

Welcoming Children & Families to Kindergarten



PURPOSE, VISION & VALUES

This document is a guide intended to support the transition into school for all children.

Each September and throughout the school year, the Greater Victoria School District welcomes close to 1500 children and their families to Kindergarten.

No matter when a new family joins our community, we are ready and welcoming, with systems in place for a warm first impression and a positive entry into the school system.

Welcoming Timeline



Registration (January)

Family Connection calls (February-June)

Welcome to Kindergarten Event (May-June)

Welcoming Conversations & CHEQ (September 3rd - 5th)

Professional Collaboration Session (Sept 5th afternoon only)

Gradual Entry (September 6th - 10th)

First full day for all K's (Wednesday, September 11th)

Kindergarten Readiness



Messaging around Readiness:

Children are ready for kindergarten because of their birthday – not because of a list of things they can do....

Our district welcoming process is committed to engaging students, families and staff in positive moments of connection and conversation that ultimately strive to enhance and support student equity, learning, identities and well-being,

The welcoming process and strength-based messaging is an integral part of our collective endeavor to create inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments for ALL.

We have an opportunity to reflect on and question our transition process and welcoming practices:

Are we approaching the transition into school holistically?

Do children need to be ready for school or do schools need to be ready for children?

What are we intentionally doing to ensure our children and families feel included, valued, seen and heard? Who are we missing?

Anchoring Principles guiding the Welcoming Process

Early Learning Framework Principles

- ♦ Children are strong, capable in their uniqueness, and full of potential.
- ♦ Families have the most important role in contributing to children's well-being and learning.
- ♦ Educators are researchers and collaborators.
- ♦ Early years spaces are inclusive.
- ♦ People build connection and reconnection to land, culture, community, and place.
- ♦ Environments are integral to well-being and learning.
- ♦ Play is integral to well-being and learning.
- ♦ Relationships are the context for well-being and learning.

First Peoples Principles of Learning

- ♦ Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- ♦ Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- ♦ Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- ♦ Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- ♦ Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.
- ♦ Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- ♦ Learning involves patience and time.

Family Connection Calls (February-June)

Why?

Every personalized connection between incoming families and the school is an invaluable investment.

Learning more about the varied experiences of children and families can help us anticipate ways to prepare for and/or adapt the September start-up.

What?

The goal is for **all** incoming Kindergarten parents/caregivers to receive a welcoming phone call from their new school. The purpose of the call is to foster a person to person connection, welcome the child and family to the district and school and to consider supportive transition plans as needed. This is a proactive approach to building connections and learning about incoming children to inform planning and programming.

Who?

The phone calls can be made by admin and/or Kindergarten teachers and SBT. Release time is available.



SAMPLE

I see that you are registered to start kindergarten in September. We look forward to meeting you!

We wanted to call you to welcome you to _____Elementary and simply connect.

Do you have any questions about kindergarten?

To make the start of kindergarten as positive as possible, it is helpful for us to know if you have any concerns about your child coming to school.

Will Kindergarten be their first experience away from you, or did they attend a preschool, a StrongStart or a child care?

We wanted to make sure you knew about the special opportunity coming up that we hope you can participate in. (Share about WTK).

We look forward to getting to know you and your child. Please check your email regularly as the school will send you information about the start of school.

Welcome to Kindergarten Event for ALL (May-June)



The main goal of the spring WTK event is to welcome new K families and give them an opportunity to connect with the school staff members they will be working with in the fall (K teachers, ECE's, principal, vice-principal, admin assistant, teacher librarian, learning support teacher, counsellor etc.) Please consider including the child care provider from your school site. WTK is a wonderful point of connection between child care and school. Families who require before and after care will appreciate the access point as well.

It is also the time to distribute the WTK bags to incoming K families. Consider keeping track of participants by putting the students' names on the bags. Try to find alternative ways to ensure that every child receives a bag before the summer break.

Editable Welcome Information Template for schools:

Please feel welcome to use this template for your information evenings, or as a slideshow in an email.



Open this [LINK](#) click the blue button on the top right "use template" this will make a copy for you to use. You will then save it in your own drive.

Editable Social Story for Children and their Families:

Open this [LINK](#) to create a social story that uses images and words to help explain and illustrate specific situations; in this case starting school. You can personalize and share this story with your new K families.

Open this [LINK](#) for a French Immersion social story sample. . Please feel welcome to share with your staff and school community!

Helpful Videos

These videos offer families a snapshot of what life in Kindergarten is like.

Beginning Kindergarten: An Experts Guide [VIDEO LINK](#) A Day in the Life of Kindergarten: [VIDEO LINK](#)

Welcoming Supports for Some

Supporting Transition from Community-Based Supports to School-Based Supports for New Kindergarten Families

Process for spring 2024:

- Schools will receive information from in late Feb/early March about incoming students from the following community agencies: Queen Alexandra Centre for Children's Health (QA), Intercultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA), BC Family Hearing Resource Society, and the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC).

**Reminder:* these child profiles are created many months before students will start Kindergarten and are likely to change as children continue to learn and grow.

- In some cases, community partners have been working with these children and families for multiple years. Please involve them as much as you can in the transition process.
- Consideration for specialized equipment or building modification requirements need to be identified as soon as possible. **Please connect with Sean McCartney ASAP to discuss these needs for any incoming Kindergarten students.**
- School teams will take the lead in getting to know all new Kindergarten students and their families this spring. All children and families should be invited to participate in the activities you design (eg. WTK events).

Individualized Student Planning:

- Reach out to the family to welcome them to the school community and set-up a time for an initial welcome meeting
- Offer a school tour.
- Use the Summary of Supports Guide to help determine the level of support required by the child in various skill areas through observations (eg. preschool visits, welcoming activities) and read the reports from community agencies: [LINK](#)
- Offer the child a social story about Kindergarten and your school: [LINK](#)
- Visit the [Learning Support website – Transitions page](#) for other information and resources

Welcoming Conversations

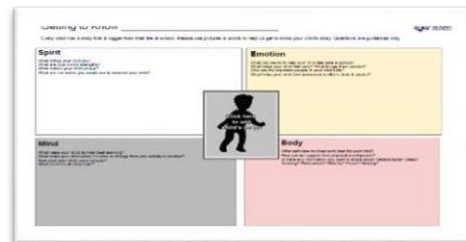
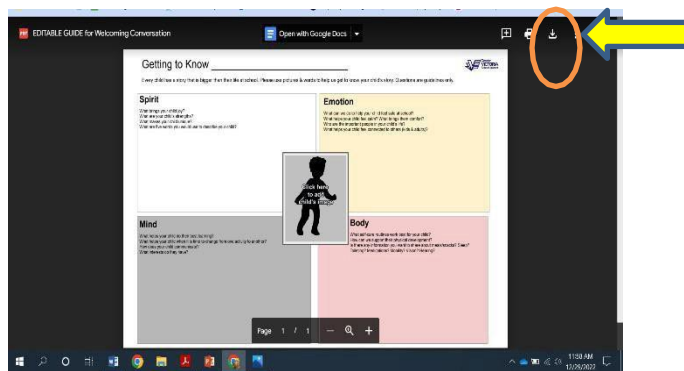
Kindergarten teachers and Early Childhood Educators (ECE) play a vital role in establishing positive connections with children and their families. The gradual entry process includes scheduling a 15-20 minute welcoming conversation with each family, teacher and ECE (when applicable). These conversations are intended to take the place of google or paper forms that families are sometimes asked to complete. Welcoming conversations are an integral part of creating an equitable and inclusive start to school for all families.

The welcoming conversation guiding questions are an intentional practice of connecting with each family through a purely curious and compassionate lens. The conversations provide an opportunity for educators to learn about and prepare for the uniqueness of each child and family. The sharing gleaned from the conversation can help us plan and prepare a classroom culture that will allow for each child to see themselves in their kindergarten setting.

Welcoming conversations set the tone for a positive transition. The Early Learning Framework reminds us that families are their children's first teachers. Families are respected as teachers of culture, heritage, language, and values. When we make positive connections with families we begin to nurture a home/school partnership that will be invaluable throughout the child's educational journey.

Please consider how to address common barriers to engagement between families and school such as language, cultural context, and scheduling etc.

Open this [LINK](#) for a guiding template (download to edit) for your welcoming conversation. This editable google doc uses a holistic, strength-based approach to getting to know new Kindergarten children. This template can be filled out together (family/teacher) during the conversation, and is meant to inform planning.



Open this [LINK](#) for a sample virtual welcoming conversation video that you can share with teachers who are new to welcoming conversations. (thank you Karen Higginbotham at Craigflower Elementary)

Gradual Entry

The purpose of gradual entry is for children, families and teachers to have focused time to connect with each other and adjust to the new social and emotional realities of the elementary school context.

Suggested Gradual entry schedule

Week One

Tuesday (AM), Wednesday (All Day), Thursday (AM): Welcoming Conversations (20 minutes/ family, teacher and ECE)

Thursday afternoon: Early years collaboration opportunity for all K teachers and ECE's

Friday: 1/2 day for each Group (A & B)

Week Two

Monday: Full day for Group A

Tuesday: Full day for Group B

Wednesday, First full day Kindergarten begins for ALL

Supporting the First Full Days



To be proactive in preparing for the known 'unknowns' of classroom compositions, we encourage school teams to rally as much support as possible to be focused on the Kindergarten classrooms. The inclusive learning team, the teacher librarian, the school counsellor, and available EA's are encouraged to spend the early days of kindergarten building relationships with the new students & families and supporting the transition into the building and helping establish the daily routines.

Please connect with Charmaine Shortt with any questions:
cshortt@sd61.bc.ca

Sample Welcome Letter for Families

Dear Kindergarten Parent(s)/Guardian(s)/Caregiver(s)

Welcome to -school name- !

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with important information about your child's upcoming Kindergarten Gradual Entry Schedule and Welcoming Conversation.

The transition to Kindergarten is important for your child, your family, and for the school. For this reason, the Ministry of Education & Child Care and the Greater Victoria School District have established a gradual entry process for all children starting Kindergarten.

The gradual entry process ensures that we get to know your child and create a sense of belonging as they transition to the larger learning environment of a school.

Attach the
schedule!

Attached to this letter is your child's gradual entry schedule for the first two weeks of school. You and your child will be invited to a Welcoming Conversation in the first week of September. During the Welcoming Conversation you will be able to share information about your child with the Kindergarten teacher. You are welcome to review the questions that may be asked during the Welcoming Conversation. They are attached to this letter.

Each child entering Kindergarten is viewed as a unique individual which is why gradual entry along with the Welcoming Conversation are essential for creating the foundation of support among the family, school, and child. The information you share with the teacher will be helpful in supporting your child throughout the year.

We look forward to welcoming you and your child into our school community.

Sincerely,

Sample Welcoming Conversation Questions

What are your child's strengths?

What brings your child joy?

What makes your child unique?

What are five words you would use to describe your child?

What helps your child feel calm? What brings them comfort?

Who are the important people in your child's life?

What helps your child feel connected to others (kids & adults)?

What helps your child do their best learning?

What helps your child when it is time to change from one activity to another? How does your child communicate?

What is your child's home language?

What interests do they have?

What physical activities does your child enjoy?

Is there any information you want to share about meals/snacks? Sleep? Toileting?

Medications? Mobility? Vision? Hearing?

Helpful Resources

For Parents and Caregivers

Starting Kindergarten



[When I go to Kindergarten](#)

Play



[Let's Play: Activities for Families](#)

Play



[Play Today: A Guide for Families](#)

For Educators

Early Learning in BC



[The BC Early Learning Framework](#)

Play



[Play Today: BC Handbook](#)

Early Learning Framework
Online Course & Everyday
Anxiety Strategies for
Educators (EASE)



[Introducing the Early Learning Framework](#)

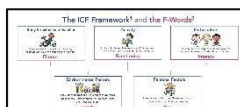
[Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Educators](#)

Indigenous Education Resources



[Indigenous Education Resources](#)

Early Intervention Program



[EIP Website](#)

Supporting Newcomer Multilingual Students



- **Acknowledge all cultures in the classroom in a safe and respectful way.**
- **Encourage** and **celebrate** the continued development of children's heritage language.
- **Build** upon your students' language and cultural knowledge. Do some research and be **curious**. Take time to learn about who they are, their family, country and culture. Be **aware** and acknowledge special holidays and observances that are important to your students.
- **Enlist** the help of **parents as partners** in education. Free digital multilingual books are available on Storybooks Canada and Unite for Literacy. Enlist the help of your school librarian to source multilingual or dual language books and encourage signing up at the public library.
- **Learn** how to say hello in different languages that are represented in the classroom.
- **Welcome** parents and/or family members into the classroom to volunteer or share something.
- Try to **connect** new learning to students' prior knowledge and experience.
- Buddy up a newcomer students with classmates to help them get oriented and involved in extracurricular activities.
- Include all students in what you're doing, even if they are not fully capable in English. Give students an opportunity to show what they know in their own language.
- Invite and actively encourage parent or family involvement in the school community (ie. volunteering/ PAC) and utilize community supports that encourage home/school communication (ICA). Foster relationships between families (ie. provide an optional family contact list so playdates can be arranged).
- Help students set goals. Consult with the school ELL teacher.
- Look for opportunities and teachable moments to include your students' home languages, cultures and interests.

Notes: