



Programs and Services Offered at the Elementary Level

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Introduction

At the culmination of my second school year as Director of Education for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), I am delighted to provide an overview of the evolution of programs and services offered at the elementary level, system-wide, as well as a synopsis of essential endeavours that will strive to ensure the continued delivery of high-quality education for our students, moving forward.

The establishment of a solid educational foundation in the elementary years is key to the success of our most precious societal resource, our students. Over the past quarter century plus, there has been a plethora of research studies related to efficient infrastructural processes and effective instructional practices regarding systemic reform for the education sector from across the globe, especially in the early years. The Ministry of Education Ontario, most specifically, has documented a number of these practices and processes through professional learning articles and reports, seminars and webinars, in order to demonstrate their great potential to lead to student success if exercised by educators with care and commitment, compassion and consistency.



Of prominence, in his foundational report on the implementation of early learning in the province of Ontario, [With Our Best Future in Mind](#), Special Advisor on Early Learning, Charles Pascal, provided a vision for full-day learning in the kindergarten years (2009). The vision emphasized the proactive improvement of benchmarks for early learning and care, including skill development in early literacy and early numeracy, through the offering of full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds, province-wide (p.4-8). Amongst a number of recommendations noted, the report highlighted the creation of a continuum for early learning, childcare, and family supports for children from the prenatal period through to adolescence. At the time, recommendations also included the establishment of an Early Years Division at the Ministry of Education, as well as the implementation of an Early Years Policy Framework for children from zero to eight years of age (p.55).

“Research indicates that the experiences during the first five years of a child’s life have a major bearing on their future success in school, in the workplace, and many other aspects of a healthy, fulfilling life.”

~ Report on the State of Early Childhood Learning in Canada, Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, pp.2.

Through a follow-up ministerial resource related to pedagogical practices for the early years, [How Does Learning Happen?](#) (2014), the provincial government built upon a previously-established framework – Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) – as a continuum for the development of children from birth to age eight. The introduction of a full day of learning for four- and five-year-olds in Ontario called for transformational changes in the pedagogical approaches used in Kindergarten, moving from a traditional pedagogy to one that is centred on the child and informed by evidence from research and practice about how young children learn.

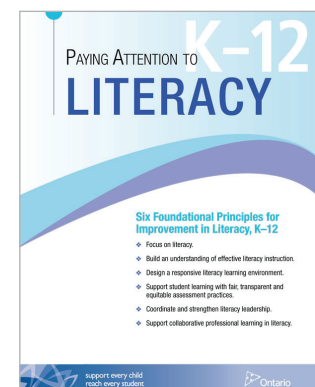
[The Kindergarten Program](#) (2016) of the Ministry of Education Ontario is a child-centred, developmentally appropriate, integrated program of learning for four- and five-year-old children. The purpose of the program is to establish a strong foundation for learning in the early years, and to do so in a safe and caring, play-based environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of all children. The primary goals of the program for Kindergarten are to:

- establish a strong foundation for learning in the early years;
- help children make a smooth transition from home, child care, or preschool settings to school settings;
- allow children to reap the many proven benefits of learning through relationships, as well as play and inquiry; and,
- set children on a path of lifelong learning and nurture competencies that they will need to thrive in the world of today and tomorrow.

These goals work collaboratively in the interactions between the child, the family, the community, and the educator to provide insightful and inspirational teaching and learning environments, particularly in preparation for early literacy and early numeracy.

In [Paying Attention to Literacy, K-12](#) (2013), the Ministry of Education Ontario outlined six foundational principles for improvement in literacy. The principles, as stated, are:

- ensure a focus on literacy;
- build an understanding of effective literacy instruction;
- design a responsive literacy learning environment;



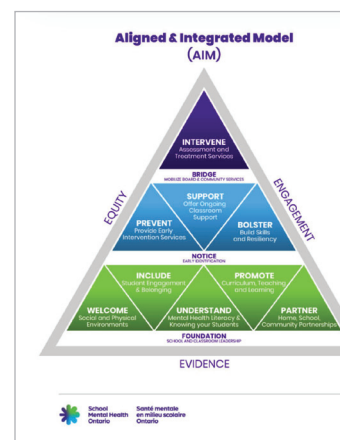
- support student learning with fair, transparent and equitable assessment practices;
- coordinate and strengthening literacy leadership; and,
- collaborate as educators in professional learning related to literacy.

These principles are centred on the ‘instructional core’ – the dynamic interplay between the educator, the student, and the task at hand that is based upon curricular expectations – by “aligning and energizing provincial direction, district priorities and school improvement efforts in support of effective classroom instruction” (p.3).

“Literacy is the ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, speak, view, represent, discuss and think critically about ideas. It enables us to share information and to interact with others. It is an essential tool for personal growth and active participation in a democratic society.” ~ Ontario Ministry of Education

Noted in the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat’s Capacity Building Series article, [Maximizing Student Mathematical Learning in the Early Years](#) (2011), the Ministry of Education Ontario also emphasized that early numeracy plays a significant role in later education. The key guidelines shared for a concentration on numeracy, K-12, include:

- identify and use everyday mathematics knowledge to plan instruction;
- encourage and foster “math talk”;
- facilitate experiences that allow for mathematization of everyday knowledge; and,
- model and nurture positive attitudes, self-efficacy and engagement.



These guidelines further the focus on the ‘instructional core’, ensuring that numeracy is conducted in an authentic, engaging context that “guides students to attain strong conceptual understandings, positive attitudes and self-efficacy” with real-world applicability at the classroom and school, system and jurisdictional levels (p.8).

“Numeracy is the ability to access, interpret, apply, and communicate mathematical information and ideas to solve problems in various contexts. It encompasses a broad range of skills, including recognizing and using mathematics in everyday situations, and understanding the role of math in the world.” ~ Ontario Ministry of Education

Beyond the examples of research shared above from the past twenty-five-year period in the field of public education, more recent studies related to the value of early learning indicate that the development of skills in the early years in the short term remain as pertinent as ever for student success in the long term. The Canadian Pediatric Society (2024) and McMaster University (2023) both reveal analyses regarding the importance of proactive skill development for reading, writing and arithmetic at the elementary level.

Nonetheless, despite the sector’s best efforts, the report issued by the Ontario Human Rights Commission in the Winter of 2022, [‘Right to Read’](#), indicates the province is not fulfilling its obligations to meet all students’ right to read, well beyond students with reading disabilities. In brief, the report identified ableism and low expectations for students from certain Ontario Human Rights Code-protected groups as a key outcome of the inquiry. It stressed that public education has a responsibility and a legal duty under the Code to remove any barriers that limit students’ opportunities to learn and succeed... as “a matter of overall equity in education” (p.68).

The inquiry is not just about an equal right to read – it is about an equal right to a future.

~ Right to Read, Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2022, pp.7.

As one of a handful of district school boards reviewed for the inquiry, the OCDSB acknowledges the importance of the report and its recommendations; in particular, the decades of multidisciplinary research on teaching reading through direct, explicit, systematic instruction in foundational word-reading skills as structured literacy, as well as the worthiness of early screening for young learners.

From a thought leadership perspective, the context shared above for the value of early learning on the ultimate success of our students sets the stage for our collective work ahead as a system. As Chief Education/Executive Officer of the District, I would like to share three essential endeavours that, from my perspective, underpin the move forward.

Three Essential Endeavors for Programs and Services at the Elementary Level

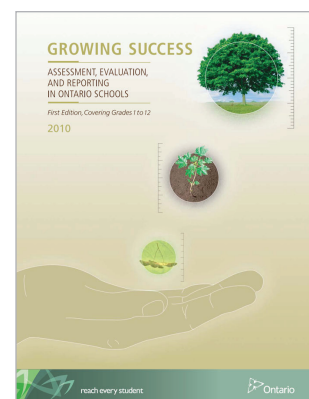
The following endeavours seek to continue the provision of high-quality programs and/or services at the elementary level, system-wide. They build upon the fine efforts of interest holders – students, parents/guardians/caregivers, staff, federation/union partners, trustees, and community members – since amalgamation of the District as an institution of public education from existing boards of education over twenty-five years ago.

• Application of Authentic Assessments to Adequately Inform Instruction

In [Growing Success](#) (2010), the Ministry of Education Ontario declares “the primary purpose of assessment and evaluation is to improve student learning” (p.6). The seven fundamental principles shared therein – to ensure that assessments are valid and reliable, and that they lead to the improvement of learning for all students – insist on protocols and procedures that:

- are fair, transparent, and equitable for all students;
- support all students, including those with special education needs, those who are learning the language of instruction (English or French), and those who are First Nation, Métis, or Inuit;
- are carefully planned to relate to the curriculum expectations and learning goals and, as much as possible, to the interests, learning styles and preferences, needs, and experiences of all students;
- are communicated clearly to students and parents at the beginning of the school year or course and at other appropriate points throughout the school year or course;
- are ongoing, varied in nature, and administered over a period of time to provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate the full range of their learning;
- provide ongoing descriptive feedback that is clear, specific, meaningful, and timely to support improved learning and achievement; and,
- develop students’ self-assessment skills to enable them to assess their own learning, set specific goals, and plan next steps for their learning.

The most recent ministerial direction related to early literacy issued in the Summer of 2023, Provincial Policy Memorandum#168 – Reading Instruction and Early Reading Screening – ensures the completion of annual early reading screenings for all students in the second year of Kindergarten through to Grade 2.



As described, early reading screening is a process of assessing a student's foundational reading in the early years of schooling, through the administration of a tool to identify students who may be at risk for reading difficulties. The early reading screener is designed to inform educators on next steps for instruction, as well as further interventions to support students, by measuring age-appropriate reading proficiency through identifying and articulating letters, sounds and their relationships, as well as decoding words and reading text.

At the OCDSB, authentic assessments to adequately inform instruction take place daily in classrooms across the system thanks to our talented and thoughtful educators. The District's selected early reading screener – Acadience Reading – is utilized in conjunction with other classroom-based assessments (conversations, observations and products) in order to plan instruction. As the memorandum outlines, research suggests that the implications of difficulties with early literacy can be minimized when identified proactively and addressed using evidence-based instructional practices. The Acadience Learning Online (ALO) platform allows for the benchmarking of assessments at the classroom, school and system levels, as well as providing useful resources for consideration, as a progress-monitoring experience.

Through the dedication and diligence of the Central Instructional Coaches/Educators in Program Services, as well as the Reading Intervention Teachers (RITs) and classroom teachers, the administration of the early reading screener is completed expeditiously. It is 'checked off' on the reports for communication of learning at the kindergarten level and/or provincial report cards at the elementary level to indicate if each student has completed the early reading screening and met the benchmark as part of their composite score. (Of note, the 'first benchmark screening' is ministry-mandated and completed in the fall season, with results communicated in the first Kindergarten Communication of Learning Report or the first Elementary Provincial Report Card. The 'second benchmark screening' is required for all students who did not meet the benchmark in the first screening, yet is optional for students who did meet the benchmark previously, and completed in the winter/spring season in order to provide time for ongoing tiered intervention.)

Beyond the use of Acadience Learning for second year of Kindergarten through to Grade 2, the District also utilizes a number of other literacy-based assessment resources and/or tools including Heggerty Literacy, UFLI, as well as Empower Reading for students with specific literacy-related needs. For multi-lingual learners, STEP - Steps to English Proficiency is used as a framework to monitor language proficiency in English, and inform instruction in Grades 1 through 12.

Further, PPM 168's requirement for protected time on foundations of language instruction includes uninterrupted time for explicit and systemic instruction in reading for a minimum of 150 minutes per five-day cycle in Grades 1 to 3. This protected time for foundational reading instruction is to be realized through daily blocks of at least 30 minutes within the overall daily literacy block. It is noteworthy to clarify that the District reinforces the importance of this dedicated time through the establishment of daily 60-minute literacy learning blocks in its scheduling/timetabling at the elementary level for the system.

The District also provides the system with an optional mathematics-related assessment tool entitled ONAT – the OCDSB’s Numeracy Assessment Tool – in order to identify students’ strengths and needs, enabling targeted interventions and personalized learning in mathematics. The tool focuses on skills in number sense, expanding daily fact fluency routines, most specifically.

Although not ministry mandated per se, nor a documented element of the communication of learning reports/provincial report cards, the assessment tool in numeracy provides an additional measure for educators to adequately inform instruction.

Beyond the utilization of the OCDSB’s Numeracy Assessment Tool, the District also uses a number of other numeracy-based assessment resources and/or tools including Knowledgehook Math Software, as well as MathUP Classroom and Mathia Adventure of Carnegie Learning for students at the elementary and secondary levels.

The directives of Provincial Policy Memorandum#160 – Protected Time for Daily Mathematics Instruction, Grades 1 to 8 – issued in the Fall of 2016 set the expectation for focused daily mathematics instruction for students at the elementary level. In brief, PPM 160’s requirement for protected time in mathematics includes 300 minutes per five-day cycle for Grades 1 to 8, preferably in daily blocks of 60 minutes, with a minimum of 40 minutes per block. Once again, it is of value to share that the District reinforces the importance of this dedicated time through the establishment of daily 60-minute numeracy learning blocks in its scheduling/timetabling at the elementary level for the system.

This focused instructional time on mathematics provides the opportunity for educators to nurture a community and culture of math practice and problem solving, both of which facilitate the acquisition of core skills for students.

The tools described above at the elementary level, including those described for early literacy such as Acadience, and early numeracy, namely ONAT, ensure a continued focus on skill development through the Student Achievement Plan (SAP), established yearly, at the school and system levels. Moving forward, annual targets for early learning and early numeracy that are increasingly explicit and intentional in nature will be set for the District, well beyond the provincial assessment measures, in order to continue to monitor progress over time.

• **Provision of Consistency in Programming, System-Wide**

As part of the District’s first chapter of the ‘vision exercise’ for programs and/or services offered, system-wide, a number of aspects for program consistency are being refreshed at the elementary level.

In particular, Program Services has renewed the ‘[Literacy Framework](#)’, K-12, moving forward, with a focus on: learning letters and identifying sounds in words; word-level

reading and spelling; how sentences are created; reading fluency; and, comprehension. The framework for literacy builds upon evidence-informed studies of reading and writing instruction, through a structured literacy approach, that emphasizes the explicit and intentional teaching of foundational literacy skills. The key components of language acquisition include:

- phonology – the study of speech sounds and how they are used in language;
- sound-symbol association – the relationship between sounds and the letters or letter combinations that they represent in written form;
- syllables – the understanding of how words are divided as a critical aspect of reading, as well as spelling;
- morphology – the structure of words and how prefixes, suffixes, and root words affect meaning;
- syntax – the rules that govern sentence structure and how words are combined to form meaningful sentences; and,
- semantics – the meaning of words and sentences, including vocabulary development and understanding word relationships.

Through structured literacy, these components are taught in a cumulative, constructive manner in order to ensure all students, especially those with dyslexia or other reading difficulties, develop the necessary skills for reading and writing. That is, literacy-related skills are taught directly, in a logical sequence, and with repeated practice, along with regular diagnostics of student progress and adjustment of instruction accordingly.

Program Services has also rejuvenated a '[Numeracy Framework](#)', K-12, with a focus on the key concepts of: number; algebra; data; spatial sense/geometry and measurement; and, financial literacy. The framework for numeracy mirrors that for literacy as an evidence-informed approach to mathematics instruction, through structured numeracy, that emphasizes the explicit and intentional teaching of foundational numeracy skills. The key components of arithmetic acquisition include the development of strong number sense, which includes understanding numbers, their relationships, and how they can be manipulated... along with explicit instruction on efficient strategies for solving basic math facts, like addition and multiplication.

As is the case for literacy learning, these components are taught in a sequential, sensible fashion so that all students, including those who have dyscalculia or other math-related difficulties, develop the ability to understand and work with numbers, perform calculations, and grasp mathematical concepts.

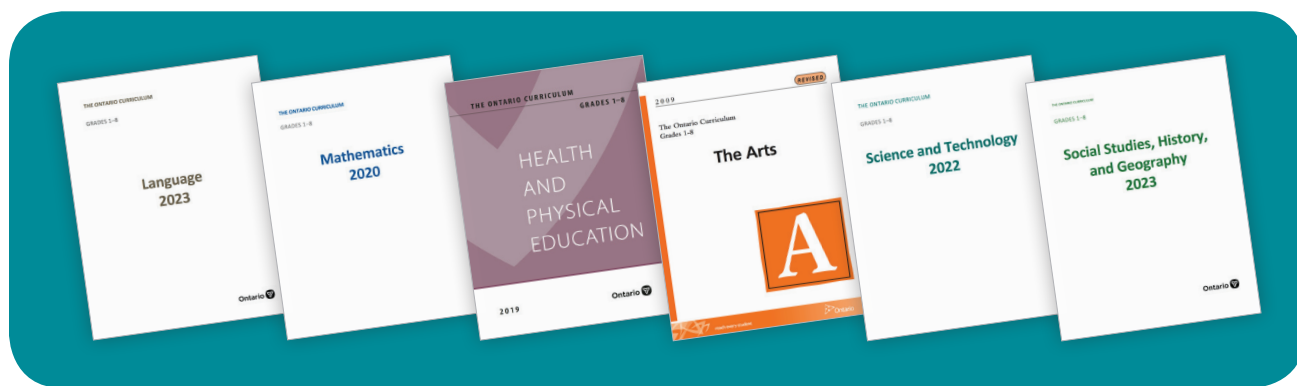
Further, in addition to the streamlining of programs for instruction in both languages of English and French, a renewed model for the allocation of time by subject area/ discipline and language of instruction has been established at the elementary level. The '[Time Allocation Model - Revised](#)' evolves instructional blocks into 60-minute timeframes in order to ensure increasingly effective and efficient scheduling, while maximizing instructional time to support deeper, more comprehensive learning and increased

student achievement. The revised TAM also allows for greater alignment of PPM 168's requirement for protected time on foundations of language instruction (explicit, intentional reading instruction in daily blocks of at least 30 minutes within the overall daily literacy block), as well as the PPM 160's protected time for daily mathematics instruction at the elementary level (direct, focused mathematics instruction, preferably in daily blocks of 60 minutes), as previously described.

The new schedule for the 'Time Allocation Model-Revised' will ensure all classrooms have a clear and consistent way of organizing learning time, minimizing transition times and teacher contacts while maximizing focused student learning time.

~Program Services - OCDSB

It is important to note that the revised model for time allocation at the elementary level (TAM-R) allows for (moreover, encourages) the cross-curricular teaching and learning opportunities that arise in an engaging, meaningful real-world context. At the heart of the instructional core, educators and students alike are supported in the exploration and discovery of literacy and numeracy everywhere throughout the curriculum and in daily life. This may take place through mathematics in the arts... the counting of beats per measure in music, for example.. or language in the social studies... such as the seven grandfather teachings – love, respect, bravery, truth, honesty, humility and wisdom – shared as an integral part of Anishinaabe philosophy, for instance.



As a District, the collective work ahead emphasizes the continuation of direct, focused instructional practices – through both structured literacy and structured numeracy – that research has clearly demonstrated will lead to student success over time.

• Coordination of Services for Support, System-Wide

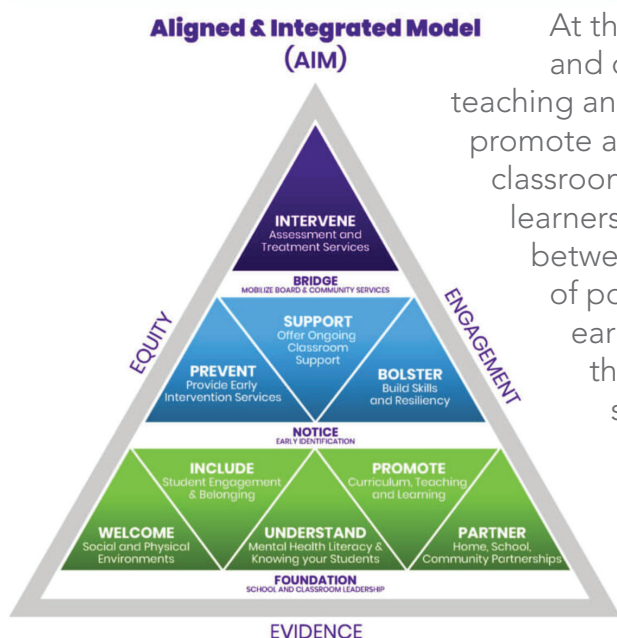
An additional aspect of the District's most recent program review at the elementary level, as integral to the first chapter of the 'vision exercise' for the organization, is the revitalized coordination of services for students, system-wide.

Most specifically, Learning Support Services has envisioned an evolved support model for students in their classrooms and schools, as well as at the system level. The '[Collaborative Classroom Support Model](#)' prioritizes the notion of IDEA – inclusivity, diversity, equity and accessibility – creating a culture where the focus is on students' strengths and next steps for instruction on their learning journey. It is important to note that the model for student support sets the conditions for optimal learning through the principles of:

- mentally health and inclusive classrooms;
- student-centred teaching and learning environments;
- a focus on individual student profiles;
- family/community engagement and partnerships; and,
- high-impact instructional practices of structured literacy and structured numeracy.

The 'Collaborative Classroom Support Model' is flexible and fluid, tailored and timed in order to meet each student's individual needs – academically, emotionally, and/or socially – and is responsive to their changing circumstances as learners. ~ Learning Support Services – OCDSB

The support model is in alignment and coherence with the Ministry of Education Ontario's 'Learning for All' resource guide (2013), setting direction for tiers of intervention to address students needs, along with School Mental Health Ontario's AIM – Aligned and Integrated Model – as the province's multi-tiered support system for mental health and wellness in schools and systems.



At the first tier, the model sets the foundation for school and classroom leadership through the creation of teaching and learning environments that engage students and promote a sense of belonging. Predominantly exercised at the classroom level, this tier emphasizes getting to know your learners as an educator, as well as nurturing the partnership between home and school. The second tier takes notice of potential learning difficulties and/or issues, through early identification, and promotes preventive measures through early intervention services and bolstering skill development and resiliency at the classroom and school levels. The third tier mobilizes school and system supports, as well as community level services, bridging resources with needs, intervening if/as required with assessment and/or treatment services.

Much like the explicit, intentional nature of structured literacy and structured numeracy, the purpose of AIM is to provide supports for students as proactively and seamlessly as possible. At the OCDSB, these supports include partnerships with community agencies/organizations such as the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa and the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa.

Learning Support Services has also renewed a '[Well-Being Framework](#)', which focuses on the four domains of well-being – physical, emotional, social and cognitive – at each developmental stage, K-12. The framework for well-being nurtures mental health as a lifelong process, strengthened by supportive interactions between home and school, as well as in the community.

The support model and framework in place both demonstrate the District's care and commitment to early education and the 'wrap-around' supports required in the short-term to ensure student success in the long-term.

Early Learning and Child Care Services as a Key Contributor at the OCDSB

The Early Learning Department is a key contributor to the organization of early learning and child care services within the District. The department provides high-quality care for children from 18 months up to the elementary level through its own district-run programs and strategic partnerships with third-party providers. This comprehensive approach ensures that children have access to a variety of options, including before- and after-school Extended Day Programs and licensed child care programs that meet all legislative requirements set by the Ministry of Education Ontario.

The District's position as a key contributor to early learning and child care is further demonstrated by its proactive adoption of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child

Care System (CWELCC). The OCDSB and its licensed partners have fully embraced this national priority, leveraging federal and provincial investments to enhance the quality, accessibility, affordability, and inclusivity of early learning and child care. The District is actively working to meet the key objectives of the CWELCC agreement, which include:

- affordability – reaching an average base fee of \$10 per day for licensed child care spaces by 2025-26, following a significant 50% fee reduction (based on 2020 levels) as of December 31st, 2022;
- accessibility – creating 86,000 new, high-quality, and affordable licensed child care spaces by December 31st, 2026, with a focus on not-for-profit providers;
- inclusivity – addressing barriers to ensure that child care is inclusive for all families; as well as,
- workforce support – valuing the early child care workforce by providing crucial training and development opportunities.

The District's commitment is also evidenced in its collaboration with the Ministry of Education Ontario to offer high-quality early years programming through EarlyON Child & Family Centres in eight elementary schools. These free centers are open to all families with children from birth to six years of age, offering a vital resource for play-based learning, child development support from early years professionals, and access to essential community resources. In addition, funding from provincial and federal sources allows the OCDSB to provide on-site child care so that families can attend Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) or Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) classes.

“Ontario recognizes the vital role that a strong and accessible child care and early years system plays in supporting families across the province. High-quality early years and child care is fundamental in children’s learning, development and well-being.”

~ Ontario’s Early Years and Child Care Annual Report 2024, Ministry of Education Ontario, 2024, pp.1.

These multi-faceted and value-added initiatives ensure the District continues to be a key provider of comprehensive and accessible early learning and child care services, moving forward.

Consolidation

The evolution of programs and services offered at the elementary level, system-wide, as well as a synopsis of essential endeavours that will strive to ensure the continued delivery of high-quality education for our students, moving forward, is paramount to the success of our students, and ultimately, our organization.

The efficient infrastructural processes and effective instructional practices regarding systemic reform for the education sector described herein, including the application of authentic assessments to adequately inform instruction, along with the provision of consistency in programming and coordination of services for support, system-wide, as well as the key contributions of early learning and child care, have the great potential to lead to student success if exercised by educators with dedication and desire, determination and diligence.

These essential endeavours related to early learning, as outcomes of the first chapter of the 'vision exercise' at the elementary level, set the stage for our collective work ahead as a system. I look forward to engaging in this important work together!

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