

BACK TO BASICS



The first day of kindergarten marks an important milestone for many five-year-olds and their parents. Having graduated from pre-school and naptime, kindergarten represents an auspicious beginning to the next decade of formal education.

Yet for many children, that first day of kindergarten arrives before they are truly prepared. According to recent UBC research, some 29 per cent of children in British Columbia begin kindergarten lacking the basic skills they require to succeed in class.

These findings arise from the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Mapping Project, an initiative of the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) based at UBC. Based on complex early child developmental data organized into regional and local jurisdictions, the maps illustrate the relative vulnerability of children in a particular area in a way that is meaningful to those communities. The maps break down results by neighbourhood or regions, enabling communities to see in which areas

children may be developmentally vulnerable as defined by the five areas of the EDI scale (see sidebar).

For HELP researchers, the information is significant in working with local communities to integrate lacking resources and services. “Maps have a huge power of creating ownership in the data,” says Joanne Schroeder, Community Development Manager at HELP. “Instead of looking at numbers on a table, looking at maps of your own community is a powerful way to engage people. Maps allow researchers, policy-makers and the community to see how kids are doing from one neighbourhood to the next.”

In each wave of the study, the ECD Mapping Project typically collects EDI data from 40,000 children across the province. British Columbia is the first province to map EDI data at the neighbourhood level. HELP researchers have also digitized the maps of 480 neighbourhoods within B.C., providing policy-makers and community members with greater access to this data.

“My role is to mobilize communities to use the ECD Mapping Project information, making them champions for their local cause,” says Schroeder. ■■■

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The implementation of EDI data in HELP’s ECD Mapping Project was funded by The BC Ministries of Children and Family Development, of Education, and of Healthy Living and Sport.

The Early Development Instrument

(EDI) is a population-based tool used to assess children’s developmental readiness at kindergarten. The EDI is a checklist completed by teachers on behalf of the children in their classrooms to assess children’s school readiness in five areas: physical health and well-being, social knowledge and competence, emotional health and maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills and general knowledge.