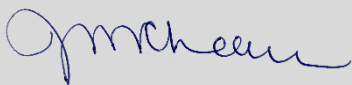




Early Kindergarten Policy	
Minister Approval:  Minister Jeanie McLean	Effective Date: August 20, 2021

GENERAL INFORMATION

Early Learning and Childhood Development is a priority for the Government Yukon. The first five years of a child's life are the most critical for healthy, mental, physical and social development.

Early Kindergarten in-school programming is for children who are 4 years old on or before December 31 of the school year. It provides a literacy rich, play-based learning environment which encourages children to learn through authentic experiences and enhances a child's emotional, social and cognitive development. Early Kindergarten programs can support and enrich children's early learning experiences through building strong relationships, nurturing well-being and belonging, promoting communication and literacies, and helping children to build a positive personal and cultural identity.

This program provides children with everyday moments to inquire, wonder and explore their world through play. Playing helps young children's brains to develop and their language and communication skills to mature. Through play, children use their creativity and imagination to develop multiple literacies as they explore their world. Play gives children the opportunity to interact with others, to learn about relationships, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills.

Optional Early Kindergarten programming is available to all rural Yukon schools. The Department of Education seeks to ensure all rural Yukon schools have the resources and professional development opportunities they need to offer high quality early Kindergarten programming that fits the needs and context of their students and community.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide guidelines that support high quality Early Kindergarten programming in all rural schools in Yukon.
- Establish parameters for Early Kindergarten programs in order to ensure consistency in programming.
- Allow for flexibility to accommodate local needs.

POLICY STATEMENT

Goals of Early Kindergarten

- Foster strong relationships with other children and caregivers
- Participate in a literacy and numeracy rich environment
- Learn with others through play and inquiry
- Practice social-emotional and problem solving abilities
- Develop and nurture positive self-esteem
- Encourage lifelong learning and well-being
- Improve fine and gross motor skills

Standards and Procedures

Structure

The structure of Early Kindergarten Programs can vary among schools based on local needs and whether the program is integrated within the school's Kindergarten program. Some structural components are consistent in all programs. Early Kindergarten students:

- Participate in and follow an established curriculum.
- Participate in play-based programming.
- Participate in open-ended activities which allow for a wide range of abilities and needs.
- Engage with others, materials and the world around them.
- Build connection to land, culture, community, and place.
- Early Kindergarten students who are being seen by the Child Development Center (CDC) may require special support and may be assigned a CDC Early Childhood Therapy Assistant who will work in the classroom.

Age of Entry

Students have the option of two Kindergarten starting points, either:

- Early Kindergarten when they are 4 years old on or before December 31 of the school year.
- Kindergarten when they are 5 years old on or before December 31 of the school year.

Proof of age is required upon registration.

Attendance

Enrollment in both Early Kindergarten and Kindergarten programs is a parental choice and is not mandatory as per Yukon's Education Act.

Once enrolled in an Early Kindergarten program, parents commit their child will attend on a regular basis. Early Kindergarten programs are full-time. Students are not permitted to attend the program on a part-time basis, unless a student attends on a part-time basis in order to accommodate their special educational needs.

Staffing

The Early Kindergarten Program will be instructed by certified teachers who have the background and expertise to support early childhood learning and development.

Operating Requirements and Class Size

A minimum of 7 students in total is required to operate a stand-alone Early Kindergarten class, and will depend on the constraints on the school staff allocation.

A minimum of 7 students in total (Early Kindergarten plus Kindergarten) is required to operate a separate Early Kindergarten/Kindergarten class, and will depend on the constraints on the school staff allocation.

In accordance with the provisions of the Yukon Teacher's Association collective agreement for the maximum class size of a Kindergarten class, Early Kindergarten will have the same maximum.

Where there are fewer than 7 eligible students for a program of Early Kindergarten or Kindergarten instruction, student enrollment in these classes may be combined with

other primary students if the Director of the School Board or Superintendent is satisfied that an appropriate instructional system can be established and maintained.

Consideration will be given for additional classroom supports as described below.

Programming and Curriculum

The Early Kindergarten program follows the BC Kindergarten Curriculum. This curriculum and the corresponding instruction are informed by the BC Early Learning Framework (ELF), the BC Play Today Handbook, and the Yukon Child Development Centre Preschool Curriculum. The program will provide an opportunity for students in rural schools to attend a full-time educational program in both the Early Kindergarten and Kindergarten years.

Communicating Student Learning

Communication on student learning is an integral part of the Early Kindergarten program. This includes communication between teachers, parents and students to support learning and involving parents as partners in dialogue about their child's progress.

Teachers will reinforce the importance of self-assessment and goal setting and will articulate next steps for learning. Teachers will also provide meaningful, relevant descriptions and concrete evidence of student learning.

Documentation of student learning is important in making learning visible to families and the greater school community. It also helps students and teachers connect to each other as learners and serves to keep the learning process alive by sharing learning stories. This process of noticing and collecting moments from daily practice and sharing these with colleagues, children, and families make children's learning processes, as well as educators' pedagogical choices, visible and open to interpretation and reflection.

Other Considerations

Staggered Entry: To help make the first day of Early Kindergarten and Kindergarten a happy and comfortable experience for each child, children are introduced to their new Early Kindergarten and Kindergarten class in small groups of 7 or less. Each small group will attend for one full day during the first three days of school, with all children attending together by the fourth day. This staggered entry allows children time to become acquainted with their new teacher, classmates, surroundings and routines. A

maximum of 3 school days can be reserved for completing the entry of all Kindergarten children in the school.

Review of Policy

The Assistant Deputy Minister of Schools and Student Services (or designate) shall conduct an initial review of this policy within one year of this policy going into effect.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Yukon First Nation governments with Education Agreements who have indicated an interest in early kindergarten and those with Section 17.7 Self Government Agreements:

Currently Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in is the only First Nation with this clause in its Self-Government Agreement. Under this clause, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in will:

- Have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the design, delivery and administration of early kindergarten in its Traditional Territory.

Child Development Centre Outreach Team:

The Child Development Centre Outreach Team travels to all rural communities to meet regularly with school personnel in communities where an Early Kindergarten program is being delivered. The team may include a speech-language pathologist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, developmental therapist and psychologist. With parental consent, the Outreach Team will:

- Follow the Early Kindergarten Protocol: Roles and Responsibilities of the Child Development Centre and the Department of Education, specifically:
 - Complete the developmental screen for children attending Early Kindergarten, and communicates the results to families;
 - Assist in identifying children with developmental needs;
 - Work with the family and school to develop goals and priorities;
 - Provide support to the classroom teacher as needed;
 - Communicate with CDC clients about assessment results and/or progress towards goals; and
 - Provide weekly supervision to Early Childhood Therapy Assistants.

School Administrators and School Staff will:

- Create a developmentally and culturally appropriate, literacy rich and play-based learning environment;
- Deliver a developmentally and culturally appropriate program that is inclusive for all learners;
- Make learning visible to children, families, colleagues, and the greater school community;
- Support children and parents in the transition from pre-school to Kindergarten;
- Help students work to their full potential;
- Communicate regularly and meaningfully with parents
- Meet with the Child Development Centre Outreach Team as needed. The school administrator will:
 - Provide the opportunity/space for Child Development Centre staff to work, whether to complete assessments or work with individual children;
 - Ensure the Early Childhood Therapy Assistant is oriented to the school;
 - Enable access to school materials and resources including use of phone, fax and photocopier; and
 - Direct any concerns or issues to the Outreach Team or the program coordinator; and
- Obtain consent from the families for assessment when needed;

Parents will:

- Ensure that their child attends school regularly and on time;
- Show an active interest in their child's learning and progress;
- Communicate regularly with the school;
- Help their child be prepared for school; and
- Encourage and assisting their child in following the school behaviour expectations.

The Department of Education will:

- Oversee implementation of early kindergarten in rural Yukon schools;
- Work with stakeholders to:
 - Consider expanding early kindergarten offerings to other rural communities; and
 - Review and evaluate the effectiveness of early kindergarten implementation and this policy;

- Provide direction to schools, School Councils and School Boards to ensure opportunity and help promote success in all Early Kindergarten Programs;
- Ensure necessary resources and professional learning opportunities are in place for school staff; and
- Ensure implementation of this policy aligns with the Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of British Columbia and Yukon Respecting Education, in particular, curriculum and assessment development.

APPLICATION

This policy applies to the Department of Education, School Councils and School Boards, and all other members of the school community.

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

In situations where the individual circumstances of a case are such that the provisions of this policy cannot be applied or to do so would result in an unfair or an unintended result, the decision may be based on the individual merits and justice of the situation. Such a decision will be considered for that specific case only and will not be precedent setting.

EFFECTIVE DATE

This policy is effective August 20, 2021.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY REFERENCES

Education Act, Section 32.

Yukon Teachers Association Collective Agreement, Article 35 Class Size.

Early Kindergarten Protocol: Roles and Responsibilities of the Child Development Centre and the Department of Education (August 2021)

HISTORY

Guidelines for Junior Kindergarten (K4) in Rural Schools, effective October 1, 2005.

Four-Year-Old Kindergarten Protocol Roles and Responsibilities of the Child Development Centre and Yukon Education (Reviewed October 2015).