



EARLY YEARS DEPARTMENT GROWTH PLAN 2025-2026

School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast)

THE EARLY YEARS DEPARTMENT

WELCOME!

Welcome to the School District No. 46 Early Years Department

School District No. 46 is known across the province for the early years programs & supports available for families with young children, and the district-wide cohesion we are building between children, families, and educators in both schools and child care centres.

The Importance of the Early Years

Development during the first years of life is highly influenced by a young child's experiences in their home and community. Research has shown that nurturing environments promote healthy child development. While good nutrition, shelter and protection are some of the basic aspects of nurturing environments; young children also need to spend their time in environments that include support from parents/caregivers and other adults.

Children benefit from nurturing adults in their environments, including:

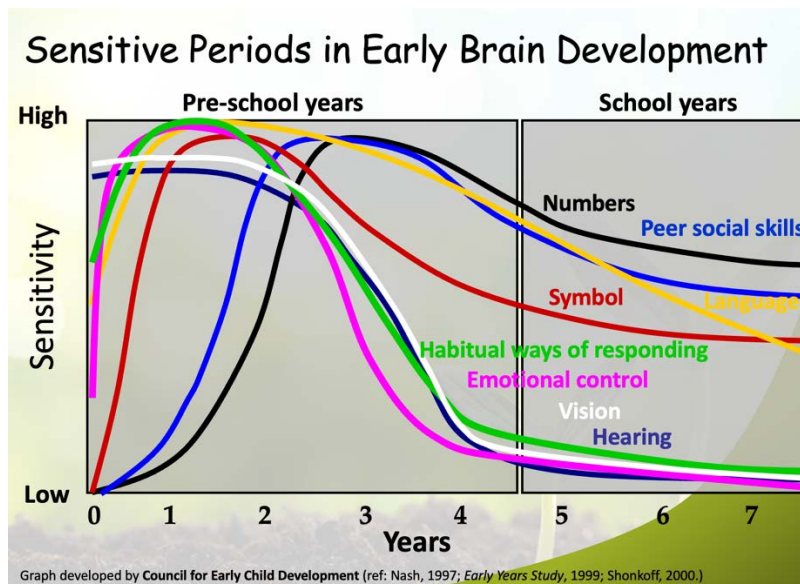
- Parents & Caregivers in the Home (including grandparents, etc.)
- Educators in School Settings
 - Early Childhood Educators
 - Kindergarten & Primary Teachers
 - Educational Support Staff
- Educators in Child Care & Community Settings

Children also benefit from opportunities to explore their world, to play and to learn how to interact with other children. These experiences help to build a strong foundation for healthy development over time.

The Developing Brain

Neuroscience highlights that the early years are critical for establishing positive growth trajectories, which influence learning and development throughout life. During this period, the brain is highly sensitive to its environment, with critical windows for language, vision, hearing, emotional regulation, social skills, numeracy, and symbol recognition. Missing these opportunities can significantly reduce the brain's capacity to develop in these areas.

Early life experiences play a major role in shaping the brain, guiding the differentiation of neurons, the formation of synaptic connections, and the development of biological pathways that impact future learning, health, and overall development.



The Importance of Child Care

In addition to establishing positive trajectories in the early years, Child Care has emerged as a critical support for families in today's world. Quality child care that is accessible, affordable and inclusive is essential in order to support both families and the economy. The global pandemic surfaced the essential role of child care in helping our society run smoothly, with school districts across the province, including in SD46, providing child care for essential workers in order to keep systems functioning.

Summary

Ensuring that children are in nurturing environments with adults who are attuned and responsive to their individual needs contributes to positive learning and development. This Growth Plan will include strategies to support the children and adults in both early learning & child care environments. In fact, strategies are structured to nurture cohesion between children, families, child care educators and school district educators, establishing a common vision for learning, with shared pedagogy and practices.

A theme of joyful engagement is woven throughout this Growth Plan, with children and adults deepening their core competencies through playful approaches, reflective practices and aspirational goal setting.

ABOUT THE EARLY YEARS DEPARTMENT

DEPARTMENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The BC Early Learning Framework (ELF) defines the Early Years as the time in a child's life from birth to 8 years old.

Supports are in place for children 0 – 8 years old through both:

1. **Early learning**
2. **Child care**

Early Learning Demographics & Programs

Demographics:

- Under School Age:
 - 1,150 children under the age of five are living on the Sunshine Coast.
 - 939 people have registered in programs offered for children & families under school age
- School Age Primary Years
 - 205 children are currently enrolled in Kindergarten (down from 236)
 - An additional 600+ students are enrolled in grades 1 - 3

Programs: Building a 'Continuum of Connection' for Children Under School Age

The 'Continuum of Connection' (p.5) outlines many of the programs offered through School District No. 46 to support families with young children before school entry.

Our 'Continuum of Connection' outlines the range of programs available, beginning with the prenatal classes taught by our Early Years Family Support Navigators. This 'Continuum of Connection' allows relationships to build over the 5 critical first years, to ensure that families and children are well connected to staff, resources and supports. The programs invite the participation of both parents and caregivers, including Child Care Providers. Professional Development hours are offered for child care educators, which count towards their professional certification. The 'Continuum of Care' provides many opportunities for contact between children, families and educators, designed to build shared experiences and shared language – creating a felt experience of 'paddling together' within a connected community.

Sunshine Coast Early Years



**SUNSHINE COAST
SCHOOL DISTRICT 46**

CONTINUUM OF CONNECTION

Paddling Together As an
Early Years Community



PRENATAL CLASSES

Expecting a new baby? Learn about the stages of pregnancy and labour, comfort and pain management and caring for the baby after delivery. Tour the hospital, meet other new parents and ask questions. Each family receives a children's book and information on how to talk, sing, read and play with the baby.



S.P.A.R.K.! 'SUPPORTING PARENTS ALONG THE ROAD TO KINDERGARTEN'

Parents and caregivers of children newborn to age 5 on the Sunshine Coast can attend a new 90-minute SPARK! session every Fall, Winter & Spring. Sessions focus on ways to support holistic learning & spark curiosity. Parents receive free information & toys at every session. Sessions are offered both in-person (with childminding available) and virtually. Supported by the Ministry of Education & Child Care's 'Ready, Set, Learn' initiative.



DOLLY PARTON IMAGINATION LIBRARY

Families receive an age-appropriate, quality children's picture book every month mailed right to their home address until their child's fifth birthday. SPARK! is the official registration site, offering strategies for successful read-aloud experiences at each age and stage. The Sunshine Coast Lions Club and private donors partner with the district to support this program.



PARENTING & CHILD DEVELOPMENT CLASSES

Parents & caregivers are invited to participate in the following 6-week parenting classes:

- The Circle of Security® Parenting™ Program: Based on decades of research focused on supporting secure relationships and an awareness of children's need for both playful exploration & a secure 'base'.
- Positive Discipline Program: Offering parents long-term parenting skills that will encourage their children to think for themselves, become more responsible and have greater respect for themselves and others.
- One-Hour Parenting Solutions: These classes have a specific focus each week, designed to support families in navigating things such as sleep, feeding and behaviour.



STRONGSTART

Families drop into StrongStart Centres and meet with other parents and community supports while playing and learning together. Gym, library and Song & Rhyme Times are offered. StrongStart programs are open three hours/day on days when school is in session in the following locations: Gibsons Elementary, Roberts Creek Elementary, Sechelt Early Years Centre, Halfmoon Bay Elementary and Madeira Park Elementary. StrongStart is offered on Saturdays in the Sechelt Early Years Centre.



KINDERSPARK!

Welcoming Families to Kindergarten - Families attend a 90-minute session once a week for 4 weeks in the Spring before Kindergarten entry. Each week we highlight the 'WonderFull Me' of the children in the program and share this with school staff! In partnership with Community Schools, programs are held in the Kindergarten classrooms in all of our elementary schools.



WONDERWHEELS

Nature-based StrongStart Outreach programming is offered through the 'Tales & Trails Program' using the 'WonderWheels' Bus. The bus has a weekly schedule of visits up and down the coast - offering programming in the Gibsons, Sechelt & Pender Harbour Areas. Visit TinyTown in the Sechelt Early Years Centre 10:00 - 11:30 am Monday - Saturday.



EARLY YEARS FAIR

Every Spring, families have the opportunity to talk to community experts and receive information on developmental screening, programs, supports in the community, and Kindergarten transitioning.

See our website for more information and to register: <https://early-learning.sd46.bc.ca/>
or phone 604-885-6787

Questions? Contact Kirsten Deasey District Principal Learning, Innovation & Child Care
kdeasey@sd46.bc.ca

Sunshine Coast School District 46 | Early Years
5538 Shorncliffe Ave Sechelt BC V0N 3A0 | Ph. 604-885-6787 | Email: earlyyears@sd46.bc.ca



Child Care Demographics & Programs

Child care School District No. 46 currently offers more Seamless Day and Just B4 Preschool programs than any other district in the province. A three-year pilot program grant through the Ministry of Education and Child Care has helped support the implementation of these pilot programs. This past June (2025) the 3 year grant was extended in order to offer another year of grant funding support.

Birth – Five Licensed Child Care

JUST B4 Programs in SD46

JUSTB4 is a licensed, preschool program specifically designed for 4-year-old children with the hope of inspiring and supporting the creation of rich, joyful early childhood experiences. The program offers opportunities to strengthen early years to kindergarten transitions for young children and their families. JUSTB4 uses StrongStart spaces in the afternoon with the same StrongStart educator that leads the StrongStart program in the morning. Families pre-register for the afternoon program and choose the days of the week they would like their children to attend. Because it is a licensed preschool program, parents/guardians are not required to attend.

The following JUST B4 programs are licensed and operated by School District No. 46:

- Halfmoon Bay Elementary:
- Gibsons Elementary:

Seamless Day Programs in SD46:

The Seamless Day Kindergarten program (SDK) employs two certified Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) to offer before and after school care. With a Kindergarten teacher, they make up a team that provides a seamless day for children in Kindergarten to Grade 2. Typically, one ECE welcomes children for before school care at 7:45 AM and stays in the classroom until the end of the school day. A second ECE begins in the classroom at 12:30 AM and continues until 5:00 PM. This program gives children continuity throughout the day.

The following Seamless Day programs are licensed and operated by School District No. 46
Seamless Day Locations:

- West Sechelt Elementary Seamless Day Program:
- Kinnikinnick Elementary Seamless Day Program:
- Cedar Grove Elementary Seamless Day Program
- Gibsons Elementary Seamless Day Program

Each of the programs listed above provided care for 12 children. However, this past September, the licensed capacity of the Seamless Day Child Care was doubled, in order to meet the demand for child care in this neighbourhood.

Connecting with Community Child Care Partners

The Early Years Department connects with child care providers in the community – operating both on and off school grounds, in order to build relationships and provide community cohesion.

SD46 Early Years Team: Staff Composition

The Early Years Department is staffed primarily with Early Childhood Educators. The department currently has the following positions on staff:

- Early Childhood Educators (ECE): 18
- ECE Casuals: 7
- Education Assistants (EA2): 3
- ECE Admin Assistant: 1
- Family Navigators: 2
- Early Learning Teacher
- Note: Primary Teachers across the district – are closely connected to the department

COMMUNITY CONTEXT & DEMOGRAPHICS

The Early Years Department serves the entire Sunshine Coast.

We acknowledge with respect the unceded and traditional lands and waters of the *Skwxwú7mesh* Úxwumixw and the swiya of the *shíshálh* Nation. We appreciate the rich Indigenous heritage of this place, and are grateful to be able to learn, collaborate and partner with the First Peoples of this place.

Families with young children on the Sunshine Coast experience a range of socioeconomic conditions influenced by the area's housing market, income levels, and employment opportunities.

1. **Living Wage and Costs:** The living wage for a family on the Sunshine Coast was calculated as \$19.79 per hour in 2021, slightly below that of neighboring areas like Metro Vancouver. Monthly expenses for a family of four include significant allocations to housing (30%), childcare (23%), and food (15%), with total monthly costs estimated around \$6,641. Despite this, housing affordability challenges persist due to limited rental stock and high demand, further exacerbated by the prevalence of short-term rentals
2. **Income and Employment:** The region's median income levels are moderate, but many families face employment challenges due to the seasonal nature of tourism and service-sector jobs, which are common in the area. Remote work opportunities have increased, allowing some families greater financial flexibility
3. **Population Trends:** Although the Sunshine Coast has seen population growth in recent years, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas, the projection is for population declines likely due to factors such as immigration policy, access and affordability.
4. **Cultural and Ethnic Diversity:** The Sunshine Coast has historically been less ethnically diverse compared to urban centers like Vancouver. However, the region is gradually becoming more diverse as families from various cultural backgrounds relocate for lifestyle reasons. A significant portion of families are of European descent, with growing representation from Indigenous, South Asian, East Asian, and other communities.

Population Demographics at a Glance:

- 26.6% of families are living in one parent families
- \$60,800 Median after tax income of one parent families
- \$110,00 Median after tax income of two parent families
- 12.9% of children 17 and under living in low-income households

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Building community cohesion is a focus of the Early Years Department. On-going partnerships to support community-wide collaboration strengthens the Sunshine Coast early years sector. Early Years Community Councils that meet regularly include:

Joint Child Care Council Membership includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• School District No. 46 (Chair)• District of Sechelt• District of Gibsons• Sunshine Coast Regional District• Vancouver Coastal Health• Capilano University• Sunshine Coast Child Care Resource & Referral Centre• Sunshine Coast Community Services Society• shíshálh Nation	Sunshine Coast Early Intervention Collaborative Membership includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• School District No. 46<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Principal (Chair)◦ Early Childhood Educators◦ Early Years Navigators• Vancouver Coastal Health<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Public Health Team Lead◦ Public Health Nurses◦ Social Worker◦ Occupational Therapy◦ Speech & Language• Sunshine Coast Community Services Society<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Child Care Resource & Referral Centre• Ministry of Children & Family Development• shíshálh Nation
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Additional Strategies to Build Connections

The district is dedicated to strengthening relationships with child care providers and community child care partners throughout the Sunshine Coast. The School District leads the following Communities of Practices, designed to bring together Community and School District Early Childhood Educators.

Communities of Practice

- In previous years, a grant from the Ministry of Education and Child Care supported relationship building through ongoing inquiry involving members of the district Early Years Team, primary teachers, and community child care providers. Although Ministry

funding is no longer available, SD46 continues to partner with the Sea to Sky and West Vancouver School Districts to bring educators together for meaningful, shared learning opportunities. This year's focus has been **Purposeful, Playful Literacy**, supported through one in-person session followed by three virtual sessions.

- The practice of focusing on a **“Wonder Child”** to support inquiry-based learning was a key component of previous cross-district collaborative work. SD46 has since implemented this approach across all sites through the work of Learning Guides and Principals/Vice Principals. This work emphasizes strategies to document student growth in the core competencies, with thoughtful documentation serving as an essential component of the process.
- A **Literacy and Numeracy Support Community of Practice (LANS CoP)** has been established, with representation from every elementary school. During the current school year, all participants are working with a “Wonder Child,” with a specific focus on supporting and documenting the child’s **Communication Competency**, aligning directly with the goals of the Early Years Growth Plan.

Strengthening Early Years to Kindergarten

- The Strengthening Early Years to Kindergarten grant from the Ministry of Education and Child Care provided funding to support relationship building across the early years system through several district-coordinated strategies. While the grant funding has concluded, these following initiatives continue to be offered:
- **The Early Intervention Collaborative**
This group of early intervention professionals meets three times per year to collaboratively design and refine strategies that strengthen the early years community and improve transitions into kindergarten.
- **Creative Community Connections Series**
This series brings together child care providers and teachers from across the Sunshine Coast three times per year to build relationships and co-create classroom resources. This generative space has been an important strategy for strengthening connections between community-based and school district early years educators. This year, the focus continues to be on using materials to enhance connection and engagement.

Parent Involvement

The Early Years Department is dedicated to engaging not only child care providers but also parents and caregivers. Many of our programs are designed to bring families together in shared learning experiences with their children.

The Continuum of Care (p. 5) outlines SD46's parent engagement programs, which include a variety of initiatives:

- **Prenatal Classes:** These classes connect with families during a time of anticipation and preparation.
- **SPARK! Program:** Developed in SD46 and now adopted by communities across the province, this program supports parents at each stage of their child’s development.
- **StrongStart Programs:** Available at least five days a week in all locations, with additional Saturday sessions offered in Sechelt.

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- Parenting Classes: Offered year-round, these classes engage families in programs such as *Circle of Security*, *Positive Discipline*, and *One Hour Parenting Solutions*.
 - In the spring before children start Kindergarten, families are invited to attend the Welcome to Kindergarten 'KinderSPARK!' program at their local elementary school.
 - Volunteer Readers in Primary Classrooms are coordinated by Community Schools with support/resources
 - This year, the Early Years Department has focused on programming to support primary families with learning & literacy support. Examples include: 'Supporting Your Kindergarten Child' and 'Understanding your Child's Report Card.'

We are committed to building meaningful and reciprocal partnerships with families. Guided by a shared commitment to supporting children, we serve as a resource on early childhood learning and development while valuing families as essential knowledge-holders. By learning with and from families, we celebrate their children, diversity, and cultures.

Our goal is to support families in balancing the demands of work and home life while creating accessible and inclusive opportunities for engagement.

TRENDS

The Sunshine Coast offers a high quality of life and stunning natural beauty. However, rising living costs, housing challenges, and reliance on specific economic sectors can make it difficult for families with young children to achieve financial stability. These challenges highlight the need for policy interventions, such as affordable childcare and housing initiatives, to support local families.

In response, the Joint Child Care Council, chaired by SD46, has facilitated on-going collaboration between the Sunshine Coast Affordable Housing Society and Child Care providers. This partnership has led to the submission of several New Spaces Grants to the government.

The rising cost of food has also impacted food security for many families. StrongStart programs play a vital role in providing food to families with children under school age, operating five or six days a week. Families have expressed deep appreciation for this support. The SD46 Central Kitchen is now supporting food in StrongStart programs on the Sunshine Coast, providing fresh, made from scratch food for families who attend.

Attendance in StrongStart programs across the province is nearly back to pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, many parents who participated in virtual parenting programs during the pandemic continue to engage, with attendance in these offerings remaining strong.

Access to quality, affordable child care is a cornerstone of thriving communities, supporting children's development, family stability, and economic growth. Recognizing this, the 2019 **Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan** served as a critical milestone, addressing the

urgent need for inclusive child care in the region. This plan has since directed the coordinated efforts of local governments, child care providers, and community partners in tackling child care challenges.

Since the release of the 2019 plan, significant strides have been made. The Sunshine Coast has seen an increase in child care spaces, particularly for children aged 3 to 5 years, and improvements in addressing staffing challenges. These advancements highlight the dedication of community partners to making child care a priority and supporting families while building a strong, connected community.

Key federal and provincial initiatives have further bolstered this progress. Programs under the **ChildCareBC Plan**—such as New Spaces funding, the \$10-a-Day initiative, fee reductions, and wage enhancements for Early Childhood Educators—have played a vital role in expanding access to affordable, high-quality child care across the province and enhancing efforts on the Sunshine Coast.

To build on these efforts, the Joint Child Care Council introduced the **2025 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan**. This updated strategy, grounded in stakeholder input and comprehensive data, celebrates the achievements since 2019 while tackling ongoing challenges. It provides a forward-looking framework to address current demands, explore new opportunities, and reaffirm a commitment to an inclusive and sustainable child care system that supports children, families, and the broader Sunshine Coast community.

Since its release in January 2025, the Joint Child Care Council actively shared the plan through numerous engagements. The 2025 plan was presented and adopted by three local governments, and shared with provincial and federal government representatives. Further engagement is planned with the shíshálh Nation and local providers. The current Action Plan strengthens advocacy, supports grant applications for new facilities, and provides a shared roadmap for coordinated child care expansion across the region.

The **2026** Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan provides updated data from parents, child care providers and Vancouver Coastal Health Child Care licensing.

Trends in Child Care

The 2026 Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan highlights the following trends and actions:

- Rural communities like the Sunshine Coast experience unique challenges due to low wages, limited supports, geographic barriers and housing affordability.
 - In response, the Joint Child Care Council co-developed regional priorities focused on provincial funding and policy solutions, which were brought forward by local government officials during the Union of BC Municipalities 2025

Conference (UBCM). Key recommendations included a province-wide, publicly funded wage grid tied to credentialing, ensuring pay at or above a living wage and competitive with similar roles, and the coordinated expansion of the \$10aDay system paired with sustainable operational funding. Combined, these actions would help stabilize the workforce, expand affordable care, and strengthen rural communities' ability to retain qualified educators.

- Child Care Staffing is traditionally challenging in small rural communities. This year, staffing shortages significantly impacted the Infant-Toddler sector. (see 'Stretches' section p. 13).
 - Parents affected by closures became strong advocates, prompting the formation of a multi-sector working group that includes parent representatives, local governments, YMCA BC, School District 46, and the Ministry of Education and Child Care. This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to addressing systemic challenges and ensuring reliable access to quality child care.

Trends in Achievement

Since the pandemic, the district has observed a steady decline in literacy and numeracy outcomes, reflecting challenges in the development of the **Communication** and **Thinking Core Competencies**. This trend, consistent with global patterns, likely stems from the learning disruptions caused by COVID-19 and will be explored further in subsequent sections of this Growth Plan.

Attendance in Early Years Programs was significantly affected during the pandemic, impacting the development of **Personal and Social Core Competencies**. However, participation in programs like StrongStart has now returned to near pre-pandemic levels, offering hope for renewed progress in these areas.

Technology Use

Technology, such as Zoom, played a vital role during the pandemic, providing critical social support for families in need. Evening virtual parenting classes continue to see strong participation, as parents value the convenience of learning from home. This format has the added benefit of engaging more adults in the household and eliminating the need for child care.

Despite these advantages, the impact of technology use on parenting and child development remains a concern. The Early Years Department is actively developing strategies to raise awareness and provide support for mindful technology use.

STRENGTHS

School District No. 46 is a provincial leader in the Early Years. The 'Continuum of Care' reflects more than two decades of strong leadership and innovation. Districts around the province visit the Sunshine Coast to see programs such as SPARK!, KinderSPARK!, Parenting and WonderWheels in action.

The district has created a comprehensive system of supports for Priority Learners. Priority Learners are children with disabilities/diverse abilities, children in care and children with Indigenous ancestry. These strategies are designed to build relationships beginning prenatally, and to create strong connections between priority learners and our early years team. We work in close collaboration with our community partners and the shíshálh Nation in order to design supports collaboratively and in partnership. Families of priority learners benefit from the many tiers of support provided and the years spent in connection with caring staff. Supports for Priority Learners are outlined in under the 'Equity Considerations' section beginning on page 15.

The Early Years team, despite operating in locations spread out across the coast, is a vibrant group of dedicated educators, who are creative and collaborative.

The Early Years department conducted a parent survey, just over a year ago, designed to surface to voices of parents. When asked what they liked about the Early Years Programs, parents responded:

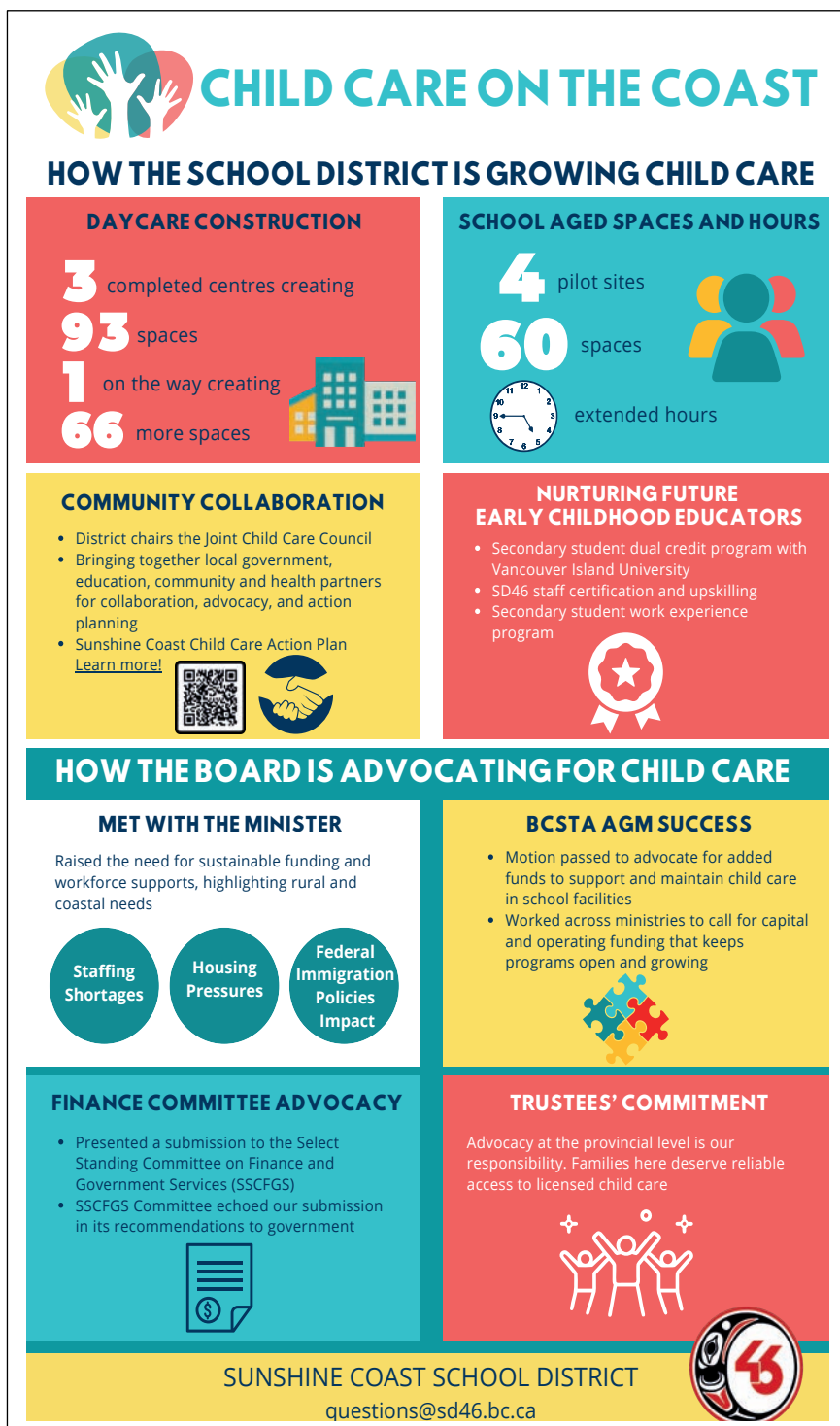
- **Community and Social Interaction:** Many respondents emphasized the importance of the program as a place for children to socialize with others and for parents to connect with other parents. This aspect of community building and social interaction is a recurring theme.
- **Variety and Quality of Activities:** Respondents appreciated the variety of activities and toys available, which are seen as engaging and beneficial for the children's development. Specific mentions of crafts, messy play, and imaginative activities highlight the program's diverse offerings.
- **Positive Environment and Staff:** The welcoming, non-judgmental atmosphere provided by the staff is highly valued. The staff are praised for their kindness, warmth, and ability to create a safe, engaging space for both children and parents.
- **Educational and Developmental Value:** The program is recognized for its educational benefits, providing opportunities for children to learn new skills, explore different interests, and prepare for school. Circle time, storytime, and learning through play were frequently mentioned.

STRETCHES

Child Care

The rising costs of food and child care have significantly affected families with young children. Demand for child care continues to outpace availability, particularly for Infant/Toddler and School Age programs. Access during non-traditional hours and for children with support needs also remains limited. The issues experienced in small, rural communities such as ours are compounding staffing shortages, due to factors that include high housing costs, reduced access to educational programs, low wages and geographical barriers.

School District No. 46 is actively contributing to solutions, as highlighted in the following infographic:



Exploring Options for Sustainable Care

The district is currently exploring possibilities for continuing to offer care after the Ministry Grant support ends in June 2026. SD46 has implemented a number of strategies to support sustainable child care programs, including the following:

- The district has piloted having school budgets cover the cost of hiring an Early Childhood Educator during the school day. This provides extended hours for the Early

Childhood Educator who provides before school child care. These positions with increased hours provided skilled early years educators in primary classrooms during the school day, which benefits the school. These child care positions are also more stable, with little staff turnover, as they offer more hours than a regular support shifts. An pilot agreement is in place with the CUPE union to allow for these extended hours.

- This past year, the EsiKids Child Care software has been implemented across all SD46 child care sites. This has provided streamlined support for the registration, fee collection and administrative aspects of providing child care.
- The district was successfully able to raise fees beyond the 3% maximum, allowing the district to test whether these increased fees would be sustainable from both a family and a district perspective.
- The district also increased the hours of Seamless Day Child Care to offer more than 4 hours of care in all sites. This allows for expanded hours of care for the benefit of working parents. It is also above the threshold required in order to allow families to access the maximum fee reductions provided by the Ministry.
- The district was able to double the capacity of the Cedar Grove Seamless Day site, in response to the demand for child care in this neighbourhood.
- The district continues to advocate for continued ministry funding for the Seamless Day, Just B4 and the Early Learning & Child Care Lead (ELCC) positions, which are all scheduled to end after June 2026.

Early Learning - Under School Age (Prenatal – Age 4) Supports

Family attendance in Early Years Programs, which is voluntary, was significantly impacted by the pandemic. In rural communities, families often face additional barriers to participation, including challenges with affordability, transportation, and access to programs.

In a Parent Survey conducted last year, parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with early years programming. Many indicated they would not change anything about the programs, while others suggested expanding them. Common requests included longer hours, more weekend and holiday programs, and extended hours of operation.

Early Learning - School Age Supports (Kindergarten to Gr. 3)

On June 26, 2025 the Ministry announced significant changes to literacy assessment practices across the province. Moving forward, all students Kindergarten to Grade 3 must be assessed by a teacher using specific criteria. The ministry plans to create their own provincial screening tool, with the release date scheduled for 2027-28. In the meantime, all districts are required to assess students K – 3 using specific measures.

SD46 is actively exploring standardized measures that meet the ministry criteria until the provincially developed tool is available.

VISION FOR GROWTH

The Early Years Team spends significant time collaborating to develop an Early Years plan that aligns with the district Strategic Plan.

Every September, in these collaborative meetings, the team explores and shares the following:

Their stories of SELF:

- Each team member shared their personal story - Why they were called to what they do

The story of US:

- As a team we explore and develop our shared purposes, goals, and vision.

A story of NOW:

- The team uncovers the challenges we face, the choices we must make, and the hope to which we aspire

In this process, the Early Years Team determined our vision, mission and values, as follows:

Vision

A community united, leading with love; empowering curious, passionate learners.

Mission

We believe in:

Nurturing belonging & growth

Inspiring love & respect

Strengthening well-being & agency

Values

BELONGING

LOVE

GROWTH

AGENCY

EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

Supporting Priority Learners:

Equity is at the heart of the Early Years Department's work, driven by the belief that every learner deserves to thrive. Programs are designed using the principles of Universal Design for Learning, ensuring they are inclusive and accessible to all families. Research highlights the profound impact of the early years in shaping lifelong learning trajectories. The Early Years team is passionate about providing equitable access to programs and supports within nurturing communities of care.

In every early learning program, facilitators are committed to inclusive practices and fostering a sense of belonging. Through a grant from the Ministry of Children & Family Development, the early years department has two Family Support Navigators on staff. These navigators are on-site in our StrongStart Family Resource Programs in order to connect with priority learners and their families. They also provide one-to-one counselling and support for families. Early Childhood Educators collaborate with Family Navigators to connect families with community supports and resources. Staff participate in on-going professional learning on strategies to support inclusion throughout the year.

Navigators also provide weekly Parenting Classes throughout the year in order to support families. Early Childhood and Primary educators encourage and support families of priority learners to participate.

The following classes are provided by our Family Support Navigators and Early Learning Teacher, in order to support families through challenges. All of the classes below are provided free of charge, and are offered both virtually and in-person (with childminding) in order to reduce barriers to access. They are also offered in multiple locations and at many times of day.

Child Development Classes:

Parents & caregivers are invited to participate in the following 6-week parenting classes:

- The Circle of Security® Parenting™ Program: Based on decades of research focused on supporting secure relationships and an awareness of children's need for both playful exploration & a secure 'base'.
- Positive Discipline Program: Offering parents long-term parenting skills that will encourage their children to think for themselves, become more responsible and have greater respect for themselves and others.
- One Hour Parenting Solutions: These classes have a specific focus each week, designed to support families in navigating things such as sleep, feeding and behaviour.

S.P.A.R.K.! – 'Supporting Parents Along the Road to Kindergarten'

- Information sessions for parents with children newborn to five

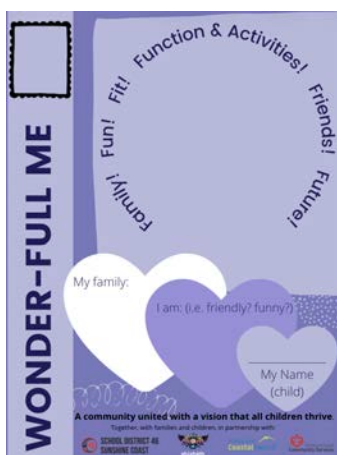
- Parents & caregivers of new babies on the Sunshine Coast can attend a new 90-minute SPARK! session every Fall, Winter & Spring until their child enters Kindergarten.
- Sessions focus on ways to support holistic learning & spark curiosity.
- Parents receive free information & toys at every session.
- Relationships are built with families of priority learners beginning at birth.
- Resources and community supports and referrals for priority learners are provided at every session.

KinderSPARK!

- Welcoming Families to Kindergarten - Families attend a 90-minute session once a week for 4 weeks in the Spring before Kindergarten entry.
- In partnership with Community Schools, programs are held in the Kindergarten classrooms in all of our elementary schools.
- Additional staff are brought in to support priority learners and ensure a positive experience for children & families.

WonderFULL Me

- All families in the KinderSPARK! program complete a WonderFull Me Poster – where families interview their children in order to surface their strengths, their stories and to celebrate their cultures.
- The WonderFULL Me Poster is based on CanChild's 'F Words of Childhood Disability'. Our team collaborated with community partners to design the WonderFULL Me poster, and ensure that all children are provided the opportunity to create a poster and present it to their Kindergarten Teacher. The posters are often displayed in Kindergarten classrooms and are used as springboards for the Kindergarten Conferences with families.
- These posters were originally designed to surface the strengths of priority learners. However, the benefits were so positive that all families are now engaging in this process. By expanding this to be a universal program, it has the additional benefit of normalizing the exercise and recognizes that every child is unique and has strengths and stories to share.
- SD46 is recognized nationally for the development of the WonderFULL Me poster as a tool to support priority learners, and is featured in the National CanChild Training Modules.

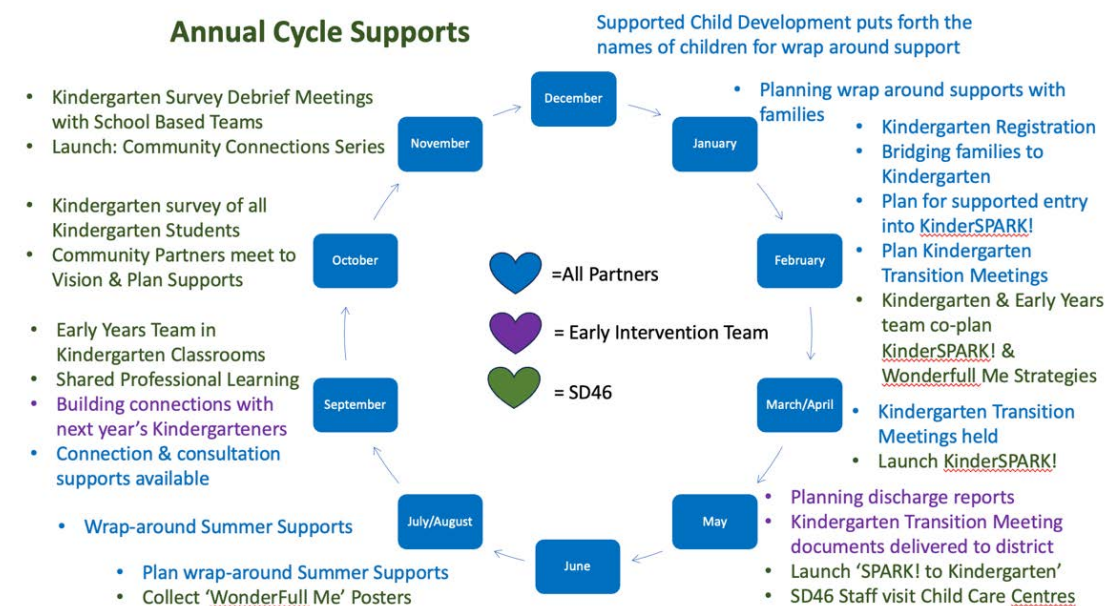


Child Care Programs on the Sunshine Coast work closely with the Sunshine Coast Community Services Supported Child Development Program (SCD). Almost every board operated child care in SD46 has **hired additional staff in order to support priority learners**. Some of our programs have more than 1 additional staff in place. Care Plans are developed with families, educators and Supported Child Development in order to provide strength based and individualized supports for priority learners. Child Care staff participate in professional learning provided in collaboration with Supported Child Development in monthly staff meetings.

The Purposeful, Playful Literacy Initiative supports community and district educators in child care and in schools to work together to support priority learners. Through 4 collaborative sessions, educators participate in inquiry-based research to support promising literacy practices.

The Literacy & Numeracy Support Community of Practice (LANS CoP) gathers primary literacy leads, including a primary teacher and a support teacher from every school in monthly sessions. Educators **adopt a 'Wonder Child' for sustained observation, who is a priority learner** in the classroom. Throughout the year, Educators engage in transformative assessment practices, including pedagogical narrations and other forms of documentation communicate learning and growth of these priority learners. This cross-district initiative is supported through the Ministry of Education & Child Care through a literacy grant.

For the past 7 years, the school district early years team has led collaborative processes to design an **Annual Cycle of Support for Priority Learners**. The community **Early Intervention Collaborative** works together to outline and document strategies that the district and community partners implement in order to ensure that our priority learners have wrap around support.



A developmental lens is also applied, as the collaborative carefully plans and documents the supports for priority children at each age and stage of development, through the careful planning of 'Ages & Stages Supports.'

5. Strengthen 'Ages & Stages' Supports
Goal is for children & families to experience coherent support – from birth through the early years.

Supporting Families at each Age & Stage

Infant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prenatal Collaboration • SPARK! • Circle of Security • Baby Groups/Infant Development Program 	Age 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPARK! • Family Navigators connect with Supported Child Development & EI team to begin connecting with families
Age 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPARK! • Drop-in StrongStart/Parent-Tot • Being Present Parenting 	Age 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPARK! • KinderSPARK! • SPARK! to Kindergarten Programs
Age 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPARK! • Positive Discipline • Work with families to support connections with Child Care Centres & bridge to Family Doctors & the Family Support Institute. 	Age 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported Child Development & Early Years Team in Kindergarten to support Transition • Strategies Fair
	Age 6! 7! 8! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story Workshop • Literacy/Numeracy

The early years team also collaborates with community partners and the shíshálh Nation in order to provide **extra support for priority learners in Kindergarten classrooms during the month of September.** The Early Years Team has often worked with these children and families for many years prior to Kindergarten entry and has deep relationships. Having these familiar educators on-site during the month of September provides comfort to the children and families, and is an efficient and effective way to share effective strategies for supporting priority learners.

Identifying Priority Learners through the Kindergarten Survey Process

- The district has long had a robust process for identifying priority learners as soon as children enter Kindergarten in School District No. 46. Staff work with every Kindergarten student in September and October in order to administer Literacy Numeracy surveys and consider holistic learning & development. Kindergarten and Early Years educators work with district specialists to identify concerns in the following areas: Speech & Language; Attention; Sensory Sensitivity; Fine & Gross Motor Skills, Behaviour, Language & Culture.
- This process gathers both qualitative and quantitative data and engages Kindergarten Teachers, Early Childhood Educators, Principals, Inclusion Support Teachers, Therapy Staff and District Leads in a strategy to identify priority learners and put plans for support in place. A comprehensive system identifies concerns to be monitored or to be submitted for immediate referral. Referrals are entered into the district's CLVR system and the system to documentation and monitor progress is initiated.

- Progress is revisited through School Based teams at each building site throughout the year.
- The district early years team then works with every student again in May in order to assess progress. At this time, the same Literacy/Numeracy Screen is completed once again with every child in Kindergarten in the district, in order to document growth and assess the effectiveness of interventions.

Partnerships with the shíshálh Nation

A strong partnership with the shíshálh Nation is a cornerstone of our commitment to equity through supporting Priority Learners. The early years **Outreach visits the Mem7iman Child Development Centre weekly** to collaborate with educators and children.

Professional Learning partnerships, such as Creative Community Connections support early years educators to learn collaboratively with indigenous partners. Staff from the Nation regularly participate.

Collaboration and joint planning with the shíshálh Nation through the Joint Child Care Council and the Early Years Council has been long-standing and positive. The work of the shíshálh Nation is an inspiration, and the department is honored to learn and plan alongside the Indigenous early years community.

The Mem7iman KinderSPARK! program exemplifies efforts to reduce barriers and provide strengthened supports for priority learners. School District early years and shíshálh Nation staff jointly plan the series. The first session is held at the Mem7iman Child Development Centre, where families and educators come together to collaborate, celebrate, and share food and fun. The second and third sessions are held in Kinnikinnick Elementary school, with busing provided and staff from both the Nation and the district collaborating to support children and families.

STRATEGIC GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The following Core Competencies will guide our Early Years Team:

Communication

Connecting! Engaging! Talking! Reading! Singing! Playing!

Social Awareness & Responsibility

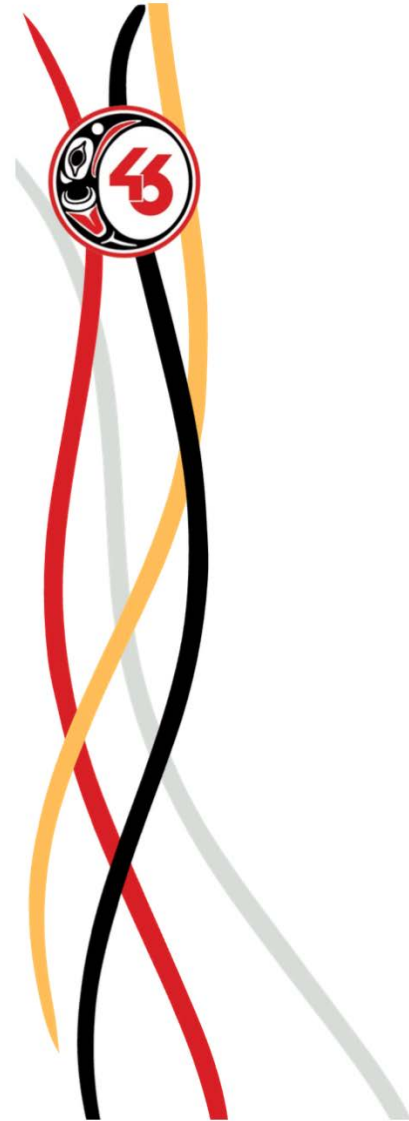
Valuing! Respecting! Nurturing Agency! Being a Good Ancestor

STRANDS

If we are attuned educators who build connections with joy, passion, and respect, we can design an irresistible future for all learners through weaving the following strands:

- **Authentic Relationships**
- **Transformative Assessment**

Then we believe students will authentically connect to and develop their core competencies; thus, nurturing their personal deep engagement, joy, and learning over time.



GROWTH GOAL #1

Core Competency Goal: Communication

Our goal is to increase communication using authentic relationships & transformative assessment to deepen connections & joyful literacy in our early years programs.

Evidence Analysis & Interpretation

See Appendix A for Data

Indirect Evidence

Satellite, Map and Street Data in Appendix A Indicate the following literacy scores have been generally declining since 2019. Research:

- 2023-24 Grade 4 FSA
- SD46 Performance Based Literacy & Numeracy Data - with Indigenous Student Cohorts
- SD46 K – 7 Reading & Writing Performance Based Data (2023)

Priority Learners

Provincial data shows a downward trend in Grade 4 literacy, and we are observing a similar pattern locally. However, students in all populations continue to perform above the provincial average. Over the past five years, results have been variable, with significant fluctuations among resident and Indigenous students. While resident students with designations have shown more stability, they also experienced a decline this past school year. Equity gaps persist between priority learners and all resident students, with a performance discrepancy of approximately 9–16%.

The Importance of the Early Years:

A great deal of evidence outlines the importance of the early years. Evidence gathered from around the world document the importance of the Early Years in providing the foundation for later learning.

Impacts of Technology Use

Data reveals that technology use is extremely high. The high use of technology by both adults and children is likely impacting the Communication competency.

Direct Evidence:

Kindergarten Survey Literacy Skills – The Foundations of Later Literacy

Kindergarten Survey Literacy Data indicates significant and stable growth during the Kindergarten year (Fall to Spring) in literacy. Three years of decline were experienced during the pandemic, with a recent uptick noted for 2024-25.

Attendance

The attendance in early years programs was significantly impacted by the pandemic. Provincially and in our district we are making gains, but there is a need to closely monitor attendance and address barriers.

Rationale

Link between Communication & Literacy:

Literacy research highlights the direct link between literacy and communication. Literacy skills are built on the foundation of oral language, and exposure to back-and-forth conversations builds vocabulary and literacy skills. Playing with language (rhyming, blending, segmenting into syllables, alliteration) builds phonological awareness skills that is one of the highest predictors of later literacy skill development. Shared reading experiences build vocabulary and knowledge of books and concepts about print. Writing is a key strategy for supporting literacy development.

The Importance of the Early Years as Foundational for Literacy:

A great deal of evidence outlines the importance of the early years as providing a critical foundation for future literacy learning. In the first five years of development the brain is especially sensitive to language and vocabulary development in these early years, and is imprinting sounds and rhythms in language that will support future literacy and communication. The rate of vocabulary learning is also critical during the early years, as it sets the trajectory that affects later literacy skills far into the future, and is one of the strongest predictors of later competency in communication. Thus, it is critical to provide opportunities for children to be surrounded by language and literacy rich environments in the early years of human development.

Impacts of Technology Use:

Technology use is extremely high and may also having an impact on the child's developing Communication competency. Parents report high levels of distraction and children are often spending a great deal of time in front of screens instead of engaging in back-and-forth conversations.

Attendance:

The attendance in early years programs was significantly impacted by the pandemic. Since the pandemic, parents are heightened to the spread of contagious disease and numerous families sited this as a barrier in the parent surveys completed last June.

The district is implementing a number of strategies to re-engage families in early years programming and supports.

Priority Learners

A great deal of evidence reveals that the literacy of priority learners is most affected by the factors listed above. It is well documented that children in lower socio-economic households have reduced oral language compared to children with higher economic status. Since oral language is the foundation for later literacy, this has a significant impact on the later literacy success of priority learners. The efforts to provide literacy rich environments will be targeted for our priority learners. Diversity of literacy materials will be made available, and indigenous books will be a focus, to ensure that priority learners see themselves represented and celebrated in our spaces. Efforts to support priority learners will ultimately benefit all learners, since strategies targeted for these children will support the learning of all.

Rationale for Using the Strands: Authentic Relationships & Transformative Assessment

Our goal of increasing the Communication Core Competency will be accomplished through the use of the Authentic Relationships & Transformative Assessment strands.

Through Authentic Relationships we will improve

- Joyful engagement - Attendance in the voluntary programs offered through the Early Years Department. Joyful engagement will keep people coming back.
- The richness of the environments of our youngest learners – capitalizing on the sensitive and critical periods of brain development that occur in the first years of life. This will help to establish positive trajectories to support later literacy and communication competencies.
- The frequency of back-and-forth conversations and oral language. People like to talk with people they enjoy spending time with.
- A reduction in technology use when in the programs. Reduced use of technology with an ‘unplug & play’ philosophy will contribute to richer literacy environments, as families will be more likely to engage in reciprocal conversations.
- The literacy skills of children in the programs. Including: Oral language, vocabulary, phonological Awareness, storytelling, book knowledge, concepts of print, etc.). We will use Authentic Relationships to have fun playing with language, reading and communicating with each other.

Through Transformative Assessment we will improve

- Our ability to educate families about the factors that support the development of Communication Competencies – including the foundational pillars of literacy and the importance of joyful literacy approaches
- Our ability to communicate with families about the negative impact of technology use on reciprocal engagement and the Communication Competency.
- Our ability to understand & communicate student learning – to make joyful learning visible to families and inspire a commitment to building Communication competencies.

- Equitable outcomes for children and families on the Sunshine Coast. If we can communicate the importance of building communication competencies, and inspire through education, we can set positive trajectories for learning, regardless of income, socio-economic status or privilege.

Implementation Plan

Actions: We will improve the Communication competency by supporting:

1. Irresistible environments
 - Warm, caring environments with educators who are deeply connected to families & children. The Purposeful, Playful Literacy Project brings together educators from 3 districts to share examples of the irresistible environments they have created to support playful literacy.
 - Irresistible invitations & provocations in our centres that inspire playful engagement, curiosity & reciprocal conversations
2. Environments that promote reduced use of technology with an 'Unplug & Play' philosophy.
3. Joyful literacy environments & approaches
 - Circle Time Language Play
 - Dialogic Reading Strategies – A research-based strategy for Reading Aloud
 - Invitations that invite Communication (Writing cards, signs, stories, etc.)
 - Indigenous stories will be highlighted throughout the year.
4. Current Assessment & Instruction Practices in Primary Literacy Classrooms - will be supported through the following practices:
 - Primary 'Residencies' will be offered 2 – 3 times a year in every elementary school. The Early Years Teacher will meet with the entire primary team beforehand to review data and co-design the focus of the week long 'Residency.' A follow up meeting will be held to debrief the residency experience with the entire primary team afterwards.
 - Literacy & Numeracy Community of Practice (LANS CoP) - Monthly sessions with a primary teacher and a LANS Support teacher from every elementary school will be held during the school day. The LANS CoP will incorporate the following:
 1. The Ministry's Foundational Literacy Progressions are examined at every session and provide the framework of focus over the year.
 2. The *Reach All Readers* book has been provided for all participants and provides the an in-depth resource to complement the 'Foundations'.
 3. A 'Wonder Child' Inquiry approach will be used at each session to provide street data, classroom based examples and documentation of growth.
 - Kindergarten Survey Process – will be used to identify Priority Learners early in the year. The Kindergarten Survey assessment had a phonemic awareness

component added and Kindergarten Teachers were trained to conduct the assessments. Strategies to monitor progress are implemented at the school level. District wide data collection of all Kindergarten students progress in literacy will again take place in May/June.

- Standardized Literacy Assessment Tools – will be explored this year in preparation for K – 3 implementations in all primary classrooms in 2026-27.
- Formative Assessment Tools (Early Literacy Profile - 'ELP') - will be piloted in Primary Classrooms across the district. Priority Learners will be assessed more frequently using the ELP, with interventions embedded through this assessment tool implemented immediately. Progress of priority learners will be closely monitored. The software for the ELP assessment was launched in January 2025 and has been renewed for another year in January 2026.
- Competency-Based Rubrics for Assessment & Reporting – SD46 has developed competency-based rubrics for all subject areas, including English Language Arts, by releasing teachers to collaborate to develop these rubrics with teachers, for teachers. These rubrics provide language for all levels of proficiency, and incorporate language for communicating growth with families. Multiple in-services have been provided for all teachers, supported by teacher leads in each school. Early in the year in-services focused on using the rubrics for competency-based assessment & reporting, with a mid-year focus on incorporating rubrics into the planning process.

Timeline:

We will implement the above strategies with the following approaches & timelines:

Monthly Staff Meetings

- Every Staff Meeting will have a focus on:
 - Communication Competency– with evidence-based communication & literacy strategies shared in every meeting.
 - Documentation – of ways to use Transformative Assessment to make learning visible, highlight irresistible literacy provocations/strategies and encourage communication and celebration of learning. Staff Sign Up has been distributed.
 - Priority Learners – with documentation supporting the growth of Indigenous and other priority learners.

Focus of Monthly Staff Meeting, Professional Learning & Development:

- September: shíshálh Nation Circle Time Songs & Stories; Supporting Kindergarten Teachers to do Literacy Assessments; Literacy & Numeracy Community of Practice (LANS CoP) launched

- October: Dialogic Literacy Professional Development; Metis Nation Professional Development Day; LANS CoP #2
- November: Purposeful, Playful Literacy Session 1; LANS CoP #3; Dive into Decodables Session 1; All staff create Professional Learning Plans– with concrete actions and strategies they will learn and implement.
- January: Professional Development Day – Literacy Deep Dive with 4 facilitators brought in to support evidence-based literacy practices; Plan Early Years Fair – literacy focus; Review Professional Learning Plans (in light of PD Day learning); Purposeful, Playful Literacy Session 2; LANS CoP #4
- February: Plan KinderSPARK! – to get high attendance, encourage reciprocal engagement & literacy rich environments. All staff to present documentation of a student's growth in their Communication/Social Awareness competencies. Plan Early Years Fair (based on an anchor book); Playful Literacy Session 3; LANS CoP #5
- March: Plan Mem7iman shíshálh Nation KinderSPARK!;
- April: Plan Kindergarten Survey Schedule; Purposeful, Playful Literacy Session 4
- May: Plan Parent Survey. Plan Summer StrongStart & WonderWheels Bus summer schedule. Review FESL Data with Staff.
- June: Data review of Kindergarten Survey; Plan September support in Kindergarten;
- July & August: First Day PD Day activity; Kindergarten Gradual Entry Professional Development afternoon, First Week Staff Meeting Content.

Early Years Team Weekly Bulletins will highlight:

- 3 main educational sections, including 1 Communication Competency section where evidence-based literacy strategies are highlighted for all staff.
- Upcoming Professional Development opportunities (ie Learning in the Primary Years, Creative Community Connections, etc.)
- Upcoming Early Years Programming – to encourage staff to register parents in SPARK!, Parenting Classes, etc.
- Resources – links to resources (i.e. Learning in the Primary Years document, Recorded videos of sessions, etc.)

Monthly Primary Teacher Support

Primary Teachers will receive instructional & assessment support through:

- Monthly Community of Practice sessions
- Residency Weeks (2 – 3 sessions in every elementary)
- Assessments will be piloted (ELP; Standardized)
- Competency-Based Assessment & Reporting

Resources Required:

The resources required include funding to support the early years programs outlined in the 'Continuum of Care' (see p. 5)

The resources required include funding to support the following Professional Learning Sessions:

- Early Learning Profile (ELP) Assessment
- Primary Residency Support
- Literacy & Numeracy Community of Practice

Human resources will be required to facilitate these sessions

- Colleen Hourigan & Michelle Smart (retired Literacy Committee Members) and the Early Learning Teacher will facilitate these sessions

Financial Resources

- Financial resources will be required to purchase the handouts, resources and food provided during sessions listed above.

Materials:

- Decodable Books for all Elementary Schools – 2 sets (including Indigenous)
- Early Learning Profile (ELP) - Purchase of the ELP & ESGI
- Imagination Library Books will be leveraged
- Book Study Books 'Reach All Readers'

Success Indicators:

- Staff Feedback is obtained after every professional learning session & will be used to determine next steps in teaching.
- Transformative Assessment Documentation will provide evidence of student growth. This will include video, photo and written documentation. Sharing in monthly staff meetings.

Metrics used to determine development of the Communication Competency include:

- Kindergarten Survey Results (September & June) (students)

- Early Learning Profile Pilot (ELP) will provide concrete measures of growth throughout the year (students)
- Grade 4 FSA Results will improve; for All Students & Priority Learners (students)
- Staff growth will be measured at every Residency and LANS Community of Practice (self-assessment)
- Staff Engagement in
 - Primary Residency
 - LANS CoP
 - Competency-Based Assessments & Reporting Sessions
- Parent Surveys – CHEQ
- Attendance Data (Parents & children) will also serve as a measure of growth for Early Years Programs and will be reviewed every 4 months (in pre-scheduled meetings)

Reflection and Evaluation of the Plan: Seasonal Round

Indicators of success will be reviewed throughout the year.

- Fall Kindergarten Survey – reviewed in November
- Spring Kindergarten Survey – reviewed in June
- Early Learning Profile – will be used to assess growth of priority learners (schedule varies depending on school literacy support structure)
- The focus of Residency Sessions will be based on data driven decision making with the primary teams at each school.
- Feedback from all professional learning will be reviewed immediately after sessions and before subsequent sessions are designed, in order to inform planning.

GROWTH GOAL #2

Core Competency Goal: Social Awareness & Responsibility

Our goal is to increase Social Awareness & Responsibility using authentic relationships & transformative assessment to build relationships, celebrate diversity & agency, and act as good ancestors.

Evidence Analysis & Interpretation

See Appendix B for Data

Indirect Evidence

Satellite, Map and Street Data in Appendix B Indicate the following:

Harvard Study of Adult Development – which is the longest longitudinal study ever conducted. It has followed the lives of two generations of individuals from the same families for more than eighty years.

The importance of social connectedness is clearly documented in the research. These findings are documented in the book *The Good Life*. This research outlines the impact that social connection has in ensuring better physical, mental, emotional and social health.

In addition, Karl Pillemer's research consistently shows that **social connection is central to well-being and healthy aging**. Drawing especially from the Cornell Legacy Project, he found that older adults overwhelmingly identify **close relationships—with family, friends, and community—as the most important factor in a meaningful and satisfying life**, outweighing wealth, status, or achievements. His findings emphasize that maintaining strong social ties protects against loneliness, supports mental and emotional health, and helps individuals cope with loss and adversity in later life. Older adults repeatedly advise investing time and effort in relationships early and throughout life, noting that social connection becomes even more vital as people age and face increased vulnerability.

Increase in Loneliness:

The Harvard Study of Adult Development, the longest longitudinal study of adult life (started in 1938 and still ongoing), provides strong evidence that loneliness and lack of close relationships are bad for our health:

Key Evidence from the Harvard Study

1. Loneliness is “toxic” and harms health

Researchers from the study have found that people who are more isolated than they want to be experience worse physical health, earlier health decline, and shorter lives compared with those who are socially connected. In other words, loneliness isn't just unpleasant — it is linked to measurable declines in well-being and longevity.

2. Social connection predicts long, healthy lives

The study repeatedly shows that good relationships — not wealth, fame, or genes — are among the strongest predictors of both physical and mental health later in life. Those who had supportive relationships in midlife were healthier and lived longer than those without meaningful connections.

3. Loneliness and health decline go hand-in-hand

Director of the study Dr. Robert Waldinger has explicitly stated that:

“Social connections are really good for us ... and loneliness kills.”

People who are disconnected tend to report earlier declines in both health and brain functioning, and they often die younger than socially engaged peers.

Canadian Research through Statistics Canada indicates that loneliness is an important issue because without social connections and supports, one's health and overall well-being can suffer.

In August and September 2021, close to half (49%) of those who said that they always or often felt lonely reported that their mental health was either fair or poor. In comparison, among those who said that they rarely or never feel lonely, a much smaller share (7%) reported fair or poor mental health.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211124/dq211124e-eng.htm>

Research indicates that loneliness has significantly increased in recent years, especially among younger populations. A 2024 poll by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) found that 30% of U.S. adults reported feeling lonely at least once a week, with 10% experiencing loneliness daily. Young adults (18-34) were particularly affected, with many reporting frequent feelings of disconnection. This represents a persistent issue since the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated social isolation for many individuals. While levels of loneliness for some groups, like older adults, have returned to pre-pandemic levels, they remain high overall.

The issue has been labeled a "public health epidemic" by U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, who emphasized its severe impact on mental and physical health. Single adults, younger individuals, and those lacking close social networks are disproportionately affected. Factors like reliance on technology and changes in social habits contribute to both mitigating and sometimes worsening feelings of loneliness.

Efforts to reduce loneliness focus on fostering community connections, encouraging meaningful social interactions, and addressing barriers to mental health care. These interventions are critical as loneliness has profound effects on well-being and health outcomes.

<https://www.psychiatry.org/News-room/News-Releases/New-APA-Poll-One-in-Three-Americans-Feels-Lonely-E>

<https://www.psypost.org/massive-meta-analysis-finds-loneliness-has-increased-in-emerging-adults-in-the-last-43-years/>

Impact of Technology on Social Connection

1. Screen Time & Parent–Child Talk (12–36 months)

Cohort study showing that more screen exposure is linked with fewer conversational turns, adult words, and child vocalizations:

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10913002/> — *Screen Time and Parent-Child Talk When Children Are Aged 12 to 36 Months* (Mary E. Brushe et al., JAMA Pediatrics, longitudinal cohort)

This version on PubMed Central is the complete PDF of the peer-reviewed study that directly measures language interaction in young children.

Parental Technology Use (“Technoference”) Systematic Review & Meta-Analysis

This JAMA Pediatrics paper examines how parent device use in children’s presence links with cognitive, socioemotional, and prosocial outcomes:

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2833506> — *Parental Technology Use in a Child’s Presence and Early Childhood Development*

Commentary on Technoference

Editorial framing the concept and its importance:

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2833508> — *Parental Technoference — Small Effects, Big Questions* (context for the meta-analysis)

Encouraging 'unplug & play' habits in early childhood supports mental health, fosters social connections, and facilitates the development of friendships. These relationships provide essential social support, which helps cultivate the core competency of Social Awareness and Responsibility in both parents and children participating in early years programs.

2. Loneliness

Recent research indicates that loneliness has become a significant public health concern in Canada, with substantial portions of the population—particularly young adults—reporting frequent feelings of loneliness, and rates increasing during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies show that pandemic-related social disruptions and broader societal trends in social connection have contributed to more frequent and severe loneliness, which is associated with poorer mental health and well-being. Efforts by national agencies and researchers are now focused on measuring, understanding, and addressing these trends through data, policy frameworks, and targeted interventions.

Statistics Canada — Canadian Social Survey: Loneliness in Canada — official survey data on loneliness prevalence and demographics:

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211124/dq211124e-eng.pdf>

Contributing to Community & Environmental Initiatives

Research shows that contributing to community and environmental initiatives can have a significant positive impact on well-being. Participating in activities such as community

gardening, environmental conservation, and other collective efforts enhances social connection, reduces stress, and fosters a sense of accomplishment and purpose.

Involvement in environmental enhancement projects, such as conservation or restoration efforts, has been shown to provide psychological benefits, including reduced stress and improved emotional health. A review by Cochrane identified themes like personal achievement, strengthened social identity, and psychological restoration among participants in conservation activities

https://www.cochrane.org/CD010351/PUBHLTH_participation-environmental-enhancement-and-conservation-activities-health-and-well-being-adults

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10449002/>

Insights further shed light on how the family unit and larger community are able to create collective unity and foster each member's responsibility in community service provision that promotes community integration.

Direct Evidence:

Attendance - The attendance in early years programs was significantly impacted by the pandemic. Provincially and in our school district we are making gains, but there is a need to closely monitor attendance and address barriers. StrongStart attendance provincially and in our district is not yet at pre-pandemic levels, although it is on an upward trajectory.

Child Care Access Rates

Access to child care programs is in need of improvement. Although gains have been made in increasing access to the number of child care spaces for children ages 3 – 5, the community is in need of increased child care spaces for infant/toddlers and for school-age children. The Child Care Action Plan outlines recommendations to improve Child Care, including:

- Increasing Access
- Strengthening Inclusion
- Improving Affordability
- Enhancing Quality
- Deepen Collaboration

Creative Community Connections Attendance

The Creative Community Connections is designed to build a sense of community connection and coherence. Early years programs have historically been fragmented in the province of BC and we are hoping to build connection with community child care centres by hosting sessions throughout the year. In these sessions we will get to know each other, engage in shared learning and develop shared language and pedagogy. We will monitor attendance in these sessions to monitor progress.

Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (CHEQ)

The Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (CHEQ) is a comprehensive tool designed to capture key insights into the early experiences of children before they enter kindergarten. Administered to families as part of the kindergarten registration process, the CHEQ collects data on various aspects of children's lives, including their health, well-being, and participation in early learning programs, such as licensed child care. On the Sunshine Coast, CHEQ data provides valuable information on child care access and utilization, helping to identify trends and gaps in care for children aged birth to 5 years. In 2025, 46 parents provided information about their children's experience in child care (see Figure 3). As was the case in 2024, responses show that children beginning Kindergarten in 2025 were significantly more likely to have been in a child care setting during their preschool years than when they were a toddler. Preschool aged children were also more likely to have attended a licensed child care centre or preschool, while parents were more likely to rely on other forms of child care when the child was a toddler. Of those who completed the CHEQ, 86% reported having challenges accessing early learning and child care arrangements, with availability of spaces, being waitlisted and cost being the most frequently cited hurdles.

Early Years Team Parent Survey – Conducted May/June 2024: 84 Parent Responses

The parent survey administered last June indicated that parents appreciate the community and social interactions in our StrongStart programs. 72% of parents have moved to the Coast within the last 10 years. Parents are very grateful for the support of the StrongStart program. They see the program as a place for children and adults to socialize and make connections. They also appreciated the variety of activities and materials, the positive environment and the staff.

For improvements parents expressed that they would like more StrongStart. They would like StrongStart available over extended hours, weekend and holidays. A few parents noted that they would like a stricter illness policy and more frequent cleaning. Social anxiety was also noted by one parent as a barrier.

Rationale

The Core Competency of Social Awareness & Responsibility focuses on Building Relationships.

In the Early Years we will focus on building relationships with:

1. Children and parents/caregivers
2. Community Partners & Educators (ECEs, Primary Teachers): To collaborate in a shared vision of care

Building Relationships with Children & Parents is important because research indicates that **loneliness** and **technology use are increasing**, both of which have significant negative impacts on health and well-being. Participating in early years programs helps children & parents build relationships with staff and other participants. These friendships will reduce feelings of loneliness and increase a sense of social support and connectedness.

Addressing the Needs of Priority Learners

Vulnerable children and families are least likely to have the means to access early years programs and to build positive relationships when attending. Transportation barriers, economic barriers and social judgement can all affect the attendance of priority learners in programs offered for children newborn to five. As a result, the district has made significant efforts to provide programming in all of our neighbourhoods in order to provide access within walking distance.

The recent creation of an **Early Years Centre** in the neighbourhood of Sechelt was a result of data documenting the high vulnerability in this area. This centre is located on bus routes, and has multiple programs and resources offered under one roof. Family Navigators are on-site in both Gibsons and Sechelt Family Resource programs, and provide counselling and referrals for priority learners. In order to build relationships with priority children and families and, indeed, with all families, we will concentrate on the strand of Authentic Relationships. Creative genuine connections will support all children and families in the program. Helping all families value each other and building a community of care and collaboration through authentic relationships will support all learners to thrive.

Building Relationships with **Community Partners** is important in order to have a sense of community connectedness, trust and shared purpose in order to best serve children and families. Creating opportunities to deepen relationships with community child care partners and providers will help us create a more united, cohesive community, which will work together to serve children. We will use Compassionate Systems Leadership tools and training to support our work.

Building authentic relationships with the staff, community partners and with other children and families will result in a deepening of the Core Competency of Social Awareness & Responsibility. In order to have authentic relationships we will focus on celebrating diversity and agency. This is critical since people must feel safe to be themselves and feel celebrated if deep relationships and social connectedness is to form. We will also promote social responsibility by using sustainability and 'being a good ancestor' to guide our decision making.

We will use the strand of Transformative Assessment to document and communicate the deepening social competencies we will observe.

Implementation Plan

Actions: We will improve the Social Awareness & Responsibility competency through:

- Strategies to strengthen relationships with between children and parents/caregivers and staff.
 - We will design irresistible provocations and invitations to support curiosity, conversation and engagement.
 - We will build on the interests of children and families whenever possible, using 'emergent curriculum' and by inviting their contributions.
 - We will use Positive Discipline & Compassionate Systems Leadership Tools to build empathy and connectedness between children & families. Priority learners

-
- who often struggle more with challenging behaviour and social isolation will likely benefit the most from this strategy.
- We will strengthen the visibility of our cleaning in the StrongStart program, since fear of contagious disease can be a barrier to participation.
 - Strategies to increase access to quality, affordable, inclusive and accessible child care. Priority learners are often most affected by child care centres with weak inclusion policies, which means that they are often not welcome to attend. Child Care staff throughout the community and district will be provided with professional learning in the area of inclusion.
 - We will collaborate with the Joint Child Care Council to address the identified needs in child care on the Sunshine Coast in the following areas:
 - Increasing Access
 - Strengthening Inclusion
 - Improving Affordability
 - Enhancing Quality
 - Deepen Collaboration
 - Strategies to strengthen relationships between school district staff and community partners and child care providers to contribute to a shared vision of care.
 - We will invite partners to co-plan community engagement and supports through the Early Intervention Collaborative, and the Joint Child Care Council. The Joint Child Care Council had a strong engagement focus last year, and presented the Child Care Action Plan to
 - The District of Sechelt
 - The Town of Gibsons
 - The Sunshine Coast Regional District
 - SD46 Board of Education
 - MLA – Randene Neill
 - MP – Patrick Weiler
 - Sunshine Coast Community Services Society Board
 - Sunshine Coast Thriving Communities
 - We will invite community child care providers to engage with school district early years and school age educators through the Creative Community Connections professional learning series.
 - We will partner early years district staff up with community child care centres in order to form connections and deepen relationships. On professional Development days and a few times throughout the year staff will visit child cares to work together or to distribute fliers about upcoming professional learning opportunities for staff and for parents.
 - Strategies to celebrate diversity and agency. People must feel safe to be themselves and feel celebrated if deep relationships and social connectedness is to form. We will highlight the interests, heritage & cultures of our families in positive ways.
 - Strategies to celebrate Indigenous Culture & sustainable community contributions

- We will use the book and phrase “Be A Good Ancestor” to highlight that our decision making is grounded in community contribution and sustainability.
- We will deepen our learning around Indigenous cultures and people.
- We will use Compassionate Systems Leadership tools and training to support our work in the areas above.

Timeline:

We will implement the above strategies with the following approaches & timelines:

Staff Meetings:

- Social Awareness & Responsibility (Building Relationships) Competency– with evidence-based strategies shared in every meeting. *The Good Life* book will be used as a book study throughout the year.
- Documentation – of ways to use Transformative Assessment to make Social Awareness & Responsibility learning visible, highlight building relationships and celebration of diversity. Staff Sign Up has been distributed.
- Priority Learners – with documentation supporting the growth of Indigenous and other priority learners.
- Attendance data will be reviewed 3 times a year.

Focus of Monthly Staff Meeting, Professional Learning & Development:

- September: Plan Truth & Reconciliation Orange Shirt Day – Indigenous Literature review and story baskets (Engaging Early Years Staff in Professional Learning)
- October: Professional Development Day on Dialogic Literacy (this strategy focuses on building relationships and engagement while reading with young children) Professional Learning for ECE Staff.
- November: Design Creative Community Connections – focus on inviting and engaging with community child care centres. (ECE staff & Community Child Care Providers). Professional Development Day – Metis Nation Social Awareness & Responsibility
- December: Connect with Child Care through the Child Care Provider Survey.
- January: Focus on literacy & engagement; Host an Early Intervention Collaborative Meeting (Family Navigators & Early Intervention Community Partners)
- Host a Child Care Engagement Meeting -
- February: Work with Community Schools to plan KinderSPARK! Attend Creative Connections Session.
- March: Host Early Years Fair – with all Early Years Staff – and inviting Kindergarten Teachers, Community Partners
- April: All Early Years Staff ECEs facilitate KinderSPARK!
- May: Partners with Mem7iman Shíshálh nation to host KinderSPARK!

-
- June: Plan Year End Celebration. Invite partners. Data review of Parent Survey. Plan September support in Kindergarten rooms;
 - July & August: Implement WonderWheels and Summer StrongStart support.
 - September: First Day PD Day activity; Kindergarten Gradual Entry Professional Development afternoon, First Week Staff Meeting Content will focus on building relationships and supporting the Social Awareness & Responsibility focus.

Early Years Team Weekly Bulletins will highlight:

- 3 main educational sections, including a Social Awareness & Responsibility section where evidence-based strategies are highlighted for all staff.
- Upcoming Professional Development opportunities (ie Learning in the Primary Years, Creative Community Connections, etc.)
- Upcoming Early Years Programming – to encourage staff to register parents in SPARK!, Parenting Classes, etc.
- Resources – links to resources (i.e. Learning in the Primary Years document, Recorded videos of sessions, etc.)

Joint Child Care Council

- Regular Meetings throughout the year to move forward with the Actions described in the Child Care Action Plan

Resources Required:

The resources required include funding to support the early years programs outlined in the 'Continuum of Care' (see p. 5)

The resources required include funding to support the following Professional Learning Sessions between community partners:

- Purposeful Playful Literacy – Collaboration with 3 districts
- Creative Community Connections
- Early Intervention Collaborative
- Early Years Fair
- Child Care Professional Development – through Early Learning & Child Care Community of Practice

Human resources will be required to facilitate these sessions

- The Early Years Team will facilitate most of this learning between children & families.

- The Early Years Family Support Navigators will engage in the partnership building sessions.
- The District Principal will coordinate Joint Child Care Council, and collaborate with partners to reach goals

Financial Resources

- Financial resources will be required to support the early years programs outlined in the 'Continuum of Care' (see p. 5) and the Professional Learning Sessions between community partners, including food. The district currently receives grants to support this work.

Materials:

- For Creative Connections, KinderSPARK!, SPARK!, etc.

Success Indicators:

- Attendance in programs will be monitored, as a measure of engagement
- Child Care – increase in the number of spaces
- Feedback is obtained after every collaborative professional learning session & will be used to determine next steps in teaching.
- Transformative Assessment documentation will provide evidence of child and adult engagement. This will include video, photo and written documentation. Sharing in monthly staff meetings.

Metrics used to determine development of this core competency include:

- Attendance Data (Parents & children) will also serve as a measure of growth for Early Years Programs
 - Average Attendance in StrongStart by children
 - Number of visits in StrongStart by children
 - Attendance in Parenting Classes by adults
- Child Care – increased number of child care spaces.
- Early Years Team Parent Survey
 - To ask questions about what you like about the StrongStart program? And what you would change – watching for specific indicators of social anxiety barriers and health & hygiene concerns.
 - Equity and Belonging Questions will be added – to measure whether parents feel welcome and that their culture is celebrated in the programs.

Reflection and Evaluation of the Plan: Seasonal Round

Indicators of success will be reviewed throughout the year.

- Attendance Data will and will be reviewed every 3 months (in pre-scheduled meetings)
- Joint Child Care Council has developed a Child Care Action Plan to be updated annually.
- CHEQ data to be reviewed annually
- Early Years Team Parent Survey – data will be reviewed in every 2 years
- Feedback from all professional learning sessions will be reviewed immediately before subsequent sessions are designed, in order to inform planning.

ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION PLAN

To communicate the Growth Plan to the Early Years Community we will use a number of strategies

- The Early Years Team will develop posters with 'Taglines' to engage families that will be made into posters and distributed to all centres (1 per month). These will be used as springboards for discussion in our daily Circles with families. This strategy will engage staff, families and community partners.
- At every staff meeting we will review Transformative Assessment through documentation created by staff, and include other Evidence of Growth as topics of discussion and reflection.
- Staff will notice, name and nurture the Core Competencies for children and families, in order to highlight growth.
- Staff will create Personal Professional Growth Plans – to document their self-reflection and intentional activities for growth in our 2 Competencies of focus.
- Staff bulletins will highlight strategies for every competency each week



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

The Professional Learning & Professional Development focus can be found as follows:

- Communication Competency: P. 27
- Social Awareness & Responsibility Competency: P. 38

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

Budgets for Early Years Support are provided through the following Ministry of Education & Child Care Funding Sources:

- StrongStart
- Ready, Set, Learn
- Literacy Professional Learning Grants
- Just B4 Grants
- Seamless Day Grants
- Early Learning & Child Care Lead Grant

This is the last year that we will receive funding for the last 4 initiatives. We are working on finding sustainable ways to continue to provide supports.

CONCLUSION

In closing, this Early Years Department Growth Plan highlights the strands of Authentic Relationships and Transformative Assessment as vital drivers of growth in the Communication and Social Awareness & Responsibility Core Competencies. Through these efforts, we move closer to realizing our vision:

“A community united, leading with love; empowering curious, passionate learners.”

We are committed to strengthening the bonds between children, families, and staff, celebrating diverse voices, and centering the rich cultures within our community. These relationships foster trust and provide the foundation for a shared vision of equity and agency—a vision that inspires us to move forward together.

On the Sunshine Coast, we are honored to support families who treasure the natural beauty and close-knit spirit of this rural community, even as they navigate challenges such as affordable housing and access to child care. Their unwavering dedication to their children motivates us to create opportunities that honor and amplify their resilience.

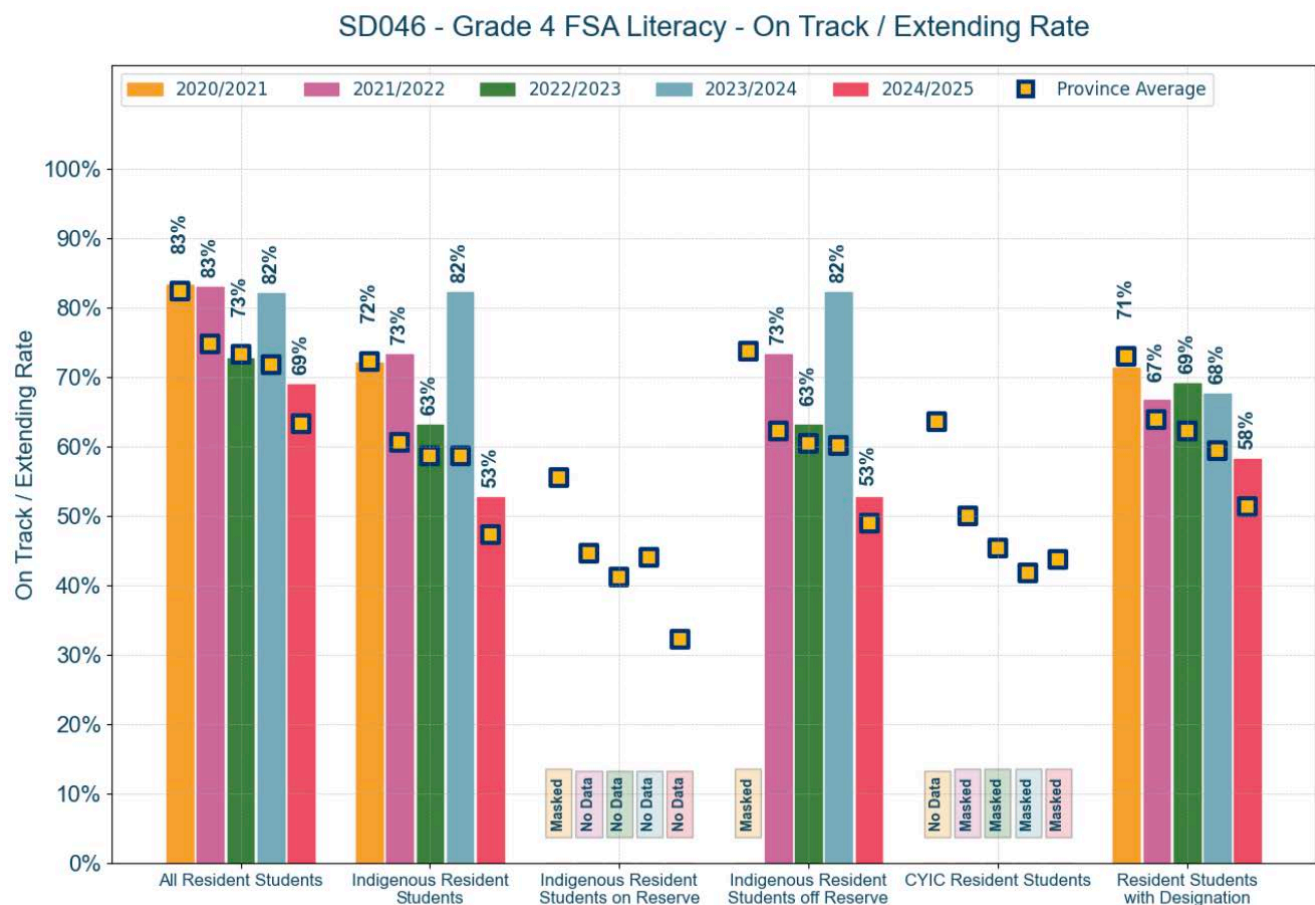
The Early Years Department’s pursuit of transformative education aims to empower educators to embrace innovative practices such as learning through documentation, conversation, and observation. These practices will illuminate the boundless potential of our children and reflect our collective aspirations for their future.

Together, we envision a community united by love and driven by the promise of curiosity and passion. As we create new child care spaces, nurture meaningful connections, and celebrate each child's unique journey, we commit to building irresistible todays and tomorrows. United by this vision, we paddle forward—stronger together—reaching new horizons for the children and families we serve.

Appendix A – Communication Core Competency

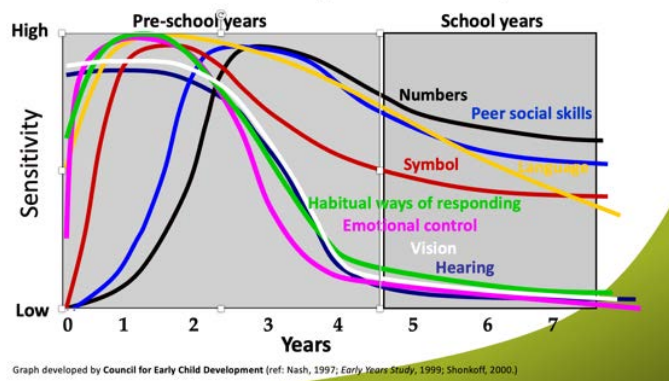
Literacy Data:

Satellite Data

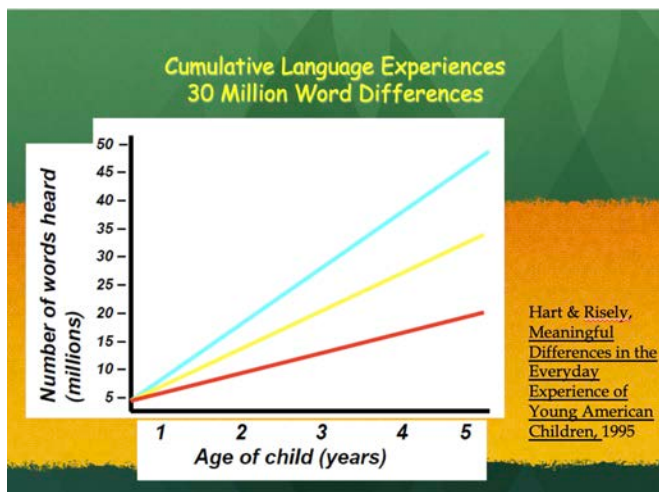


Provincial data shows a downward trend in Grade 4 literacy, and we are observing a similar pattern locally. However, students in all populations continue to perform above the provincial average. Over the past five years, results have been variable, with significant fluctuations among resident and Indigenous students. While resident students with designations have shown more stability, they also experienced a decline this past school year. Equity gaps persist between priority learners and all resident students, with a performance discrepancy of approximately 9–16%.

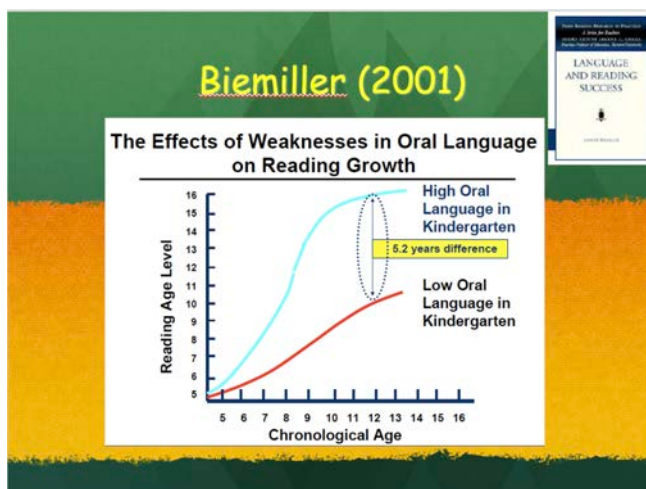
Sensitive Periods in Early Brain Development



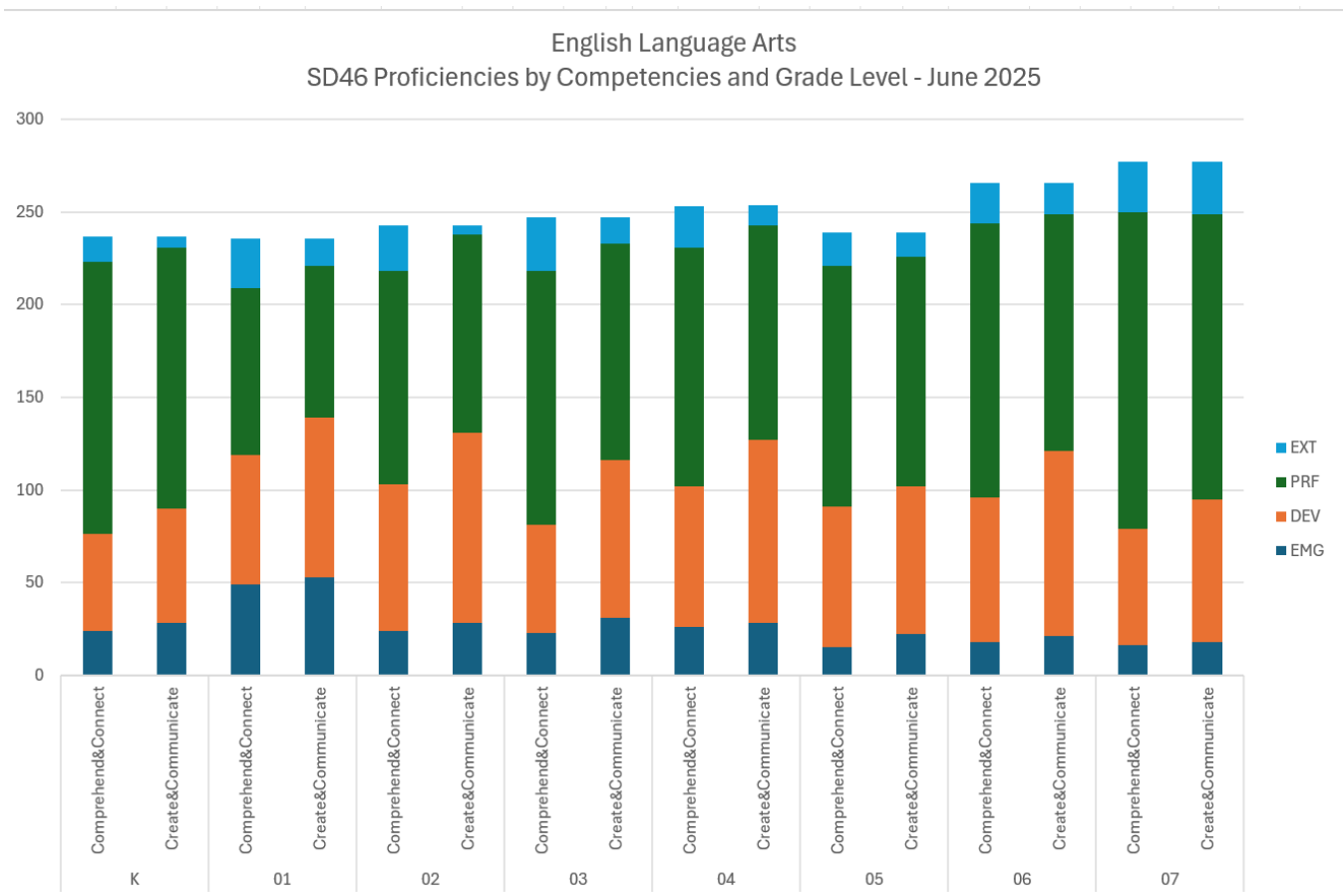
The Early Years Make a Difference: Trajectories of Vocabulary Growth



The Long Reach of the Early Years: How Early Vocabulary Growth Affects Later Literacy Learning

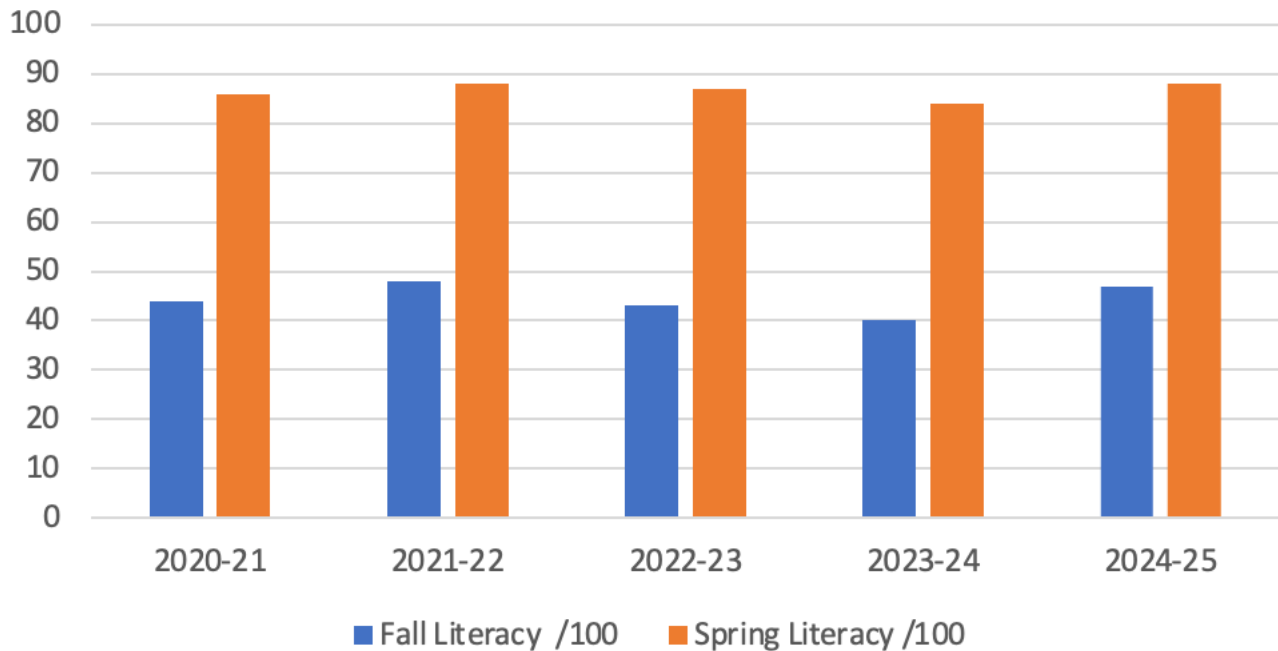


Map Data



District data from June 2025 indicate that, across both curricular competency areas (Comprehend & Connect and Create & Communicate), Grade 1 has the highest proportion of students in the Emerging and Developing categories. This aligns with Grade 1 being a pivotal year for reading development, during which students are introduced to many new literacy skills and instructional demands are particularly high. The data further suggest that student proficiency generally increases across subsequent grades, indicating developmental growth as students mature and gain experience in English Language Arts.

Kindergarten Survey Literacy Results



Literacy Measures:

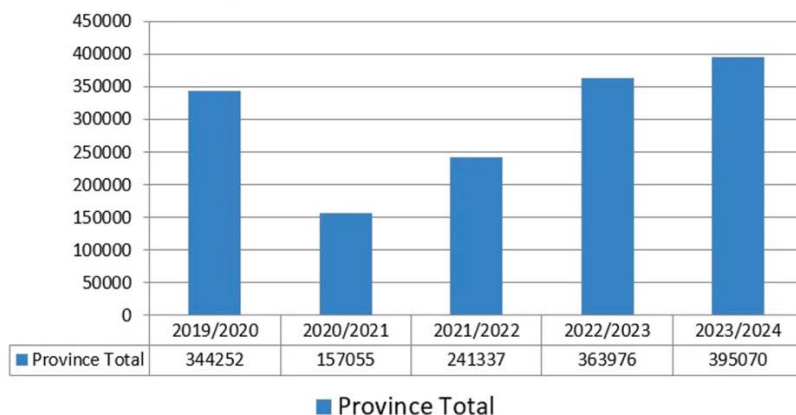
- alphabetic principle
(alphabet names & sounds)
- phonological awareness
(rhyming, initial sounds)
- simple writing skills.

Kindergarten Survey Literacy Data indicates significant and stable growth during the Kindergarten year (Fall to Spring) in literacy. Three years of decline were experienced during the pandemic, with a recent uptick noted for 2024-25.

Appendix B – Social Awareness & Responsibility Core Competency

Satellite Data

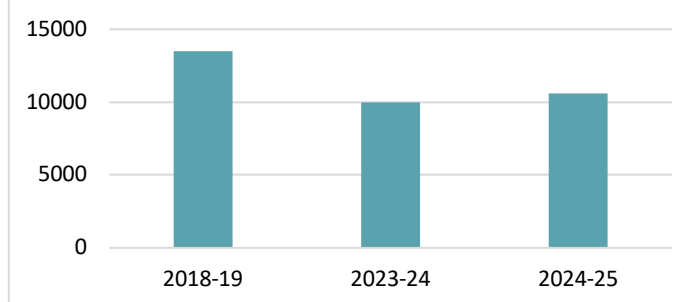
Strong Start Attendance Over Time



Provincial data indicates that StrongStart attendance is still not at pre-pandemic levels, but is trending upwards.

Map Data

Total Visits to StrongStart by Children in SD46

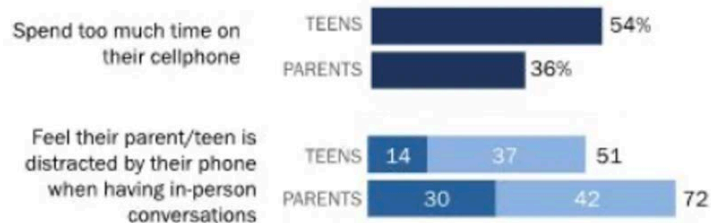


SD46 data indicates that StrongStart attendance is still not at pre-pandemic levels, but is trending upwards.

Evidence of the Impact of Technology use by Parents on Child Development

Parents and teens report varying levels of attachment, distraction due to their cellphones

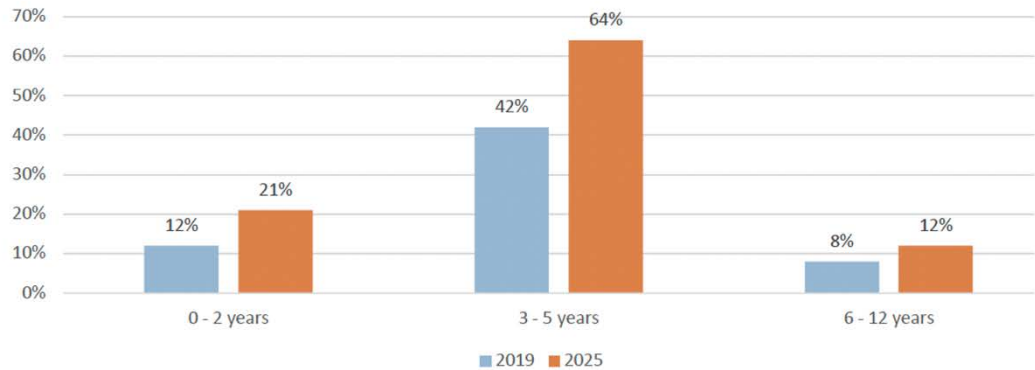
% of U.S. teens/parents who say they ...



Sunshine Coast Child Care Action Plan 2025

Estimated Child Care Access Rates Over Time

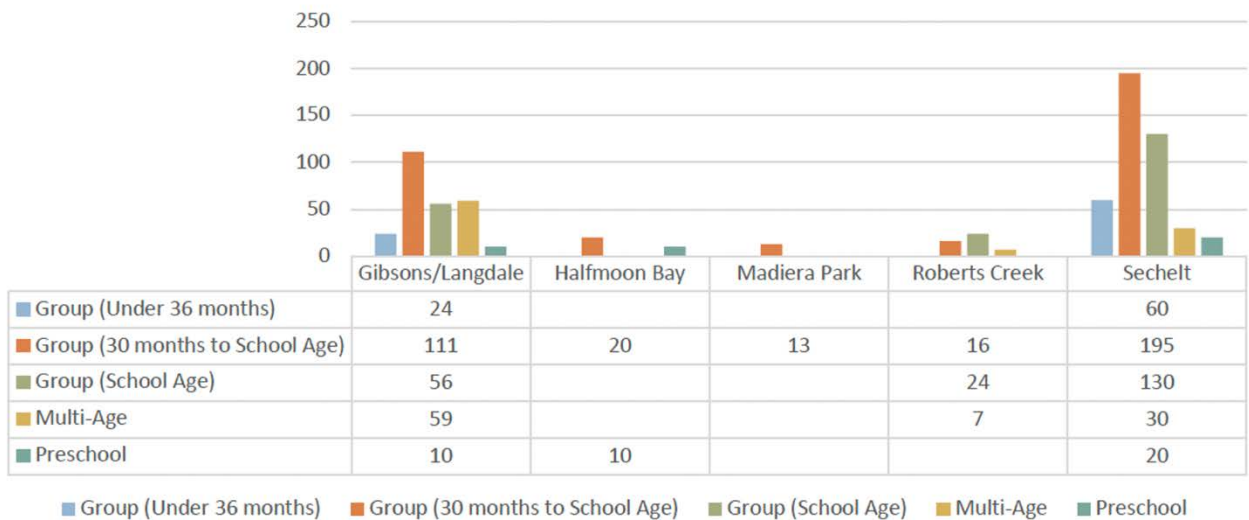
Child Care Access Rates 2019 & 2025



Source: BC Stats, Population Estimates and Projections; Vancouver Coastal Health, Child Care Licensing Data

Child Care Action Plan 2025

Number of Licensed Spaces by Location and Child Care Type (October 2025)

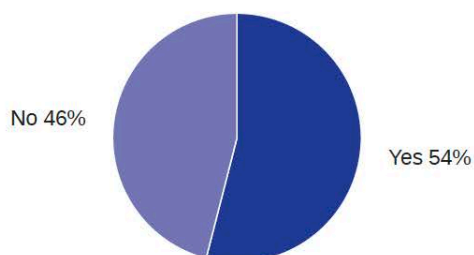


Source: Vancouver Coastal Health, Child Care Licensing Data

Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (CHEQ) 2025-26

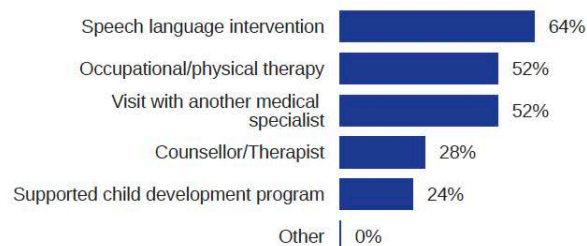
From 3 years to kindergarten entry, did the child or family use or receive any programs or supports?

ANSWERED: 46



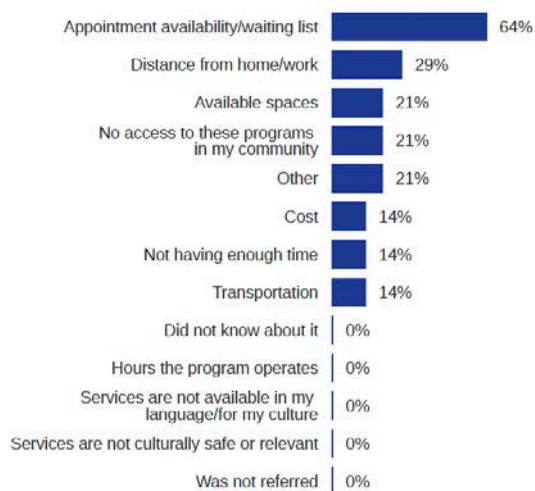
Types of programs or supports used

ANSWERED: 25



Barriers to using these types of programs or supports

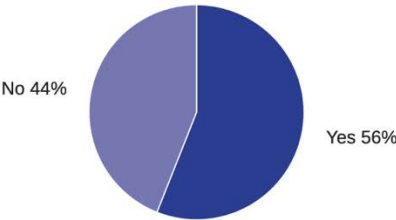
ANSWERED: 14



2024-25

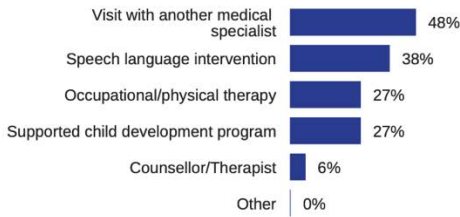
From 3 years to kindergarten entry, did the child or family use or receive any programs or supports?

ANSWERED: 86



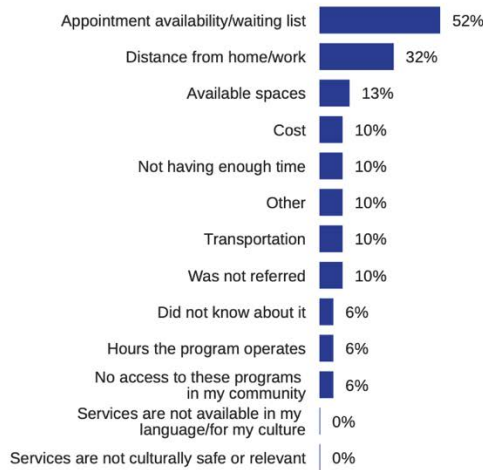
Types of programs or supports used

ANSWERED: 48



Barriers to using these types of programs or supports

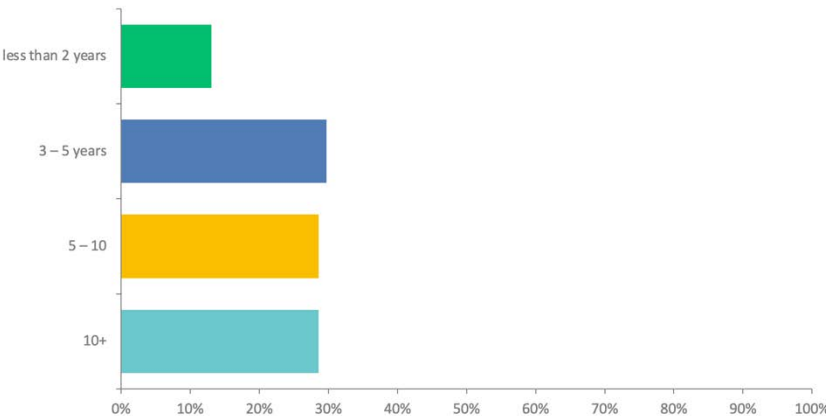
ANSWERED: 31



Early Years Team Parent Survey – Conducted May/June 2024: 84 Parent Responses

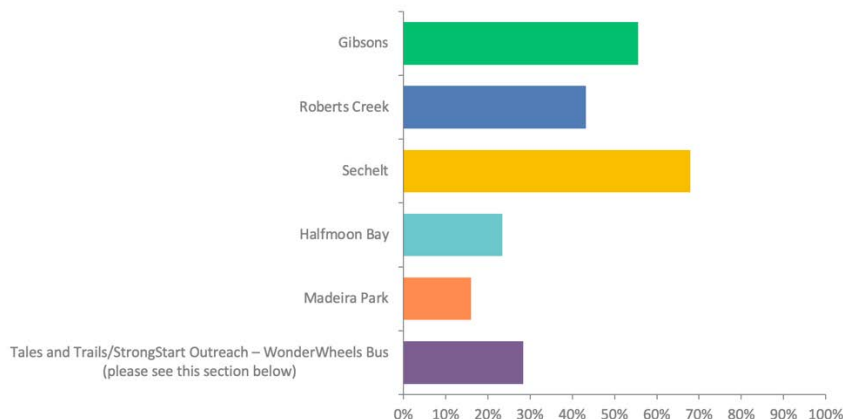
Q3: How long have you lived on the coast?

Answered: 84 Skipped: 0



Q7: If yes, which StrongStart's have you attended? Please select all that apply.

Answered: 81 Skipped: 3



'Tell us what you like about the StrongStart program?'

- **Community and Social Interaction:** Many respondents emphasized the importance of the program as a place for children to socialize with others and for parents to connect with other parents. This aspect of community building and social interaction is a recurring theme.
- **Variety and Quality of Activities:** Respondents appreciated the variety of activities and toys available, which are seen as engaging and beneficial for the children's development. Specific mentions of crafts, messy play, and imaginative activities highlight the program's diverse offerings.
- **Positive Environment and Staff:** The welcoming, non-judgmental atmosphere provided by the staff is highly valued. The staff are praised for their kindness, warmth, and ability to create a safe, engaging space for both children and parents.
- **Educational and Developmental Value:** The program is recognized for its educational benefits, providing opportunities for children to learn new skills, explore different interests, and prepare for school. Circle time, storytime, and learning through play were frequently mentioned.
- **Accessibility and Flexibility:** The program's drop-in nature and availability were appreciated by many, as it allows families to participate without the need for pre-registration. However, some respondents noted challenges with accessing the program due to work schedules or the need for more open hours.

'Please tell us what you would change about StrongStart':

- **Satisfaction with the Program:** Many respondents expressed satisfaction with the current state of the program, with several stating that they would not change anything. This indicates a general positive sentiment towards the program as it currently stands.
- **Suggestions for Operational Improvements:**

-
- Opening Hours: Several responses suggested adjusting the opening hours to better align with school drop-off times, with a preference for opening earlier.
 - Weekend and Holiday Availability: There were requests for programs to be available on weekends, holidays, and even Sundays, as well as suggestions to keep locations open during the summer and September.
 - Space and Facilities: A few respondents mentioned the need for larger spaces, especially in certain locations, and improvements to specific areas like snack preparation and storage.
 - Expansion and Funding: Some responses mentioned the need for more funding to expand the program
 - Health and Safety: A stricter illness policy and more frequent cleaning were suggested, as quite a few respondents noted fears around getting sick after attending.

One parent responded: 'I have a lot of social anxiety, my child does not, the barrier is getting myself there.'