

The EDI TEACHER NEWSLETTER



Introduction

Welcome to the fifth edition of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) newsletter. As a member of the provincial Healthy Child Advisory Committee and executive director of the Manitoba School Boards Association, I am pleased to note the progress we are making in early learning and care.

The 1999 release of the early years study, *Reversing the Real Brain Drain*, and the Winnipeg visit by Dr. Fraser Mustard, one of the report's principal authors, marked the beginning of a new era for early learning and care in our province. Since then, there have been many notable firsts:

- Healthy Child Manitoba Strategy launch (2000)
- The Educaring conference (2000) – a formal collaboration between Manitoba's child care and public school sectors
- set up of 26 parent child coalitions across the province (2001/2002)
- first collection of EDI data by Manitoba school divisions (2002/03)
- full participation of all 37 public school divisions in EDI data collection (2005/2006 school year)
- *The Healthy Child Manitoba Act* proclamation and release of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) position paper on early childhood education and care (2007)
- 2009 the MASS Journal dedicated to early learning (2009)
- first pan-Canadian EDI conference, Winnipeg (2009)
- 10th anniversary of the Healthy Child Manitoba Strategy (2010)

Through this same period of time we have witnessed within Manitoba's public education sector a major shift in thinking about the importance of early human development as the

foundation for successful learning and the role of public schools in the provision of early learning and care supports and services. This shift is evident in the enthusiastic response of school boards' and superintendents' associations to the newly created Early Childhood Education Unit within Manitoba Education and school boards' 2011 convention resolution calling for additional provincial support to finance early years initiatives including nursery programs and full-time kindergarten in public schools.

The EDI has been a powerful learning tool for educators in this journey toward greater collaboration with the early years sector. Data allow communities to celebrate their strengths and better understand areas that need greater support. Partnerships and working together are essential to making the most of the EDI data. Supporting parents is as important as the work we do with young children. And strategic investment in early years initiatives, beyond addressing school readiness for young children, will ultimately benefit our entire community.

While we have certainly made progress, there is still work to be done. Despite our best efforts, too many of our very young children are vulnerable. Too many of our families and communities lack the resources to ensure all Manitoba children succeed in school and in life. The root causes of their vulnerability and inequity are many and varied and most fall outside the parameters of the public education system. Still, schools and educators, working with community and government, can play significant roles in securing a better future for all our kids. They're counting on us. I am optimistic that together – with goodwill, passion and absolute determination – we can make it happen.

Carolyn Duhamel
Executive Director
Manitoba School Boards Association

WHAT'S NEW?

Manitoba Education Early Childhood Education Unit

Manitoba Education is committed to working with other government departments, school divisions, community organizations and parents to address the crucial area of early childhood development. The department is a member of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet which has been implementing the Healthy Child Manitoba Strategy since March 2000. The strategy is based on interdepartmental co-operation on programs and services for children and families. A key initiative of Manitoba Education, implemented in the 2001/2002 school year, is the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) which provides funding support to all Manitoba school divisions to address the early development needs of children prior to school entry.

Increasingly, Early Development Instrument (EDI) data has been used by school divisions and schools to inform planning and implementation of initiatives that help children to prepare for successful school entry with ECDI support.

Recognizing the important connection between early learning and the Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education system, the Manitoba government created the Early Childhood Education Unit (ECEU) in April 2011. ECEU's mandate was determined after consulting stakeholders as part of Manitoba Education's ongoing commitment to partnerships in early childhood development. An important ECEU role is to monitor and share research about early childhood development. Its main goal is to find ways to apply the research to improve programs and services. The unit will also help school divisions work with community partners and use EDI data to develop programs and services that support families and pre-school children.

Other ECEU roles include:

- ensuring a co-operative approach to quality early learning and care for children from birth to age eight
- monitoring and supporting the Early Literacy Intervention Initiative grants provided to school divisions
- co-ordinating collection and distribution of provincial education data

In addition to establishing the ECEU, the Manitoba government added \$300,000 to ECDI funding for the 2011/12 school year to help school divisions work with communities on early childhood focused initiatives. Some of the funds are targeted to schools with a high proportion of children in particular need – a need determined by EDI data.

This additional support is intended to improve education outcomes for all Manitobans. To achieve intended outcomes in an integrated way, Manitoba Education will continue to work closely with all relevant partners. This includes working with the Healthy Child Manitoba Office to connect with the parent child coalitions. The department is grateful for the contribution of Kindergarten teachers who collect EDI data used in early childhood decision-making and programs. Manitoba Education believes that quality, early learning experiences are critical to a child's success in school and in life. It is vitally important that we work with all our partners to help families and communities give children a strong start that prepares them for lifelong success.



Turning Data Into Action in The Community



Supporting Early Childhood Development in Pembina Trails School Division

The Pembina Trails School Division (PTSD) is dedicated to educational excellence. We believe that supporting children **before** they start Kindergarten is important to ensuring successful learning. The early years are critical for brain development and overall healthy child development. PTSD offers a variety of pre-school initiatives and supports to meet the differing needs of our community's young children and their parents and families. We use Early Development Instrument (EDI) data to ensure our early years initiatives meet the needs of our diverse community.

PTSD, in partnership with our parent child coalitions, has several **Family Centres** in many of the schools in our division. The Assiniboine South parent child coalition offers five Parent Child Drop-In programs every weekday morning at various school sites. It also has theme programs such as Leap Into Learning, Movement for Dad and Me and Terrific Thursdays. Bookmates Family Literacy programs and Wiggle, Giggle and Munch are also offered throughout the year.

The Fort Garry/St. Norbert parent child coalition has five Family Centres and, like the Assiniboine South Coalition, offers theme programs throughout the year at different locations. Theme programs that ran in the 2010/2011 school year include: Rock & Read, Alphabet Soup, Alphabet Soup in Motion, Family Learning Olympics, Tales for Tots, Wiggle Giggle and Munch, Jumping Gym Time, March into Music and the Parenting Circle (based on Nobody's Perfect). All the programs are free and designed for parents to attend with their children.

To support children as they prepare to start Kindergarten, we offer **Kindergarten Here We Come** for four and five year old children (the year before they start Kindergarten). Qualified early childhood educators deliver this half-day program once a week at 12 schools. The goal is to support children in all areas of their development with a particular focus on early literacy, numeracy, fine motor skill and social and emotional development. Parents have expressed their appreciation and gratitude for program, grateful that it makes their children better prepared to do well in school.

Many of our PTSD school communities also host Literacy Links, a program that helps parents and children with the transition to kindergarten. Trained facilitators visit parents in their homes and introduce them to engaging activities they can do to foster and support their child's literacy and numeracy development. Parents have expressed their appreciation for the many creative ideas provided to help their children learn numbers and letters. Almost every parent involved in 2010 endorsed the program was grateful for the opportunity to add to their children's skills at home. In 2011, Literacy Links also partnered with Welcome To Kindergarten, a program from The Learning Partnership that supports incoming kindergarten students and provides resources and support for parents.

Our Community Partners

There are two Parent Child Coalitions that operate within the boundaries of PTSD: The Assiniboine Early Years Coalition and The Fort Garry / St. Norbert Coalition. PTSD works closely with them to support early childhood initiatives in these communities. PTSD also developed a community needs assessment – Community Asset Mapping Study – with these two coalitions. In 2007/08, community stakeholders and coalition, PTSD and school board representatives developed a large inventory of GIS (geographic information system) maps. The maps highlight the location of programs in relation to the needs and strengths of our communities using EDI and census data. The study results provided a comprehensive picture of our community's strengths and needs



and have guided our decision-making in developing and strengthening our supports for children and families.

Building on the success of the mapping study, we hosted a division-community event in January 2011 to review our third collection of EDI data. This event brought together our division's early years teachers, administrators, clinicians, school resource teams and child care providers within our community. It was a great opportunity to strengthen the partnerships between our schools and child-care community. After reviewing our latest EDI data, participants discussed new ways to better support healthy early childhood development.

In follow-up to our January event, our school board also dedicated time at their March 2011 board meeting to review our newest EDI data. In June 2011, our division's clinical team reviewed our EDI data trends as well. You could say we are on an "EDI roll"!

Where do we go from here?

Confirming our PTSD assessment results, our three-year EDI data show our community's many strengths in healthy child development and school readiness. These strengths include very strong results in literacy and numeracy. Our EDI data also shows a need to improve in the area of emotional and social development and fine motor development. Our preschool programs and partnerships reflect our commitment to addressing these needs. Responding to this evidence is important to PTSD.

"In its support for student learning, the Pembina Trails School Division is providing a strong commitment to early childhood development and programming in this area. Literacy Links and Kindergarten Here We Come are two such programs that have received more support over the years so that they are more accessible throughout the divisional community. We also have strong community partnerships in this area as exemplified through Parent Child Coalitions in several areas and Family Centers in some of our schools. Pembina Trails School Division believes that early childhood development is the foundation for lifetime success."

Lawrence Lussier, Superintendent,
Pembina Trails School Division

The Swan Valley School Division (SVSD)

The Swan Valley School Division (SVSD) has long recognized early years learning as a foundation for educational success. School division traditional support for young children and their development included a partnership with the community based Better Beginnings programs, involvement with Manitoba's Positive Parenting Program, shared space agreements with local nursery school and day care programs and good communication with the Children's Therapy Initiative. While all of these activities contributed to the well-being of children, pupils entering Kindergarten continued to present with identifiable intellectual, social and emotional needs that were creating significant barriers to learning success.

In response to these needs, and following an extensive community consultation process, the SVSD launched two **early learning pilot projects** in September of 2009 across the division. Senior Kindergarten, programming for five-year-old learners, was expanded to a full time, all-day every day offering in four schools. Junior Kindergarten classrooms, programming for four-year-old learners, were opened in three communities. Since 2009, positive results and strong community

support have secured these pilots as regular program offerings. An additional French Immersion Junior Kindergarten program was opened in September of 2011.

Getting Started

The **early learning pilot projects** were developed in response to students' observed needs and recognition of the division's "not ready" EDI results. As in all communities, families face barriers to accessing early childhood educational and recreational opportunities. These include: cost barriers, transportation issues, scheduling difficulties, etc. With the growing evidence that participation in quality early learning opportunities provides significant and long-lasting benefits for children, the Swan Valley School Division sought to ensure accessible quality early years programming for **all** students. Extensive consultation and ongoing collaborative decision making with the parent and wider community was an essential ingredient in developing and implementing effective early learning experiences. Leadership on the part of the board of trustees was instrumental in setting the stage for this work and in bringing it to fruition.

Our Success

Classes, both Junior and Senior Kindergarten, are taught by qualified and certified Manitoba teachers. Ongoing professional development for Kindergarten teachers is being provided at the division level. Junior Kindergarten pupils are further supported by an educational assistant who, in many cases, holds Early Childhood Educator certification. Classrooms are equipped with rich play-based resources and curriculum designed to support social, physical,

"Swan Valley School Division is successfully implementing an Early Learning Program based on the pioneering work of Dr. Fraser Mustard and his Early Years' Studies. The Council for Early Child Development was instrumental in our Division building capacity for improved Early Learning."

Marilyn Marquis-Forster, Superintendent and
Deborah Burnside, Student Services Coordinator



intellectual, cultural and emotional development. Additional and specific Early Literacy Intervention support being provided for struggling students in the Senior Kindergarten year was added to SVSD early learning programs in the 2010/11 academic year.

Both full time Senior Kindergarten and half time Junior Kindergarten programs have been widely accepted and positively received. More importantly, assessment data of student academic growth have documented significant gains. Careful and systematic monitoring of individual and group progress is built into the design of the early learning programs. The opening of a French Immersion Junior Kindergarten, in September 2011, proved to be so popular that a second class had to be opened so as to accommodate enrolment.

Making it Happen

Full stakeholder involvement has made the **early learning pilot projects** possible. Educational change requires numerous opportunities for community discussion and a commitment to ongoing dialogue and flexibility. Trustees, senior administration, school leadership, teachers, parent councils, families and interested community members have all participated in the ongoing conversations. Parent Child Coalition partners provide input and support into planning for optimal support for the children and families within our community. Public attitudes towards schooling and young children have changed over the past three years with a growing acceptance. Educators, through ongoing assessment and evaluation of the programs, have been able to provide meaningful information to the larger school community regarding the value of this work.

Support for early learning must be financial as well as philosophical. The SVSD has made a commitment to allocate sufficient funds for these programs so as to allow high quality staffing, classroom physical space, and play based equipment, resources and curriculum. Financial commitment for the ongoing professional development of teachers involved in delivering the instruction has also been critical. Student success is dependent upon the quality of instruction and the instructional environment provided.

Positive Results

Assessment of student and program effectiveness are key components of the **SVSD early learning projects**. Reporting of student progress to parents is completed through a SPICE report. SPICE stands for Social, Physical, Intellectual, Cultural and Emotional. Teachers provide a comprehensive indication of how students are progressing in each of these five important developmental areas. In May or June, all pupils are assessed using the individually administered Bracken Readiness Assessment. This inventory provides educators with a reliable and valid measure of school readiness as well as an opportunity for evaluation of the effectiveness of the **early learning projects**. Test results thus far indicate that the Junior and Senior Kindergarten programs have had a significant positive influence on student learning.

Annual parent satisfaction surveys have provided support for the notion that **early learning projects** are meeting community needs. Survey results indicate that 95 per cent of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with the program and over 80 per cent have observed positive gains in their child's development. Junior and full day Senior Kindergarten teachers have also reported positive gains in children's development and learning. And, of course, the Swan Valley School Division is looking forward to the 2010/11 EDI results.

Next Steps

The Swan Valley School Division plans to continue operating the **existing early learning projects**. Ongoing study of participating students over time is planned. Each school community and each classroom is a dynamic enterprise continually building upon the strengths present and responding to the needs of the time. The Division seeks to lead through example by learning from these projects and by planning forward accordingly. Community calls for extending full time Senior Kindergarten into all schools as well as offering Junior Kindergarten in every community are being entertained.



Fraser at Tavern in the Park, Assiniboine Park, Winnipeg, MB, May 2007

Remembering Fraser Mustard (1927-2011) and Moving Manitoba Forward

On Nov, 16, 2011, Manitoba and the world lost a beloved grandfather and father, not only of his own family but of a social, political, and intellectual movement that reshaped our understanding of what our children need from their earliest years to live their lives more healthy, wealthy, and wise, and what we all need to do now to ensure the future of our society. For this and much more he was renowned worldwide and personally shaped the policies of nations, states, and provinces, including our own Premiers Selinger, Doer, and Filmon. Each considered him a friend, as did each of us.

Fraser taught us all that the future prosperity of our province and society depended entirely on the quality of the daily experiences we provided to our youngest children today, most of all from before they are born until they start school.

From him, we learned that investing in early childhood development made the most economic sense, paying back lifelong dividends to both the children and their families, as well as to society, through better health, education, employment and enterprise, and less illness, crime, and social inequality. We learned how the architecture of the child's developing brain was built sturdy through the daily "serve-and-return" of nurturing relationships with parents, families, and communities; or made fragile by toxic stressors like persistent poverty and uninhabitable living conditions. We learned that our DNA was not our destiny but could be differentially expressed, for better or worse, depending on the social environment.

He taught us that Manitoba was unique in the world in its potential to put the neuroscience into practice, weaving

tightly together what we know and what we do in the daily lives of children, and to tell the story powerfully with data and research of how it made an intergenerational difference in the short and the long run, mobilizing communities to become better and better in becoming the villages worthy of raising our young people. Fraser's message mattered to a great many Manitobans.

Most of all, he taught us that we had a moral imperative, to act quickly and invest wisely, not just because our children are our future learners, workers, parents, and citizens, or because it made eminent business sense, but because of their inherent value and right to a decent life. The truest measure of what matters is how well our children are doing today and every day, especially the most vulnerable among us. Fraser was famously impatient with what he felt was the slow pace of progress, how long it was taking for us to change and adapt ourselves and our policies to the reality of the research on early brain development.

The recent release of the Early Years Study 3, co-authored again by Fraser and the Honourable Margaret Norrie McCain, indicates Manitoba is on the right track, ranking third out of the 10 provinces in early childhood education. But there is still more to do. As this report states, "The resources can be found. Although we are still cleaning up from the collapse of the world's financial markets, economists tell us that public spending is the best antidote. This science of early development provides a framework to look beyond public works and incentives ... to preparing our future workforce, supporting parents to work or upgrade their skills, and strengthening democratic communities" (p. 3).

Fraser never minced words and so neither shall we. Manitoba has a provincial government and a Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet that understands the importance of early childhood development, but government cannot, indeed should not do this alone. We call on all of our Manitoba colleagues in community, business, and academia to work even faster and harder together to ensure that Manitoba becomes the best place to have a baby, that all of our youngsters are ready for school and for life, and that all of our families, parents, and parents-to-be are fully prepared and supported in raising the future of our province. We need every Manitoban to understand,

support, and act now on the evidence for investing in early childhood. We owe it to Fraser and we owe it to our children.

Strini Reddy, Chair, Provincial Healthy Child Advisory Committee, and Co-Chair, Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council; Jim Carr, President and CEO, Business Council of Manitoba, and Co-Chair, Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council; Noralou Roos, Professor and Founding Director, Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, University of Manitoba.

Source: www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/fraser.html

I grieve the loss and celebrate the life and amazing contribution that Fraser Mustard has made! His visions, research and advocacy for the importance of pro-active support for children beginning right from birth has made an everlasting impact that has been life changing for children, families and educators around the world! What a priceless gift he has left for us! God's Blessing and his sincerest sympathy to his family.

Cindy Nachtigall (Family Center Leader),
Fort Garry/St Norbert Coalition

I remember the first public address I heard by Dr. Mustard, just after he had spent a fair amount of time with school superintendents, about 11 years ago. When he started showing slides of how the brain works in young children I remember an electric charge up my spine. I had worked with young children most of my career and had never heard put into words with such solid proof what I had suspected. There was no looking back for me after that. Fraser Mustard inspired me to work harder at my profession, to never take no for an answer when it came to providing the best services for young children and their families. There is still a long way to go, but we must continue working in the spirit of this man of such great conviction.

Jackie Sturton, Bright Beginnings
North Eastman Parent Child Coalition

It is with a heavy heart that I write this brief note, because of our recent, immeasurable loss of one of the founding grandfathers of the Healthy Child Manitoba (HCM) Strategy: Dr. Fraser Mustard (1927-2011). I already miss him dearly, deeply. It is fair to say that, without Fraser, there would have never been an Early Development Instrument (EDI). It was Fraser, along with the late, great Dr. Dan Offord, in the 1990s that originally pushed for the need to measure our progress in Early Childhood Development (ECD) at a population level. And it was Fraser who connected Dan to Dr. Magdalena Janus, who would go on to co-develop the EDI with Dan at McMaster University, and then lead its provision to all jurisdictions across Canada, and many more worldwide, after Dan's untimely passing in 2004. Indeed, if there had never been a Fraser Mustard, it is likely that the ECD revolution that swept our country and others would have never happened, at least as quickly or powerfully. Fraser was relentless and impatient for us to "get on with it" in making measurable changes for our children, in every community. Fraser loved Manitoba and believed in our collective capability to do this. Let us honour his memory, and his innumerable contributions to our province and the world, by carrying on and carrying out his early childhood clarion call. As all of us as partners in the HCM Strategy begin another decade together, may we always remember and enact what Fraser taught us: translating knowledge about how all of our young children are doing into local action for the betterment of their lives today, and every day into the future.

Dr. Rob Santos, Healthy Child Manitoba Office