

DATE: May 25, 2021

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee Sherry Adams, Policy Review Committee
Trustee Michael Janz, Policy Review Committee
Trustee Bridget Stirling, Chair, Policy Review Committee

SUBJECT: Board Policy GGAJ.BP Early Years

ORIGINATOR: Karen Mills, Director Board and Superintendent Relations

RESOURCE STAFF: Kelsey Duebel, Rachel Foley, Ann Parker, Nancy Petersen, Natalie Prytuluk

REFERENCE: [Trustees' Handbook Section 6.1 – Board Committee Protocols](#)
[Board Policy CH.BP – Framework for Policy Development and Review](#)

ISSUE

The Policy Review Committee is presenting Board Policy GGAJ.BP Early Years to the Board of Trustees at public Board for second, third and final reading.

BACKGROUND

Edmonton Public Schools' Board of Trustees is committed to high quality early learning opportunities for children across Edmonton. The Board sets direction for early years programming through Board Policy GGAJ.BP Early Years. This policy is currently up for review.

RELATED FACTS

As part of its policy review, the Board invited families, staff and community members to provide their perspectives through conversations about early childhood education in the spring of 2019. Engagement sessions were held to identify values to inform the development of the first draft of the policy. The Board approved the first draft of the policy at the January 26, 2021, public Board meeting.

The draft policy and a public survey was posted on the Division website in February 2021. Feedback was provided by a total of 44 respondents who participated in the survey. In addition, the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op's early years team provided written feedback on the draft policy. Revisions to the draft policy coming forward primarily responded to stakeholder feedback to:

- Ensure a learner and child-centred approach throughout the document.
- Strengthen emphasis on partnerships and collaboration with families, community members and community organizations.
- Explicitly recognize the value of diverse cultural knowledge and practices in young children's lives.
- Clarify eligibility and age requirements of Division offered programming within the definitions.

The draft policy reflects the role of the Division as an early childhood service provider as set out by Alberta Education and the provincial funding manual. This work by the Board of Trustees supports the following areas of the 2018-2022 District Strategic Plan:

- Priority 1: Foster growth and success for every student by supporting their journey from early learning through high school completion and beyond.
- Goal 1: An excellent start to learning: More children enter Grade 1 reaching emotional, social, intellectual and physical developmental milestones.

RECOMMENDATION

That Board Policy GGAJ.BP Early Years be read for the second, third and final time and approved.

OPTIONS

Based on the information provided in this report, the following options are considered most appropriate:

1. Support the recommendation to approve Board Policy GGAJ.BP Early Years.
2. Complete the second reading of the policy and direct the Policy Review Committee to adopt revisions to the policy and engage further with stakeholders prior to third reading.

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

Board Policy GGAJ.BP Early Years is up for review. The draft policy being brought forward for approval has been informed by stakeholder engagement and a review of current research and programming for the early years.

In the Policy Review Committee's work plan, the intended timeline to have this policy work completed is the 2020-2021 school year. Approval on May 25, 2021, will achieve this timeline.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of the recommendation, the updated policy will be posted to the Division website.

ATTACHMENTS AND APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Board Policy GGAJ.BP Early Years

BS:rf

CODE: GGAJ.BP

EFFECTIVE DATE: (28-01-2020)

TOPIC: Early Years

ISSUE DATE: (29-01-2020)

REVIEW YEAR: (2016)

PURPOSE

To support the Division's youngest learners to thrive within a welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy learning environment.

To affirm the Board of Trustees' (the Board) role in supporting the provision of early childhood services programs in collaboration with families, community early years providers, and government.

DEFINITIONS

Early Years Programming is the continuum of programs offered in Edmonton Public Schools for children under the age of six and for children as young as two years and eight months in alignment with requirements for Early Childhood Services under the Education Act. Early Years Programming includes Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten and is delivered in alignment with provincial eligibility and funding requirements.

- **Pre-Kindergarten** provides early intervention for children who are in need of specialized programming supports, are 3 or 4 years old by December 31st of the year they register, and meet eligibility criteria. Children may be eligible for one or two years of Pre-Kindergarten before their Kindergarten year.
- **Kindergarten** serves all children in the year prior to Grade 1 who are 5 years old on or before December 31st of the year they register. In Edmonton Public Schools, Kindergarten is typically offered five half days per week though some full-day programs may be available to serve children living in neighbourhoods with high social vulnerability.

POLICY

Research in the field of early childhood recognizes that the early years of a child's life have a profound and lasting impact on children's future learning and development. Young children thrive when they have secure, positive relationships with adults who are knowledgeable about how to support their development and learning.

The Board believes that all children are curious and eager to learn and recognizes the importance of families as children's first teachers. Families play a significant role in children's learning, health, development and well-being. Families bring a wealth of cultural knowledge, practices, and identity critical to children's learning and development. The Board is committed to building strong relationships with families as critical partners in their children's learning.

The Board acknowledges that early childhood educators also have an important role in nurturing relationships among children, staff, and families and is committed to providing positive experiences in the early years of a child's life. Additionally, the Board recognizes the effectiveness of early years programming for children and the positive long term impact this investment has for the broader society.

Early childhood programming provides early intervention, especially in key areas such as language, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, gross and fine-motor skills and early literacy and numeracy. The Board is committed to providing an excellent start to learning through the provision of early years programming that is responsive to the needs of all children.

Early childhood educators support the growth and well-being of young learners through a range of developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive experiences using research and evidence-based approaches to learning. The Board is committed to providing early years programs and learning environments that are inclusive, nurturing, and strength-based and support the diversity of languages, cultures, social circumstances, and physical and intellectual abilities and well-being of the children served. Diverse cultural knowledge, expertise, and practices, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit ways of knowing, being and doing will be reflected in both the learning environment and activities that support learning. The Board recognizes that the provision of high quality early years programming is supported by staff who have the knowledge, skills, attitudes and expertise to work with the diverse needs of young children.

Strong early development and learning requires a relationship-based and culturally meaningful approach to nurture young children's sense of belonging as members of a community. There are many community organizations who serve as important partners in the provision of early years programming for families in the Edmonton community. The Division acknowledges the diversity of perspective, expertise and services of these partners and values the opportunity to collaborate with them to provide additional support for children and families.

The Board acknowledges the importance of strategic collaboration with community partners and various orders of government, including municipal and provincial, to advance funding, access and guidelines to support the needs of children and families in the community.

EXPECTATIONS

The Superintendent will implement this policy by assigning roles and responsibilities and through developing administrative regulations, processes and best practices.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Superintendent will provide updates to the Board around progress made in support of early years programming in Edmonton Public Schools.

The Division will provide an annual update on progress and priority strategies that support early years programming through the Annual Education Results Report.

REFERENCES

AA.BP - Stakeholder Relations

AE.BP - Welcoming, Inclusive, Safe and Healthy Learning and Working Environments

HAA.BP - First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education

Education Act Section 21

Early Childhood Services Regulation (Alberta Education)