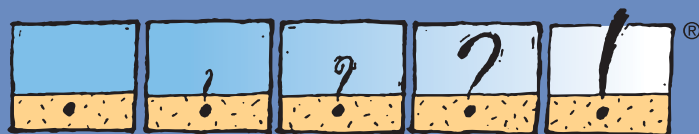


# Welcome to Kindergarten™



THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

Champions of Public Education Across Canada



**A Reference Guide to Building Community Partnerships for Schools with the Welcome to Kindergarten Program**

# A REFERENCE GUIDE TO BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR SCHOOLS WITH THE WELCOME TO KINDERGARTEN™ PROGRAM

## PARTNERING TO BUILD FOR SUCCESS IN SUPPORT OF YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

### ■ GOAL

*This document has been developed to guide those schools that are partnering with The Learning Partnership*

*to provide the Welcome to Kindergarten program. Outreach to school community partners is an essential component of the Welcome to Kindergarten program. The goal is to enhance and provide the necessary guidance and support that families can draw upon to ensure*

*the well-being and healthy development of their young children.*

**“**Entering school ready to learn and interact socially is a good predictor of success later in high school.**”**

*(Building a National Strategy for Healthy Child Development. Report of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health, May 1997)*

Working in partnerships is exciting and challenging. It helps us to understand our work and puts it into perspective; it introduces us to new people and ideas, broadens our knowledge and makes us grow. At the same time, it strengthens the Welcome to Kindergarten program and brings the voice of The Learning Partnership to the wider community. When people work together, the result is stronger communities, stronger schools and better services and support for young children and their families.

### ■ THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

The Learning Partnership is a national not-for-profit organization that strengthens public education in Canada by developing and delivering innovative programs, conducting credible research, advancing policy initiatives while engaging the public in meaningful dialogues. The Learning Partnership is best-known for its first program, Take Our Kids to Work.

The Learning Partnership sees the child in the context of the family, the community and society. Partnerships and collaboration are at the heart of The Learning Partnership's work: Teamwork with colleagues, organizations, the community and families is essential.



## THE WELCOME TO KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

The mission of the Welcome to Kindergarten (WTK) program is to provide parents and their pre-school children with the resources and experiences to begin their child's formal education with a foundation in early learning nurtured within their home. WTK accomplishes this mission by providing a community needs-focused partnership vehicle to spark interest and enable parents to play their natural role in doing what they can do to prepare their children for their future and gain the confidence and understanding of how to continue that support as their children learn and grow.

Parents/caregivers are invited to attend a workshop(s) at their neighbourhood school where they receive early learning resources from The Learning Partnership's Welcome to Kindergarten program and learn the strategies and rationale for using the resources with their child.

The Welcome to Kindergarten program encourages the involvement of school/community



partnerships. Schools are reminded to invite their community partners to the staff training sessions and the parents' orientation sessions. It is recommended that the school staff and the community partners work together to plan the parent/child orientation sessions and any follow-up activities.

## WHAT ARE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS?

**Community partnerships have many different names — community mobilization, community cooperation, community development, community collaboration, community alliances, linkages, coalitions.**

Basically they are all variations on a single theme: people working together toward a common goal. The connections between the participants can be informal and short term or formal and long-lasting. The gradations in between are as numerous as the people and groups who come together.

In any partnership, relationships are key. As partners make connections, work together and get to know each other, they develop trust and respect for each other.

The Learning Partnership has developed significant relationships with many community partners through its Welcome to Kindergarten program. This

program has become a catalyst to bring schools, families and community agencies together in very meaningful ways.

## ■ WHY BECOME INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS?

*Community partnerships enhance the work that we are doing and ensure support for children and families.*

*There is power in partnerships. Working together, people and groups have more impact than they do alone. Working together actually builds community and solidifies relationships. Partners come to know each others' programs and become more supportive.*



### Community partnerships can:

- Provide greater access to community resources and services, new information, contacts, expertise and ideas that can help identify the issues that children and families face, the supports they need and the ways to help them.
- Help ease children's transitions from one environment to another (child care to school, pre-school to school, home to school).
- Build strong home/school relationships by making the whole spectrum of community supports visible and accessible to all parents and families.
- Strengthen communities, thereby nurturing the people who live and work in them.
- Allow for a wider set of activities to be performed by a larger set of partners, often creating richer, more rewarding experiences instead of resorting to a traditional set of activities for example: The Ontario Early Years Centre may provide children and parents follow-up activities related to The Welcome to Kindergarten program (summer programs providing early learning activities); The Library delivering their "Ready for Reading" program at the



school for the Welcome to Kindergarten children and parents, etc.

Community Audit to fully determine and understand your community's assets and resources?

When choosing participants, the goal is to create a diverse team that will represent all members of the affected community. This way, the team can build a sense of community, address the strengths of their practices, identify needed changes and expectations, and link activities to the goals of the partnership.

Being meaningfully involved in the early development of children is important not only to family members, but to all stakeholders in a community. A community-wide approach often results in greater community commitment to the initiative. By drawing on a cross section of community expertise

## WHO CAN BE YOUR PARTNERS IN THE COMMUNITY?

### Consider these questions:

- Who has an interest in and/or is involved in early child development?
- Who is providing services to young children and their families?
- Who is affected by it?
- Who needs to be involved to enhance your initiative?
- What partnerships already exist?

***“Children grow and thrive best within responsible families who offer the dignity, security, respect and love children deserve and require, and attempts to enhance their lives must recognize children’s lives are lived in families. Families/caregivers should be supported by individuals, communities, businesses, labour, organizations and governments, who share the responsibility for their healthy development and well-being.”***

*(Building a National Strategy for Healthy Child Development: Report of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health, May 1997)*

- How do you want to grow your Welcome to Kindergarten program and who could help?
- Should you conduct a

to support the Welcome to Kindergarten program, schools and communities end up with a more effective program — one that truly reflects the specific local needs.

One of the major rules of engaging partners is to involve the people who are most affected. If you forge ahead without them, they feel excluded and patronized. How can you best support and encourage their involvement? Outreach and inform the partners as soon as possible when the school knows that it will be delivering the Welcome to Kindergarten program.

**“Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”**

*Margaret Mead*

**Representatives of some of the following groups might be considered in your partnership list:**

- Community Services Organizations (i.e. YMCA/ YWCA)
- Child Care Centres — operators and staff
- Public Libraries
- Community Centres
- Child/Parent Play and Education Programs (i.e. Ontario Early Years Centres; Parent and Family Literacy Centres; Success by Six; Strong Start Centres; School Hubs; Best Start Hubs, Family Resource Centres)
- Health and Medical Resources (i.e. Hospitals; Public Health Units, Health Centres)
- Cultural/Ethnic and Settlement Services (i.e. First Nations’ Friendship Centres)
- Agencies supporting Families with Young Children (i.e. Children’s Aid Societies; Family Services Associations)
- Businesses
- Service Clubs (i.e. Rotary, Lions)
- Police and Fire Departments
- Ratepayers Associations
- Government (i.e. Ministries of Social Services, Children and Youth Services, Local Municipalities, MPs, MPPs and City Councillors)
- Parent Councils/Home and School Associations
- Churches
- Ontario Early Years Literacy Specialists
- Early Intervention Programs (Speech and Languages Services)

Any organization providing services to young children and their families can be a partner.



## ■ HOW DOES A COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP START?

### **Start where you are — close to the school(s)**

Connect with a person or group with shared interests. You might want to start with one person at a time. The more people involved, the more complex the work. Starting with a single partner might make things easier to manage. Start with a group or person with whom you already have a relationship.

Start with a goal that is concrete and tangible — invite your community partner(s) to The Welcome to Kindergarten Teacher/Administrator Training Workshop to receive information about the program.

Invite your community partner(s) to participate in the planning of your school's WTK Parent Orientation Session(s). Each partner will be able to identify their unique strength and expertise and thus contribute to the overall plan. Consider the issues of translation, child care or transportation. What is the best time to schedule the meeting(s) and where is the most convenient place to hold the session(s)? Will the school need release time for the teachers to be involved? Start where there is the greatest consensus!

Involve your community partner(s) in the delivery of the WTK Parent/Child Orientation Session(s) and any follow-up activities. Encourage community partners to take responsibility for providing programs/services which will enhance the goals of the Welcome to Kindergarten program.

### **The nature of the community partners' support can be varied, some examples are:**

- Providing translation and interpreting support for families at the school orientations,
- Providing print informational material and/or resources to be included in the Welcome To Kindergarten resource bag,



- Outreaching/sharing information/providing assistance to parents,
- Attending WTK information meetings and orientation sessions,
- Providing information on their programs at the orientation sessions,
- Working with school staff to plan the orientation and implement the session(s)
- Providing extension of early learning activities/services for parents and children
- Facilitating the use/ distribution of early identification screening tools
- Providing additional strategies to parents in the use of the curriculum materials in the Welcome to Kindergarten program resource bag
- Providing follow-up workshops to parents (e.g. Ontario Early Years Literacy Specialist on reading to children; Speech and Language Services on identifying the language developmental stages of children and the support services available).

Each partner will be able to identify their unique strength, expertise and service and thus contribute these to the overall plan.

## HOW DO PARTNERSHIPS FUNCTION?

There are no prescribed structures for working in partnerships, no traditions or precedents to follow. There are some logistic questions to consider as you move forward. How will the community partners communicate with one another? Who will be the school contact person that will facilitate communication and sharing of information with the community partners? Who will chair meetings? Will the chair rotate? The foundation of a successful community partnership is knowing what you hope to accomplish and why. Do people agree about what they want to do and why they want to do it?



Reviewing the WTK program goals/objectives may assist to put everyone on the same path.

***The overall goal of the Welcome to Kindergarten program is to close the achievement gap, by preparing children from families with diverse backgrounds for school and learning with a prime focus on school readiness skills and early literacy development.***

**Objectives:**

- *To provide pre-school children and their families with the resources and experiences to begin their formal education with a foundation in literacy/ numeracy nurtured within their home.*
- *To deepen the understanding of parents/caregivers about the value of participating in early learning activities and play with pre-school children.*
- *To provide the professional development and resources for kindergarten/early childhood teachers and community partners to connect with and support the families of three and four year old children, before the children enter school.*

Knowing why people are there gives people a sense of purpose and keeps them together. School-family-community partnerships will have a different look

and feel depending on many issues, demographics, school profiles, needs and wants of the community, as well as the expectations of parents and family just to name a few.

It is also important to develop a plan. People have very little spare time and lots of other responsibilities. Without a plan, they get frustrated and feel as if they are wasting their time. A plan helps to avoid duplication and coordinate activities. It provides an overview of what the group hopes to achieve and how it hopes to achieve it. With a plan, everyone can see how everything fits together.

***“The Welcome to Kindergarten program created trust and special relationship links between parents and teachers, teachers and children and community partners and parents.”***

*North Bay parent.*

## ■ Sample Plan:

*Activities/practices that the community organizations and the school plan to initiate in order to support families and pre-school children in the Welcome to Kindergarten program process:*

### **Communication Strategies:**

- Exchange Newsletters, flyers, etc.
- Distribute each other's information as appropriate to children and families.
- Establish a partnership contact liaison person.
- Establish regular information sharing procedure/practices.

### **Pre-Kindergarten Registration Involvement:**

- Establish practices for enhancing children's entry into kindergarten.
- Community partners work with schools to plan their participation in kindergarten registration.
- Partners identify and implement school readiness programs for children and families.
- Partners bring community agencies together to address early identification needs.
- Partners provide parent outreach and facilitate completion of forms.

### **Kindergarten Registration Involvement:**

- Kindergarten age children with their parents from community early years programs visit the schools.
- Partners provide activity tables.
- Partners provide translation services.

### **Welcome to Kindergarten Orientation Workshops:**

- Community partners participate in the Welcome to Kindergarten Orientation workshops.
- Partners provide translators (if required).
- Partners provide additional strategies to parents in the use of the materials in the Welcome to Kindergarten bag.
- Partners provide information about their services to parents.
- Partners encourage families to attend the orientation sessions.

### **Follow-Up support**

- Community partners provide extension of activities to support the Welcome to Kindergarten program.
- Partners provide follow-up workshops to parents to support the literacy of their



children (i.e. Ontario Early Years Literacy Specialist on reading to children)

- Partners work jointly with support agencies to advocate for identified needs (i.e. Speech and Languages Services)
- Partners hold joint workshops on issues of interest
- Partners deliver support early learning programs (i.e. Parent-Child Mother Goose Program)

Knowing why people are there gives people a sense of purpose and keeps them together. A well thought out plan allows a large number of people to think in a structured way about their work together. It outlines the steps that must occur in order to reach the goals, and saves time, energy and resources.

## ■ DO PARTNERSHIPS MEAN NEW WAYS OF DOING THINGS?

People have different skills and different ways of working, and when we team up we learn new ways from each other. Some conceptual shifts may be required by members of the group to enhance the newly formed partnership. For example: Moving from competition and turf protection to collaboration and consensus.

It is important for people to get to know each other and to explore their differences openly. Acknowledging and accepting differences enhances respect, trust and understanding and helps to build relationships.

Remaining flexible is key. It's important to keep communicating, stay open to new opinions, ideas and information, and be able to respond to feedback. The responsibility for children's educational development is a



collaborative enterprise among parents, school staff and community partners.

## ■ HOW DO PARENTS AND FAMILIES BENEFIT FROM PARTNERSHIPS?

*Partnerships between schools and the community have significant benefits for everyone involved particularly parents and families:*

- Studies show that when programs and initiatives focus on respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families and community members, they are effective in creating and sustaining community connections with schools;
- Parents/caregivers develop their understanding of the “parent’s role” from the expectations and experiences

of the groups with which they belong or identify, i.e. other family members, the school, their workplace;

- Parents/caregivers are made aware of the resources available to them within the school and the community to help them develop their child’s skills and knowledge;
- School and community cultures are created where parents feel like “members of the family”;
- Clear communication strategies are established between all partners including families.



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**THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP**

Champions of Public Education Across Canada

The Learning Partnership  
4211 Yonge Street, Suite 301  
Toronto, ON M2P 2A9

Tel: 416-440-5100 | Toll free: 1-800-790-9113 | Fax: 416-482-5311

[info@thelearningpartnership.ca](mailto:info@thelearningpartnership.ca) | [www.thelearningpartnership.ca](http://www.thelearningpartnership.ca)