacy Bus delivers services to isolated, rural areas. District staff members are fully represented on all community committees. One district staff member commented that: “Seamless continuity for kids is now in place”.

The School District and the Mount Waddington Family Literacy Committee work closely together to ensure that each small community has the opportunity to participate in early-literacy events and programs. This coalition promotes family-based education and community support of kindergarten preparedness in all district preschoolers. The Mount Waddington Family Literacy Committee was originally named the Preschool Literacy Committee. Members of this committee include: SD 85, MCFD, Vancouver Island Health Authority, North Island Crisis Centre: Family Place, North Island Infant Development Society, Kwakiutl Band Council, Gwa’sala-Nakwaxda’xw First Nations Health Clinic, Quatsino First Nations Health Clinic, Aboriginal Infant Development, Success by Six, Mother Goose, Toddler Time, Literacy Bus Coordinator, Literacy Now, Octopus Gardens, Stepping Stones Preschool, Huckleberry House, Story Time Buddies, and Vancouver Island Regional Library. The Mount Waddington Family Literacy Committee operates as follows:

1. Meetings are held on a monthly basis.
2. Agendas are circulated before meetings.
3. Problems and decisions regarding joint scheduling are resolved collaboratively.
4. Grants are shared collectively by all representatives at the table.
5. The committee ensures that each small community is informed of programs and schedules.
6. The committee’s mandate is focused in “literacy and learning for families”.
INTERSECTORAL COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES  
(cont’d)

The First Nations Parents’ Club is another community-based organization active in this school district. The First Nations Parents’ Club meets on the first Monday of every month. Another active participant in community-based early-learning efforts is the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA). VIHA operates numerous parenting programs and hosts multiple events. VIHA has also increased its speech and language therapy services in Port Hardy in recent years. The Stepping Stones Centre is an organization that is integral to North Island community-program delivery. This organization offers numerous programs, which include screening and referral services, early intervention, infant development, mental health, playgroups, parenting programs, a preschool, library facilities, professional development, and a web-based children’s service. Stepping Stones serviced 30 children in 2002, but its organization has expanded so efficiently that in 2008 it serviced 130 children. Family Place Partnership is another community-service agency that works to support early-learning initiatives in the North Island School District. This agency provides prenatal classes, parenting programs, health and wellness services, and assistance with housing, childcare, employment, and educational needs.

3. SCHOOL DISTRICT ROLE
a. Early Learning

The North Island School District’s mandate includes provision of full service for 0 – 3 year-olds in addition to full service for 4 and 5 year-olds. By 2003, efforts were underway to make this mandate fully operational. The district has also increased its collaboration with First Nations Bands and now provides training to band staff. District leadership is fully committed to supporting early-learning initiatives in vulnerable areas such as Port McNeill and Alert Bay, and to ensuring that early-childhood workers are well trained. The district is also committed to working collaboratively with tribal councils, and engagement and interaction with First Nations personnel is seen as essential. The district also views “strength based” programming as more valuable than “targeted” programming. This means that programs are designed to service all preschoolers, rather than to service only targeted, vulnerable populations.

The school district employs an Early Learning Support teacher for children aged 0 – 6 years, as well as a Literacy Support teacher for this age group. The school district also maintains full representation on the Mount Waddington Preschool Literacy Committee. School-district staff members work closely with administrators and teachers in the district’s two Strong Start programs. School District 85 is also committed to permitting extensive use of its school buildings and facilities for early-learning initiatives and program implementation.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the district (along with MCFD, and VIHA) in 2004.
b. School District Planning

School-district plans are devised with reference to information provided by the Early Learning Development (EDI) Instrument. School-district staff members decided to use the Early Learning Grant to fund a fulltime Early Literacy Teacher. This teacher’s deployment is as follows: .6 FTE for early-learning initiatives and .4 FTE for First Nations literacy development.

School District 85 states its plan as one focused in the provision of “stewardship” of early learning and family literacy throughout future years. Plans also include a concerted effort to decrease the vulnerability in social competence and emotional maturity (as identified in the Early Development Inventory).

b. Tracking of Student Progress/Data Collection

The spring 2007 DART assessment results for District 85 indicate students in earlier grades are meeting District expectations more frequently than older students.

Students Currently Registered in Grade 9:
These students were exposed to limited or no early interventions. Only 64% of these students fully meet expectations.

Students Currently Registered in Grade 6:
These students were not exposed to the extensive early-literacy program offerings currently in place in the district. 85% of these students fully meet expectations.

Students Currently Registered in Grade 3:
These students have had considerable exposure to early-literacy programs. 96% of these students fully meet expectations.

4. EDI FINDINGS

EDI Reduction in Vulnerabilities

Baseline (Wave 0/Wave 1) to Wave 2 by Domain:
District-wide:
Phys: -0.47
Soc: -0.95
Emo: -1.62
Lang and Cog: -8.36
Ever-risk: -7.10

District staff members state that before Wave 1 findings were circulated, many early-learning services were fragmented. Following Wave 1 findings, a Community Services Directory Booklet was created, in order to ensure that programs were coordinated and that parents were informed of offerings.
EDI FINDINGS  (cont’d)

EDI findings show marked reduction in the Port Hardy preschool population’s vulnerability. Reasons for this reduction are attributed to:

1. Greater economic stability now exists in Port Hardy.
2. Quatsino School was established between Wave 1 and Wave 2.
3. A smaller group of children was sampled in Wave 2.
4. District educators have a better understanding of early-childhood education following Wave 1.
5. Wave 1 findings galvanized the community to take action. Community leaders understood how vulnerable their children were and moved to take proactive action.
6. Applications for grants were undertaken, new programs were developed, and existing programs were strengthened.

5. FUNDING SOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Funding sources include the Ministry of Education, the Early Literacy Grant, and Community LINK. Success by Six provides $240,000 in yearly funding.

Preschool educators in this district expressed a need for the coordination of funding allocations. Future funding sources were often viewed as unreliable. Year-to-year grants are problematic, as programs must be eliminated where funding sources are not renewable. Funds for both district and non-profit preschool programs often depend on outside sources.

One other problem is that the district is under some pressure to sell school properties in order to generate funding. However, preschool initiatives require increased property space, rather than the elimination of existing facilities.

There is a strong district consensus in this area that district funding sources should be shared with preschools: “We work together; we share resources with all community partners.” (District staff member)

Some programs are in need of ongoing, reliable funding, rather than “one shot” influxes of funds. District personnel feel that sustainable funding is essential to the continued success of early-learning initiatives, and that funds must encompass preschool programs as well as kindergarten to grade-12 programs. District staff members believe block funding must be made available to preschool programs, and that the continued need to make requests for grants is unsatisfactory and unreliable. Staff members also stated that employment of a grant writer would greatly assist in the procurement of grant funds.
SECTION 6.2
COMMON THEMES - LESSONS LEARNED
SECTION 6.2: COMMON THEMES - LESSONS LEARNED

While a number of themes emerged at each site, some of them unique to a site, five themes were consistent at all 10 sites.

ONE: A strong intersectoral coalition

Each site (and the program being implemented at each site) was supported by a strong intersectoral coalition. In all cases, the coalition had been a part of the initial planning of the program and its implementation. It continued to support the program through the contribution of advice, resources, staff time and leadership. This interagency cooperation facilitated the coordination of family support services and community collaboration. What was reported in all three studies was that, even though coalitions had been in place prior to the implementation of EDI, in all but one case, school districts had not been active participants in the coalitions until the implementation of EDI. In all communities, coalitions reported renewed momentum and enhanced orchestration of planning and shared resources when school districts became active participants.

TWO: A focus on the EDI results

At all 10 sites, the EDI results were the catalyst for the implementation of new programs. When EDI results were announced after Wave 1, the intersectoral coalitions used the EDI results to determine (a) the highest priorities in the community, (b) which programs or resources would be most appropriate, (c) which domains would be targeted first, and (d) in which locations the resources and programs would be most effective. At each site, respondents described the pride and affirmation experienced when Wave 2 of the results validated their efforts. At six of the 10 sites, further data collection had been implemented using other strategies and tools. This additional data, although implemented only recently, appeared to validate the EDI results. Several of the sites were beginning their own tracking programs to identify individuals who were vulnerable in kindergarten in order to apply special interventions in grade one and beyond, in an attempt to reduce vulnerabilities year by year. The EDI results were credited with assisting communities in pursuit of additional funding (when results were quoted in grant applications) and galvanizing diverse community groups towards common goals.

THREE: Multiple layers of programming and support focused on families

In all 10 school districts the coalitions relied on a variety of programs to reach their vulnerable populations. Multiple layers of family support were offered.
Common themes (cont’d)
For example, in one community, the following services were designed to deliver an integrated offering: a pre-school literacy bus, a Mother Goose program, a Literacy Book Bag Outreach Program, a Healthy Opportunities for Preschoolers Program (HOP), a new Family Literacy Committee that plans co-ordinated events, a series of Parenting Skills Workshops, Books by Mail from the public library, a Family Place Drop-in Centre, a speech and language project called Moe the Mouse, multiple family events (regularly scheduled throughout the year organized through a contracted service), a Healthy Kids Clinic for three-year olds, an annual Learning and Literacy Fair, a First Nations Parents’ Group and even a Fly-in Program for remote sites.

In the same community, over 50% of the aboriginal population participated because of programs designed after collaborative planning and resulting from the reporting-out of EDI results. By comparison, an average of 11% of Aboriginal families participated in programs in comparable communities. A variety of events attracted Aboriginal families: Family fairs were organised where contact could be made with interagency services such as health, nutrition, employment and counselling support, and paediatric specialists; parenting groups were offered where parents could work with their children or place their children in babysitting services while attending parenting classes; literacy celebrations were designed for the whole community to raise awareness and teach skills; Aboriginal family celebrations sponsored elders who told ancient stories for all ages; travelling intersectoral teams brought their services to family homes; and a variety of family drop-in centres and resource centres provided comfort, activities and resources to support families.

FOUR: Community leadership
At all 10 sites respondents identified strong and dedicated leadership as key to success; however, the leadership pattern was different at each site. For example, at one site, the two key leaders were retirees from one of the agencies and a senior school-district staff member; at another site, leadership rotated among different agencies on an annual basis to share the responsibility; at another site, a series of sub-committees provided leadership for discreet projects; leaders at different sites included a contracted consultant, the chair of the intersectoral coalition and a dedicated volunteer community member. Respondents commonly described leaders as having a passion for enhancing the lives of families and for early learning offerings. All leaders demonstrated a dedication to community development as an investment in the young children.

FIVE: Trustee involvement
At almost every site the role of school trustees was very significant to the success of the early childhood initiatives. In many districts a key trustee or trustees championed the importance of early childhood initiatives and facilitated the smooth acceptance of early childhood initiatives at the Board level. Actions undertaken by trustees included proposing Board motions around early childhood, to active participation in the many community events. The level of knowledge demonstrated by key trustees was impressive and made a significant difference in cooperative initiatives undertaken by the Board of Education with intersectoral groups.
SECTION 6.3

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY
CONSIDERATION
QUESTIONS FOR POLICY CONSIDERATION

A. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEADERSHIP?

i.) What may be the leadership role at the district level?

- Designating responsibility for program leadership and supervision to a school board district staff member appears a key contributor to the success of implementing early childhood programs.

- Providing the designate with professional-development experiences so he/she can work effectively with the other staff members to implement early childhood programs into the school system.

- Designating clear reporting relationships.

- Meeting regularly with all the district stakeholders to monitor implementation of early childhood programs, to set goals and to evaluate the success.

- Meeting with the Coalition table (representing local community agencies) regularly. Early childhood education programs help families to connect with agencies and programs. In fact school district programs can provide an anchor where such agencies meet at Open Houses or offer information as guest speakers for families of preschool children.

ii.) What may be the leadership role at the school level?

- Recognizing that leadership theory is explicit about the fact that programs in schools thrive when the principal supports staff and provides program support.

- Engaging early childhood facilitators as an integral part of the school staff’s internal activities.

- Actively encouraging early childhood education staff members to attend staff and school events.

- Including early childhood educators in professional-development activities.

- Using other school professionals to support preschool initiatives.

- Sharing school facilities and resources with preschool staff.

- Providing professional-development activities for principals, kindergarten teachers and early childhood staff members to learn as a team.

- Playing an active role in welcoming intersectoral partners.
QUESTIONS FOR POLICY CONSIDERATION (cont’d)

B. WHAT COULD BE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL/DISTRICT STAFF AND THE COMMUNITY?

It is vital that the school and district-based early childhood staff members are familiar with the community in which the programs are located. If some or all of the children who attend programs live in other communities, the early childhood staff members should become informed about those areas as well. School districts typically have well-established relationships with their parent communities. It is even more important to work beyond this school group and move into the entire community to identify the values, wants and needs and to work towards building partnerships and to a sharing of resources.

C. WHY IS OUTREACH IMPORTANT FOR SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS?

It is important to understand the cultural or ethnic groups that live in the community and to be cognizant of the complexities of life in each community. Creative approaches may be necessary to gain entry to groups in order to build trusting relationships within the centre and community at large. Districts might consider assigning early childhood staff members to go out into the community to become more visible and to garner a better understanding of groups that would benefit from preschool program attendance. Use of creative strategies to find those in need may be required. Using volunteer groups, Aboriginal family support workers and interagency staff to assist with outreach efforts may all be highly beneficial.

A genuine effort needs to be made to determine what would make early childhood programs more attractive to those who are choosing not to attend. Districts may undertake such analyses with intersectoral coalition partners. Developing creative marketing strategies for early childhood initiatives to reach those who are not aware of the offering may be advisable. These may include low SES populations (refugees and immigrants, and multicultural and Aboriginal populations).

Working with Aboriginal leaders, with their existing programs and with other agencies to develop partnerships that are sensitive to Aboriginal culture, and encourage families to attend early childhood initiatives is recommended.

D. HOW DO INTERAGENCY REFERRALS PLAY A PART IN EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES?

There are many organizations that play a significant part in the lives of preschool children. To avoid duplication of services, to maximize limited resources and to plan in an organized and coordinated manner, the various groups need a mechanism to regularly meet and plan together. There is no one blueprint for planning collaborative efforts, but a comprehensive structure does appear to be an important feature of many communities with strong early childhood initiatives.
Questions for Policy Consideration (cont’d)

Consideration may be given to the following:

- Establishing a formal relationship with the local intersectoral coalition (if not already in place) to collaborate on early learning initiatives.

- Establishing partnerships, share resources and develop interagency referral processes that can be implemented through school district programs.

- Planning coordinated interventions. One of the greatest advantages of collaborative relationships among family support groups is the opportunity to apply interventions to help children and families at the earliest possible stage. A structured system needs to be established to support the facilitators and make them knowledgeable of local expectations. The referral process can be enhanced by clearly defined protocols in (a) the school system, and (b) the community.

- Establishing internal policies and procedures for referrals of families and/or children with special needs or who may be considered to be living in a condition of risk. Defining roles, responsibilities and processes for referrals both in the school district and to interagency groups, particularly health authorities and social services, using formal and informal channels of communication.

- Establishing reciprocal relationships between school-based early childhood programs and the various community agencies.
Summary, Limitations and Conclusion
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND CONCLUSIONS

The EDI (Early Development Instrument): So What?

The EDI (Early Development Instrument) has established itself in many jurisdictions in the world, and particularly Canada, as a standardized research tool for assessing early child development in a population over time. Skeptics of the instrument have been known to say: “So what? The real question is whether the use of the EDI assessment tool can effectively guide the implementation of targeted programs that will result in reduced vulnerabilities and meaningful social change for young children and families - as measured by changes in EDI scores over time.”

British Columbia (BC) has led the way in Canada by being the first jurisdiction to implement the EDI instrument province-wide in public schools. Once BC had completed two waves (or cycles) of implementation – a span of three to five years – it became possible to study whether targeted programs applied to vulnerable populations could reduce vulnerabilities between Wave 1 and Wave 2. This study was, therefore, designed and implemented to attempt to compile evidence that once informed of EDI results, communities would be able to implement programs to effectively reduce high levels of vulnerabilities in the preschool population in specific communities or neighbourhoods as evidenced by the second Wave (cycle) of EDI results.

LIMITATIONS

The first limitation faced by the researchers was to address the question about whether factors other than the implementation of new programs could have been the causal factor in the change of the EDI results. The researchers addressed this challenge by assuming it to be a possibility and including the issue as a key question in the study – investigating local, provincial and national data and trends in the 10 sites, and examining the issue in key interviews.

A second limitation was the issue of:

1. the reliability of the EDI results (which was not within the scope of this study and therefore not addressed) and

2. the reliability of the qualitative data-gathering processes that were used in this study.

To respond to the second issue, the researchers chose to use community-based research design which is a collaboration between community groups and researchers for the purpose of creating new knowledge or understandings. This approach supplements the currency of traditional academic research by valuing the contribution that community groups make locally in the development of knowledge about their own practice – a participatory, iterative, reflective methodology – in this case the use of narrative (stories told by multiple individuals from multiple perspectives) in response to the same questions.
Conclusion (cont’d)

This theoretical base reflects an innovative and participatory approach to the evaluation of social development in communities by engaging ‘social innovators’ who are paying attention to their environment as a significant source of information in order to implement urgently-needed social reform. In this role they examine and reflect on their programs, the needs of their citizens, the effectiveness of their work, what new ideas might be feasible and possible solutions – in a participatory process with researchers.

CONCLUSIONS

This report represents the voices of key social change agents and observers within the ten districts, through their narrations. The narrators tell stories of successes, collaborations, struggles, and barriers that have marked the journey as they attempted to improve the lives of young children. The five themes that emerged from the cross-sectional analysis of the 10 sites under investigation emphasized the importance of establishing and implementing change through: the vehicle of a strong intersectoral coalition, the implementation of multiple layers of programs and initiatives targeted to the same families, the importance of distributed community leadership practices, the impact of school trustee advocacy and involvement and use of the EDI results as a benchmark for measuring program impact.

The participants’ narratives and the researchers’ cross-sectional analyses of these themes result in transferable knowledge for Boards of Education and intersectoral coalitions who are working to develop and implement policies and programs to reduce vulnerabilities of young children. Perhaps more important, the collaborative community efforts to implement new programs as a result of the EDI data appeared to have a supplementary and unanticipated impact – enhanced community development efforts including (a) heightened community awareness of the needs of early learners (b) newly integrated and coordinated intersectoral programs for families (c) reduced barriers and increased access to programs for all and (d) a sense of community pride and resulting moral imperative to take action. These factors, in the opinion of the researchers, resulted in enhanced community ownership and commitment to establishing programs that would bring about continuous positive change for young children and their families – change that would be informed and validated again by the next application of the EDI (Early Development Instrument).
The Early Development Instrument in British Columbia: Documenting Impact and Action in Early Childhood Development
A BCSTA/Human Early Learning Partnership Joint Research Project:  
Funded by the Canadian Council on Learning

The Early Development Instrument in BC:  
Documenting School and Community Action and Impact  
on Early Childhood Learning

INVITATION FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO PARTICIPATE

Background:
The Canadian Council on Learning approved funding for a project through which HELP and the  
BCSTA could explore the new legislated early learning mandate for BC schools. The project is using  
the EDI results as a guide to explore how BC communities, in collaboration with Boards of Education,  
are re-aligning resources and establishing new programs to respond to identified early learning needs.

Goal:
It is our intention to support the leadership role of BC Boards of Education in the field of early  
learning by identifying and documenting:

• Evolving models of successful intersectoral community coalitions  
• Thoughtful processes in action  
• Infrastructures that are working  
• Policies that are being developed  
• Roles and interconnected relationships with other community agencies  
• Funding, staffing and facility issues  
• Resulting innovative programs

Purpose of this survey:
We want to identify and document at least ten school districts, individual schools and/or neighbourhoods  
that believe they are making a positive difference to the new early learning mandate (birth to age  
five) through any combination of the above approaches and in response to EDI (Early Development  
Instrument) data. On the basis of the survey results, our research team and advisory committee will  
select a minimum of ten districts, individual schools or neighbourhoods for spring 2008 visits to  
document promising practices. The results of this research project will be disseminated throughout  
BC and Canada.
A BCSTA/Human Early Learning Partnership Joint Research Project:
Invitation to Participate

Responding to this invitation assumes your district has initiated programs at the district, school or
neighbourhood level in response to information provided by the EDI (Early Development Instrument) data.

District Name: ___________________________ District Contact: _____________________________

Phone Number(s) _______________________ Email(s) ____________________________________

For each of the questions below, please feel free to answer in the space provided and/or on a separate
piece of paper.

1. Is your school district playing an active role in an intersectoral coalition? If you do, please
provide a brief description.

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

2. Do you have any other examples of community partnerships that play an active role in early
childhood programs? If you do, please provide a brief description.

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

3. Have you developed programs or activities to address EDI vulnerabilities at the district, school
and/or neighbourhood level? If you have, please provide a list and brief description.

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________

4. Do you believe programs you have initiated have made an impact in the five domains identified
by the EDI? Please provide a brief description.

______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________
5. Have your EDI results shown reduced vulnerabilities between Wave 1 and Wave 2? Please provide a brief description.

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

6. Do you have any evidence (surveys, tests, evaluations, etc.) that the programs you initiated have made a positive impact in the five domains of the EDI? Please provide a brief description of the evidence you have gathered.

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

7. Do you have any policies that have been developed by your district to address early childhood programs? If so, please provide the topic areas that the policies address.

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

8. Have you used your one-time early learning grant from the Ministry of Education in innovative ways? If so, please provide a brief description.

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

9. If selected, are you willing to participate in this research project? It will involve an initial telephone interview with a member of our research team and a follow-up visit from our research team to document successes. Please circle one: YES  NO

Please feel free to add additional pages and/or comments. We look forward to your responses.

When you have completed the survey, please fax to: 250 652 7889 attn: Janet Mort
Dear,

Re: BCSTA/Human Early Learning Partnerships Joint Research Project

Thank you for applying to be part of the joint research project documenting ten school districts, individual schools and/or neighbourhoods that believe they are making a positive difference to the new early learning mandate (birth to aged five) and in response to EDI (Early Development Instrument) data.

Almost half of the school districts in the province indicated an interest in the project and returned documentation to HELP.

In order to identify ten districts, individual schools or neighbourhoods for spring 2008 visits by teams from HELP, a significant analysis was undertaken of the data available.

Researchers at HELP completed the following steps:

1. The original applications were analyzed thoroughly and sorted according to:
   a. Policies developed
   b. Intersectoral coalitions formed
   c. Funding, staffing and facility issues
   d. Innovative programs initiated
   e. Use of Early Learning Grant
   f. Use of EDI to establish programs
   g. Other information provided

2. Follow-up phone interviews were conducted with many applicants.

3. The EDI data was examined closely for all applicants by HELP staff members, particularly with respect to identifying a reduction in vulnerabilities from Wave 1 to Wave 2 in any of the five domains. This was a significant factor in making our final selection.

As a result of the analysis, ten districts were selected for spring visitations.

We are pleased to inform you that your district was selected as one of the ten sites selected for April/May visitations. You will be contacted shortly to determine a suitable time for us to visit your district. Thanks you for participating and we look forward to seeing you shortly.

As you are aware, the recent announcements from the legislature, make this project particularly timely, and will help guide districts in planning for early childhood initiatives.

Thank you, again, for responding to our survey.

Sincerely,

Janet Mort, PhD
Human Early Learning Partnerships
March 4, 2008

Re: Impact and Action: BCSTA Project

Dear Superintendents:

As you are probably aware, a representative of your school district completed a survey that was circulated from the BCSTA offices in November 2007 about early learning projects developing in your school district and community, and indicated your district’s interest in participating in a research project that is being undertaken jointly by BCSTA (BC School Trustees Association) and HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership). This research project will be conducted in the months of April and May 2008 and is being funded by the Canadian Council on Learning.

The purpose of this letter is to formally seek your permission for Janet Mort and a member of her research team to visit your school district for two days in the spring of 2008. Janet is a former Superintendent of schools, has completed her PhD in Language and Literacy and works with HELP; the other members of the team are experienced in ECD and in school leadership.

The purpose of the study is:

- Enter a partnership with the BC School Trustees Association to engage in the process of examining school district/community projects that appear to be enhancing opportunities for child development and therefore child outcomes in the early years.
- Engage in Change Map analysis and discussion with communities.
- Identify neighborhoods or communities where intervention programs have been established that appear to be reducing the level of vulnerability of students as measured by the EDI.
- Conduct an in-depth study of up to ten of those identified neighborhoods or communities, analyzing their projects to determine which interventions, parenting programs and/or care arrangements have enhanced literacy, learning opportunities, and school readiness for preschool children who are vulnerable in the five domains as measured by EDI.

The research team will document the process you and your staff have engaged in to implement early learning programs, the successes and roadblocks you have experienced, your perceptions of the experience, and their perception of the experience of families in the site. Janet and her team will use interviews with staff who have been actively involved in EDI implementation and resulting program implementation. The team will want to also review relevant public documents.

If you agree that your district will participate in this evaluation, we are requesting that you designate a District Contact for us to contact to make arrangements for the study and provide your signature on the attached form to indicate approval. The on-site interviews should require one to two hours of your staff members’ time. If they wish to be interviewed during work hours we would be pleased to provide for the cost of substitute time.
There are no known or anticipated risks to you or any of your staff or parents by participating in this research.

All participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If any participant decides to participate initially, but for any reason wishes to withdraw, they can do so at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If any of the participants withdraw, the related data will not be used in the study unless specifically requested and approved with the individual participant’s signature.

In terms of protecting anonymity only the name of the school district will be provided in the final report. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: a summary report to all involved school districts, presentations at scholarly meetings, or in a published article or book.

If you agree to your organization’s participation, please provide your signature on this letter and forward it to your District Contact for signature agreeing to participate in the study. Once this letter is returned with signatures, one of the researchers will be contacting the District Contact in order to establish the dates of the visit.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request. Your district was selected because of the promising work it is engaged in on behalf of young children. Documenting your success in this important area is a privilege for us.

Janet Mort, who is coordinating this project, can be reached at the following sources if you have questions or concerns:

jnmort@shaw.ca
Telephone 250 652 6299
Fax 250 652 7889
Please return this form to her.

Sincerely,
Clyde Hertzman
HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership)

Proposed School District Contact Person(s)

Name: _______________________________________
Title: _________________________________________
Phone Number: ________________________________ Email:_______________________________

Superintendent’s Signature for Permission to Conduct Research in the School District
______________________________________________

District Contact’s Signature for Agreement to Participate
______________________________________________
Dear School District Staff:

Please read the following form carefully. Sign one copy and return. Keep the other for your records.

Your school district has entered an agreement to participate in a research project being conducted by HELP in partnership with the BC School Trustees Association. This project is being funded by the Canadian Language and Literacy network.

The purpose of the study is to:

• Enter a partnership with the BC School Trustees Association to engage in the process of examining school district/community projects that appear to be enhancing opportunities for child development and therefore child outcomes in the early years.

• Engage in Change Map analysis and discussions with communities.

• Identify neighborhoods or communities where intervention programs have been established that appear to be reducing the level of vulnerability of students as measured by the EDI.

• Conduct an in-depth study of ten of those identified neighborhoods or communities, analyzing their projects to determine which interventions, parenting programs and/or care arrangements have enhanced literacy, learning opportunities, and school readiness for preschool children who are vulnerable in the five domains as measured by EDI.
(Documentation) will be conducted through April and May of 2008.

This is a request for you to take part in the study that we are doing. It is important to us that we learn from staff how your project was implemented, the roadblocks you encountered, your successes especially related to the EDI results and the issues you have had to problem solve. This information will be very helpful to other districts as they begin to address the new early learning mandate.

Purpose:

The purpose of this letter is to ask you to participate in an interview with one of three members of our research team: Janet Mort or one of her assistants. Janet is a former Superintendent, has completed her PHD in Language and Literacy; the other two researchers are experienced in ECD and school leadership issues.

The researchers will use interviews with volunteer staff as well as review relevant public documents to inform the study.

Research Study Participation:

- Taking part in the study means that you agree to take part in an individual interview.
- The interviews will take approximately one to two hours and will be conducted at a time and place convenient for you. (If you prefer to be interviewed during work hours we can provide substitute time at no cost to your district. We have arranged that with your superintendent.)
- The questions will be about your experiences with and views about the EDI results and programs that have been implemented as a result. We have attached a copy of our interview questions for your information
- Being a participant is voluntary and will not affect your role and/or responsibilities with the school district.
- You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and you have the right to not answer any of the questions.
- Only the name of the school district will be provided in the final report. Your responses will be confidential – no names will be revealed at any point except to the researchers.
- It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: a summary report to all involved school districts, presentations at scholarly meetings, or in a published article or book. Again no actual names of participants will be used in any write up of our results.
• If at any time you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a person who takes part in our project, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia at (604) 822-8598.

Janet Mort, who is coordinating the study, can be reached at:
Telephone 250 652 6299
Fax 250 652 7889
Email jnmort@shaw.ca

Please return this form to her at the interview or fax it to her prior to the interview. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project you may contact Janet Mort at the sources listed above.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request. Your district was selected because of the promising work it is engaged in on behalf of young children. Documenting your experience in this important area is a privilege for us.

Impact and Access: BCSTA Project
Consent Form

I. Consent to Participate in an Individual Interview
   Please check one of the following:
   ___ Yes, I agree to take part in this project through an individual interview.

II. Consent to have the interview audiotaped (optional)
   Please check one of the following:
   ___ Yes, I agree that the interview may be audiotaped.
   ___ No, I do not agree that the interview may be audiotaped.

Participant signature (please sign): ____________________________________________
Participant name (please print your name): ______________________________________
Date: ______________________________________
Impact and Action: BCSTA Project
Funded by the Canadian Council on Learning
Questions for Interviews

Consent Form: Let us review your consent form together. Do you have any concerns or questions?

EDI Results: Please review the EDI Change Maps with me (provided prior to the interview).

1. In your opinion have any of the changes between the two Waves of data been significant in any of the five domains?

2. What surprised you about these results, if anything?

3. What disappointed you about these results if anything?

4. What factors do you think affected the changes in the two Waves?
5. Can you provide me with any information related to these factors that might be useful to help explain them? (census information, demographics, etc.)

6. Did you implement any programs in an effort to reduce the vulnerabilities of children in any neighbourhoods? (If yes proceed with the next set of questions.)

**Program Implementation:** Please describe your program using the following questions as a guideline:

1. How does the program attempt to address the vulnerabilities identified by the EDI?

2. What are its stated goals?

3. Describe the location of the program, the intended audience and the time and frequency of the offerings.
4. Describe how the program functions. How do children and/or families use the program? What would we observe if we were to visit?

5. Describe any evidence of success you have documented (surveys, interviews, anecdotal comments, assessments etc.). Can you provide those to us for review?

6. Describe the connections to any other community agencies (health, social services etc.). How are members of your local coalitions involved? Are any referrals being made as a result of the programs?

7. What are your funding sources? How will you work to sustain the programs or extend them?

8. Have any school district policies been developed related to early learning programs? What policies do you think need to be developed for the future? What should be contained in them in your opinion?
9. Is there anything else you can think of that would aid us in our study?

Thank you for agreeing to participate. Your school district will receive a copy of the final report and we will notify you of its availability.

Describe the actual record of attendance – numbers, age of children, frequency and composition of adult attendees (family member, caregiver, etc.)