

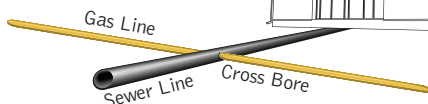
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Starting school: Building partnerships with parents



Norm Blaseg
FIRST PERSON

Parents have a very important role in their child's education. That's why educators in Rainbow schools are keen to build relationships with parents early and often in order to support children's learning at school.

Parents are the child's first teacher. According to the Early Learning Kindergarten curriculum, "parents offer learning opportunities that are based on the deep knowledge they have of their children. Parents and other caregivers nurture and teach children at home and in the community, supporting the dynamic process of early learning."

Parents' knowledge of their children is a rich resource that educators draw on when planning for learning at school. Parents can give educators a sense of what their children know, what they are interested in, what they value, and how far along they are in their physical, social and emotional development.

They can share important information with the school about family life (including siblings and pets) and activities that their child enjoys (including sports, music or camping experiences).

In the French Immersion Early Learning classroom at Lansdowne Public School, based on the children's interests and experience with pets at home, teacher Julie Kelly and early childhood educator Lynne Lundrigan created a veterinarian centre.

Children brought photos of their family pets from home, which they posted on the wall of the vet clinic. At school, the children role-played visits to the clinic with their pets using their growing French vocabulary.

"Knowing what children already know helps us plan meaningful learning experiences for children in the class-

room," Kelly said.

Rainbow District School Board staff reach out at this time of the year to begin establishing relationships between home and school. Information Nights and Welcome to Kindergarten (WTK) orientation sessions for Junior Kindergarten are two important opportunities for families and children to meet staff, and get to know the school.

Parents and children are invited to Information Nights for full-day, every day Junior and Senior Kindergarten on Jan. 24, 2012 from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. for English program schools, and Jan. 26 from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. for French Immersion program schools. Schools offering both the English and French

enjoy seeing pictures of their children at play and talking about what they are learning," said Jennifer Hearn, a teacher at Lansdowne Public School.

Parent Crystal Way has a daughter in Early Learning at Lansdowne Public School this year. Her son was in the program last year.

"It is great to have all the photos and learning stories shared with me," she said. "I have a real understanding of what goes on in Chloe's day."

"When my son Ethan was in the Early Learning Kindergarten class last year, a portfolio was sent home at the end of the year," she added. "He was able to show me what he did, some of his friends, and all the won-



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Teacher Jennifer Hearn and parent Crystal Way, left, chat about daughter Chloe's progress in Early Learning Kindergarten at Lansdowne Public School.

Immersion programs will host one information night on Jan. 26.

Welcome to Kindergarten (WTK) orientation sessions are held at all schools in the spring. Families connect with educators from the school and staff from community agencies. The strategies and resources that parents receive at the WTK orientation session serve to introduce children to Rainbow schools and the exciting experiences that await them in Junior Kindergarten and Early Learning.

Once the child begins school, parents receive ongoing invitations to join in the conversation about their child's learning.

"In my classroom, parents

derful things he learned in the program. Often he will still pull it out and reminisce about his time in Kindergarten."




Starting school is not the beginning of a child's educational experience. It is a continuation of the journey of learning together as children engage, explore, investigate and communicate.

In the next column, we will take a look at inquiry-based learning in action, as we are introduced to young scientists exploring the woods behind their school.


Norm Blaseg is director of education for the Rainbow District School Board.


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