

**Final Report: C22-7371 (SEY2KT)**

Strengthening Early Years to Kindergarten Transitions

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This is one of three reports from Contract C22-7371 that relate to early years to Kindergarten transitions in BC. See also Seamless Day Kindergarten and JUSTB4 (Jeroski et al, 2022.)



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## 1. Background

Strengthening Early Years to Kindergarten Transitions (SEY2KT) is a community and school district partnership designed to support BC children and their families in a local community by strengthening early years to Kindergarten transitions. It is one of a collection of initiatives from the Ministry of Education including Seamless Day Kindergarten (SDK) and JUSTB4 that are designed to support children, families, educators, and communities (Jeroski, Lewis & Driussi, 2022; Jeroski, Driussi & Lewis, 2022.) SEY2KT increases the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and information about transition practices and experiences, analyzes possible barriers in both school and community systems, and works toward enabling conditions (e.g., shared pedagogical practices, joint professional learning opportunities.)

SEY2KT is based on research from OECD (2015) and on advice received at BC regional sessions in 2017. Key findings from OECD research that guided initiation of SEY2KT include:

- quality transitions are well prepared and child-centred, managed by trained staff collaborating with one another, and guided by an appropriate and aligned curriculum
- successfully transforming education jurisdictions embrace a 'learning leadership' model where all system partners work *collaboratively* to shift programs, policies, and practices simultaneously in thoughtful and sustainable ways. (OECD, 2015.)

Participants at the BC regional sessions offered the following advice:

- increase the use of restorative transition policies and practices that are strength-based, child and family-focused, holistic, and emphasize the importance of cultural identity
- establish a local context for partnership, strong relationships, and collaboration in planning and decision-making
- include children and families in the collaboration process as well as a broad range of professionals that the family identifies as critical to include
- work collaboratively to increase the exchange of knowledge, experiences and information about transition practices and experiences by creating ongoing communities of practice – at every level.
- identify and address the barriers in 'both systems' and determine what would be enabling conditions (e.g., shared pedagogical practices, joint professional learning opportunities)

In 2021, SEY2KT was further enhanced when teams at each site were given the opportunity to participate in Compassionate System Leadership (CSL) led by Joanne Schroeder and Pippa Rowcliff where they engaged in structured sessions to develop tools and practices to support their intersectoral work:

CSL builds skills and practices in three interconnected domains: personal mastery, reflective or generative interactions, and systems thinking. (CSL website)

The SEY2KT project was initiated in 2018-19 at 6 sites; then expanded to 12 the following year. After two years of consistently positive research findings, and the strong endorsement of both community and school district partners, the Ministry is expanding the project to include 40 sites in the 2022-2023 school year.

SEY2KT research reports from 2019 to 2021 can be found at on the CSL website <https://www.compassionatesystemsladership.net/sey2kt-20-21>

## 2. Participation

Twelve communities/school districts, comprising 222 educators participated in SEY2KT in 2021-2022. Most of these were in their second or third years as SEY2KT sites; six of them had been participating in SEY2KT for three years or more.

Each group met regularly with their community partners to design and plan activities that would enhance transitions within their community. They submitted monthly reports to the SEY2KT research team and provided brief oral reports at SEY2KT meetings. For most the year, meetings were held virtually to ensure everyone would be able to attend. A list of education and community partners is provided in Appendix A.

Within the 12 sites, teams developed a variety of ways to engage families and strengthen connections between families, schools, and the community. Teams often used technology to make these connections and continued to explore ways of meeting out of doors.

Over the year, an increasing number of families participated. The use of technology made it difficult to determine numbers, as many families connected through websites, Facebook groups, e-mail, and media products such as videos that introduced children and families to school and classroom. Through virtual connections, as well as real-time activities, and gradual-entry K, as many as 2000 children may have participated in at least one transition activity.

## 3. Research process

As in previous years, research on SEY2KT was collaborative and involved both local sites and the overall SEY2KT project. Research forms appear in the Appendix. Data collection included:

- team self-assessment: Teams at each site completed a self-assessment based on factors identified during the pilot that contribute to successful projects.
- monthly reports. Teams submitted brief monthly summaries of their actions and plans that often included artefacts illustrating their work. These reports also tracked the number of educators; children; families and community organizations involved.
- sharing on regular video conferences. Teams provided informal reports where they shared their activities and progress on both CSL and SEY2KT with the other sites.
- Compassionate System Leadership (CSL) reports. Each team presented a 10-minute report on their experiences and observations as part of the CSL initiative. The reports are posted on the CSL site <https://www.compassionatesystemleadership.net/sey2kt-20-21>

Research and analysis in 2020-21 confirmed the four themes of interest that had been tentatively identified in 2020:

- welcoming families into the school community
- going out into the community
- collaborating and creating partnerships
- creating communities of practice

Because of COVID-19 protocols, groups were often unable to interact directly with families, community partners and team members in ways they had anticipated but they continued to find innovative ways to engage and collaborate.

#### 4. Research findings

##### 4.1 Welcoming families into the school community

Traditionally, transition activities have offered events and programs that bring young children and their families into the school before they start Kindergarten. Within SEY2KT these activities continue to be important; however, transition activities are increasingly likely to focus on ongoing events and relationships. Some teams have established a regular schedule of events that involve both children who are currently attending school and younger children. Many of these are part of an extended “welcome” or “transition”

program that takes place over several weeks, and, for example, invites children to *Play your way to K*. Specific examples in 2021-22 included:

- having children who attended Strong Start join the Kindergarten class for an hour each Thursday at the end of the day
- Hollyburn primary choir where families, Kindergarten and Strong Start children come together once a week to sing
- gardening where Strong Start and Kindergarten children have been working together to plant, care for, and label a garden of native plants
- “Play your Way to K,” a four-part series where Early Learners play and learn in a Kindergarten classroom
- a week-long, virtual, nature-focused literacy event, with “enchanted back packs,” scavenger hunts, food, and recipes.
- bringing the pumpkin patch to the children – facilitators created a “pumpkin patch” in the school yard
- shared community walks with early learners, K children and educators (in at least one place, this included children from a local day care.)

These activities are designed to build community for early learners before they even start school. Comments from educators included:

*There is no transition if you are already used to being there!*

*We are making relationships and connections with new families, and we are hopeful and excited to support them on their journey*

*As families are picking up bags and the prizes they won, they are becoming aware of services in the community that they did not know about before.*

*Families appreciated the opportunity to be in the school in a different way, connecting to place.*

#### 4.2 Going out into the community

Groups continue to be energetic and innovative in finding ways to connect with families outside of the school building, often through a “Pop-up” where they go into community spaces (e.g., parks) and offer opportunities for children to play. Over the three years of the program, these have been challenging to develop, but very successful and appreciated. And fun! They also help to raise the visibility of young children in the community.

Examples in 2021-22 included:

- after a Story Workshop, the educators posted children's stories at various sites in the community on large weather-resistant poster boards
- photos and artefacts were displayed in local coffee shops
- pop-up play—often hosted by community partners
- exchange visits (outside) with local day care sites (e.g., story walks)
- Grade 5 students provided narration to a video showing K classrooms.

Teams often used technology to interact with families, for example:

- virtual strong start, where facilitators live-streamed Strong Start activities; the school provided materials for children who were registered
- a video link where children could click on bitmojis to explore Kindergarten classrooms and experience songs, stories, art projects and other activities
- a video, *A Day in the Life of Kindergarten*, where children could watch and learn about the Kindergarten they would be attending

Families in many communities received bags of learning resources, along with suggestions about how to use them.

#### 4.3 Collaborating and creating partnerships

Teams continued to find broader and deeper ways to engage with their partners and their community, and to support transitions. Observations over time indicate that this is probably the strongest area of growth. For example, in the first year of the project, several groups did not really have a working partnership outside of the education community; currently most groups have several partners who play a substantial role in their work.

Partnerships are both wider and deeper — there are more and more active partners; they are involved in increasingly diverse ways; and they play a larger and larger role in planning, making decisions, facilitating the groups, and designing and leading activities. Often, district teams are co-chaired by an educator from the school district and someone from the community.

One participant commented: *We are becoming a team with shared successes and connections; another noted: we have common goals—we all want families to feel welcome, supported, and aware of available community resources*

Teams at every site have faced challenges to their partnerships from impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the first two years of SEY2KT, sharing food was a key strategy for building community in many; currently, individuals and groups often comment on how



much they hoped to get back to the sharing and connection of a simple act such as having lunch together.

Monthly summaries indicate that communication and collaboration are becoming two-way processes at many sites where both school and community participants are enriching each other and widening perspectives. For example, at one site, a different partner presents at each meeting, offering insights into their organization's goals, values, successes, challenges, key activities, and aspirations.

*We discovered that we didn't really know what others organization do, so how could we support each other and keep families informed about what is available in our community! (a participant)*

Compassionate Systems Leadership has been an important tool in creating the trust and connections that support the work both among members of each site team, and across teams from different sites.

#### 4.4 Creating communities of practice

Several groups are making strong progress in developing shared Pro-D activities, and some have been able to plan together for 2022-23 when they anticipate that they will be able to meet in person.

These activities have included:

- agreeing as a group to highlight selected common practices (for example, participants at one site have agreed to emphasize play; indigenous teachings; and outdoor learning.)
- following an annual plan or cycle where educators come together to co-create and co-facilitate
- using common resources (e.g., the BC Early Learning Framework.)
- engaging in common activities, (e.g. children and families creating *Wonderful Me* posters)

Groups have been flexible and inventive in finding ways to work together. For example, at some sites, they have re-arranged the time of their professional learning activities to allow ECEs to participate; in others, they have organized dinner meetings where all participants receive appropriate payment for attending. All these solutions are developed locally to fit the context and circumstances of the local site,

Participants' common experience with *Compassionate Systems Leadership* has helped to create a foundation of practices for working together and offering leadership and mentorship to each other.

Several groups noted that an Early Learning Lead is often the key to common practice.

*Hiring an Early Learning Lead has been a big step forward for us-you can't do this without someone on the ground! (a participant)*

## 5. Conclusions

- BC communities and schools are united by a profound desire to support young children and their families in feeling secure and joyful as they transition into school.
- Educators and community partners are inventive and tenacious in finding ways to sustain and extend important early childhood experiences.
- Communities are developing and tailoring strategies that reflect their unique strengths, interests, and needs.
- Given time and support, school/community teams are able to extend their work more broadly and deeply, engaging more people and creating changes that “stick.”
- Those working to make changes thrive on developing new leadership skills and strategies, such as those offered by CSL.
- Local leadership and support such as that provided by Early learning Leads is important factor.
- Educators and community members who are working for change at a local level are extremely appreciative of opportunities to connect and exchange ideas with others working in similar contexts.
- This is joyful work!

*We learned that everybody is at a different point in their journey with the Early Learning Framework (ELF) and in their careers and experience. It was really lovely to see how the diverse group came together to share experiences, perspective and learn from one another. (a participant)*

## 6. References

BC Ministry of Education. (2019). British Columbia Early Learning Framework.

Compassionate Systems Leadership.

<https://www.compassionatesystemsleadership.net/sey2kt-20-21>

SEY2KT: Research reports from 2019 to 2021 can be found at <https://cr4yr.com>

## Appendix A: List of Community and School District Partners

### COMMUNITY PARTNERS, 2021-22

#### Regional coalitions

- Columbia Basin for Literacy
- EY Coalition Coordinator
- South Peace Community Resources Society

#### Community Services

- Options (Surrey)
- Child Development Society (REACH)
- Family Services
- Intercultural Association (SWIS)
- Family Resource Society (Sooke)
- Child Care Societies (Alberni Valley)
- Family Outreach

#### Community members

#### Private preschools/day care

#### Early Learning and Care Consultant

#### Indigenous

- Metis Nation BC
- EY Indigenous Council
- Indigenous Elders/Knowledge Keepers
- Friendship Centres (Fraser Region)
- Young Warriors (Victoria Native Friendship Centre)
- Tribal School
- Tsartlip HS facilitators
- Sooke Nation Preschool

#### Centre for Child Development

#### BC Government

- Child Care Resources and Referral
- MCFD
- Interior health; Vancouver Coastal Health
- EY navigator (Family Hub)

#### Library

Preschools/Childcare

- Outdoor Preschool (Saplings)
- Community daycare/preschool educators

Students (Volunteers)

- E.g., North island College; Secondary Alberni District Secondary School)
- - private preschools (Kingfisher in Sooke

SCHOOL DISTRICT PARTICIPANTS 2021-22

District administrators

- Assistant Superintendent
- principals and vice-principals
- Directors of Instruction

District Services

- Indigenous Community Coordinator
- Community Schools Coordinator
- =Early Learning leads

Strong Start Facilitators /ECEs

- At Strong Start Centres
- In K Classrooms

K and K/1 educators

- classroom teachers
- Language teachers
- Teachers of English Language Learners

Principals and vice-principals

Support workers

- Indigenous classroom support worker
- SWIS workers

Student Services

## Appendix B: Research Forms

Research on the processes and impact of SEY2KT is a collaborative process involving both local sites and overall SEY2KR project:

- **Team self-assessment:** Teams at each site complete and submit a self-assessment based on factors that have been demonstrated contribute to successful projects. They also respond to open-ended prompts about their focus and growth. (The self-assessment form is included below.) This form is completed collaboratively (by the whole group) at the second or third meeting and again at the end of the project.  
Form attached. SUBMIT TO SHARON sjeroski@icloud.com
- **Monthly reports.** Teams submit brief summaries after each meeting (about once a month) of their actions and plans that often include artefacts illustrating their work. These reports also track the number of educators; children; families; and organizations involved.  
The monthly form is included below) SUBMIT TO SHARON after each meeting.  
If you have any questions for the research team, please include them in the form and we'll try to respond quickly.
- **Sharing in ZOOM meetings.** Teams provide informal updates during ZOOM meetings where they share their activities and progress on both CSL and SEY2KT with the other sites. (Details will be shared at CSL meetings.)
- **Compassionate System Leadership (CSL) reports.** Each team will present a brief report on their experiences and observations as part of the CSL initiative. While these are not a formal part of the evaluation, they offer insights that provided additional background for the evaluation. These will be discussed as part of CSL.

The Research Team makes interim reports describing the variety of ways that various teams are planning and organizing their work, gathering information and taking action. We always organize around the following broad themes:

**SEY2KT Team Self-Assessment Fall 2022**

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At your second or third meeting, please work together as a team to come to consensus about a rating for each question as it relates to SEY2K. Please send your responses to Sharon [sjeroski@icloud.com](mailto:sjeroski@icloud.com) right away.

**Community/district** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Team members:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please check the response that is best describes your SEY2KT team at the start of your 22-23 work:	This is not like us YET	This is a bit like us	This is quite like us	This is a lot like us
1. We are a well-functioning and committed <b>TEAM</b> .				
2. We have an explicit common <b>PURPOSE</b> that focuses all our work.				
3. We focus on supporting each other's <b>SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING</b>				
4. We have informed and supportive <b>DISTRICT LEADERSHIP</b> .				
5. We are building <b>RELATIONSHIPS</b> with individual families.				
6. We are <b>CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITY</b> .				
7. We bring a sense of <b>JOY</b> to this work!				
8. We are <b>CONFIDENT</b> that we are making a difference in our community (Spring Only)				

**When your team thinks about your work on SEYKT this year ....**

- What is one thing you are **curious** about?
- What is one thing you are **confident** about?
- What is one thing you are **committed** to?
- What is something that is special about your team?

**Monthly Report (after each meeting).** This is the centre of our data collection. We often select short excerpts to share with Maureen and the Ministry team., as well as with other groups.

Most teams will be able to submit a total of 4 to 6 reports between October and April.

Teams often find it best to take a few minutes at the end of each meeting and use this framework to summarize their work and planning. Some groups do this on large paper; others create visuals collaborative electronic documents. The format doesn't matter at all: just consider the four key questions and record a brief summary of your group's work and thinking.

ACTIONS: What did you do?	OBSERVATIONS: What happened?
UNDERSTANDING: What did you discover/learn?	PLAN: What's next?



How many interactions/connections this month.

Educators \_\_\_\_\_ Families \_\_\_\_\_. Children \_\_\_\_\_. Community partners \_\_\_\_\_