

What is Understanding the Early Years?

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a national research initiative, funded by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada that examines early childhood in communities across Canada. The UEY Initiative was developed to enhance knowledge of the community factors that influence the early development of children.

What type of research does UEY do?

The UEY Initiative examines community factors that influence the early development of children. UEY creates an inventory of programs, services, and resources for families with children ages six and under; examines demographic and socio-economic characteristics of neighbourhoods; measures the early child development of kindergarten-age children (Early Development Instrument); interviews parents; conducts direct assessments on a sample of kindergarten children (Parent Interview and Direct Assessment of Children Survey); and works closely with the Regina and Area Early Childhood Network, a broad network comprised of community-based organizations and professionals who work with young children and their families.

What is the Early Development Instrument?

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a teacher-completed checklist developed by the late Dr. Dan Offord and Dr. Magdalena Janus of the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University. The EDI measures early childhood development from birth until children enter kindergarten, and the impact of such development on how ready children are to begin school. The EDI provides group-level measurements and is not designed to screen, diagnose, or assess individual children.

How many children were included in the data collection?

Kindergarten teachers in both Regina school systems completed the EDI on 1999 pupils in their classes during the 2008/09 school year. In total, 1906 of the completed questionnaires were valid, including 81 completed on children with diagnosed special needs. City-wide data for Regina include the 1825 valid questionnaires for children *without* a diagnosed special need.

Is the EDI a valid measurement tool?

Yes, the EDI has undergone extensive testing and is a valid and reliable measurement tool.

What does the EDI measure?

The EDI measures children’s overall development from birth until kindergarten entry (and its impact on children’s readiness for school) in five key areas of development, as identified by research on early child development.

Does the EDI measure the effectiveness of kindergarten classrooms?

No, the EDI is not designed to measure the effect of kindergarten on children’s learning, school performance or teacher ability. Rather, the EDI measures children’s early development, which has primarily occurred prior to children entering kindergarten.

What are the 5 major areas of early childhood development?

The 5 major areas of early childhood development measured by the EDI are:

Major Areas	Description
Physical Health & Well-Being	Child’s physical readiness for the school day, physical independence, and gross and fine motor skills
Social Competence	Child’s overall social competence, responsibility and respect, approaches to learning, and his or her readiness to explore new things
Emotional Maturity	Child’s prosocial and helping behaviour, anxious and fearful behaviour, aggressive behaviour, and hyperactivity and inattention
Language & Cognitive Development	Child’s basic and advanced literacy skills, interest in literacy and numeracy, memory, and basic numeracy skills
Communication Skills & General Knowledge	Child’s ability to communicate needs and ideas effectively, and general knowledge of the surrounding world

What is ‘readiness for school’?

‘Readiness for school’ refers to, “the child’s ability to meet the task demands of school such as comfort in exploring and asking questions, playing and working with other children, listening to the teacher, and benefiting from educational activities that are provided by the school” (Offord Centre for Child Studies). Children are considered “ready for school” when they have developed certain skills and behaviours, such as being able to understand and follow instructions, to communicate and get along well with others, and having basic literacy skills.

Children’s readiness for school is assessed based on the skills and abilities children have learned from birth until they reach kindergarten. Readiness for school is based on years of cumulative early childhood development, beginning at birth.

Why is readiness for school important?

Readiness for school is important because children who arrive at school ready tend to benefit more from and face fewer challenges in a school environment. When children are not ready for school, they may experience greater challenges adapting to, participating in, and benefiting from their new learning environment.

By measuring readiness for school at the group level, the EDI enables community members, educators, and researchers to better understand the strengths and needs in a community, and to identify the types of supports that are needed for families with young children.

Are EDI scores available for individual children?

No, EDI scores are not available for individual children and the EDI is not designed to assess, screen, or diagnose individual children. The EDI is designed to examine children’s early development at the population level (i.e., groups of children), and results are never produced for groups with fewer than 10 children. While EDI scores are not available for individual children, you may wish to discuss

your child's overall development with his or her teacher.

If you are interested in learning more about the EDI results for Regina, public meetings will be held to share EDI results with community members. As well, a Community Mapping Report and Community Action Plan will be available in spring 2010. For more information, please visit the UEY Regina Web site, at www.reginakids.ca.

Who should I contact if I would like to discuss my child's development?

If your child is enrolled in school, you are encouraged to speak with your child's teacher about his or her development.

If your child is not yet in school, you are encouraged speak to your child's physician or to visit a child health clinic. At a child health clinic, a public health nurse will check your child's growth and development and provide counselling and immunization. For more information on child health clinics, visit www.rghealth.ca (type "child health clinic" into the search box) or call (306) 766-7777.

What can parents and caregivers do to support children's early development?

It is important to note that children are unique, and learn and grow in different ways. There is not a 'strict' timeline that can be applied to children's development. Research does, however, point to key elements that parents and caregivers can use to support their young child's early development:

- Remember that babies begin learning at birth. Each time a parent or caregiver provides loving interaction, he or she is helping his or her baby learn about things such as how to communicate with others or how the world around him or her works. Research shows that when caregivers respond to a baby's expressions and needs, babies develop a sense of trust and security that enables them to thrive.
- Talk to your baby beginning at birth. Babies brains are 'wired' to learn language from the time they are born.
- Provide opportunities for play and exploration. Research shows that babies and young children learn best through play.
- Provide safe, stable, secure, predictable, and engaging environments for children, wherever they are.
- Provide a daily routine, healthy food, and plenty of opportunities for exercise and time outdoors.
- Establish rules and boundaries for children, and ensure that children understand and follow rules and limits.
- Read aloud to your child everyday.
- Really talk to your child - listening to children's thoughts, answering their questions thoughtfully, and sharing stories encourages children's development by helping them feel loved, valued, and confident while they learn.
- Introduce basic concepts (such as counting) and letters of the alphabet to children as they play, or while you read to them.
- Provide opportunities for children to play and interact with other

children—this helps children develop their social skills.

- Provide opportunities for children, such as running, jumping, drawing, writing, etc., to develop and practise their gross and fine motor skills.
- Teach your child how to share, to take turns, to co-operate, to express himself or herself effectively, to say sorry, and how to get along with others.
- Encourage your child to feel positive about school and about learning, while ensuring that he or she does not feel pressured.
- Encourage children to try new things and to learn new things. Remember to offer praise, and to let children know how much you love them!

For more information about children's development, visit the Canadian Paediatric Society's 'Caring for Kids' Web site at www.caringforkids.cps.ca or visit the UEY Regina Web site at www.reginakids.ca, and click on "Child Development and Parenting".

How will this information be used to improve outcomes of young children?

A primary outcome of the UEY Regina project is the development of a community-driven action plan, informed by research, collection of local data, and broad community involvement. The community action plan is due for release in the spring of 2010. Planning is underway with local results already contributing to better-informed planning and program development.

The Regina UEY Community Action Plan will be child-centred and will consider the interdependencies between parenting, family circumstances, neighbourhood context, cohesion and conditions, and the state and quality of early childhood development.

There is widespread community involvement in the UEY Regina project. Some of the key partners include:

- Parents
- Regina and Area Early Childhood Network
- United Way of Regina
- Regina Catholic Schools
- Regina Public Schools
- City of Regina Community Associations
- Regina Regional Intersectoral Committee
- Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region

In October, November, and December of this year, community meetings will be held in local schools, community centres, and libraries. The project will present the results of the study and will ask community members to offer their reflection, ideas and concerns.

For more information regarding dates, times and locations of the upcoming community meetings, please visit the UEY Regina Web site at: www.reginakids.ca, or call (306) 766-6795.