
June 6, 2024

To: Yael Ginsler, Assistant Deputy Minister, Student Achievement Division, Ministry of Education

Re: OPSBA Response to Information Gathering (Kindergarten)

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) appreciates this opportunity to provide comments to inform future updates to the kindergarten curriculum.

OPSBA represents English public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA is seen as the expert voice of public education in Ontario and is routinely called on by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy directions.

Our response on the following pages has been sent to the ministry via the appropriate online mechanism and is informed by our internal consultation with our program team of educators across the province.

As the province's leading advocate for public education, OPSBA continues to support initiatives that improve student achievement and well-being, and that also lead to increasing public confidence in our world-class public education system.

As the key advocate for our members, we look forward to continuing our work with the Ministry of Education and relevant stakeholders on future initiatives related to early years education and hope to receive an advanced copy of the draft revised PPM.

Sincerely,



Cathy Abraham
President, OPSBA

cc.

The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
Kate Manson-Smith, Deputy Minister (Education)
Dasha Androusenkov, Director, Stakeholder Relations, Minister of Education's Office

RESPONSE TO INFORMATION GATHERING (KINDERGARTEN)

What are the strengths of the Kindergarten Program 2016? (Please provide a rationale based on the scope of revision: foundational literacy, mathematics, and STEM)

The 2016 Kindergarten Program reflects an understanding of the importance of play for young learners as they develop curiosity. It provides a good foundational background of young children and their learning, with an important aspect being the focus on co-constructing learning with students and making learning and assessment visible. In addition, the focus on the collaborative strength of the partnership between the early childhood educator (ECE) and the teacher and the need for strong planning is appreciated. This enables different strategies to be used with different learners at different times. The curriculum and the natural integration of it across topics and the focus on outdoor and hands-on learning are important key components. A focus on well-being, even at an early age, was also noted. Other strengths are the inclusion of some of the early math skills with expectations and examples of what programming looks like.

Overall, the vision, purpose and goals of the program are well-articulated, as are the foundational conditions and frames, and examples of what learning looks like. The inclusion of educator responses is appreciated.

It was also mentioned that the terms “curriculum” and “program” should not be used interchangeably as kindergarten attendance is not mandated.

In what ways might the learning expectations in the kindergarten curriculum be revised to support a clear progression of learning in language, mathematics, and science and technology curriculum as children transition to Grade 1?

The present document does not go far enough in terms of its specificity and explicitness. For example, the concepts and aspects of direct instruction in early reading and mathematics are not made clear – e.g., letter sound recognition, and letter development in writing. The document does not speak directly to the concept of “number,” which serves as the basis of math. Presently, there seems to be a large jump in expectations between kindergarten and Grade 1. While the focus on play has merit, the document does not deal enough with the component parts of skill development and the explicit links to play. Something has been lost with the focus on play and what that really means, which has led to some misunderstandings. How can play be linked to the child’s trajectory of learning so that parents understand it? Also, in a multicultural society with differing view of childhood and learning, how can the value of play be specifically linked to skill development to enhance parent understanding of its value? The new document should consider, and make clear, math and literacy behaviours; it is presently too general. The new document would benefit from suggestions in the front matter of it including more explanations about qualifiers and greater concreteness in terms of skills development and significant milestones. A skills continuum would answer questions about what readiness looks like and assist boards and parents by providing consistency in definitions. More information about how to weave in Universal Screening data to inform both small and whole groups instruction would be very helpful.

Are there opportunities for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children to see themselves and their traditions reflected in the curriculum expectations? (Please provide suggestions and a rationale based on the scope of revision: foundational literacy, mathematics, and STEM)

Such opportunities are dependent upon the skill sets of teachers and their access to certain groups such as elders. This knowledge needs to be taught and educators need greater access to specific interpretations while still respecting the many different Indigenous teaching and learning styles. **It is essential that Indigenous communities are consulted and that Indigenous ways of knowing are included.** It would be helpful to provide specific expectations and examples that are culturally relevant including student responses on Land-based learning, not just outdoor learning, needs to be understood and taught. Belonging is a part of the present document. This could be a place to further define/describe and outline this concept.

In what ways might the kindergarten curriculum be revised to be inclusive of all children and their lived experience? (Please provide suggestions and a rationale based on the scope of revision: foundational literacy, mathematics and STEM)

It could be more inclusive with better examples as they are presently not specific enough. The ministry should look to the many stellar summer programs and culturally based programs that occur across the province. A focus on equity and inclusion, as well as understandings around anti-Black racism are critical to ensuring that the curriculum is inclusive.

Consider the strength of these summer programs where parents are invited into the learning and where their knowledge is embraced. Systems need to be more responsive to community and the lived experiences of our families, especially those who experience poverty. Culturally based programs have shown us the power of creating open and inclusive environments. The updated document needs to emphasize the importance of community and family; this needs to be embraced and articulated through examples. In addition, a greater understanding of the importance of first languages needs to be articulated in the document. It should highlight Universal Design and the needs of individual learners so that all students can meet with success.

What are some developmentally appropriate, evidence-based instructional approaches that could be considered with respect to early reading, math, and STEM to inform the kindergarten curriculum? (Please provide suggestions and a rationale based on the scope of revision: foundational literacy, mathematics, and STEM)

Direct instruction on literacy and numeracy are essential. The Right to Read should inform the new document. Specific and explicit expectations and ways that children might respond should be considered. There are some examples but they are not very specific or inclusive. The document should encourage interactive rich read alouds, print rich environments, manipulatives with real world applications even with technology applications. It would be helpful to increase the importance of spatial reasoning and consider the work of experts. The document should be research informed.

What would be helpful to communicate to parents/guardians in order to provide a better understanding of the learning in kindergarten and the benefits of that

learning? (Please provide suggestions and a rationale based on the scope of revision: foundational literacy, mathematics, and STEM)

Parents/caregivers would benefit from regular updates, practice activities, understanding the why of instructional methods and a clear understanding of the areas of focus. Wherever possible, the learner’s story should be shared, and structures should be developed to make learning more visible to families. A “learning together” approach, where families are invited in, and where a “we are here to help” mindset can benefit everyone. It would be good to advocate for a more formal intake where parents, as their child’s first teacher, can share their knowledge of their child’s learning. Schools should inform families about school readiness attributes so that parents can share their child’s skill development as not all children attend kindergarten. Screening, based on development skills, can assist in understanding students. Educators can share milestones of development to create a partnership with families. Parents can be part of the intake process.

How could your community/organization/agency support educators’ capacity to teach this focused revision of the program/curriculum and to best support children’s meaningful experiences (e.g., resources and training)?

A good kindergarten program is based on the educator team. We must ask: How can the professional development be provided for both teachers and ECE and how can there be opportunities for co-planning? Can there be stronger links with the Faculties of Education, the Ontario College of Teachers and ECE organizations to promote the implementation of the new curriculum?

Special education strategies/supports need to be part of the learning for educational teams and this needs to be woven throughout the document. Recognition of the difference between a childcare setting and a classroom for ECEs is essential and they need to have the same learning opportunities as teachers. It would be most helpful to have a partnership between the ECE and the teacher organizations to foster this.

Do you have suggestions on how the ministry could further support schools and educators to implement this focused revision of the kindergarten curriculum in order to provide all children with an inclusive and equitable learning experience focused on foundational learning skills?

The expectations regarding reading instruction and math must be explicit, and partnerships and sharing must be encouraged with parents/caregivers. Families need feedback on where the children are at and waiting until Grade 3 to address concerns is too late. Early intervention can drastically improve the outcomes for students.

We only have 194 days a year to make a difference.