

The Middle Years Development Instrument

Measuring and mapping children's well-being in their middle years
A tool for policy and program decision-making



FACTS AT A GLANCE

THE MDI...

- focuses on children's positive assets. It is a tool that can be used to promote well-being;
- helps us understand the development of the "whole child", not just a single area such as academics;
- offers children a voice and an opportunity to share their thoughts, needs, and wishes;
- provides a reliable and valid way to assess children's development and well-being.

The middle years are a time of great opportunity but also heightened risk. Middle childhood - the time between 6 to 12 years of age - marks a distinctive period in human development. Children experience important cognitive, social, and emotional changes that establish their identity and set the stage for development in adolescence and adulthood.

WHAT IS THE MIDDLE YEARS DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT (MDI)?

The Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) was developed to address the lack of population-level data on the health and well-being of children in middle childhood. The MDI was developed at the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) by researchers at the University of British Columbia (UBC), in partnership with the United Way of the Lower Mainland and the Vancouver School Board.

The MDI is a natural extension of the EDI*, a population level developmental survey that is used with kindergarten children in B.C. every year.

The goal of the MDI project is to understand how children think and feel about their lives both inside and outside of school during the middle childhood years.

It is the first population level survey of its kind in Canada that gathers comprehensive information on the lives of Grade 4 children, from the children themselves.

MDI survey questions ask children about five areas of development and well-being that scientific evidence has shown are strongly linked to health, learning, and well-being throughout the school years and into later life.

MDI MEASURES OF DEVELOPMENT

Social & Emotional Development

- optimism, empathy, happiness, prosocial (caring, helpful, cooperative) behaviour, self-esteem

Connectedness

- availability of supportive adults in school, families, and neighbourhoods, sense of belonging with peers

School Experiences

- academic self-concept, school climate, victimization at school (experiences with physical, verbal, social, and cyber bullying)

Physical Health & Well-being

- general health, body image, nutrition and sleeping patterns

Constructive Use of After-school Time

- time spent in youth organizations, school/non-school sports/lessons, time spent watching TV, time spent playing video games

WHAT HAVE TEACHERS SAID ABOUT THE MDI?

"I like how [the MDI] made the class focus on the world as it relates to them. [Students] probably don't often stop to think about the people in their life who want them to be happy and successful."

- Grade 4 teacher

"Children love thinking/ talking/ writing about themselves. Children love it when people are interested in them."

- Grade 4 teacher

"[It is] good to have students to reflect about themselves, life, friends, school. [The MDI] provided students with a the reminder that if they do have problems they have resources and people available to help."

- Grade 4 teacher

WHY DO WE NEED TO MEASURE AND MAP CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE YEARS?

1. Research shows us that middle childhood is a time of both risk and opportunity. As children move out into a more social world, the risks they face are increased. For example, children in Grades 6 and 7 generally report that they have significantly lower confidence, optimism, empathy, life satisfaction, and social responsibility than children in Grade 4. There are also many opportunities to offer supports and services that can buffer them from these risks. During these years, we can help children to develop life-long patterns of behaviour that will help them thrive.
2. There is a growing need among educators, community members, and policy makers to find reliable and valid methods to assess children's development in their middle years. This knowledge can inform programs, practices, and policies targeted at promoting children's overall healthy development.

USING MDI DATA TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S LIVES

The MDI is a tool to support governments, educators, health professionals and policy makers to make evidence-based decisions.

The MDI can offer valuable information to help monitor the impact of programs and policies designed to improve well-being of children in their middle years.

The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at UBC has produced reports and maps that have been used by:

- the United Way of the Lower Mainland to drive its investment decisions;
- community middle childhood planning committees to assist in planning community based programs and services;
- district school boards to inform community school teams and to develop services in their areas; and
- individual schools to improve their connections with community organizations and to develop strategies for creating supportive and safe environments for children.

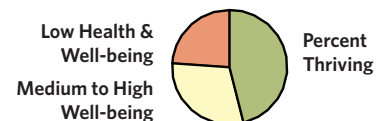
WHAT DO CHILDREN IN THEIR MIDDLE YEARS TELL US?

- Studies of children in their middle years have found that around 13% of children report being "alone" during the after-school hours, from 3 to 6 o'clock;
- Children involved in structured after-school activities are more likely to have higher academic achievement, higher self-esteem, and fare better overall than those who are not;
- Children who say they have more family and community supports in their lives are more likely to be thriving;
- Positive relationships with adults at home and in school, as well as with peers and friends, are the strongest predictor of children's social and emotional competency, academic motivation, mental and physical health, optimism, self-esteem, and happiness.

HOW ARE MDI DATA REPORTED?

MDI data are reported for schools and communities in a way that provides a measure of children's overall well-being. A Well-Being Index (below) is a composite score of 5 measures: Optimism, Happiness, Self-esteem, General Health, and (absence of) Sadness.

Distribution of Results



Thriving (very high overall health and well-being): Children reported very high levels of self-esteem, optimism, overall health, happiness and low levels of sadness.

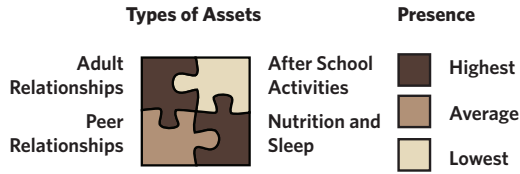
Medium to high overall health and well-being: Children reported medium to high levels of self-esteem, optimism, overall happiness and low levels of sadness.

Low overall health and well-being: Children reported a low level in one of the five indicators of well-being.

The MDI also measures several developmental assets that are advantageous to children. Assets are qualities in children's lives such as supportive adults, enriching activities, and healthy peer relationships that help to promote positive development.

Every school that participates in the MDI receives a confidential report that shows their school's data compared with the district average.

Every district that participates in the MDI also receives a community report, which maps results by neighbourhood - not by school. These reports are open to the public and are a resource for educators, parents, organization leaders, and community developers.



Highest indicates that a high percentage of children reported having the asset.

Average indicates that a close to average percentage of children reported having the asset.

Lowest indicates that a low percentage of children reported having the asset.



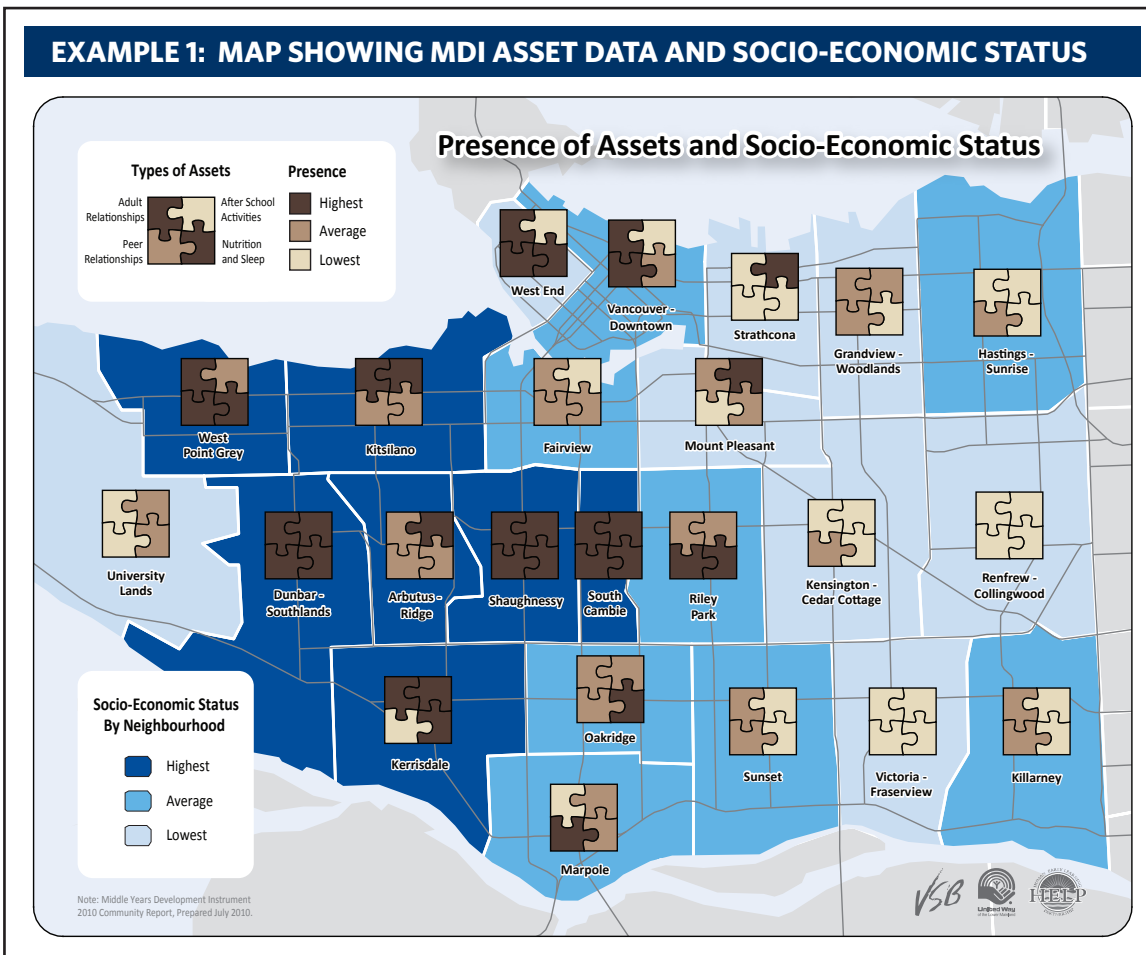
WHAT HAVE DISTRICT AND COMMUNITY LEADERS SAID ABOUT THE MDI?

"[The MDI] gives us something that we all have in common that we can discuss, that we can use to plan, and to implement practices, programs, and services for children and their families."

- Angelo Lam, Coordinator, Tri-Cities Middle Childhood Matters Committee

"Teachers have existing tools for measuring specific performance outcomes, but what the MDI provides is a measure of the whole child. Schools have struggled with how to access good quality data about their students' social and emotional development and well-being overall, so they can tell whether their programs and initiatives are having an impact. This tool really fills that need very well."

- Lisa Pedrini, Social Responsibility Manager, Vancouver School Board



HUMAN EARLY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

“Young people are the future, and when given a chance, they can describe cogently, concisely and convincingly exactly how they want to see that future shape up.”

Dr. Nata Menabde
Deputy Regional Director
for Europe, WHO

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NEXT STEPS

The foundation for the Middle Years Development Instrument was laid in 2006 when a UBC research team completed a study of 1,402 children in 8 school districts in Metro Vancouver. This study asked children to complete a daily diary of their activities, and to answer a questionnaire about their well-being. The results of this study have been recorded in a report called “Middle Childhood Inside and Out.”

The MDI was created, in part, from the early pilot questionnaire used in 2006. The revised version was first piloted in Vancouver School District in 2010 with 3,026 children. Based on teacher feedback and a review of the questionnaire’s performance, an improved version of the MDI was created and then tested Coquitlam and Revelstoke School Districts.

In 2012, the final version of the MDI will be launched in ten school districts in BC. There is also a waitlist of districts wanting to use the tool and HELP is seeking financial support to make this a reality.

This support will complement financial commitments that School Districts themselves make to direct administrative costs associated with implementation of the survey. Our goal is to achieve provincial roll-out of the MDI to allow maximum benefit for policy making and program development.



USEFUL RESOURCES

- Collins, W. A. (Ed.). (1984). *Development during middle childhood: The years from six to twelve*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Eccles, J. S. (1999). The development of children ages 6 to 14. *The Future of Children*, 9, 30-44.
- Masten, A. S., & Coatsworth, J. D. (1998). The development of competence in favorable and unfavorable environments: Lessons from research on successful children. *American Psychologist*, 53, 205-220.
- McHale, S. M., Crouter, A. C., & Tucker, C. J. (2001). Free-time activities in middle childhood: Links with adjustment in early adolescence. *Child Development*, 72, 1764-1778.
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2011). *Middle Childhood Inside and Out: The Psychological and Social Worlds of Canadian Children Ages 9-12, Full Report*. Report for the United Way of the Lower Mainland. Vancouver: University of British Columbia.
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Hymel, S. (2007). Educating the heart as well as the mind: Why social and emotional learning is critical for students’ school and life success. *Education Canada*, 47, 20-25.

* The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a survey that is completed by Kindergarten teachers and gathers information about the physical, social emotional, cognitive and communications skills of the children in their classes in February each year. It has been used for the past ten years in B.C. for over 85% of children of kindergarten age each year.

For more information please visit the Human Early Learning Partnership MDI pages at <http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/mdi>