
Northwest School Division To Increase Kindergarten Time

March 19, 2010

The Northwest School Division is increasing the time that kindergarten will be offered to students in schools across the division this coming fall. Time available for students will be augmented from between 10% to 50% depending upon demonstrated need, but almost all schools (with the exception of those which have Pre-Kindergarten classes already) will see an extension. These figures essentially mean that kindergarten classes- which are currently available every second day- will now be offered at a minimum of 60% everywhere within the division, and at higher levels (up to and including full time) where there is a need.

Superintendents and Principals are currently meeting to discuss staffing arrangements.

The move is being taken because firstly, results in schools within the division have confirmed that extending educational time before grade 1 has resulted in significant and strong improvements in student performance in the long term and secondly, an in-depth assessment, administered last year to pre-school age students, has shown that there is a clear and demonstrable need to increase instructional time in Kindergarten to enhance our children's readiness for school.

"If research and testing show that some of our children aren't ready for grade one, then we need to address this and work as a division and with parents to make them more ready," said Director of Education, Glen Winkler. "Nineteen of our schools will see an increase in kindergarten time. We've recognized that when students have experienced extended instructional time –whether it's in a pre-kindergarten class, or in a kindergarten class that's offered more than 50% - there are long term benefits to the child."

"There are challenges posed by the expansion," said Winkler. "Finding classroom space in some schools, making the staffing numbers fit the names of our staff- these aren't big problems- but they are still problems that we have to meet, because the bottom line is that all children will benefit from this, and some children will be helped enormously. We are trying to put dollars where they are most needed – and into the communities where they're most needed. This is a very, very positive thing, and the Board recognizes this and sees the potential in it. They deserve a lot of credit here because they are making innovative decisions to meet the needs of our students."

Superintendent Brain Gislason noted that the timing of the initiative was good as it was coinciding with a change in the kindergarten curriculum. "There's a new focus on language and language development, and it's timely that we are addressing these issues. An increase in time is important because recent research has demonstrated that the hard wiring and networking of the child's mind occurs in the first six years of life. The window of opportunity is not very long– fifty percent of a child's learning occurs in the first four years of life- and delayed language development is the single most common difficulty in early school years. The success that we've had in some of our schools– which are achieving results above Canadian norms- is directly

attributable to effective intervention programmes, such as early reading intervention and early learning programmes such as Pre-Kindergarten.”

When asked for her comment on the programme Superintendent of Student Services, Carolyn Forsey, simply pointed out that research has shown that full-day kindergarten is both uniformly advantageous and valuable for children from many different backgrounds and also that every dollar invested in quality early care and education services saves taxpayers up to \$13.00 in future costs. “We in the Northwest,” she went on to say, “understand the importance of increasing grade one readiness through early and intensive intervention for language development, cognitive development, and social skill development. During the first five years of life, the brains of little children are like sponges, and we, as educators and as parents, have to give them lots of rich learning to soak up.”

Gislason agreed with her assessment, noting also that the increased time will be to the benefit of all students: “Extending kindergarten time to help children in need earlier on also has the effect of helping all the kids because the differences in learning abilities between children will hopefully be smaller.”