

GRAUER EARLY LEARNING CENTRE A School-Community Partnership



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January 2008

Introduction

The Ministry of Education and school districts now have an opportunity to increase early learning programs available to families and their preschool children. Along with the Ministry of Children and Family Development and their community agencies, schools can play a greater role in realizing the vision for early learning: a greater proportion of children will enter school with optimal health and development, ready to be successful in kindergarten.

(Ministry of Education Contribution Agreement, 2006)

The Early Learning Framework, currently being finalized by the Ministry of Education, states:

This vision for early learning in British Columbia is based on the image of the child as capable and full of potential. Early learning is envisioned as a dynamic process, actively supported by families and other adults who care for and teach children in their homes and communities. Children, adults, and environments play distinct but interacting roles in promoting early learning.

The vision for children aged 0-5 is that they will experience physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual well-being. All children will feel safe, secure, and enjoy a sense of belonging in their homes and communities.

The vision of families, communities, and governments is that they will work in partnership to support children in building the foundations for early development and lifelong learning

With the implementation of **StrongStart Centres** across British Columbia, the Ministry of Education has asked districts to co-locate other services within their sites and connect with community agencies where possible. Over 27 school district across British Columbia have already embraced this concept, resulting in a variety of integrated service models. Research studies are clear that when services to young children and their families are integrated, they are more effective, particularly when they are situated in a school environment.

The establishment of the Grauer Early Learning Centre provides an opportunity for the Richmond School District to partner with community agencies to create a unique integrated service model responsive to the needs of Richmond children and their families, particularly children in the Blundell neighbourhood.

Discussions with representatives from health, the city, the Ministry for Children and Family Development, community agencies and the school district have resulted in this proposal – a proposal that has received endorsement from Richmond Children First¹, the Richmond School District Early Learning Advisory Committee and Grauer Elementary School.

¹ **Richmond Children First** is one of 45 community initiatives in B.C. funded by the Ministry for Children and Family Development. The initiative has been active since 2004 and is a community partnership that brings people together to build a supportive, responsive community for young children and their families. See Appendix A for membership and goals.

Children in the Blundell Neighbourhood

By the time children enter kindergarten, it is possible to identify the children who have not had secure, nurturing and stimulating early childhood experiences. They are less ready for school than other children – intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically. Approximately 25% of Canadian children are developmentally vulnerable when they enter school.

*Dr. Clyde Hertzman
Human Early Learning Partnership
University of British Columbia*

The neighbourhood of Blundell is an ideal location for an integrated service model. The following statistics highlight the need for comprehensive services and supports for young children and their families in this neighbourhood.

The Early Development Instrument (EDI)

The Early Development Instrument (EDI), a province-wide survey of the developmental health of five-year olds reveals that:

- Richmond children are vulnerable at *big city levels*, comparable to Vancouver. In 2007, 29.5% of Richmond children are vulnerable on at least one domain of their development.
- Every neighbourhood in Richmond has at least 24% of children vulnerable on one or more domains of development. Five neighborhoods, Cambie, **Blundell**², City Centre, East Richmond and Bridgeport/Sea Island all had more than 30% of children vulnerable.
- Cambie, Hamilton, Bridgeport/Sea Island and **Blundell** all had over 15% of children vulnerable on the social competence domain.
- Vulnerability on the emotional maturity domain increased in Cambie, **Blundell** and Broadmoor.

EDI results can be used as one tool to guide planning for young children and families in the community. But the results must be considered within the context of socio-economic conditions within the community.

The EDI is one key component of the Early Childhood Mapping Project at the Human Early Learning Partnership. In partnership with community networks such as Richmond Children First, the project also maps child development data, socio-economic characteristics and community assets that impact the developmental health of young children.

The research, interpreted at the neighbourhood level, helps show where there are large differences in children's development; where groups of children are more or less developmentally ready for school; how broad socio-economic factors may influence children's early development and where community assets are available to support children.

² For the purpose of the EDI, Blundell refers to the planning areas developed by the City of Richmond.

As the following neighbourhood profile shows, Blundell is a neighbourhood that faces a number of socio-economic risks and has few community assets. On the social index prepared by the Human Early Learning Partnership, which measures nine of the critical socioeconomic risk factors facing young children, Blundell scores a 5.

Socio-Economic Factors and Community Assets

	Blundell	Richmond
Number of children 0 to 6 years	1,045	11,596
Number of census families	4,865	46,025
CHILD DEVELOPMENT		
Number of kindergarten children	102	1,331
Children vulnerable on at least one domain	30.4%	29.5%
Communication & General Knowledge Skills	18.8%	
Emotional Maturity	10.9%	
Language and Cognitive Development	4.0%	
Physical Health and Well-Being	5.9%	
Social Competence	17.6%	
SOCIAL RISK FACTORS		
Population whose home language is not English	58%	52%
Total immigrant population	29%	27%
Children 0-14 born outside Canada	39%	27%
Population who have moved in the last year	13%	
Employed females with children under 6 years	65%	68%
ECONOMIC SECURITY		
Incidence of low income	27%	22%
Children 0-14 years old living in low income households	36%	29%
Population without a high school diploma	21%	14%

2001 Census Data

COMMUNITY ASSETS
Child Care 63 Family Child Care Spaces 27 Group Child Care Spaces (3-5 yr olds) 25 Group Child Care Spaces (36 months & under) 111 Preschool Spaces 2 LNR (license not required) Spaces
Playgrounds 3 Playgrounds
Non Market Housing 1 Housing Co-ops (40 units) 1 Assisted Rental (138 units)
Community Centres None
Libraries None
Early Years Programs None

Children benefit from supportive programs and from neighbourhood experiences. A neighbourhood with a variety of good resources— such as libraries, playgrounds, preschools, support programs, and childcare—promotes child well-being by providing stimulating and enriching activities. These resources are limited in Blundell.

Many families cannot access programs and community supports because of *barriers to access* such as cost, transportation or language. These barriers are more significant for lower socio-economic families. And as one goes down the socio-economic spectrum, the data reveals that many developmental issues are not identified and addressed until later in childhood.

Programs for young children that are close to home, accessible and free benefit children's readiness for school. Outreach family support programs have shown that barriers to access can be broken down, and developmental disadvantages overcome, through strategic program design and execution.

Grauer Early Learning Centre

Currently, the Grauer Early Learning Centre offers programming 5 mornings a week, based on the StrongStart model. Preschool aged children, accompanied by a parent or caregiver, attend this free, play-based early learning program that is coordinated by a qualified early childhood educator. They participate in learning activities, including stories, music and art that help them get ready for success in kindergarten. Parents and caregivers are likely to discover new ways to support their children's learning at home.

During these early formative years, a parent is a child's first and most important teacher. To ensure the best outcomes for children, families must have all the supports they need to provide a healthy start for their children.

This proposal requests that the Grauer Early Learning Centre be expanded to include afternoon programs, provided by community agencies, so that families in Blundell will have access to all the supports they need to prepare their children for school and life.

This expanded Early Learning Centre would be operated as a pilot project from February – June 2008. At the end of this time period, the program would be evaluated to determine whether it is feasible to continue this partnership. Although children's school readiness cannot be accurately measured during such a short time frame, feedback from parents, school staff and community agency staff will provide sufficient data to determine the success of the project. A multi-year program is envisioned upon the successful completion of the project.

Programs

The proposal is to provide programming 4 afternoons a week in 3 specific areas:

- Parent-Child Drop-ins (2 afternoons)
- Family Education and Support Programs (1 afternoon)
- School Readiness Programs (1 afternoon)

Parent-Child Drop-in

The parent-child drop-in program, based on family resource program principles, provides a welcoming environment for ALL families with children birth to 6 years of age. Family resource drop-ins focus on the whole family, complement existing services and recognize that all families deserve support. The drop-in is staffed by an Early Childhood Educator and Family Support Worker and provide an opportunity to:

- make new friends
- play in a rich learning environment
- enjoy singing, music and stories
- take part in outdoor activities
- find out about and be linked to community resources
- receive parenting support and information

The long-term outcomes of this proven program are:

- Children have the experiences and skills that prepare them for kindergarten
- Adults are secure in their role as parents and contributing members in their community
- Families form consistent, stable interpersonal support networks

Family Education and Support

Family education and support programs focus on building supportive relationships, facilitating growth, respecting diversity and strengthening families. Responsive to community needs, these programs are free, flexible, accessible and offered in an informal atmosphere. Free childminding would be provided as needed. Qualified childminders provide children with opportunities to participate in quality early childhood sessions that build and enhance social, emotional, language and cognitive skills.

The availability of programs will be limited during this 5-month pilot as most programs run for 6 weeks. Programs will be chosen based on the interests and needs of neighbourhood families. All these programs are evidence-based and available in other languages. The types of programs available include:

Parent-Child Mother Goose Program

The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program is a group experience for parents and their babies and young children which focuses on the pleasure and power of using rhymes, songs, and stories together. Parents gain skills and confidence which can enable them to create positive family patterns during their children's crucial early years, and give their children healthy early experiences with language and communication.

Nobody's Perfect

Nobody's Perfect brings parents together with trained facilitators to discuss and share experiences of parenting. It gives parents a safe place to meet others with children of the same age and with whom they share interests and concerns.

Make the Connection

An interactive parenting program that promotes secure attachment, two-way communication and infant-led learning. Based on current research and sound principles of adult learning, this program combines parent-baby activities, parent discussion and personalized video feedback.

Parent Power

Parent power workshops are designed as an opportunity for parents to share experiences and ideas with one another. These interactive workshops are intended to provide families with information about various topics that will support their parenting, while being fun and entertaining at the same time. Speakers are brought in from the community on a variety of topics including discipline, nutrition, routines, challenging behaviours and other topics of interest to parents.

School Readiness Programs

Programs for 3 – 5 year old children that provide children the supports needed to be physically, socially and emotionally ready to start school.

- Learning Together
- Countdown to School
- Ready Set Learn
- PALS
- Every Child Can Read

Target Group

- Inclusive of all children under 6 years and their families
- Focus on children in the Blundell neighbourhood, particularly isolated families

Goals

- Children and families will have better access to integrated community services
- Parents will develop better skills to assist and support children
- Improve school readiness of all children
- Remove barriers to participation by encouraging a community culture of shared responsibility for all community members
- More parents will choose to bring preschool children to school sites
- Educate parents by creating connections between families, professionals, and resources
- Build connections between community agencies and school

Partners

The following organizations have indicated an interest in partnering in this initiative:

- Richmond Family Place
- Touchstone Family Association
- Richmond Society for Community Living
- Richmond Public Library
- Richmond Health Services

Discussions with other potential partners will be pursued upon approval of the project.

Many, if not all, of these agencies offer outreach and satellite programs and all have a solid history of partnering with each other and with community centres and library branches in the delivery of programs.

Administration

Richmond Family Place has offered to take on responsibility for bookings and scheduling as well as contribute to developing working agreements outlining liability, responsibilities, etc. Staff will work closely with Marie Thom, the early learning consultant for the school district. Marie will play an active role in this pilot and will be responsible for reporting to the school district and the administration at Grauer school. The Early Learning Advisory Committee of the school district will act in an advisory capacity to this project.

Program Delivery

Community agencies already collaborate on co-delivery of programs. Programs will be facilitated by staff from community agencies based on training, language and availability.

Hours of Operation

Programs will be offered during afternoon school hours on days that the school is open. No programs will be offered during professional days.

Funding Sources

Richmond Family Place is the host agency for Richmond Children First and has received funding from the Ministry for Children and Family Development for the enhancement of neighbourhood early childhood development hubs. This funding allows them to take on an administrative role.

Richmond Children First receives annual funding from the Ministry of Children and Family Development for early childhood development projects and community development. Richmond Children First also approves Richmond projects for Success by 6 (United Way of the Lower Mainland) funding. Richmond Children First can fund additional expenses, over and above the cost of program delivery.

Richmond Children First is also committed to working with the school district to secure multi-year funding for the continuation of an expanded Grauer Early Learning Centre.

Future Vision

- Children in early grades will develop higher levels of skill development
- Higher levels of trust and partnership will be established between schools, community agencies and parents
- Multi-year funding commitments will be established

Evaluation

At the end of the 5-month pilot project an evaluation will be conducted with parents, school staff and community agency staff to determine:

- Improved outcomes for children
- Increased parental confidence
- Enhanced partnerships between the school and community partners
- Reduction in barriers to access for families

Appendix A: Richmond Children First

Vision

A child-friendly community where children thrive.

Mission Statement

Promoting early childhood development by connecting research, people, ideas and resources.

Goals

- Make it easier for families to receive the services they need
- Encourage everyone in the community to promote and support early child development
- Use resources more effectively to improve the well-being of children
- Build on the strengths in the community that enhance opportunities for children and families

Membership

Diane Bissenden	Richmond Health Department
Joyce Branscombe	Richmond Child Care Licensing
Kathy Champion	Richmond School District
Sue Graf	Richmond Society for Community Living
Yasmin Jetha	Richmond Mental Health and Addiction Services
Marcia MacKenzie	Richmond Child Care Resource & Referral Centre
Virginia McCreedy	Richmond Public Library
Dave Phillips (Co-Chair)	Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD)
Lesley Sherlock	City of Richmond, Urban Development (Social Planning)
Anne Stevens	City of Richmond, Parks Recreation & Culture
Sylvia Tremblay	Family Services of Greater Vancouver
Judy Valsonis	Touchstone Family Association
Sharon White	Supported Child Care & ECD Planning (MCFD)
Kim Winchell (Co-Chair)	Richmond Family Place