



Greater
VICTORIA
School District

A photograph of three children sitting at a table, looking at an open book. A girl on the left has her hair in braids, a boy in the middle is resting his chin on his hand, and a girl on the right is smiling. A large blue curved graphic element is on the left side of the image.

**WELCOMING CHILDREN
& FAMILIES TO
KINDERGARTEN**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction & Timeline	1
Reframing Readiness	2
BC's Anchoring Principles	3
Family Connection Calls	4
Welcome to K Event	5
Welcoming Conversations	6
District template	7
Gradual Entry	8
Sample Welcome Letter	9
Gradual Entry Schedule	10
Template for Families	11
Supports for some	12
Newcomers & Multilingual	13
More Resources	14

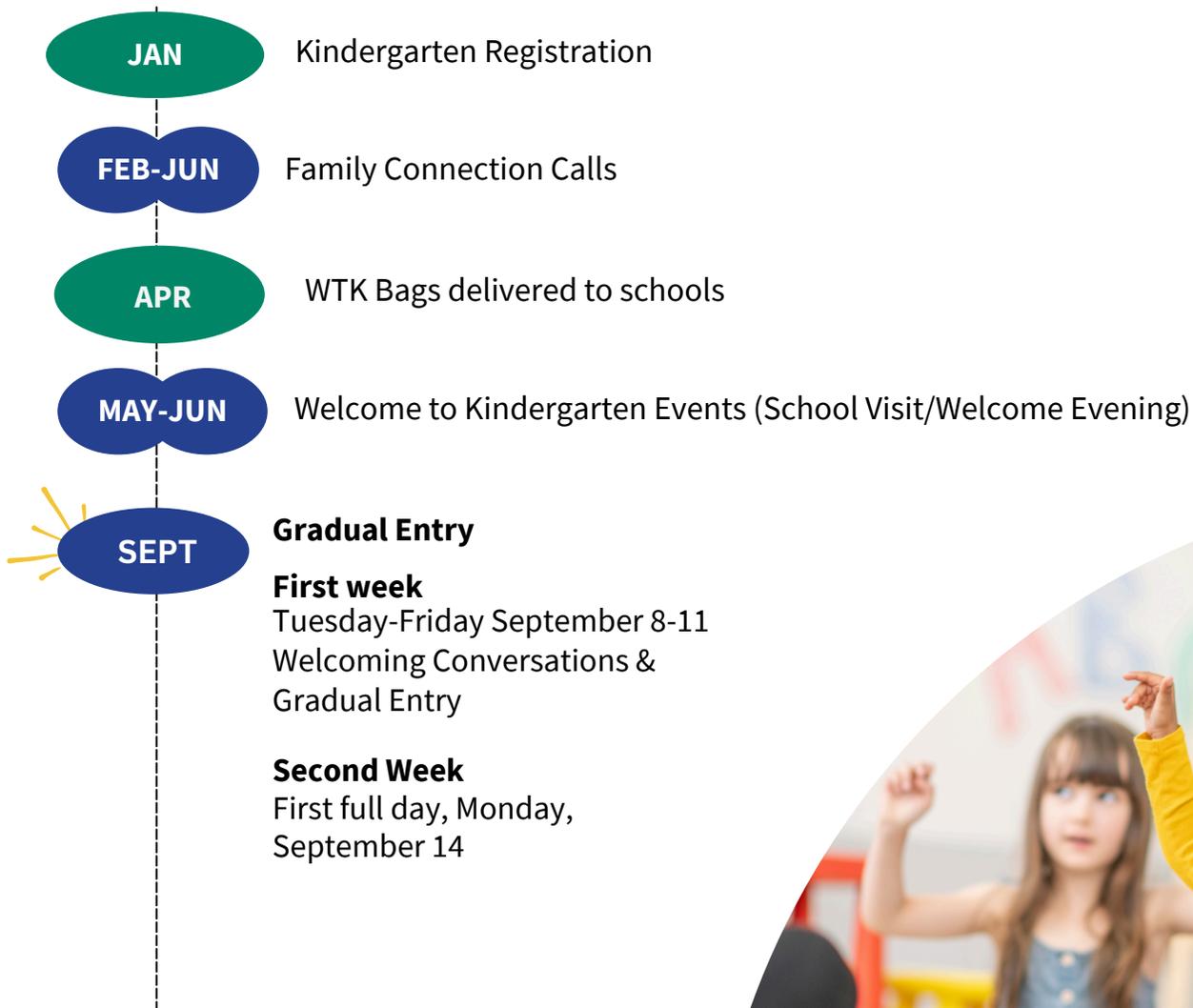


INTRODUCTION & TIMELINE

This guide is intended to support educators and staff with the transition of all children into 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.

Each September, and throughout the school year, the Greater Victoria School District (GVSD) welcomes close to 1,500 children and their families to Kindergarten.

Timeline



REFRAMING READINESS

Key Message

Children are ready for Kindergarten because of their birthday, not because of a list of things they can do. As we get to know each child, we can plan and prepare opportunities for each child to thrive and realize their potential. As a district, we continue to work toward unlearning the colonial mindset that children need be **ready** for school. In the Greater Victoria School District, all children are welcome, just as they are, and schools need to be **ready** for children.

Welcoming Process

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 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 continually reflect on and strengthen our transition process and welcoming practices.

As educators, we ask ourselves:

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



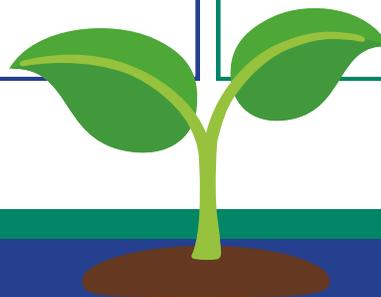
ANCHORING PRINCIPLES

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.



FEBRUARY - JUNE

FAMILY CONNECTION CALLS

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 or school based team members. Release time is available.



RESOURCES

SAMPLE CALL

“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 **<Insert School Name>** 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 Centre, or a child care?”

MAY - JUNE

WELCOME TO K EVENT

The spring Welcome to Kindergarten (WTK) Event gives new families the opportunity to connect with school staff members including teachers, Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), principals, vice-principals, admin assistants, teacher librarians, learning support teachers, counsellors etc. Please also consider including the child care provider from your school site. Families who require before and after care will appreciate the access point as well.

At this event, WTK bags are distributed to incoming families. Consider keeping track of participants by putting the students' names on the bags, and for those unable to attend, find ways to ensure that **every** child receives their bag before the summer break.



RESOURCES

SLIDE DECK

Download, save, and edit a presentation for an information evening, or as a slideshow in an email to families.

1. [Welcome to Kindergarten Slide Deck](#)

SOCIAL STORY

Download, save, and edit these templates for customizing a social story and staff reference sheet:

1. [Social Story Slide Deck](#)
2. [Kindergarten Staff One-pager](#)

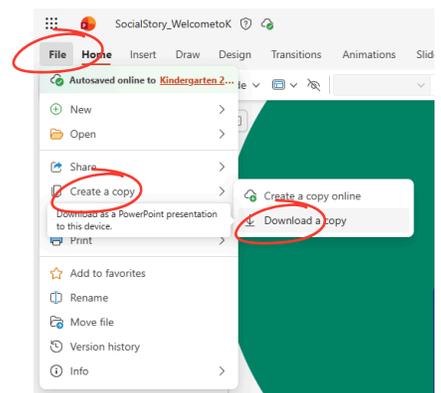
VIDEOS

Watch and share these videos to offer families a snapshot of what life in Kindergarten is like:

1. [Video link](#) to Welcome to Kindergarten
2. [Video link](#) to A Day in the Life of Kindergarten

DOWNLOAD INSTRUCTIONS

Click the link, then go to File > Create a Copy > Download a copy



SEPTEMBER 8 & 9

WELCOMING CONVERSATIONS

The gradual entry process includes scheduling a 15 minute welcoming conversation with each family and teacher. These conversations are intended to take the place of forms, and check lists, and help foster a relational and inclusive start to school.

The guiding questions (**see template on next page**) were collaboratively developed by kindergarten teachers, Early Childhood Educators and District staff in partnership with the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, and The Inter-Cultural Association (ICA). The questions are designed to connect with families through a curious and compassionate lens. They provide opportunities for educators to plan for the uniqueness of each child and prepare an inclusive classroom culture.

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, and are invaluable as we nurture partnerships between the home and school.

All schools will use this template to help us learn and plan for each child.



Getting to know _____

Every child has a story that is bigger than their life at school.

Please help us get to know your child so that we can best support their well-being and learning.



Spirit	Emotion
<p>What are your hopes for your child this year? What are your child's strengths? What makes your child unique? What brings your child joy?</p>	<p>What helps your child feel calm? What brings them comfort? Who are the important people in your child's life? How does your child interact with peers and adults?</p>
Mind	Body
<p>What activities or topics excite and engage your child the most? What helps your child when it is time to change from one activity to another? How does your child communicate?</p>	<p>What physical activities does your child enjoy? Is there any information you want to share about meals/snacks? Sleep? Toileting? Medications? Mobility? Vision? Hearing?</p>

Is there anything else you'd like us to know to help your child feel safe, happy, and successful?

SEPTEMBER 8-11

GRADUAL ENTRY

Gradual Entry Schedule for the Greater Victoria School District

WEEK ONE

Tuesday September 8 Welcoming conversations

Wednesday, September 9 Welcoming conversations

DISTRICT WIDE WELCOMING CONVERSATION QUESTIONS (TEMPLATE PROVIDED)

15 minutes / family (child & parent/caregiver) with teacher

Teacher prep time is scheduled into the gradual entry schedule.

Thursday, September 10: Half day for each group **A:** 9:00-11:00 & group **B:** 1:00-2:30

Friday, September 11: Half day for each group **B:** 9:00-11:00 & group **A:** 1:00-2:30

WEEK TWO

Monday: September 14: First full day for all Kindergarten children district wide

Supporting the early days & considerations for combined K-1 classes :

We encourage school teams to focus support on kindergarten classrooms, specifically K-1 combined classes during the first weeks of school. Members of the School Based Team, and the teacher librarian are encouraged to support the early days of kindergarten building relationships with new students and families and supporting grade one students in combined K-1 classrooms. Offering grade ones a familiar educator (ECE?) during Kindergarten gradual entry is recommended. The first week of school is a critical and proactive relationship building time for all staff and families.



SAMPLE WELCOME LETTER

Dear Kindergarten parents, guardians, and caregivers,

Welcome to <Insert School Name>!

We are excited to welcome your child and family to our school community.

This letter shares important information about your child's Kindergarten gradual entry schedule and Welcoming Conversation.

Starting Kindergarten is an important milestone for children and families. In alignment with the Ministry of Education and Child Care and the Greater Victoria School District, our schools follow a gradual entry process to support a thoughtful and caring transition into school.

Gradual entry gives us time to get to know your child while helping them build comfort and a sense of belonging in their new learning environment. Children begin with two half days in a smaller group before joining together as a whole class.

Attached you will find your child's gradual entry schedule for the first week of school. An important part of this process is the **Welcoming Conversation**, which takes place during the first week. This conversation is an opportunity for you to share what you would like us to know about your child. We invite you to review the attached questions in advance and reflect on anything that will help us understand and support your child's transition.

We recognize that every child and family brings unique experiences, cultures, languages, and strengths to our school community. Your insights are valued and will help us build a strong foundation of partnership to support your child throughout the year.

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

Sincerely,

<Your Name>



Remember to attach the gradual entry schedule page 10 and the sample welcoming conversation questions from page 7!

SAMPLE WELCOME LETTER SCHEDULE ATTACHMENT



Your Kindergarten Gradual Entry Schedule:

- Welcoming Conversation (please bring an adult with you to meet your teacher)

Date:

Time:

Room:

- First Half Day visit (please bring a snack with you). You will be at school for half a day with a smaller group so we can get to know you.

Date: Thursday, September 10

Time:

- Second Half Day visit (please bring a snack with you). You will be at school for half a day with a smaller group so we can get to know you.

Date: Friday, September 11

Time:

- First Full day of school. All Kindergarten students will attend Monday, September 14, from 8:45 to 2:37.

Getting to know _____

Every child has a story that is bigger than their life at school.

Please help us get to know your child so that we can best support their well-being and learning.



Spirit What are your hopes for your child this year? What are your child's strengths? What makes your child unique? What brings your child joy?	Emotion What helps your child feel calm? What brings them comfort? Who are the important people in your child's life? How does your child interact with peers and adults?
Mind What activities or topics excite and engage your child the most? What helps your child when it is time to change from one activity to another? How does your child communicate?	Body What physical activities does your child enjoy? Is there any information you want to share about meals/snacks? Sleep? Toileting? Medications? Mobility? Vision? Hearing?

Is there anything else you'd like us to know to help your child feel safe, happy, and successful?

GUIDING THE TRANSITION OF SUPPORTS FROM COMMUNITY TO SCHOOL

Process for Spring

- Schools will receive information in late February/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).
- These child profiles are created many months before students start Kindergarten and are likely to change as children learn and grow.
- In some cases, community partners have been working with these children and families for years. Please involve them as much as you can in the transition process.
- Specialized equipment or building modification requirements need to be identified as soon as possible. Please connect with the District Principal of Learning & Inclusion (Joanna Snow jsnow@sd61.bc.ca) ASAP to discuss these needs.
- 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.
- Offer the child a [social story](#) about your school.
- Visit the [Learning Support website – Transitions page](#) for more information.



SUPPORTING STUDENTS:

NEWCOMERS & MULTILINGUAL

Acknowledge all cultures in the classroom in a safe and respectful way:

- **Language:** Encourage and celebrate the continued development of children’s heritage language. Learn how to say hello in different languages that are represented in the classroom. Include all students in what you’re doing, even if they are not fully fluent in English. Give students an opportunity to show what they know in their own language. Consult with the school ELL teacher.
- **Literacy Resources:** 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.
- **Be Curious and Celebrate:** Build upon your students’ cultural knowledge through your own research and curiosity. Take time to learn about who they are, their family, country, and culture. Be aware and acknowledge special holiday and observances that are important to your students.
- **Involve Families:** Enlist the help of parents/caregivers as partners in education. Welcome parents/caregivers into the classroom to volunteer or share something. Invite and actively encourage involvement in the school community (ie. volunteering) and utilize community supports that encourage home/school communication. Foster relationships between families (ie. provide an optional family contact list so playdates can be arranged).
- **Make Connections:** Try to connect new learning to students’ prior knowledge and experience. Help students set goals. Buddy up newcomer students with classmates to help them get oriented and involved in extracurricular activities. Look for opportunities and teachable moments to include your students’ home languages, cultures and interests.





Images are linked below!

MORE RESOURCES



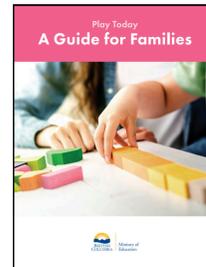
FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS



When I Go to Kindergarten
Ministry Resource

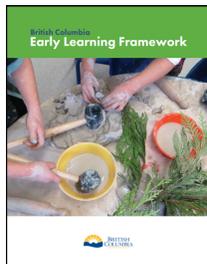


Let's Play! (Four Sets)
Ministry Resource



Play Today: A Guide for Families
Ministry Resource

FOR EDUCATORS



BC Early Learning Framework
Ministry Resource



Learning in the Primary Years
Ministry Resource



Early Intervention Program
Island Health



Indigenous Education
Indigenous Education Department at GVSD



Early Learning Framework Course
My Training BC



Mental Health Resources
Healthy Minds BC



Greater
VICTORIA
School District

sd61.bc.ca

District Principal
Early Learning & Child Care
Charmaine Shortt
250-589-5940
cshortt@sd61.bc.ca