



AGENDA
Special Board Education and Business Committee

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

4:00 p.m.

Via Zoom

Pages

1. CALL TO ORDER
We respectfully acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional and ancestral lands of the Coast Salish people where we live, learn and play.
2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA
 - 2.1. Motion to Adopt Agenda
"That the Board Education and Business Committee adopts the agenda of the October 12, 2021 Special Board Education and Business Committee meeting."
3. EDUCATION
 - 3.1. Early Learning Review: Next Steps 2 - 31
4. BUSINESS AND OPERATIONS
5. POLICY
 - 5.1. Policy 8: Early Learning and Child Care Committee 32
6. ADJOURNMENT
 - 6.1. Motion to Adjourn



COWICHAN VALLEY
School District

EARLY LEARNING AND PARTNERSHIPS REVIEW

–FOR–

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION FOR THE
COWICHAN VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

XE' XE' SMUN'EEM
OUR SACRED CHILDREN

APRIL 28, 2021

Prepared by:

Anne Cooper
AZ Cooper Consulting

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND	3
Synopsis of the Early Learning and Partnerships Review	3
CVSD Board of Education Early Learning Committee	4
CVSD 2020-2024 Strategic Plan: <i>Beyond Education</i>	5
How this Review Connects to the Strategic Plan	6
The Cowichan Valley and District Context	6
Background: Early Learning	7
INSIGHTS REGARDING CVSD INITIATIVES, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES	8
Current Use of Evidence/Data to Inform Planning	8
Data Source: Early Development Instrument (EDI)	9
Data Source: Early Success Screen	11
Future Considerations Regarding Evidence/Data to Inform Planning	13
Potential of the K-12 Literacy Plan 2020-2024 to Impact the District's Trajectory	15
REFLECTIONS REGARDING EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS	16
Partner Voice, Needs and Options to Support ELF Knowledge & Experience	16
Other Potential Early Learning Table Partners	20
Structures to Support Early Learning Moving Forward	21
Avenues to Develop Formal Partnerships and Programs to Support Early Learning	25
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS	26
CLOSING COMMENTS	28
NEXT STEPS	29
INVENTORY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES	30

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Synopsis of the Early Learning and Partnerships Review

This review is intended to support the Cowichan Valley School District's (CVSD) planning efforts. It is envisioned that the review will assist with a determination of the overall efficacy of district programs, and the impacts these programs have. Further, it is hoped that an exploration of early learning partnerships throughout the Cowichan Valley will strengthen the collective impact to support young children and their success in transitioning to Kindergarten. This review is not intended to, nor will it, comment on the effectiveness of community programs and services.

In shaping the review, six elements were established, to be considered in two distinct phases.

PHASE 1 – OUR CURRENT STATE

- A. Background – State of Early Learning in the Valley
 - ✓ Overview of available information, providing context
- B. Inventory of Community Partnerships, Programs and Services
 - ✓ Identification of existing partners and the early learning opportunities they provide
- C. Inventory of School District Programs, Services and Initiatives
 - ✓ Identification of Cowichan Valley School District early learning programs and services, including any specific initiatives.

The Phase 1 material was provided to partners in February 2021 to ensure that the current programs, services and initiatives that form the basis for further analysis were widely available, and as complete as possible. This also ensured that prior to further consultations within the community, and preceding any further analysis and provision of any recommendations, all participants were working with the same "song sheet." Subsequent to the publication of the preliminary report, organizations were able to correct, enhance or supplement the information provided. Many organizations did respond with changes and additions, and for that the author sends a big thank you!

The second phase of the project focused on ways to move forward, as described below.

PHASE 2 – MOVING FORWARD

- D. Status of District Early Learning Initiatives, Programs and Services
 - ✓ Current use of evidence/data to inform planning for early learning
 - ✓ Identify district successes and areas for growth

E. Reflecting on Existing Partnerships

- ✓ Collect partner voice and surface needs regarding utilization of the Early Learning Framework

F. Next Steps

- ✓ Suggest options to support partner knowledge and experience with the Early Learning Framework
- ✓ Identify other potential early learning partners
- ✓ Recommend avenues to develop formal partnerships and programs to support early learning
- ✓ Suggest structures to best support early learning moving forward.

CVSD Board of Education Early Learning Committee

The Board of Education of the Cowichan Valley School District has established an Early Learning Committee. The role of the committee, as stated in the terms of reference, is to ensure all students have opportunities for early success by:

1. Working to provide space, based on community need, for pre-school, childcare and/or before-school and after-school care programs in district elementary schools.
2. Supporting the growth of family literacy programs within the schools and community, and increasing skills as measured by a variety of assessment tools.
3. Tracking and providing appropriate interventions for Kindergarten/Grade 1 students.
4. Developing and maintaining community connections and partnerships.
5. Promoting reading and learning as presented in the Early Learning Framework for children from birth to eight years of age.
6. Supporting developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that support "school readiness."
7. Providing ongoing opportunities for parents to receive quality information on early childhood education.
8. Promoting and supporting literacy and lifelong learning.



This Early Learning and Partnerships Review supports the work of the Early Learning Committee, specifically in role four, above.

The Board of Education for the Cowichan Valley School District launched their new [2020-2024 Strategic Plan](#) in February of 2020.

The new plan, titled *Beyond Education*, was the culmination of months of work engaging with students, staff, parents and community. The plan was built on the transformational work that existed within the district and will now support the district's future-focused priorities.



Beyond Education was developed through the most comprehensive, future-focused engagement exercise the district had ever undertaken. Learners, staff, parents and community shared their vision for the future and then told the Board what skills and attitudes would be needed to get there. Finally, participants shared how, as a community, the district could help make that future become a reality.

The journey depicted on the district's new logo is a representation of what the Cowichan Valley School District and community have undertaken. The district is on a learning journey that will take them far past the four walls of their schools and the *Beyond Education* plan. The new logo features the warm colours of the rising sun, representing both a new day and a time to give thanks for all that we have. Inside the sun are the *spaal'* (raven) and *wuxus* (frog), both representing transformation. The collective journey is represented in the canoe and four paddlers. A central part of Coast Salish culture, the canoe visually represents the coming together of the community on a shared journey.



How this Review Connects to the Strategic Plan

With regard to the Strategic Plan Priority Area of Learning, and specifically the Strategic Plan Goal to

Develop competent, agile learners who are creative, critical and social thinkers that have the capacity to be global citizens

the district has formulated an objective to enhance early learning opportunities and partnerships. This objective is supported by a number of actions, the first being to initiate a review of early learning partnerships throughout the Cowichan Valley with the intent of strengthening collective impact.

In considering this action, it was felt that the district would benefit from a comprehensive review of early learning within the district, and consideration of partnerships throughout the Cowichan Valley.

The Cowichan Valley and District Context

The Cowichan Valley, located one hour's drive north of Victoria, is on the traditional unceded territory of the Quw'utsun, Malahat, Ts'uubaa-asatx, Halalt, Penelakut, Stz'uminus, Lyackson and Métis Peoples. The Cowichan Valley is home to 7,639 First Nations members, both on- and off-reserve (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern development website statistic, 2019) and includes the territory of the largest First Nation in BC: Cowichan Tribes, with 5,100+ members.

The region encompasses five municipalities: Duncan; North Cowichan; Chemainus; Crofton; and Lake Cowichan and the two villages of Mill Bay and Shawnigan Lake.

Schools in the Cowichan Valley provide quality education to over 8,000 students in a predominately rural area. Schools are located in Lake Cowichan, on Thetis Island, and in Chemainus, Crofton, Mill Bay, Duncan, North Cowichan, Shawnigan Lake and Cobble Hill. The Cowichan Valley School District (CVSD) is home to 17 elementary schools, five secondary schools, and a collection of open and distributed learning programs that cater to its diverse student population.



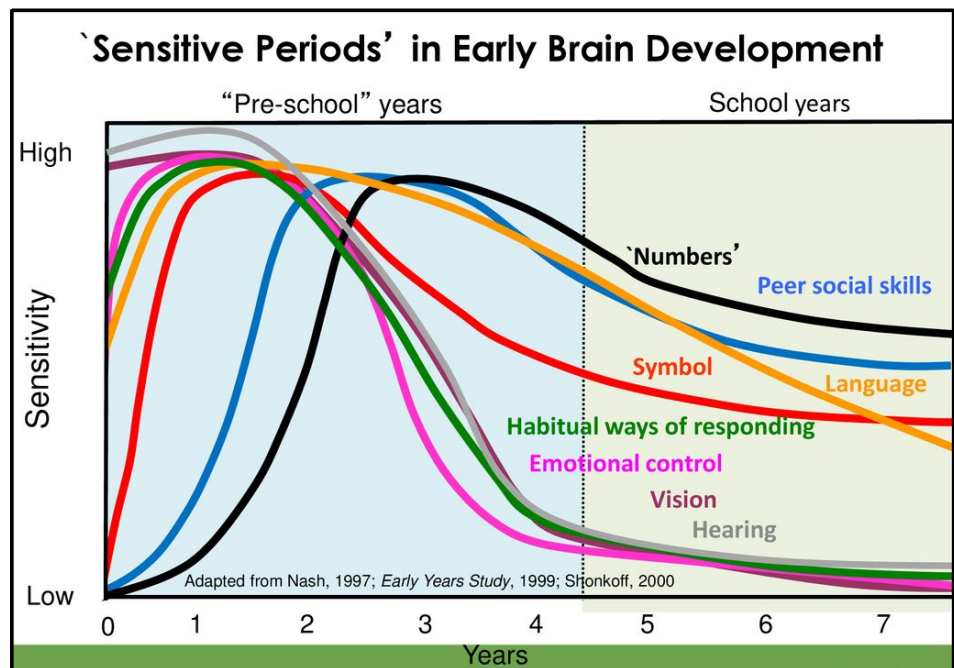
Background: Early Learning

The general question of whether early childhood programs can make a difference to children's outcomes has been asked and answered in the affirmative innumerable times. This generic query therefore requires no further investigation. The central research priority now for the early childhood field is to address more important sets of questions about how different types of interventions influence specific outcomes for children and families who face differential opportunities and vulnerabilities.¹

In British Columbia, the education sector's commitment to early childhood programs before entry to school has expanded. Progress has been made through the [Human Early Learning Partnership](#) (HELP) Mapping Project, under the direction of the late Dr. Clyde Hertzman of the University of British Columbia, to consider children's vulnerabilities more fully. Kindergarten teachers in 60 BC school districts, as well as in many independent and band schools, have assessed the developmental characteristics of their students at school entry in five domains using the Early Development Instrument (EDI): physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and communication skills. HELP maps neighbourhood EDI results to understand the role that community factors play in helping early childhood development.

Many British Columbia school districts note that EDI reporting was their first exposure to hard data indicating that they should become involved in discussing a preschool agenda. Districts across the province are now confident in applying the EDI mapping findings to the allocation of resources to support early learning within the district.

The benefits to school districts of engaging in early learning programs, services and partnerships are clear. Much of the human development occurs well before Kindergarten, as described in the adjacent graphic.²



¹ From *Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*.

² Ibid.

Current Use of Evidence/Data to Inform Planning

The district is currently utilizing two significant data sources for planning in the early years:

- ✓ the Early Development Instrument (EDI)
- ✓ the Early Success Screen (ESS), supported by Performance Measurement (PM) BenchMarks and a District-Wide Write (DWW).

District staff are largely knowledgeable in the use of both of these instruments for planning, and well-versed regarding their application, strengths and limitations.



Student needs within schools, as identified by these district data, impact staffing at the school level to a large degree within the district, including the allocations of:

- ✓ Teaching staff
- ✓ Inclusion Support Teachers (Learning Assistance & Resource Teachers)
- ✓ Support for Indigenous students
- ✓ English Language Learning Support
- ✓ Educational Assistants
- ✓ Speech and Language Pathologists
- ✓ Physiotherapists
- ✓ Occupational Therapists
- ✓ Itinerant Elementary Counsellors
- ✓ Administration time.

OBSERVATIONS

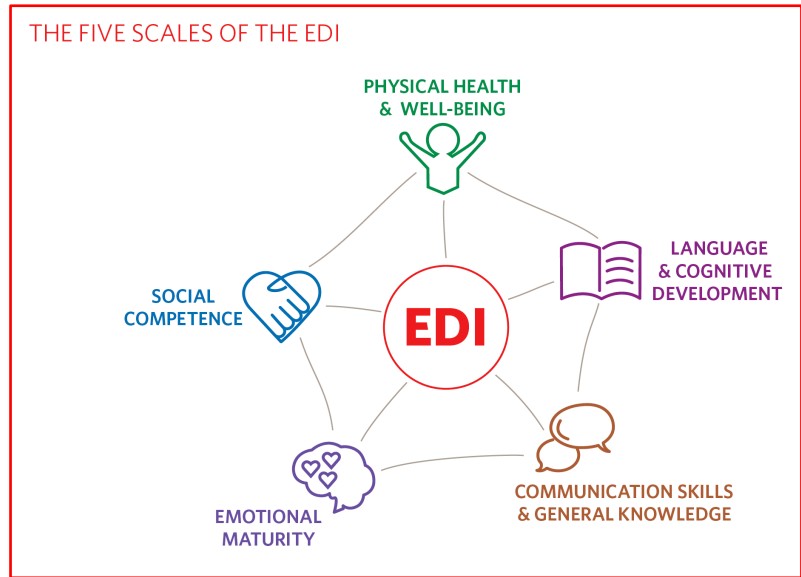
The scope for this review did not include insights into the current use of evidence/data to inform planning at the school level or allocations of staff within schools.

As there was no assessment as to how school-based staff use this data to impact school-based decisions, nor how the district-enhanced allocations make their way to support individual classrooms and students, this may be an area for the district to examine further.

Overview

As previously described, the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) Early Development Instrument (EDI) measures five core areas of early child development that are known to be good predictors of adult health, education and social outcomes. They are represented on this graphic.

What Is EDI Childhood Vulnerability?



Vulnerable children are those who, without additional support and care, are more likely to experience future challenges in their school years and beyond. Vulnerability is determined using a cut-off for each EDI scale. In order to avoid the use of individual children’s EDI data for diagnostic or placement purposes, HELP only reports vulnerability for groups of children.

Over a decade of research, conducted in BC as well as across Canada and internationally, has demonstrated the predictive capability of EDI vulnerability on each of the scales. More generally, research has linked higher vulnerability rates at school entry with a range of later life challenges, including school dropout, mental health issues and unemployment.

When considering vulnerability rates, it is important to note that some developmental vulnerability is to be expected in all populations of children. At birth, approximately 3-4% of children have congenital or diagnosable conditions that may limit their development. In addition, in BC, 6.5% of babies are born with low birth weights, which is a risk factor for later developmental vulnerabilities. At HELP, they consider a rate of **10% to be a “reasonable” benchmark** for child vulnerability. This rate is based on the data mentioned above, along with vulnerability rates reported in the least vulnerable communities in BC and other jurisdictions over almost two decades of research. With this in mind, the current provincial vulnerability rate of 33.4% is over three times higher than we would consider acceptable. EDI data show trends in vulnerability over time. Through data analysis and mapping, HELP is able to examine regional differences in child vulnerability at multiple geographical levels, from a broad provincial snapshot to community and neighbourhood analyses.

With an **overall vulnerability of 34%** in one or more of the EDI scales, [the CVSD’s EDI vulnerability](#) is placed squarely in the mid-range of other districts, which are experiencing vulnerabilities between 13% and 54%.

SCHOOL DISTRICT WAVE 7 EDI DATA

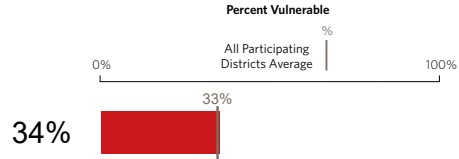
Figure 9 shows that in Cowichan Valley 34% or 199 children are vulnerable on at least one area of development as measured by the EDI in Wave 7 (2016–2019). Figure 10 explores vulnerability rates, and the corresponding number of children vulnerable, across each of the five scales of the EDI.

Total Number of Children
592

FIGURE 9. WAVE 7 VULNERABILITY ON ONE OR MORE SCALES FOR COWICHAN VALLEY

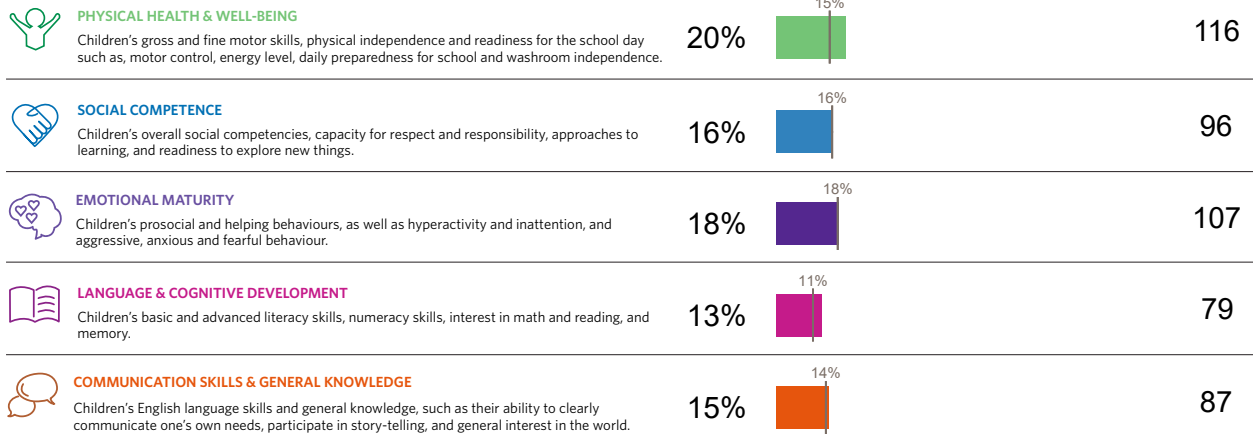
VULNERABLE ON ONE OR MORE SCALES

This is a summary measure that reports the percentage of children who are vulnerable on at least one or more of the five scales of the EDI. Children captured by this measure may be vulnerable on only one scale, or may be experiencing vulnerabilities on two, three, four or all five scales of the EDI.



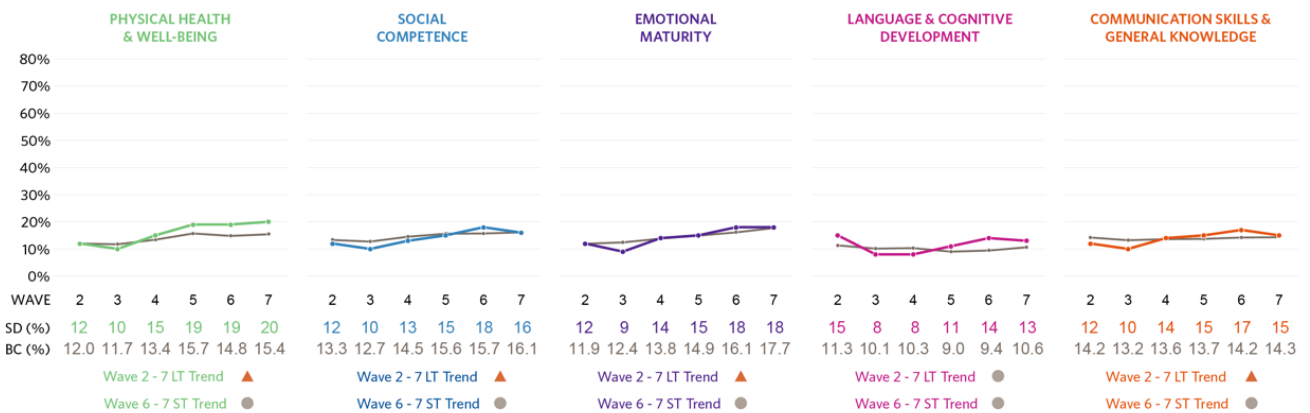
Number of Children Vulnerable
199

FIGURE 10. WAVE 7 SCALE LEVEL VULNERABILITY FOR COWICHAN VALLEY



A worrisome trend within the district is that vulnerabilities are increasing with each successive wave of the EDI, as summarized in the graphs below.

FIGURE 12. WAVE 2-7 SCALE LEVEL VULNERABILITY TRENDS FOR COWICHAN VALLEY



2004 WAVE 2 2007 WAVE 3 2009 WAVE 4 2011 WAVE 5 2013 WAVE 6 2016 WAVE 7 2019 **21**

OBSERVATIONS

- Staff confirm that EDI data were used to determine the location of the original StrongStart centres in the district. The program at Khowhemun Elementary has been relocated due to space restrictions within the school and is no longer supporting the school in the manner originally intended.
- As the EDI neighborhood data have changed, particularly since the inception of StrongStart centres, centres may no longer be serving the neighbourhoods with the highest vulnerability.
- With regard to all district programs and services, those that require significant resources in staff time should be carefully considered for their effectiveness and efficiency. Time is a precious commodity, and a careful review may reveal opportunities to make adjustments to better serve children and families.

RECOMMENDATION ONE – STRONGSTART

Given the significant differences in EDI vulnerability within the district, it may be time to both review the location of StrongStart programs, and the “reach” they are providing to families and children who could most benefit from those supports. Consideration could be given for approaches to serve highly isolated families by extending the reach of existing programs, or by relocating existing StrongStart programs.

RECOMMENDATION TWO – ALLOCATION OF DISTRICT PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND INITIATIVES

With the EDI school level data in mind, it may be valuable to review all district early learning programs, services and initiatives currently offered in early primary, with a view to ensuring they are serving families and children to the best extent possible.

Data Source: Early Success Screen

Overview

The Early Success Screen (ESS) is a district-developed screening instrument for Kindergarten through Grade 3 that focuses on six areas of early literacy development: phonemic awareness; oral language development; letter recognition; and concepts of print, word recognition and early writing. The ESS is administered twice in the year, fall and spring, with all elementary schools participating. An optional use of the screen is undertaken in some classrooms in January.

The fall administration of the ESS is intended to help inform instructional practice in primary classrooms. It is used in a variety of ways, with some variation among schools:

- ✓ informs instruction for the classroom teacher
- ✓ is the basis for class reviews in some schools
- ✓ informs the school-based team.

While district data are not available during the fall administration of the screen at the classroom, school or district level, results from the screen in May are available to support district planning.

An area of legitimate concern regarding the ESS is to ensure that it is not misinterpreted as being an assessment of teaching and/or teachers. It is obvious that district staff are cognizant of this tension and share a desire to be respectful of these apprehensions.

The district data in May clearly highlight which schools are serving students with the highest literacy needs. With district data being available in May, there are limitations as to what actions can be taken by the district when needs are identified that late in the school year. There is little opportunity to adjust resources in the district, as this information is available after the upcoming year's budget is established.

The ESS data contribute to the district designating "Focus Schools," which are allocated more resources, seemingly on an ongoing basis.

Indigenous Education Data

Indigenous Education has completed an analysis of report card data of 1,680 learners, by school, identifying students with academic, social/emotional and concerning attendance profiles. These data are used to allocate supports and to provide direction to Indigenous Education.

OBSERVATIONS

- District staff note that the ESS is not normative and is not necessarily administered in a consistent fashion. Some respondents suggest it is in need of significant refinement to become more user-friendly, to bring consistency to administration and to be more useful for district planning. As the screen is currently undergoing revision, these concerns should be addressed through the existing review process.
- In terms of effectiveness, an analysis could be undertaken to determine how predictive components of the screen are regarding children who are subsequently identified as having learning challenges.
- With district data being collected in May, it would seem that that date, in and of itself, contributes to concern that the data are a reflection of teaching and teachers. If district data were collected in September, then this concern could be ameliorated, as no possible conclusion can be drawn regarding instruction within the first month of a child's placement in a class.
- A September roll-up of individual student, class, school and district data would provide far greater opportunities to make resources available and consider budget adjustments before approving the district's Amended Annual Budget.
- It would seem that there would be a way to identify classrooms throughout the district with highest needs, and provide resources for those classrooms, irrespective as to school location.

RECOMMENDATION THREE – EARLY SUCCESS SCREENING

Depending on the nature of the revisions to the ESS, as an alternative, the district may wish to explore commercially available screening options, such as the [Early Years Evaluation – Teacher Assessment](#) (EYE-TA), [Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation](#), or the University of Oregon’s [Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills](#) (DIBELS). The intent would be to make the collection of relevant data as efficient as possible. To use the latter example, *DIBELS* is a battery of short (one minute) fluency measures that can be used for universal screening, benchmark assessment and progress monitoring in each primary grade.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR – TIMING OF DATA COLLECTION

The advantage of identifying needs at an individual student, class and school level early in the school year allows for differentiation of resources within a school, and likewise, differentiation of resources within the district. To ensure that screening is not misinterpreted, thus addressing teacher apprehension on this matter; and to provide the greatest opportunity to the district to adjust resources and respond to needs, it is recommended that the district data be captured in the September screen.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE – RESOURCES FOCUSED ON CLASSROOMS

Rather than identifying Focus Schools, the district could consider a roll-up of data to support any classroom with high literacy needs, in effect a focus on classrooms. Supported classrooms could be determined annually and would replace Focus Schools. In this way, the district would avoid the labelling of individual schools and have the flexibility to address priority learners, in any classroom in the district, on an annual basis.

Future Considerations Regarding Evidence/Data to Inform Planning

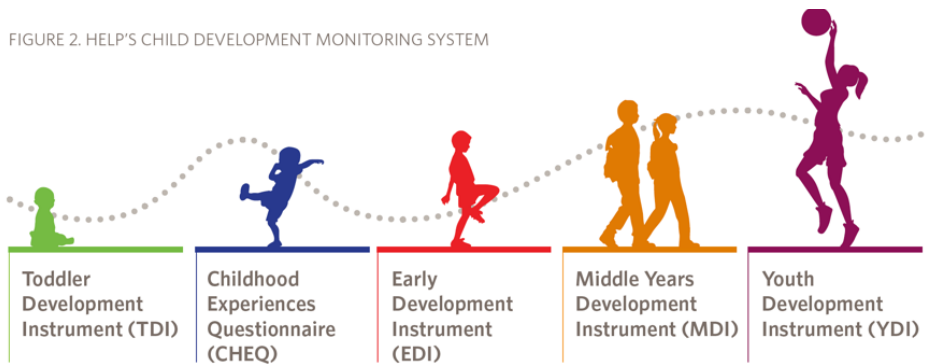
There is a sense within the district of the need to “go upstream” and provide supports to families and children much earlier than Kindergarten. Staff indicated the challenges when students arrive at Kindergarten without having had early supports, as the students’ needs were unidentified. The hope would be to reduce the number of “big surprises” every year.

Within a number of BC communities, partnerships are being established to supplement the Early Development Instrument (EDI) with additional questionnaires, including the [Toddler Development Instrument](#) (TDI) and the [Childhood Experiences Questionnaire](#) (CHEQ).

Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously said:

“There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river.
We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.”

FIGURE 2. HELP'S CHILD DEVELOPMENT MONITORING SYSTEM



HELP advises that each of these questionnaires contributes uniquely to a deeper understanding of the contexts in which children are living, growing and learning, in their early years and beyond.

The TDI and CHEQ, completed by parents and caregivers, collect information on contextual factors such as:

- ✓ Early social and emotional experiences
- ✓ Daily physical activity, nutrition, screen time and sleep habits
- ✓ Contact with the health care system
- ✓ Childcare arrangements, access and use of early learning and care programs, and
- ✓ Family demographics and supports.

Similarly, communities are collaborating to deliver more universal and broad-based use of the [Ages and Stages Questionnaire](#) (ASQ) to engage and support families.

OBSERVATIONS

A broad, community-based initiative, with the engagement of the Valley's early learning partners, to explore universal early identification of children's needs well prior to Kindergarten would be a future area to consider. This would be a significant new data initiative that could only be undertaken with the participation and collaboration of partners. An initiative as robust as this cannot be accommodated off the side of someone's desk. It is important to note that this undertaking would require the resourcing to properly plan, coordinate and implement.

RECOMMENDATION SIX – EARLY IDENTIFICATION

The district may wish to consider a pilot community-based initiative with the engagement of the Valley's early learning partners to explore universal early identification of children's needs well prior to Kindergarten – in either neighbourhoods, or in school catchment areas, with the highest numbers of children who would benefit from earlier identification and support.

"We cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults nor can we wait until they reach school – a time when it may be too late to intervene."³

³ James Heckman, 2001 Nobel Prize in Economics 2000

Potential of the K-12 Literacy Plan 2020-2024 to Impact the District's Trajectory

Currently the district is creating a K-12 Literacy Framework to support children district-wide. Key components of the plan include:

1. Grades K-3 Effective Literacy In-Service for all educators
2. Create Literacy Interventions K-9 focused on priority groups, including children-in-care and Indigenous Learners (on-/off-Reserve)
3. Review, revise and acquire district-wide assessments (ESS, DWW, DART, Numeracy)
4. Create "Response to Intervention" K-12 Models informed by data
5. In-service model for K-9 Educators, Educational Assistants and other support personnel
6. Recommendations from Early Learning Review implemented.

OBSERVATIONS

The elements of this initiative not only address the Strategic Plan objective regarding foundational learning in literacy, but also support the actions delineated within the objective to enhance early learning opportunities, and a number of the recommendations within this report. A number of respondents commented along a theme of, "With regard to student success, the big question is: what is the district prepared to do differently, to have a different outcome?" and it would seem that a comprehensive Literacy Framework represents an opportunity to do just that.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN – 2020-2024 K-12 LITERACY PLAN

It is recommended that the district proceed with a literacy framework of this magnitude, as a genuine investment in children.



REFLECTIONS REGARDING EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS

This review was structured to provide some insights regarding early learning partnerships throughout the Cowichan Valley with the intent of strengthening collective impact. Collective impact involves cross-sector coordination rather than isolated intervention by individual organizations.

Specific areas of inquiry in the review included:

- ✓ partner voice, needs and options to support knowledge and experience with the Early Learning Framework (ELF)
- ✓ other potential early learning partners
- ✓ avenues to develop formal partnerships and programs to support early learning
- ✓ structures to best support early learning moving forward.

The reflections offered within this component of the report relate to how the Cowichan Valley School District (CVSD) interacts with partners. There is no assessment of the partner organizations individually, nor of the Cowichan Early Years Table (CEYT) members.

Partner Voice, Needs and Options to Support ELF Knowledge & Experience

Partner Voice

The Cowichan Valley enjoys the expertise of dedicated and passionate individuals, working within organizations, including the CVSD, who are clearly focused on providing supports and services to enrich children's and families' lives. The Appendix contains a description of each of these programs and services.

While the emphasis of discussions regarding partner voice was the implementation of the Early Years Framework, the review invited partners to share their insights regarding current early learning partnerships, in general. With these reflections, the intent, again, was to explore ways to strengthen collective impact.

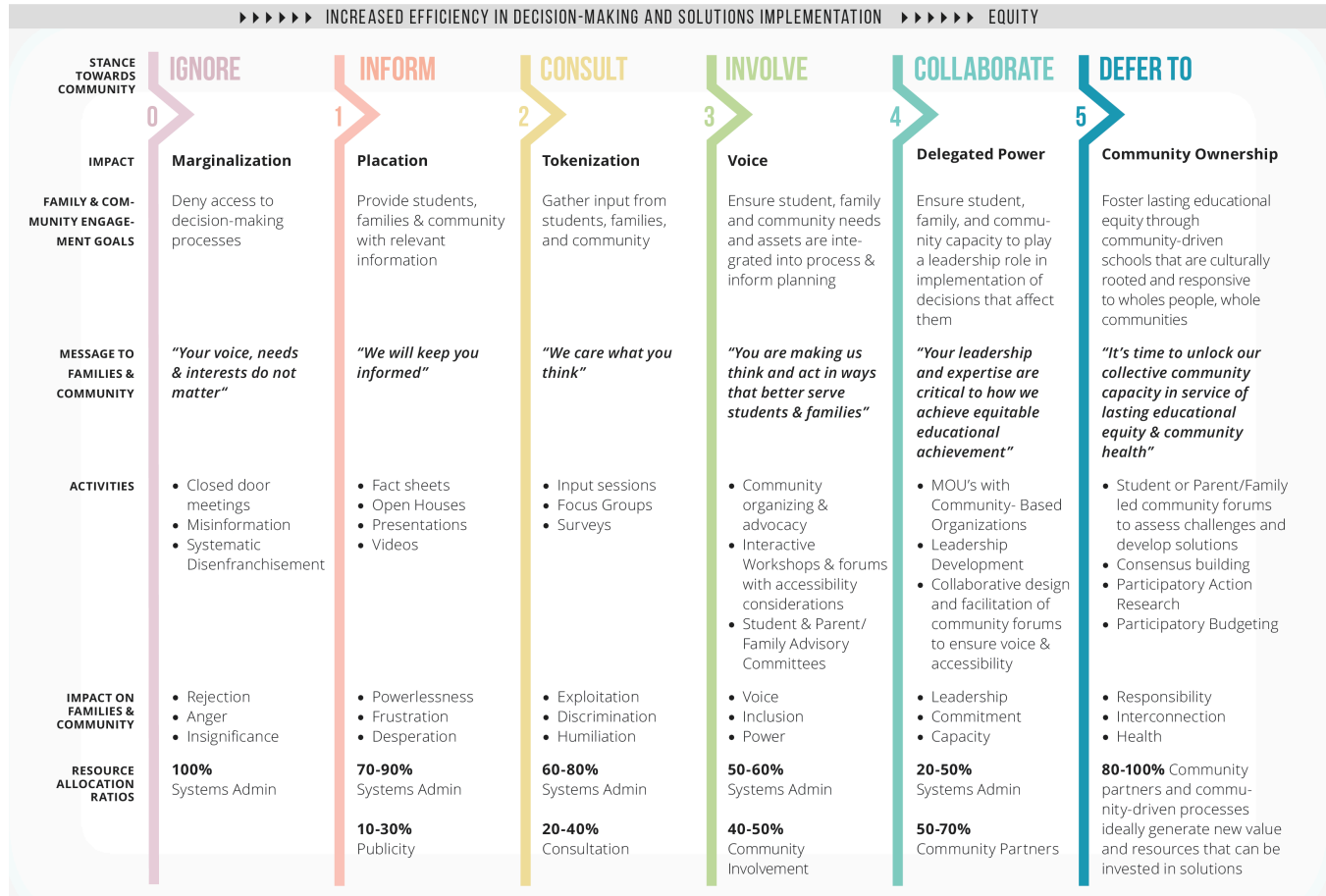
A substantial number of partners felt that mechanisms by the school district to solicit partner voice with intentionality would be of benefit. The perception is that engagement with the district focuses primarily on information-sharing and, while this is appreciated, there is a sense of missed opportunity to work more collaboratively together.

The graphic below was developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power⁴, in part drawing on content from a number of public participation tools, including Arnstein's Ladder of

⁴ Extracted from [Spectrum of Family and Community Engagement](#)

Citizen Participation⁵, and the Public Participation Spectrum created by the International Association for Public Participation⁶. It is worthy of reflection, in terms of the feedback received.

SPECTRUM OF FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY



Most partners indicated that the relationship desired with the school district is one of involvement and/or collaboration, in the true definition of those terms. It was clear they viewed that more connection to, and engagement with, the CVSD would benefit both partners and the district alike. They indicated that they were hopeful that the CVSD would welcome that type of enhanced relationship with them.

In terms of district communications that are intended to inform, partners appreciate receiving these. They did comment, however, that the timeliness of receipt of information has at times been challenging.

⁵ See Sherry R. Arnstein's "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224.

⁶ [IAP2 spectrum](#)

There was considerable feedback from partners regarding the nature of engagement with key individuals and organizations with respect to the school district's Child Care Initiative. Their observation about this initiative, being new and significant, was that insufficient engagement has occurred regarding the placement of the facilities, options for building structures and facility design. While partners very much support the initiative, there is a sense that the major decisions could have been made with more feedback from those who have expertise to share.

OBSERVATIONS

There are, and have been, a number of CVSD staff involved, from a variety of departments, with the delivery of the Child Care Initiative. Thus, considering the complexity of a project of this magnitude, a clear communication and engagement strategy would have been of benefit. There is currently the potential to learn where communications could be enriched, or where further levels of engagement could be accommodated.

CONSIDERATION – PARTNER DIALOGUE

Using the luxury of hindsight, there would be value in a dialogue with the partners involved with the Child Care Initiative to clarify their concerns. Subsequently, the district can use that information to inform upcoming actions on the project, or to support the rollout of future projects and/or initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT – CVSD COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT PLAN

To turn the page moving forward, and to augment relationships, the CVSD may wish to consider designing a communication and engagement plan that will: effectively inform; support consultation; and enhance involvement and collaboration so that the district conveys, "Your leadership and expertise are critical for the success of this initiative."



Partner Needs Regarding Knowledge and Implementation of the Early Learning Framework

As every organization is unique and their staff also unique, the district would benefit from a rigorous process to identify needs regarding the next steps to be taken regarding the implementation of the Early Learning Framework. The process must meaningfully engage all current childcare and early learning providers. Three current organizations could do this, and indeed appear willing to support the district in developing such a comprehensive plan:

- The newly reconstituted Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) Cowichan Branch would be an excellent partner in this regard. They would be able to contribute, both regarding the current needs of their members and in suggesting approaches for training and in-service.
- The Early Childhood Pedagogy Network (ECPN): Pedagogists are currently working with a cluster of centres in the Cowichan Valley. Pedagogists are supporting up to 90 early childhood educators, and their work in co-constructing curriculum with educators and children makes them a valuable resource and partner. They would have valuable insights regarding early childhood educator needs. The ECPN provides a significant opportunity for the district to support partners' knowledge and experience with the Early Learning Framework.
- The Child Care Resource and Referral Program (CCRR) mandate is to provide support services and consultations to all childcare providers to foster quality inclusive care through services such as: workshops and training; networking opportunities; and supportive program outreach. The CCRR staff are experienced in developing and delivering programs and would be knowledgeable regarding current needs and options to facilitate training.

RECOMMENDATION NINE – NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR THE EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK

That the CVSD consider a rigorous process to identify needs regarding the implementation of the Early Learning Framework in conjunction with the ECE Cowichan Branch, the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network (ECPN) pedagogists and the Child Care Resource and Referral Program (CCRR).

Options Regarding Developing Knowledge and Implementation of the ELF

The recent Cowichan Region Child Care Plan highlighted the long-standing requirements for childcare workers qualified as Early Childhood Educators to participate in regular professional development in order to maintain their credential. The plan reported that this training is typically paid for by the individual, creating another barrier or disincentive for childcare workers to pursue and/or maintain their full ECE qualification. The plan's recommendation that there be support for ongoing professional development for ECEs to reduce this burden, and thereby better meet the need for qualified childcare workers in the Cowichan region, provides a distinct opportunity for the school district.

The district has, and could continue to support training in a variety of ways, from including ECEs within existing in-service plans, to joint sessions with primary teachers; evening and weekend initiatives planned subsequent to daytime events; or others that make opportunities more accessible to childcare providers. Consideration regarding offering the training at a no or minimal cost could be of real assistance.

RECOMMENDATION TEN – CVSD CONTRIBUTION TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

That the CVSD continue to contribute to the provision of local, affordable professional development opportunities for ECEs that support the implementation of the Early Learning Framework.

Other Potential Early Learning Table Partners

Respondents were able to identify a number of potential early learning partners to supplement the Cowichan Early Years Table. The mindset of most contributors was to see the CEYT as open and welcoming. Some specific additional partners might include:

- ✓ Cowichan Intercultural Society
- ✓ Cowichan Communities Health Network
- ✓ Parent representation
- ✓ Child Care Resource and Referral
- ✓ Child Care Licensing
- ✓ MCFD staff
- ✓ Indigenous and Municipal leaders
- ✓ Business/Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Service Groups
- ✓ Key organizations providing early learning and childcare, such as Growing Together and Arcadian Early Learning.



Too often we only talk to the people that we know... Until you bring those people in, that you don't know, you're going to have the same conversation that you've had all the time." ⁷

⁷ Liz Weaver, Tamarack Institute

Collective Impact

This review was designed to provide some insights regarding strengthening collective impact to support young children and their success in transitioning to Kindergarten.

In collective impact terms, the CVSD is recognized by some as having the potential to be a backbone institution⁸. While achieving this would take considerable effort and careful planning, it certainly indicates the respect that partners have for the capacity within the district.

Collective impact, as noted earlier in this report, is achieved when cross-sector leaders come together and strategically organize all of the relevant groups in a community to accomplish a population-wide outcome. Collective impact is defined as “the commitment of a group of cross-sector actors to a common agenda for solving a complex social problem.”⁹

Collective impact initiatives are characterized by five core elements which have been derived from studying the experiences of successful cross-sector collaboratives. All five elements are consistently present—in forms adapted and customized for the local context—to effectively facilitate cross-sector collaboration and the resulting population-level impacts. These five elements are:

1. Common agenda: All participants share a vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed-upon actions.
2. Shared measurement: All participants agree on how to measure and report on progress, with a short list of common indicators identified to drive learning and improvement.
3. Mutually reinforcing activities: A diverse group of stakeholders, typically across sectors, coordinates a set of differentiated, mutually reinforcing activities.
4. Continuous communication: All players engage in frequent, structured communication to build trust, assure mutual objectives and create common motivation.
5. Backbone support: An independent, dedicated staff provides support and key functions for the sustained operation of the collective impact initiative.

⁸ Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations, *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 2012

⁹ John Kania and Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011.

No one element is more important than the others; rather, a collective impact effort needs all five to effectively drive long-term, population-level changes in a given topic or area of focus.

Planning in Support of the Early Years

The Cowichan Early Years Table is updating its strategic plan, and this represents an opportunity to contribute to a current, common agenda.

The CVSD Strategic Plan, *Beyond Education*, clearly communicates that enhancing early learning opportunities and partnerships is integral to the strategic priority area of learning. Some partners shared that they were unaware of the opportunity to participate in the CVSD Strategic Plan, and therefore did not contribute. Other partners are less familiar with the plan than the CVSD might assume and would desire.

OBSERVATIONS

Whether there is a desire to move towards a more formal adoption of collective impact or not, the next steps for the school district should focus on a common agenda. A common vision for change, with common understandings, is needed at the outset of any further CVSD undertakings in early learning, and certainly before any new structures are considered.

CONSIDERATION – BROADEN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CVSD STRATEGIC PLAN

As the CVSD Strategic Plan would benefit from greater understanding by the early years partners, it is recommended that the CVSD share the current actions within the Strategic Plan broadly with early years partners and invite their response and support.

Current Structures in Support of Early Learning

There currently are four separate tables/groups that support children and families, three with a distinct focus on the early years:

- The Cowichan Early Years Table (CEYT)
- Children and Family Council of the Cowichan Region (CFC)
- Cowichan Valley School District Board of Education Early Learning Committee.

An additional table, the Our Cowichan Communities Health Network (OCCHN), has a broad mandate and is made up of local health organizations, non-profit societies, volunteer groups and government representatives. The members have a shared commitment to helping people of the region attain the highest possible level of health and well-being. The OCCHN mandate is to create change by identifying local health issues and bringing together the people and resources best able to develop community-based solutions. Guided by 12 key determinants of health, they aim to create and sustain the most effective health system possible for our Cowichan communities.

The Cowichan Early Years Table has been successful at sustaining relationships since the dissolution of the previously funded Success by Six table. The members of the CEYT indicate that strengths include:

- Regular meetings with agendas and minutes
- Good attendance by participants, on the whole
- Engagement of the participants; some members are evidently more comfortable contributing than others, as is typical of many tables.

OBSERVATIONS

The CVSD is a welcome partner at the Cowichan Early Years Table and participants appreciate the support of, and effort by, the Early Learning Coordinator with respect to agendas and minutes.

By most accounts the CEYT is suitable for sharing of information and networking. The table might benefit from additional partners, as noted separately in this report. Some respondents indicate it would be advantageous to clarify a role and mechanism for the table to selectively provide advocacy for the early years. Consideration also might be given to a process where participants could review draft minutes and suggest additions or revisions, prior to distribution, thereby alleviating the pressure to get the minutes correct on the first draft.

The Children and Family Council of the Cowichan Region (CFC) identifies their values as being: relationships, sharing, collaboration, transparency, inclusion and action. They describe themselves as a purposeful, collective, energetic, action-based foundational movement for the children and families of the Cowichan Region. This past year the former Executive Team was replaced by a Planning Team with shared responsibility. Members of the CFC currently are members of the CEYT.

OBSERVATIONS

It seems that the Children and Family Council (CFC) and CEYT have similar interests and should consider merging. Further commentary is provided a bit later in this report about making partnerships work, and it is within that context that this proposition is offered.

The CVSD Board of Education Early Years Committee terms of reference consist of elements that would be of interest to, and would benefit from, discussion with partners. Specifically, the following seven areas fall into that category:

- Working to provide space, based on community need, for pre-school, childcare and/or before-school and after-school care programs in district elementary schools.
- Supporting the growth of family literacy programs within the schools and community, and increasing skills as measured by a variety of assessment tools.
- Developing and maintaining community connections and partnerships.

- Promoting reading and learning as presented in the Early Learning Framework for children from birth to eight years of age.
- Supporting developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that support “school readiness.”
- Providing ongoing opportunities for parents to receive quality information on early childhood education.
- Promoting and supporting literacy and lifelong learning.

OBSERVATIONS

The effort to maintain one table within the Cowichan Valley, let alone four, is immense. Considering the scope for the OCCHN and its broad mandate, there seems to be good reasoning why it has been established as a separate table.

Wherever possible, links between tables are beneficial, so in this regard the current CVSD Trustee representation on the Our Cowichan Communities Health Network (OCCHN) is very valuable.

The CVSD may wish to consider the value in maintaining a separate Early Learning Committee at some point in the future, as opposed to participation in the CEYT and/or establishing specific working groups that may arise from time to time.

Making Partnerships Work

Working **IN** the partnership involves the partners working to solve common problems or advance a common purpose. When working **ON** the partnership, the partners work to create or improve the way in which the partnership itself functions; also the partnership’s ability to produce extraordinary results. IN isn’t ON and there is no overlap. Working IN the partnership is what most people naturally gravitate to because it’s relatively straightforward and what they’re used to doing in their day jobs. Working ON is harder because it can feel ambiguous and amorphous.¹⁰ For more on “IN” vs “ON” please refer to *The E-Myth* by Michael Gerber.

Should the CEYT and the CFC formally merge, there would be even greater need to design opportunities to work ON the partnership.

OBSERVATIONS

Going forward, strategies to work ON the partnership when working IN the partnership would be very valuable. As with many committees there are personal dynamics and idiosyncrasies that flavour meetings. A common theme of the siloed nature of some of the organizations bears further scrutiny, as does the effort to remove the chance of any perception that there is a hierarchy regarding participants.

¹⁰ Backbone Organizations: A Field Guide – 27 Ways to Drive Impact in Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives

With regard to specific partnerships to deliver programs, such as those organizations delivering StrongStart, Childcare BC, or other related services, there may be benefit in more regular contact with program administrators and more formal documentation such as leases, memoranda of understanding, terms of reference, etc.

Avenues to Develop Formal Partnerships and Programs to Support Early Learning

Improving circumstances for children and families requires working in partnerships. Organizations that act in concert can tackle issues that lie beyond the scope of any single organization. Working together requires working across difference. “The diversity of communities and organizations means that almost any time we come together, we do so across difference. In doing so, we face both the opportunity and the challenge of:

- a. bridging cultural differences across race, gender, age, class, religion and more; and
- b. forming alliances with organizations that have cultures, philosophies and principles of operation different from our own.”¹¹

In relationship to working effectively together, a number of partners commented on the significant uniqueness of communities within the Valley and the consideration uniqueness must have in planning. In addition, addressing the variety of organizational cultures and philosophies, and of individual partner relationships or lack thereof, also represents areas for further work to be done.

OBSERVATIONS

A Strategic Plan priority area calls for an action to “deepen family and community engagement in new and existing early years programs.” As the vast majority of early-year programming is conducted by Cowichan Valley partners, it will be incumbent upon the district to engage with partners, both individually and collectively, to move this area forward.

A specific action with the CVSD Strategic Plan is to initiate and co-create with community a universal touch point program, Bright Beginnings, for ages birth to five. This program would have a focus on parent education regarding child development. The terminology used, “co-create,” resonates very well with one of the higher tiers of engagement, i.e., collaboration, and the current working committee could be a model for other CVSD initiatives.

CONSIDERATION – BRIGHT BEGINNINGS AS AN ENGAGEMENT MODEL WITH PARTNERS

The Bright Beginnings initiative is an opportunity to nurture relationships and can serve as a successful engagement model for future CVSD work in early learning.

¹¹ What Can We Do Together That We Can't Do Alone? Paul Mattessich and Kirsten Johnson

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are intended to support the Cowichan Valley School District's (CVSD) planning efforts. It is important to once again reiterate that this was not a program evaluation, and **no** assessment was done regarding program quality.



COWICHAN VALLEY
School District

Further, the recommendations that refer to early learning partnerships throughout the Cowichan Valley are intended to strengthen collective impact to support young children and their success in transitioning to Kindergarten. These recommendations pertain to how the Cowichan Valley School District (CVSD) interacts with partners. There is no assessment of the partner organizations individually, nor of the Cowichan Early Years Table (CEYT) members.

The recommendations contained in the report have been informed by all of the information gathered. They are summarized below for ease of reference.

Recommendation One - StrongStart

Given the significant differences in EDI vulnerability within the district, it may be time to both review the location of StrongStart programs, and the “reach” they are providing to families and children who could most benefit from those supports. Consideration could be given for approaches to serve highly isolated families by extending the reach of existing programs, or by relocating existing StrongStart programs.

Recommendation Two – Allocation of District Programs, Services and Initiatives

With the EDI school level data in mind, it may be valuable to review all district early learning programs, services and initiatives currently offered in early primary, with a view to ensuring they are serving families and children to the best extent possible.

Recommendation Three – Early Success Screen

Depending on the nature of the revisions to the ESS, as an alternative, the district may wish to explore commercially available screening options, such as the [Early Years Evaluation – Teacher Assessment](#) (EYE-TA), [Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation](#), or the University of Oregon’s [Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills](#) (DIBELS). The intent would be to make the collection of relevant data as efficient as possible. To use the latter example, DIBELS is a battery of short (one minute) fluency measures that can be used for universal screening, benchmark assessment and progress monitoring in each primary grade.

Recommendation Four – Timing of Data Collection

The advantage of identifying needs at an individual student, class and school level early in the school year allows for differentiation of resources within a school, and likewise, differentiation of resources within the district. To ensure that screening is not misinterpreted, thus addressing teacher apprehension on this matter; and to provide the greatest opportunity to the district to adjust resources and respond to needs, it is recommended that the district data be captured in the September screen.

Recommendation Five – Resources Focused on Classrooms

Rather than identifying Focus Schools, the district could consider a roll-up of data to support any classroom with high literacy needs, in effect a focus on classrooms. Supported classrooms could be determined annually and would replace Focus Schools. In this way, the district would avoid the labelling of individual schools and have the flexibility to address priority learners, in any classroom in the district, on an annual basis.

Recommendation Six – Early Identification

The district may wish to consider a pilot community-based initiative with the engagement of the Valley's early learning partners to explore universal early identification of children's needs prior to Kindergarten in either neighbourhoods, or in school catchment areas, with the highest numbers of children who would benefit from earlier identification and support.

Recommendation Seven – 2020-2024 K-12 Literacy Plan

It is recommended that the district proceed with a literacy framework of this magnitude, as a genuine investment in children.

Recommendation Eight – Communication and Engagement Plan

To turn the page moving forward, and to enhance relationships, the CVSD may wish to consider designing a communication and engagement plan that will effectively: inform; support consultation; and enhance involvement and collaboration so that the district conveys, "Your leadership and expertise are critical for the success of this initiative."

Recommendation Nine – Needs Assessment for the ELF

That the CVSD consider a rigorous process to identify needs regarding the implementation of the Early Learning Framework in conjunction with the ECE Cowichan Branch, the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network (ECPN) pedagogists and the Child Care Resource and Referral Program (CCRR).

Recommendation Ten – Contribution to Professional Development

That the CVSD continue to support local, affordable professional development opportunities for ECEs that support the implementation of the Early Learning Framework.

"What can we do together that we can't do alone?" - Hildy Gottlieb

CLOSING COMMENTS

The premise of collaborative leadership says: If you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organization and community¹².

Each component of the premise is important and supports the recommendations provided within this report:

- You must bring the appropriate people together – the collaboration must be broadly inclusive
- You must bring people together in constructive ways – design the process so that it can deal with different understandings of the issues, varying degrees of trust, and so that the process encourages people to work together
- Good information is critical to good decision-making – involve experts in the process as informers, rather than drivers of the process.

The traditional concept of leadership is that of the heroic leader – they have a vision, they assert it, they persuade us, and they gain followers. Collaborative leadership turns that concept upside down simply by saying that if we bring good people together in constructive ways, we will be able to make conscious, inclusive decisions.

We need to recognize that **how we decide** is as important as **what we decide**. We often choose to focus on a solution rather than a process that brings us to a solution.

Collaboration is more than a tool in a toolbox. When collaboration works, it allows us to deal with future issues in constructive ways. Collaboration builds social capital.

Recognizing the opportunity for greater engagement of individuals and organizations will be critical, particularly as the district assumes a larger role in early learning and childcare with the new Ministry of Education mandates. Specifically, the district will benefit from being mindful of what is appropriate and when. That is, in any given situation, whether to inform, consult, involve or collaborate with other partners; or to move forward without input.

Authentic community change moves at the speed of trust.¹³

¹² The Tamarack Institute

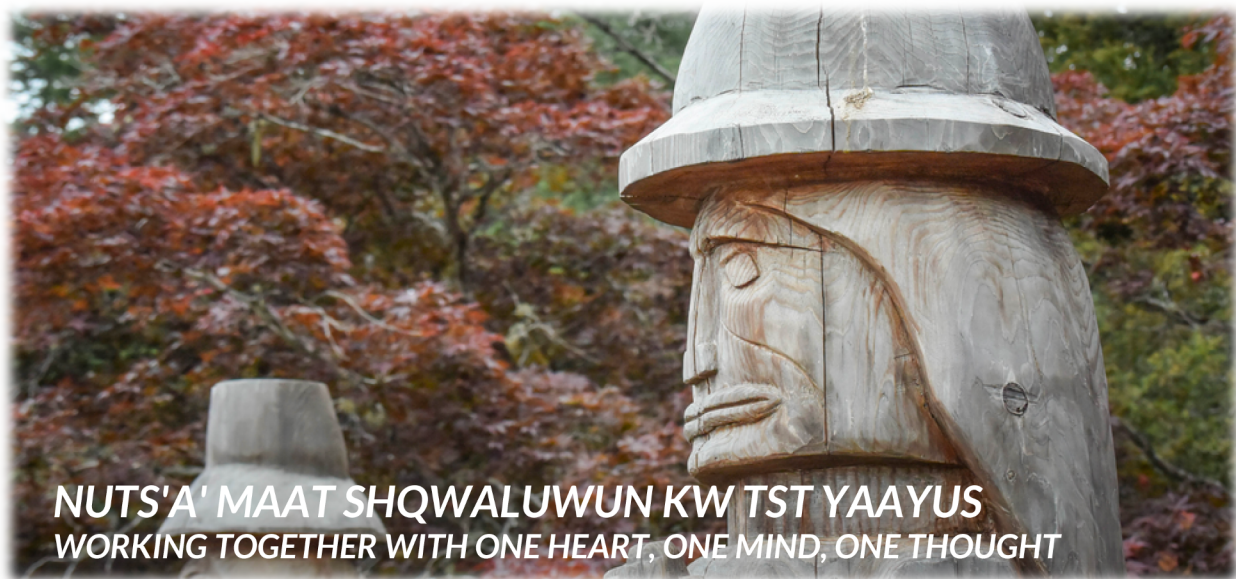
¹³ Liz Weaver Tamarack Institute

NEXT STEPS

The district will want to be thoughtful regarding the implementation of the recommendations in this report, as well as with the development of new, or refined district programs, initiatives and services.

The number and breadth of recommendations calls for careful consideration and planning. Just as recommendation nine speaks to moving forward with partners with a clear communication and engagement plan, communications and engagement regarding the recommendations within the report will also need that careful consideration. Involving partners with any plans stemming from the recommendations is critical.

The CVSD has an enormous responsibility for children, and with the support of the dedicated, knowledgeable and willing individuals and organizations who contributed to this report, the district can realize the priorities of *Beyond Education*.



A sincere thank you is extended to all of those who provided their valuable time to contribute to the information gathered. Your commitment to children and families was obvious and so respected. I extend a special thank you to district staff who were of such support.

With respect to the writing in this report, I offer this quote:

"All of my words, if not well put nor well taken, are well meant."

Woody Guthrie

Anne Cooper
April 2021

INVENTORY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

5. Early Learning and Child Care Committee

5.1 Purpose

- 5.1.2 To improve overall readiness for school and to increase student success in primary school years. The Committee will also focus on issues related to existing and future childcare spaces within School District facilities.

5.2 Powers and Duties

5.2.1 Powers

Make recommendations to the Board where deemed appropriate.

5.2.2 Duties:

To ensure all students have opportunities for early success by:

1. Working to provide space, based on community need, for pre-school, childcare and/or before and after school care programs in schools. These resources must be licensed and follow the Early Learning Framework.
2. Supporting the growth of family literacy programs within the schools and community and increasing skills as measured by a variety of assessment tools.
3. Tracking and providing appropriate interventions for Kindergarten/Grade 1 students.
4. Developing and maintaining community connections and partnerships.
5. Promoting reading and learning as presented in the Early Learning Framework.
6. Supporting developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that support “school readiness”.
7. Providing ongoing opportunities for parents to receive quality information on early childhood education.
8. Promoting and supporting literacy and lifelong learning.

5.3 Membership

- 5.3.1 Three trustees as appointed by the Board Chair. The Chair of the Committee is determined by the Board Chair. Three senior staff members. Resource personnel as needed.

5.4 Meetings

- 5.4.2 Every two months or at the call of the Chair.