

# STRONGSTART BC

## EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS: Evaluation 2017



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## A • EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MARCH

01

2017

*StrongStart BC is an ambassador for early learning, enhancing an understanding of this critical stage of human development among parents and educators alike.*



StrongStart BC is an ambassador for early learning, enhancing an understanding of this critical stage of human development among parents and educators alike. Co-locating the program in schools builds family relationships with the educational environment their children will later attend. Educators and parents credit children's participation in StrongStart BC with improved social-emotional skills, enhanced numeracy and language acquisition, and improved transitions to kindergarten.

While highly valued, StrongStart BC is challenged by its success. Overcrowding deters attendance, particularly by vulnerable families, and compromises program quality. Flatlined provincial budgets leave school districts to fund shortfalls, and program supplies and furnishings need renewal. Facilitators often rely on their own resources to respond to families in distress and to stretch food budgets to provide what may be the first meal of the day for some youngsters. Despite the challenges, StrongStart BC maintains the goodwill of parents and educators who want to see it expanded and improved. Situated within public education, StrongStart BC benefits from an infrastructure capable of fulfilling its mandate to encourage parents' understanding, skill and confidence in supporting their children's early development and easing their transition to school.

### THE EVALUATION

This external evaluation of StrongStart BC is intended to generate knowledge and understanding about the efficacy of the program in meeting its objectives to support children's early development and transition to kindergarten. It presents findings relating to service delivery and the experiences of children and families, and highlights some of the strengths, challenges and future considerations for StrongStart BC. The evaluation was commissioned by the BC Ministry of Education and the Provincial Office for the Early Years and carried out by researchers from the University of Toronto. Drafts were regularly shared with ministry officials who approved the final recommendations.



Document analysis, online surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Table A.1) were supplemented by 11 case studies selected from the 326 StrongStart BC sites. Program quality was evaluated in each centre using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Third Edition (ECERS-3). The BC Ministry of Education is in the early stages of linking StrongStart BC attendance data to student assessments. However, additional work on student identification, record of attendance, data collection, and analysis is needed before strong statements about relationships are possible (**See Methodology**).

**Table A.1** StrongStart BC Evaluation 2017: Number of survey respondents, focus group participants, and individual interviews

	Completed surveys	Focus group participants	Individual interviews	Total
Parents/caregivers	2303	112	14	2429
Strong Start Facilitators/ Kindergarten teachers	389	78	26	493
District & school Administrators	309	35	28	372
Community partners	259	0	12	271
<b>Total participants</b>	<b>3260</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>3565</b>

## THE FINDINGS

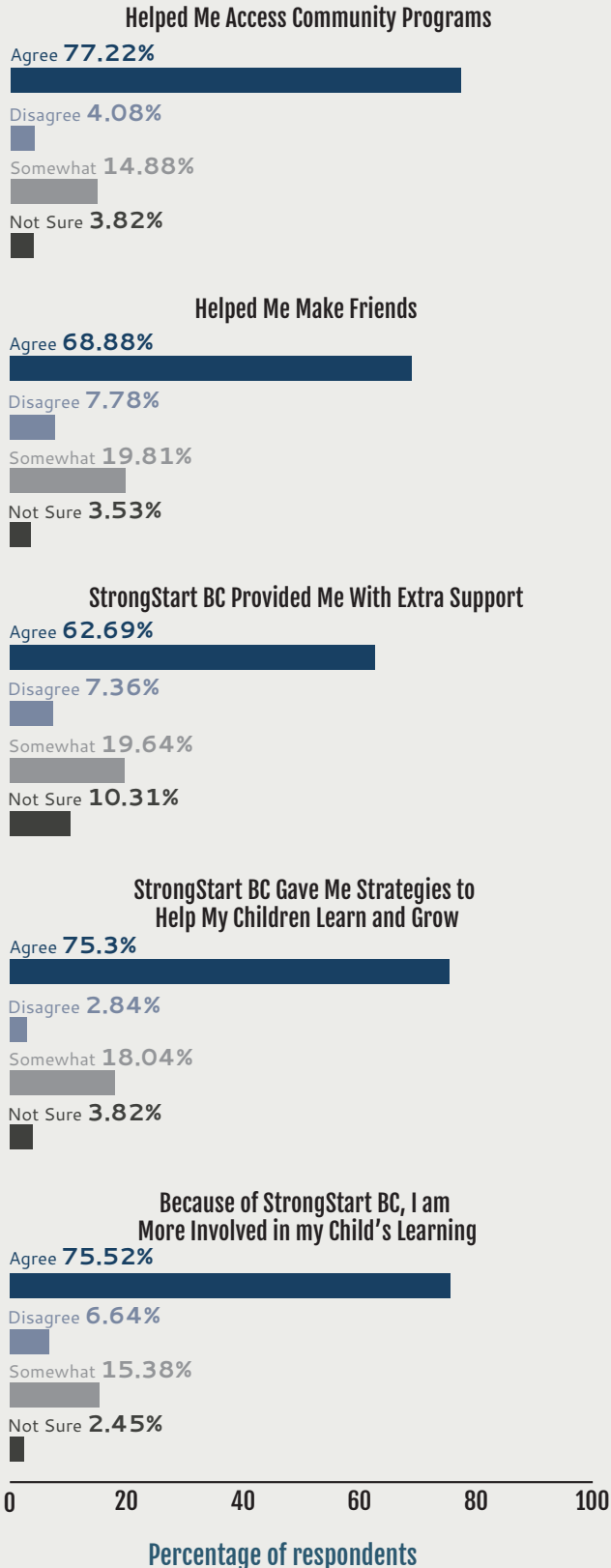
### Who participates in StrongStart BC?

Parent/caregiver survey respondents are primarily Canadian (84 percent) women (92 percent) living with a partner (96 percent). The majority (80 percent) has at least some post-secondary education. Eighty percent report annual family incomes above \$40,000. Over 60 percent of the respondents are involved in some form of paid employment. Slightly over four percent of survey participants identify as Aboriginal/Indigenous, a portion comparable to the B.C. population as reported by Statistics Canada.

### Child development and Kindergarten readiness impact

Parents and educators agree children benefit from participation in StrongStart BC. Almost 90 percent of parents and 90 percent of kindergarten teachers reported a positive change in children’s social skills including an improved capacity to get along with others. Parents noticed their children more actively engaged in play and said their children became more independent and more socially confident through their participation in StrongStart BC. Seventy-eight percent perceived improvements in children’s speech. Familiarity with school and improved transitions to kindergarten were cited as benefits by 78 percent of families and almost 90 percent of kindergarten teachers and school administrators. StrongStart BC was viewed by over two-thirds of educators as a resource for early identification and intervention. These findings are consistent with a robust body of research which associates exposure to quality early childhood programming with school readiness including social/emotional and language development, health promotion, and reduced risk for children, particularly those from more vulnerable families (Barnett, 2008; Jenkins, Boivin, Akbari, 2015; Yoshikawa et al., 2013; Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2014).

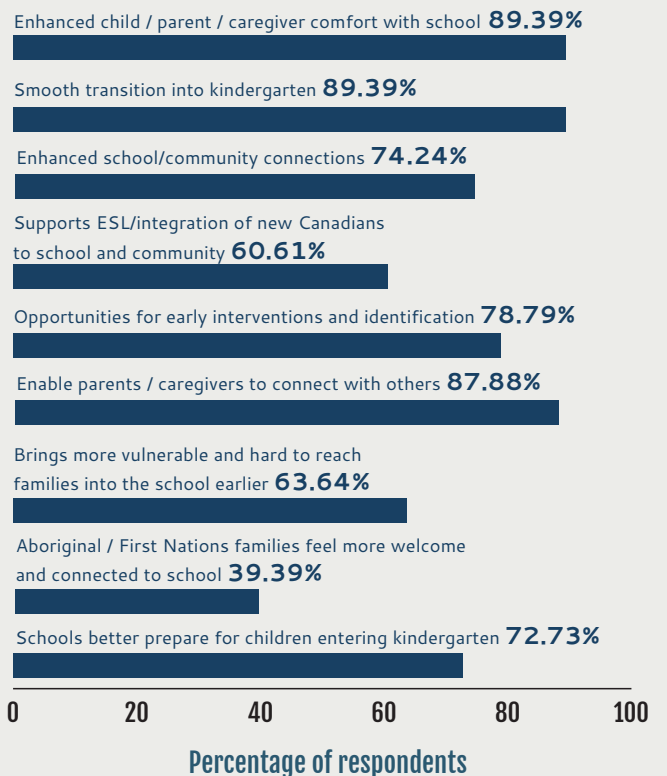
**Figure A.1** Parent/caregiver responses: Benefits of participation in StrongStart BC



**Support for families**

Families across British Columbia are enthusiastic about StrongStart BC. Over 99 percent want to see the program continued. Sixty-nine percent report improvements to their social lives through the development of new relationships and friendships. Some 75 percent credit the program with helping them become more involved in their child’s learning and exposing them to new child-rearing strategies (Figure A.1). Administrators feel (87 percent) the program reduces isolation by connecting parents with other families experiencing similar life transitions and enhances child and parent comfort with the school environment. Fewer (64 percent) saw it as a resource for vulnerable groups. Administrators (60 percent) identified StrongStart BC as a resource for English language acquisition and a soft entry point for other services. Only 40 percent saw it as a help to Aboriginal families and their connections to school (Figure A.2).

**Figure A.2** Administrator responses: Benefits of StrongStart BC for schools





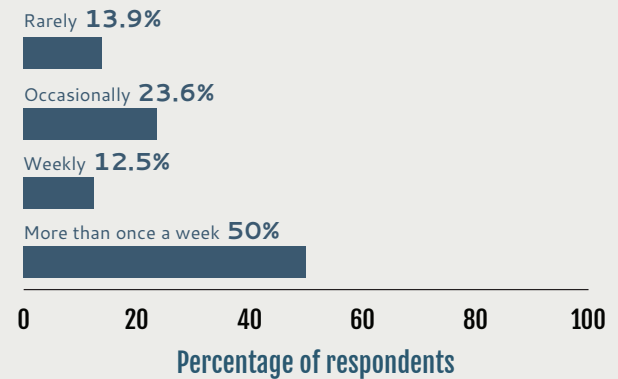
## CHALLENGES

**Capacity and quality:** Almost two-thirds (62 percent) of the programs surveyed regularly operate at capacity (Figure A.3). Quality evaluations found programs at capacity are often packed to the point of compromising quality. Almost half (46 percent) of the facilitators surveyed report regularly turning families away (Figure A.4). Educators expressed concern that packed programs and those with attendance restrictions deter the families who could most benefit from participation. The need to expand the number of sites was the most frequent suggestion heard across the range of stakeholders involved in this evaluation.

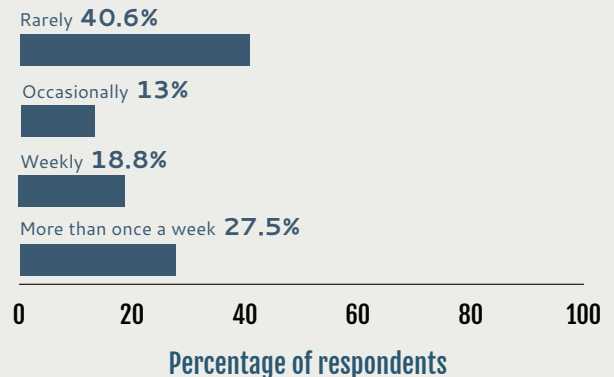
Although facilitators are responsive in their interactions, these are mainly limited to managing a large group rather than providing numeracy, socio-dramatic and literacy support to the children. In a StrongStart BC environment, facilitators' active engagement with children provides an opportunity to model strategies for parents. According to the ECERS-3 evaluation, closer consideration needs to be given to space and learning activities to ensure that facilitators have more meaningful learning interactions with the children (Figure A.5).

**Attendance and outreach:** To manage demand school districts curtail attendance by restricting participation and/or rotating attendance for families to two or three days per week. Restricted access may dilute the child benefits of StrongStart BC. Research indicates attendance must be intense enough to effect outcomes (Hall et al., 2013; Whittaker & Crowley, 2012 Nicholson et al., 2010).

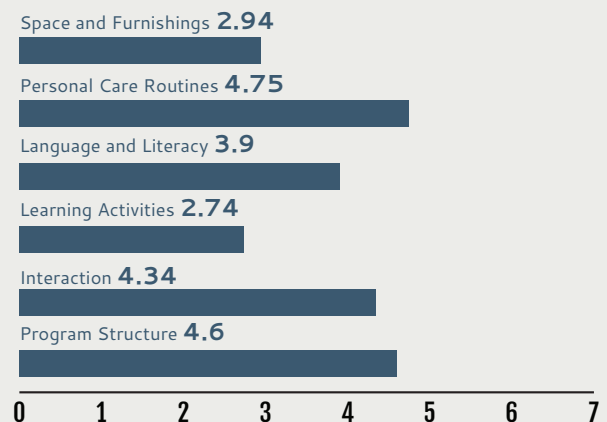
**Figure A.3** StrongStart BC Facilitator Responses: How often is your StrongStart BC program at capacity?



**Figure A.4** StrongStart BC Facilitator Responses: How often do you turn families away from your program?



**Figure A.5** Average ECERS-3 ratings across 11 StrongStart BC sites on a scale of 1-7 where 1= inadequate and 7= excellent



It is common for programs to exclude or severely restrict the participation of licensed family daycare providers. Children in family daycare would also benefit from early exposure to the school environment. Family daycare providers may also be parents who would profit, both as parents and as caregivers, from the guidance of the facilitator and the social networks of other parents/caregivers.

Centres in Francophone schools are challenged by the program's open community access requirement, which limits their ability to provide a Francization program for children. Compromised support for language development, together with third party operation, limits the integration of StrongStart BC into Francophone schools.

StrongStart BC is tested to involve Aboriginal families. The historic distrust of schools by Aboriginal families and the availability of alternative programs such as Aboriginal Head Start were cited by educators as deterrents to participation. In some schools with high Aboriginal enrolment, evaluators noted that neither the school nor the StrongStart BC environment reflected an Aboriginal presence.

Registration drops off when children turn four-years-old (18 percent). Parents and educators see value in building on StrongStart BC by offering a dedicated transition program in the year prior to kindergarten.

**Staffing support and recruitment:** Facilitators are the heart of StrongStart BC. Parents become very attached to their facilitator and report moving programs if the facilitator is reassigned. Early childhood educators consider StrongStart BC a good place to work. Their professionalism is generally recognized, and 58 percent report feeling supported in their work. The consensus among facilitators is that programs work best when directly operated by the school district because of the enhanced connection to the school community and a more seamless transition for children to kindergarten.

Lack of planning time was cited as an impediment to practice by 69 percent of facilitators, while programming for multiple age groups and the drop-in nature of StrongStart BC was mentioned by 70 percent. Facilitators appreciated when early years leads were active in providing pedagogical leadership and resources. Tapping into existing school structures and having the support of the principal were cited by educators and administrators as critical supports.

Finding qualified staff is a challenge. Almost 12 percent of facilitators do not have an ECE certificate or diploma, and no site in the study had a roster to fill in for an absent facilitator.

**Policies and funding:** Although a school program, StrongStart BC is not an educational program under the *School Act*. Its ambiguous status contributes to programs being moved, relegated to schools with low enrolment, or leftover space in portables or rooms separated from the core of the school. Room size is often problematic. Access to washrooms, playgrounds and equipment, gym, libraries and other school amenities were reported as impediments to quality programming.

Ministry funding for StrongStart BC has not been adjusted since 2010/11, leaving districts to divert funding from other school programs to cover the shortfall.



## **Future considerations**

StrongStart BC is a core component of the province's early years services with a demonstrated value to families with young children. Overall the program is meeting its objectives of supporting children's early development and transitions to kindergarten. Educators work with children and families to familiarize them with the school environment, model strategies to support social and behavioural development, and identify potential challenges. The following section provides suggestions for further exploration, organized around four areas: policy, staffing, capacity, and evaluation.

### **Policy**

- Expand the Framework for Enhancing Student Learning to recognize the foundational role of preschool programming to later student success.
- Review the policy framework to encourage school districts to include StrongStart BC as a component of early learning in their planning and accountability documentation under the School Act.

### **Staffing**

- The Ministry of Education should work with the Ministry of Advanced Education to review ECE post secondary training programs to reflect the new demands on the early childhood workforce by including family support content and a requirement for at least one practicum in a StrongStart BC program.
- Develop and institute a StrongStart BC orientation for new district and school administrators.
- Provide opportunities for joint professional development to include facilitators, kindergarten teachers, principals and early years leads.
- Provide StrongStart BC participants with access to school support services.

### **Capacity**

- Expand the number of StrongStart BC programs with priority given to high growth, high needs communities.
- Review StrongStart BC budgets with a view to meeting actual costs.
- Work with school districts to develop guidelines for StrongStart BC facilities.

### **Evaluation**

- Expand acceptable identification options for StrongStart BC registration.
- Expand use of the Early Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (CHEQ) and link to StrongStart BC attendance data and findings from the Early Development Instrument assessment.
- Use ECERS-3 in conjunction with the Reflecting on Quality tool to support program quality.
- Work with relevant ministries to expand early childhood data sets within Population Data BC.



## 1 • ABSTRACT

StrongStart BC is an ambassador for early learning, enhancing an understanding of childhood development among parents and educators alike. Co-locating the program in schools builds family relationships with the educational environment their children will later attend. Parents and educators associate children's participation in StrongStart BC with improved social-emotional skills, enhanced numeracy and language acquisition, and improved transitions to kindergarten. While highly valued, StrongStart BC is challenged by its own success. Overcrowding deters attendance, particularly by vulnerable families, and compromises program quality. Despite the challenges, StrongStart BC maintains the goodwill of parents and educators who want to see it expanded and improved.





## 2 • STRONGSTART BC

First piloted in 2006 with 12 sites, Strong Start BC now features 326 programs in communities across British Columbia. StrongStart BC Early Learning Centres are publicly-funded, school-based drop-in programs for families and caregivers and their children from birth to age 5 years. The program is offered free of charge. The schedule follows the school calendar. Centres operate five days per week for a minimum of three hours per day. They are ideally co-located in schools with childcare or parent resource centres as part of an early years hub. StrongStart BC Early Learning Outreach Programs provide early learning experiences for children in rural and remote communities. Outreach programs operate on a flexible schedule to accommodate the number of locations served (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016).

Children in StrongStart BC, along with the parents/caregivers who accompany them, engage in activities to support children's physical, emotional, cognitive and language development through play. A qualified early childhood educator models these activities and facilitates the program, guided by the British Columbia Early Learning Framework (ELF). The program gives parents and caregivers ideas that can be transferred to the home environment as a support to children's development and transition to kindergarten. Efforts are made to include hard-to-reach families and connect families with health authorities, community agencies and other service providers (e.g., early screening, libraries, parent resource centres, childcare resource and referral services, referrals for children who may have special needs).

Programs are operated by school districts under contract with the Ministry of Education. With an annual budget of \$32,000 per centre, school districts employ a part-time facilitator and provide dedicated space, equipment, supplies and food.<sup>1</sup> Districts usually assign a supervisor or principal as an early learning lead to support the facilitators and program. Districts have the option of contracting out program operations to a community service provider. Of the district administrators surveyed, five percent report subcontracting program delivery with a third party, often a childcare or family resource agency.

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1 Ministry of Education Contribution Agreement

### 3 • THE EVIDENCE FOR FAMILY DROP-IN PLAYGROUPS

*Early environments have enduring influences on life trajectories:*



**Early interactions** between caregivers and children influence brain development and help develop neurological pathways that may affect future health, learning and behaviour into adulthood, including creative and critical thinking and qualities of democratic citizenship (McCain & Mustard, 1999; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007; McCain, Mustard & McCuaig, 2011).



**Early exposure** to quality early childhood programming can influence school readiness including social/emotional and language development, health promotion, and reduce risk for children from more vulnerable families (Barnett, 2008; Jenkins, Boivin, Akbari, 2015; Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2014).



**Preschool language development** is the most robust predictor of later academic success and is associated with social and emotional competencies. A child's early language environment establishes listening and spoken language, school readiness and ultimate life trajectory. Disparities in early language environments lead to disparate outcomes (Hart & Risley, 1995). Early childhood programs that focus on strengthening children's language, literacy and self-regulation across multiple contexts typically prove to be most effective in promoting school success (Connor & Morrison, 2014).



Studies of **high-quality early learning programs** demonstrate how such programs can enhance the social, cognitive and academic development of children living in economically disadvantaged circumstances (Smith, 2014: Laurin, Geoffroy, Boivin, Japel, Raynault, Tremblay & Côté, 2015)



## *The link between supported parenting and child outcomes:*



**Parental behaviour is arguably the most** consistent and largest modifiable influence on child development (Hart & Risley, 1992; Madigan, 2007; Jenkins, Madigan & Arseneault, 2016).



**Parenting has been shown to buffer** children who are at risk of poor developmental outcomes because of genetic vulnerability (Caspi, 2002), low birth weight (Landry, Smith & Swank, 2006) or cumulative environmental risk (Evans, 2007; Garcia, 1992).



**While there is no direct evidence linking** family playgroups to improved child outcomes, ecological models draw strong inferences based on the premise that improving parent understanding and skills benefits children (McLean, Edwards, Colliver & Schaper, 2014).



**The home environment in early childhood** including family income, parent education, socioeconomic status and health, has the most enduring impact on later school performance (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2007).



**Even if children are born with biological** or “endogenous” risk, they do better and can even get onto normal trajectories, if they are raised in well-functioning and supportive homes (Werner & Smith, 1982).



**Disadvantaged families are least likely to attend** early childhood programs but are most likely to benefit from attending (Hancock et al., 2012; Evangelou et al., 2013).



**Parenting is a modifiable risk.** Multiple studies have shown that parenting can change in response to intervention and that children’s language and mental health also improves as a response to parenting intervention (Landry, 2006; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1990; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2001). A lack of resources in parents’ lives makes it harder for them to be optimally responsive to their children (Jenkins et al., 2016; Evangelou, Coxon, Sylva, Smith & Chan, 2013).

## *Families value drop in programs:*



**Family drop-in playgroups are valued** by caregivers and fulfill an important community need by providing resources to families with young children (Berman, Underwood, Patel & Moher, 2012; Commerford & Robinson, 2016; FRP Canada, 2011; Linke, 2001).



**In a number of studies parents reported** a positive change in their child's social skills as a result of participating in playgroups, including their ability to engage in play and share with other children. Other benefits included improved self-confidence and enhanced vocabulary (Commerford et al., 2016; Corter & Arimura, 2006; Janmohamed, McCuaig, Akbari, Gananathan & Jenkins, 2014).



**Parents value play-groups for themselves** as a source of social networks, for parenting advice and as a resource for referrals to other supports (Commerford et al., 2016; Corter et al., 2006; Janmohamed et al., 2014).



**The above findings are consistent** with this evaluation of StrongStart BC and the initial reviews (HELP, 2007; HELP, 2008).



***Program design matters:***



**Appropriate facilities, program planning** and qualified, responsive staff influence parent attendance and satisfaction (Williams, Berthelsen, Nicolson & Viviane, 2015; Doyle & Zhang, 2011; Moore, 2008; Linke, 2001).



**Sufficient programming hours** and sufficient attendance are required for children to benefit (Hall, Sylva, Sammons, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2013; Whittaker et al., 2013; Nicholson, Berthelsen, Williams & Abad, 2010).



**Co-locating family programs in schools** enable the relationships that are important to a smooth transition to school. This may be particularly important to vulnerable families with few social connections (Janmohamed & Pelletier, 2010; McLean, 2014; Pascal, 2009).



**Children and parents both benefit** from some programming that they participate in on their own. (Webster-Stratton, 1997; Behrman, 1999)



**Targeted, stand-alone programs** are not as likely to be as successful as universal interventions, which integrate different options and resources for families (Melhuish, Belsky & Barnes, 2010; Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).



**Four factors of early childhood** programming are found to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children (Melhuish, 2010; OECD, 2012; Gaylord, Spiker, Fleming & Korfmacher, 2012).

1. Children regularly attend. The effect size is greater when programs are available to all children rather than targeted to children in low-income families.
2. Programs are adequately staffed.
3. Sufficient numbers of educators have a degree in early child education.
4. The teaching approach is child-centred, with a high portion of child-initiated activities.

***Family drop-in playgroups  
require more study:***



**While there are promising trends,** the research is not definitive on the effectiveness of family drop-in playgroups on child outcomes. This is in part due to the differences among programs, including their target populations, pedagogical approaches and operations, which make comparisons and replicating findings challenging. Most evaluations use data from surveys and interviews, which provide rich qualitative data, but do not link children’s playgroup experiences to school or other outcomes (Commerford, 2016; Brinkman & Harman-Smith, 2013; Corter et al., 2006; Linke, 2001).

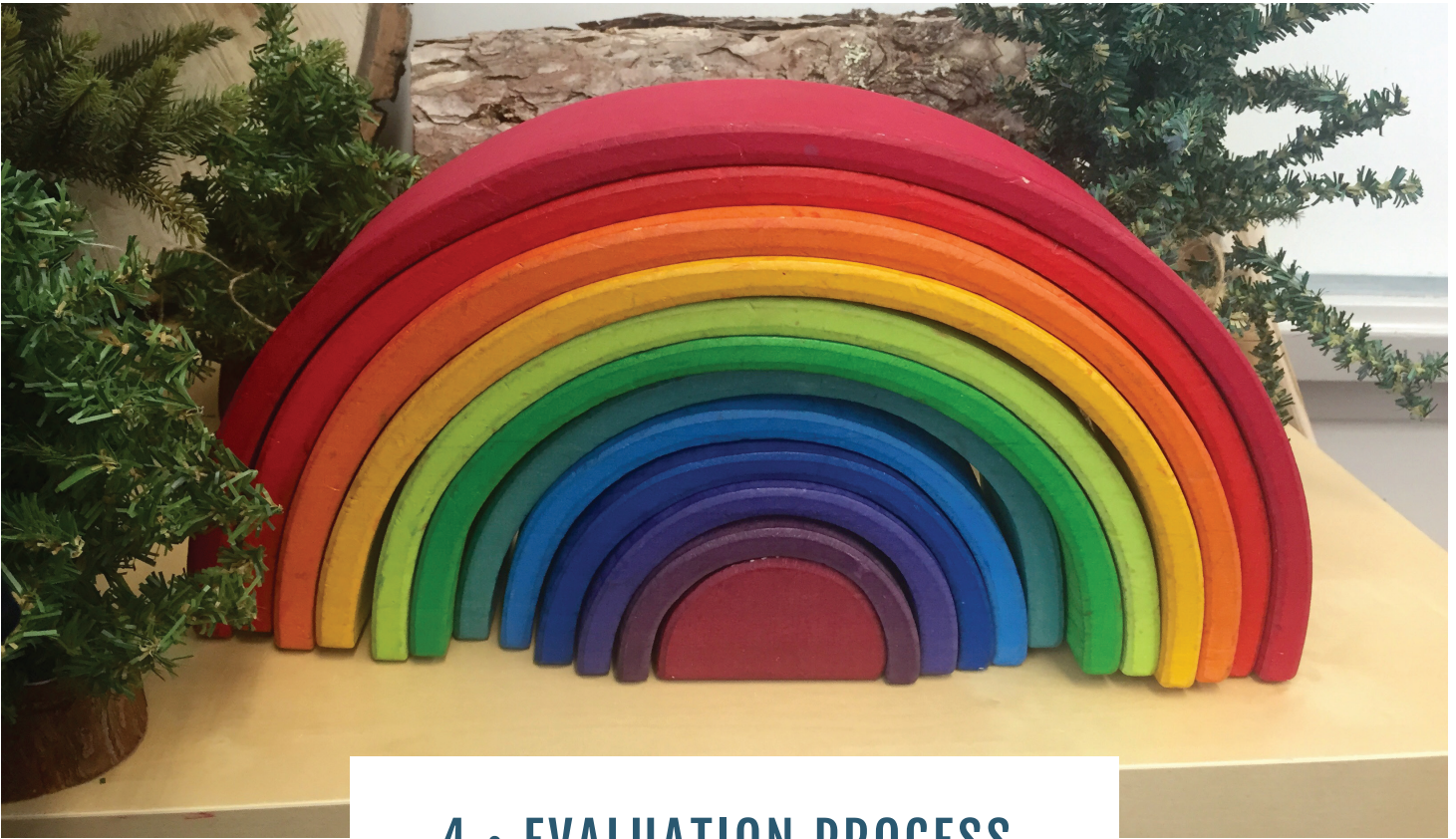


**There are few assessments of the** quality of family playgroups or of the duration of attendance on parent or child outcomes (Timmons, 2008).



**There is a need to strengthen the** evidence-base documentation of the impact of family drop-in interventions on children, parents and communities.





## 4 • EVALUATION PROCESS

This external evaluation of StrongStart BC is intended to generate knowledge and understanding about the efficacy of the program in meeting its objectives to support children’s early development and transition to kindergarten. It presents findings relating to service delivery and the experiences of children and families, and highlights some of the strengths, challenges and future considerations for StrongStart BC. Conducted by researchers at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, the evaluation was funded by the British Columbia Ministry of Education and the Provincial Office for the Early Years. Data were gathered between May 3 and November 16, 2016. Researchers used findings from document analysis, online surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1** StrongStart BC Evaluation 2017: Number of survey respondents, focus group participants, and individual interviews

	Completed surveys	Focus group participants	Individual interviews	Total
Parents/caregivers	2303	112	14	2429
Strong Start Facilitators/ Kindergarten teachers	389	78	26	493
District & school Administrators	309	35	28	372
Community partners	259	0	12	271
<b>Total participants</b>	<b>3260</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>3565</b>



The high number of responses is an indication of stakeholder interest in StrongStart BC. Data collection was supplemented with 11 case studies selected from the 326 StrongStart BC sites, with consideration given to regional and demographic representation. Program quality was evaluated at each site using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-3). A literature review specific to family drop-in centres guided the evaluation process. Attendance data was not available in a format that allowed researchers to link children’s StrongStart BC participation with kindergarten or later school assessments with validity. Therefore the study was unable to assess StrongStart BC’s impact on children’s outcomes. A more detailed description of the research methodology and its limitations are found in section 11.

#### 4.1 WHO ATTENDS STRONG-START BC?

Parent/caregiver survey respondents are primarily Canadian-born women living with a partner (Figure 4.1). The majority has at least some post-secondary education. Eighty percent report annual family incomes above \$40,000 (Figure 4.2). The survey respondents are not necessarily representative of all StrongStart BC users. In self-selected surveys, first language respondents with higher education and incomes tend to have a higher response rate than the overall population of participants (Hammer, du Prel & Bettner, 2008). StrongStart BC was originally intended to serve families with a parent in the home. Interestingly, over 60 percent of the respondents are involved in some form of paid employment. Slightly over four percent of survey participants identify as Aboriginal/Indigenous, a portion equivalent to the population as reported by Statistics Canada (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1** Profile of parent/caregiver survey respondents

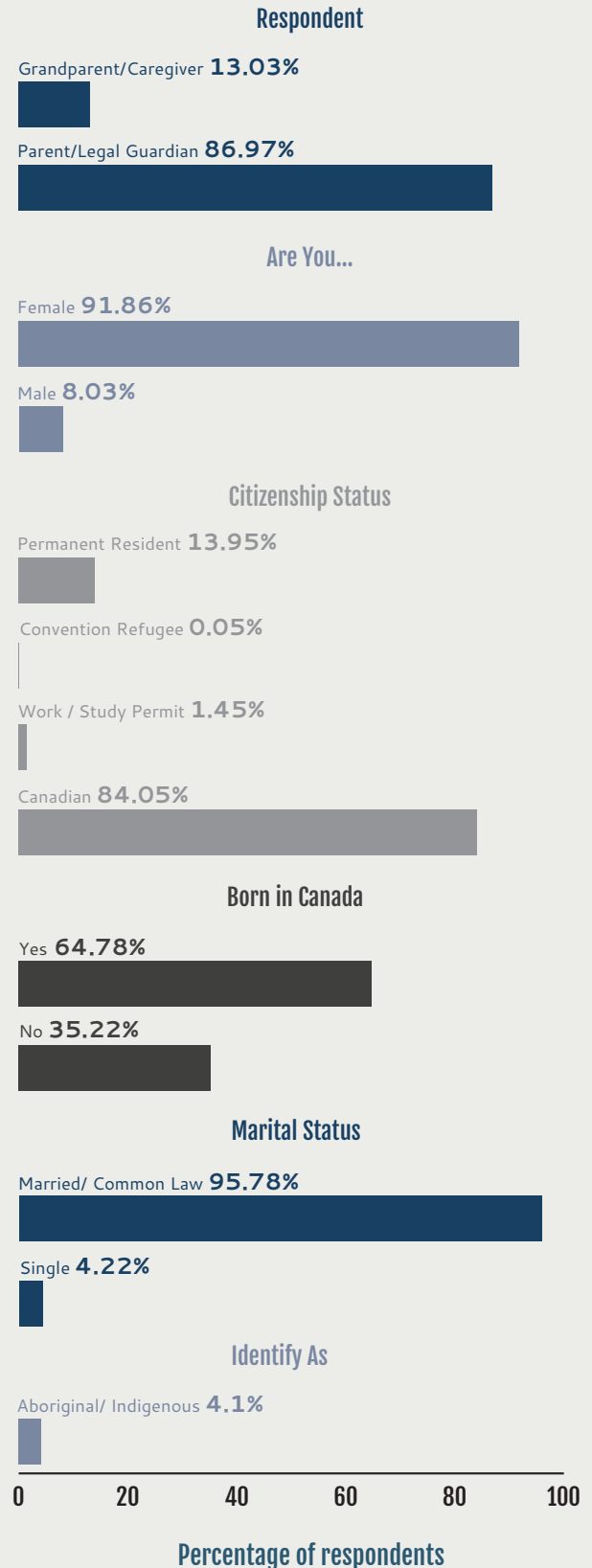
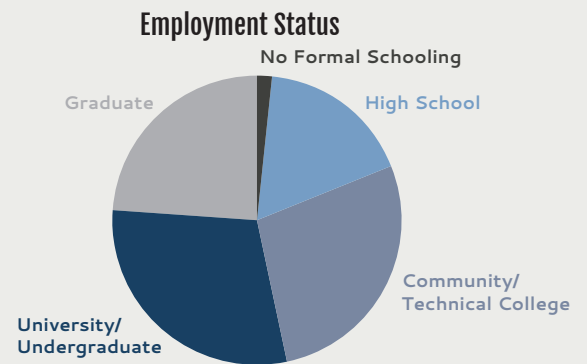
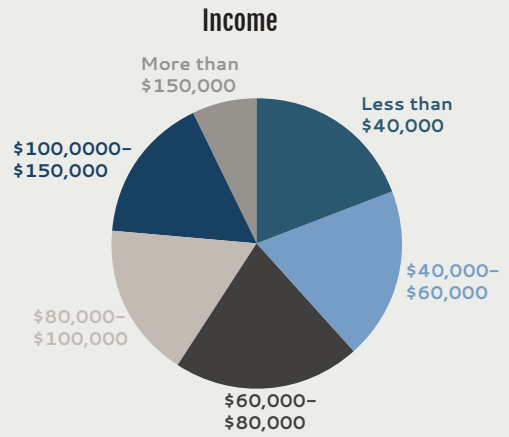
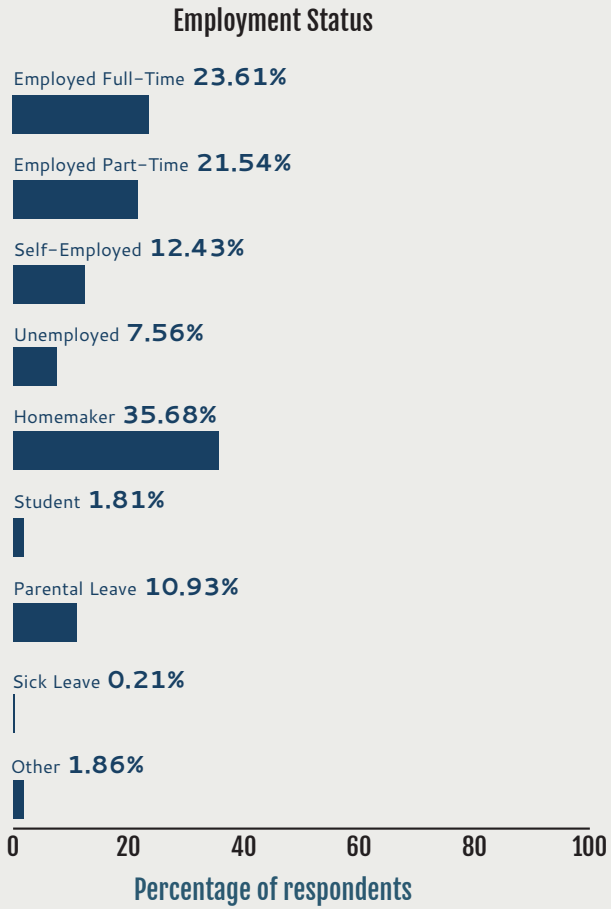
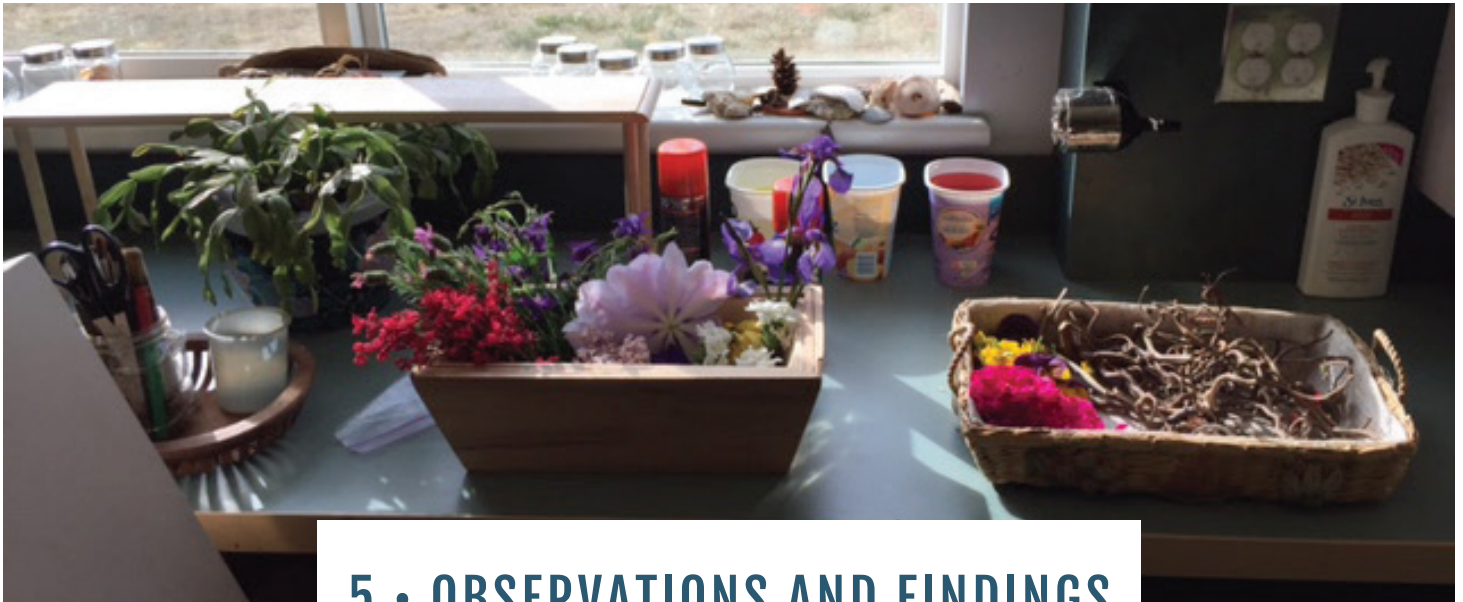


Figure 4.2 Profile of parent/caregiver survey respondents



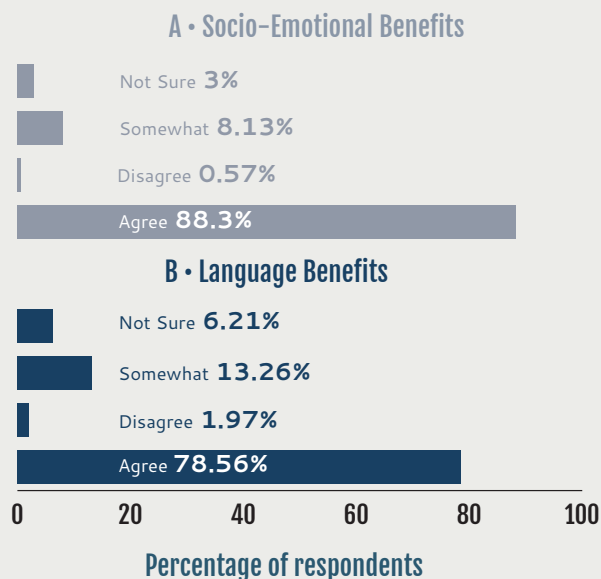


## 5 • OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

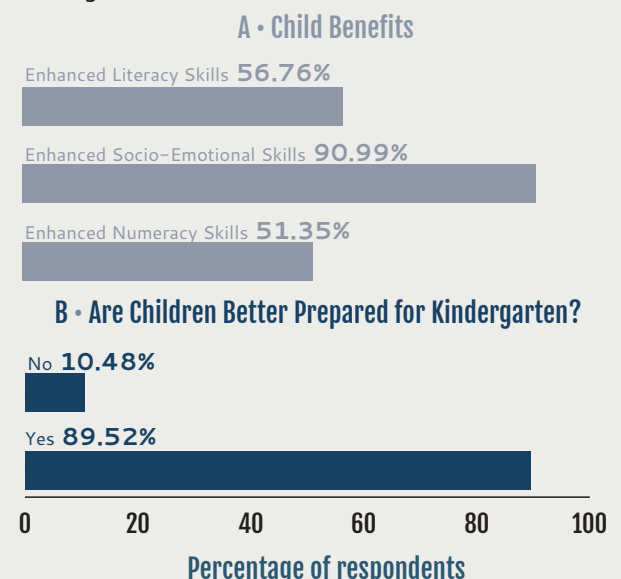
### 5.1 CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Families report benefits from using StrongStart BC for both themselves and their children. The majority of parents/caregivers indicate the program has helped them with strategies to support their children’s learning and growth, and see positive language and socio-emotional development associated with their children’s attendance (Figure 5.1.1). Kindergarten teachers echo these findings and report enhanced kindergarten preparedness and other benefits for children who attended the program (Figure 5.1.2).

**Figure 5.1.1** Parent Responses for A) Socio-emotional benefits; and B) Language benefits as a result of children attending StrongStart BC



**Figure 5.1.2** Kindergarten teacher responses A) Reported child benefits; and B) Kindergarten preparedness as a result of children attending StrongStart BC





*The children that have been to StrongStart show more readiness in terms of knowing what to do. They are able to interact socially – are better at sharing toys, taking turns, being respectful and kind to each other, and following rules.*

(Kindergarten teacher)

*We have a lot of new families to Canada and the oral language, literacy and cultural integration really helps the kids' development by the time they come to kindergarten.*

(Kindergarten teacher)

*I didn't know how to play with my child.*

(Parent)

Parents also credit StrongStart BC with supporting their children's transition to kindergarten (Figure 5.1.3). The activities offered by StrongStart BC are designed to support children's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development:

- Toys, materials, learning centres and equipment engage creativity.
- Books, musical instruments, stories, singing and movement develop cognitive and physical coordination.
- Access to gyms and playgrounds encourage large motor development.
- Daily snacks provide opportunities to learn about food hygiene, healthy eating and socialization. Special food days are highly popular.

The program expands children's general knowledge and introduces them to the broader community:

- Children who live in apartments participate in growing their own food. Those without pets are introduced to a variety of creatures.
- Health and other professionals provide ready assessment and advice.
- Elders, cultural leaders, guest musicians, puppeteers, librarians and community service providers including police, firefighters, parks and recreation and others familiarize families with the broader community.

The school location of the program is both a bonus and a deterrent. Parents need to make only one stop for both their school-age children and preschoolers. The gradual transition from StrongStart BC to a full day at school reduces



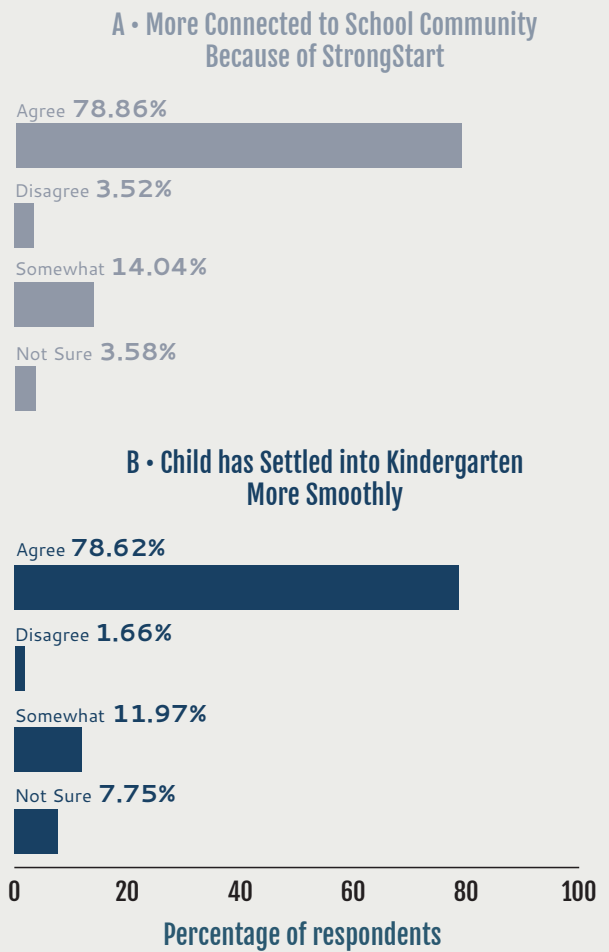
anxieties as participation accustoms children to the routines and expectations of the school environment. In some sites, the older children attending StrongStart BC spend time in the kindergarten class as an orientation. In others, the facilitator devotes the first week of school to the kindergarten class to soothe trepidations. For children going on to kindergarten, the facilitator provides the children’s documentation to the teacher as a support to program planning.

StrongStart BC activities are grounded in the value of play. In addition to numeracy and literacy skills, parents and educators notice children are more actively engaged in play, more socially confident and are able to get along with others and to share. The findings are affirmed in surveys with kindergarten teachers (Figure 5.1.2). While parents are interested in their children becoming familiar with print, numbers and the tools of formal schooling, they are pleased with and understand the StrongStart BC philosophy.

*Literacy and numeracy sneak up on them as part of play.*  
(Parent)

Parents, facilitators and kindergarten teachers note improvements in children’s speech and their ability to self-regulate through the role modelling undertaken during play. Figure 5.1.1 shows that a majority of parents see benefits to children’s socio-emotional functioning and language from participation in the program. This finding is consistent with research documenting the benefits of peer socialization provided by regular participation in play-based early learning programs (Holmes, Linden & Shin, 2013; Saracho & Spodek, 1998).

**Figure 5.1.3** Parent/caregiver responses regarding A) Parent connectedness to school community; and B) Children’s smoother transition to kindergarten as a result of attending StrongStart BC



Play is a dynamic process that develops and changes as it becomes increasingly more varied and complex. It is considered a key facilitator for learning and development across domains, and reflects the social and cultural contexts in which children live (Hewes, 2008). Regular contact allows children to develop the relationships that facilitate their entry into play. Through play, children hone their skills using language and creativity to participate. By developing their own social networks, children develop a sense of belonging, an understanding of their emotions and recognition of how their actions impact others. (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009)



Parents appreciate how facilitators scaffold their children’s interest to advance their learning. In focus groups and interviews, parents report an enhanced understanding of the importance of play to their children, and take away new ideas to advance their children’s learning at home.

*Cars, cars, cars. My son was interested in nothing else. [Facilitator] showed him how to dip the car wheels in paint to make a drawing.*

(Parent)

*My son spends hours watching the ant colony. [Facilitator] puts out books and different things he can paste into his journal.*

(Parent)

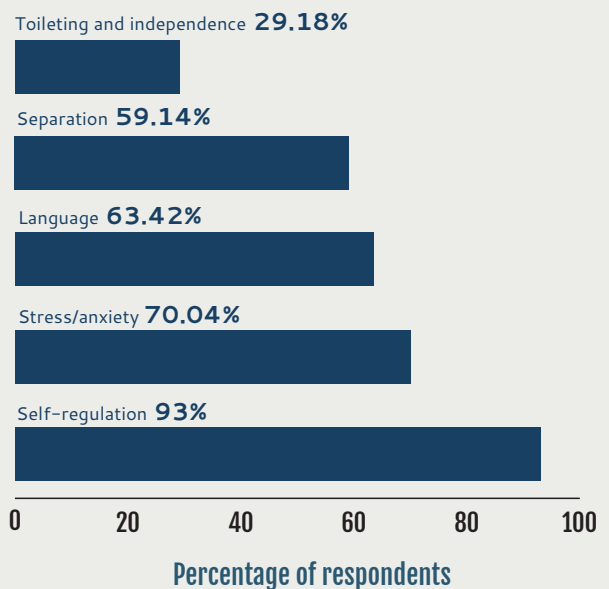
*I’ve learned that a house that is a little messy from play is better than a tidy house where no one is learning.*

(Parent)

Research documents how behavioural and emotional problems beginning early in childhood endure (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2014). Access to early intervention for families with children with identified behavioural concerns can be highly successful in redressing these issues early in life. Teachers cite self-regulation, and other socio-emotional issues among the greatest challenges in children transitioning to school (Figure 5.1.4). StrongStart BC may be helping to address some of these concerns. Parent and educator survey results credit StrongStart BC with reducing behavioural issues and easier transitions to kindergarten (Figure 5.1.2 and 5.1.3). Facilitators report that StrongStart BC



**Figure 5.1.4** Kindergarten teacher responses regarding greatest challenges for children entering kindergarten



supports early identification. They are often the first to flag developmental problems and expedite access to intervention services.

Observing other children and contact with other families can also allay parent fears about their own children’s development and behaviour. Parents have opportunities to watch other children and parenting practices and feel more validated in their own parenting behaviours.

StrongStart BC may also reduce the need for more extensive interventions. Speech therapists will refer children to the program to provide a venue for them to talk with other children. Children with other exceptionalities are also benefitting.

Early intervention has been shown to be more cost-effective than interventions implemented at later life stages (Barnett, 2011), but the transition from preschool to school services can be challenging. StrongStart BC participants are not eligible for district student supports, and while educators concur that StrongStart BC is an effective resource for children with developmental and behavioural challenges (Figure 5.1.5), schools are split on whether they make resources available to support children with special needs (Figure 5.1.6). Preschool children lose access to community-based supports when entering kindergarten. There can be a considerable time lag before the school’s interventions begin.

StrongStart BC is effective at alerting school officials that an incoming child may need additional supports, allowing them to prepare in advance. Administrators and educators agree that addressing the continuation of supports for children with identified challenges requires attention. They would like to see intervention plans follow children

*I thought my son was just shy but seeing him isolate himself from the other children made me worry. After a while, I felt able to ask [facilitator] if she thought something was wrong. She made an appointment for us with a specialist. We now have some strategies that we use at home and were able to discuss with the teacher when he started kindergarten.*

(Parent)

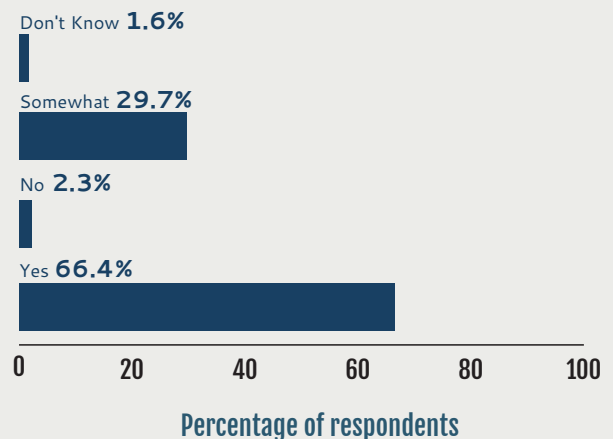
*It was such comfort to know I was normal and my kid was normal.*

(Parent)

*My son is autistic. He has opened up with StrongStart.*

(Parent)

**Figure 5.1.5** Facilitator responses: Is StrongStart BC effective resource for children with developmental/behavioural challenges?



from identification through schooling to avoid service disruptions. Parents and educators believe that timely intervention is most important, while determining who pays should be sorted out later.

*There's a disconnection between preschool and school. StrongStart has limited access to additional services — speech pathologist, etc. We would need additional funding to be able to access these resources.*

(Administrator)

## 5.2 A LIFE-LINE FOR FAMILIES

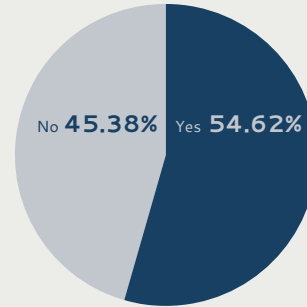
Parents refer to StrongStart BC as their life-line. It is a place to be warm on cold days, make friends, and a source for children's books and toys. Parents also report that they rely on StrongStart BC to prepare their children for kindergarten. Some parents count on the small daily snack to supplement their children's diet. (Figure 5.2.1).

They enjoy the program for the social connections it provides for them and their children. Parents attribute improved parenting skills, reduced stress and less isolation to their participation. The program enhances social supports by connecting parents with other families experiencing similar life transitions. Social networks were identified as particularly critical and appreciated in communities with new Canadians. StrongStart BC is seen as a safe and welcoming place and a recognized resource for English language acquisition. It also acts as a soft entry point to settlement, health, intervention and community services.

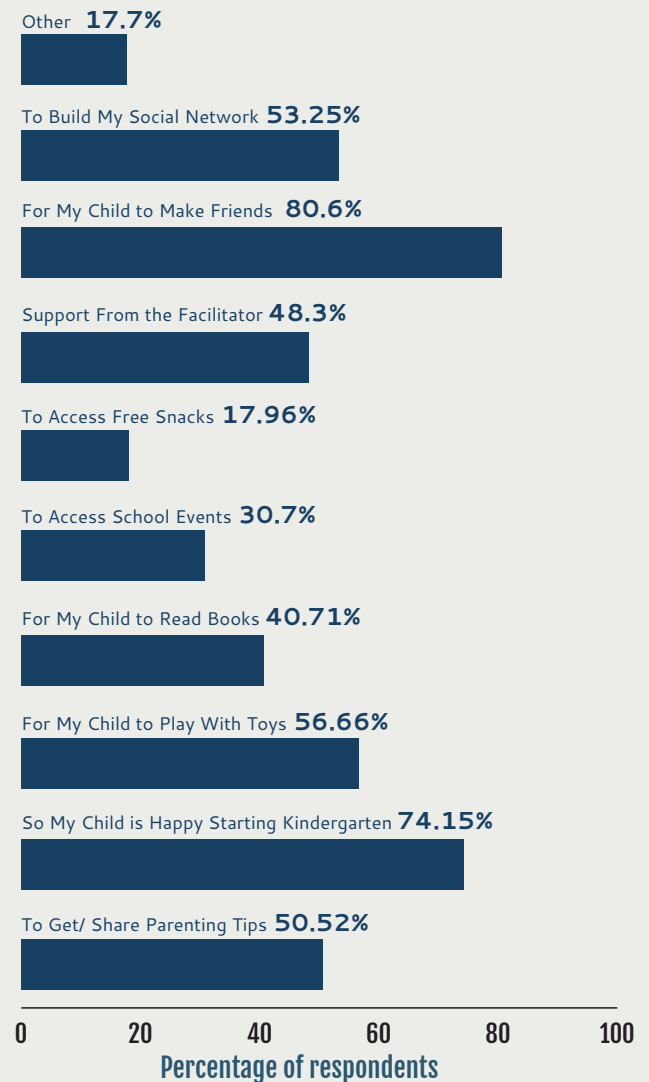
*Many schools have high ESL. I would love to have a StrongStart in each school so parents and grandparents can learn English.*

(Kindergarten teacher)

**Figure 5.1.6** Administrator responses: Does the School District provide additional resources / equipment to support children in StrongStart BC with special needs?



**Figure 5.2.1** Parent/caregiver responses reasons for attending StrongStart BC



Interviews and focus group respondents credit the program with building comfort with the school environment. The location builds familiarity with the school facilities, personnel and schedules. The ready advice of the facilitator and access to other adults is particularly useful for families without other social networks. These responses align with research indicating the positive outcomes from drop-in groups, including expanded social connections and reduced isolation and loneliness (Berthelsen, Williams, Abad, Vogel & Nicholson, 2012; Hanna, Edgecombe, Jackson & Newman, 2002)

As schools become more responsive to parents, connection to public education grows.

Parents express great loyalty toward their facilitator. They consider the facilitator a friend, a confidant and a resource they turn to for everything from child rearing advice to accessing social services. The combination of an empathetic person, together with practical information about community supports is important to parents. Parents whose children are no longer in the program will continue to volunteer to maintain their social connections and to attend to their older children.

Facilitators likewise see their role as a resource for parent referrals, promoting connections and involvement, reducing isolation and loneliness, and enhancing parent confidence in supporting their children's development and transition to school. When programs work well, the results reflect the Canadian mosaic.

*There is a group of six women in my centre, all newly arrived, each from a different country. They are the best of friends.*

(Facilitator)

*During those early months after I gave birth, I cried almost every day. I struggled to care for my baby and second-guessed all my decisions. Finally, I decided to see what the StrongStart program was like. What I found was a safe haven. It was a place where there were so many moms to talk to. I finally had found a place where I felt supported, both emotionally and in practical matters.*

(Parent)

*I was thinking of home schooling. After StrongStart I am more leaning to sending her to school.*

(Parent)

*We do not want to send her into the system but after StrongStart, if she decides that she wants to go to school, we would support that.*

(Parent)

*StrongStart put us in touch with an infant development consultant about my daughter not sleeping well.*

(Parent)

*I don't have family here. The facilitator and other parents are like a family.*

(Parent)

*It is not just a community building — it is a second home for these families.*

(Facilitator)

However, cultural differences and socioeconomic disparities can also make it difficult to create a cohesive environment, and facilitators find them-selves acting as mediators. Despite any differences, facilitators aim to create cohesion through large group activities that encourage all parents to participate.

To derive the benefits of the program, regular attendance is necessary. As reflected in the literature, parents who attend consistently are more likely to report positive impacts for themselves and their children (Sylva et al., 2007; Berthelsen et al., 2012).

About 84 percent of participants report attending one to three times per week (Figure 5.2.2). Thirty percent of parents/caregivers bring more than one child to the program. If restrictions are put on attendance to prevent crowding, parents seek out other centres in their region or create informal groups.

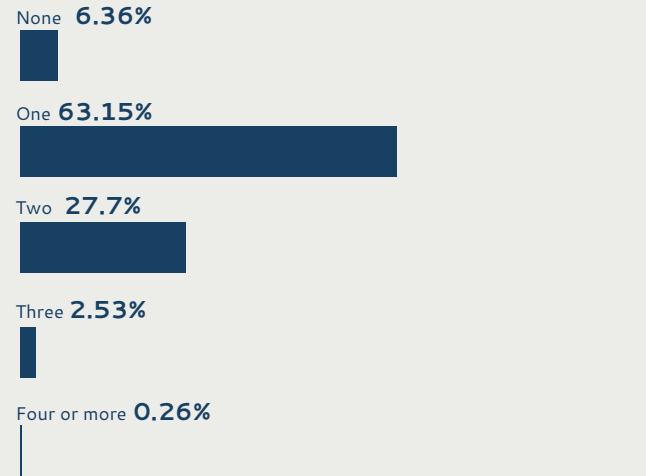
*Three mornings a week I have a reason to get up, shower, and dress. This may not seem like a lot but for a new mother it is huge. On the other two days we meet up with other moms and babies we met at StrongStart...it helped us build a community with other young families in the neighbourhood.*

(Parent)

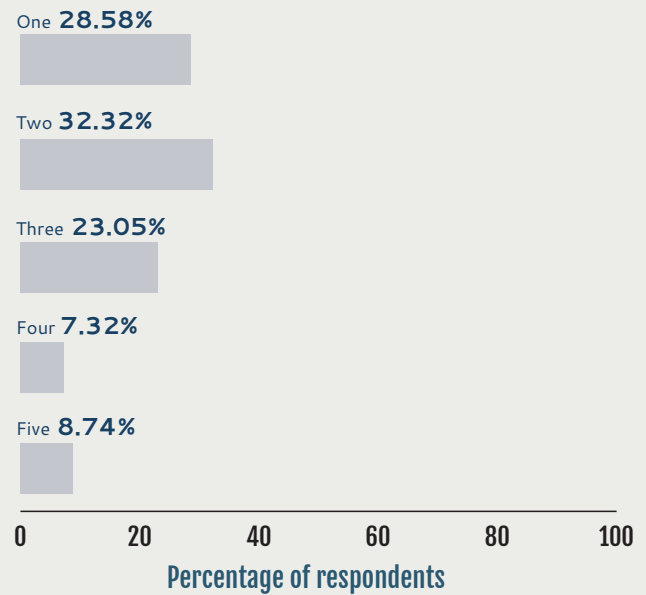
Tight-knit networks can create challenging group dynamics when parents form clusters that exclude new arrivals. Facilitators are aware of this. Translators are engaged to overcome language barriers, and other parents act as program emissaries.

**Figure 5.2.2** Parent/caregiver responses StrongStart BC attendance A) Number of children; and B) Frequency

**A • Number of children currently attending StrongStart BC**



**B • Attendance (days per week)**



*Parents must feel at ease from their first visit. When a new family arrives, I identify parent leaders who will take the new family under their wing.*

(Facilitator)



Facilitators seek and value parent input into program activities. Engaging parents and older children in program set-up and food preparation, and asking groups of parents to lead activities or to introduce cultural knowledge to the program, are seen as ways to support inclusion.

In interviews and focus groups, parents attribute their participation in StrongStart BC with feeling more confident in their parenting, with understanding their child's developmental stages more fully and with adopting more appropriate responses to their child's behaviour. As a result, they relate being more appreciative of their child's perspective, and are not so quick to reprimand.

Parents and their children enjoy having uninterrupted time to spend together in an activity-rich environment. Children become aware of the program structure, easing transitions during start and end times. Through StrongStart BC, parents describe learning the importance of routines, rediscovering the joys of play, and learning activities they can do with their child at home. They appreciate the access to facilities and seeing their children take part in projects that are too messy or difficult to replicate at home.

The StrongStart BC mandate includes an expectation that parents/caregivers participate in group activities and play alongside their child while in the program. Some parents call the requirements too rigid and feel infantilized when instructed on how to behave. For some parents/caregivers getting down on the floor is difficult and more adult-size seating would be appreciated, particularly by nursing mothers.

*When I stopped seeing the terrible twos as her being terrible, I started to admire her efforts to be more independent. I used to get irritated but now I feel empathetic when she gets frustrated.*

(Parent)

*I watched how [facilitator] breaks up squabbles between the children. She doesn't send anyone to the naughty chair. She asks them to describe their feelings to one another.*

(Parent)

*I don't like being told to join my son when I can see that he is playing happily with his friends.*

(Parent)



*The older children don't want to play with their parents. They want to play with the other children. It's good to see them becoming independent.*

(Parent)

Overall, parents appreciate the convenience of the school location. Many suggested strategies to better feature the program. They want information about StrongStart BC on the school website, including the days and times of operation, program capacity and a process to let families know when the program is full. Parents also suggest providing StrongStart BC information in the school's calendar, with regular updates for families about planned activities, field trips and community partner visits.

### 5.3 THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

Facilitators are at the heart of family drop-in programs (Jackson, 2013). Parents develop strong relationships with their facilitators and will travel outside of their area or move programs to maintain their relationships. Facilitators, in turn, express real empathy and respect for the families they serve. Facilitators articulate a common understanding of the StrongStart BC mandate and see their role as primarily supporting children's development and transitions to school by enhancing the knowledge, skills and social connections of parents.

*The whole point of StrongStart is to make schools welcoming and not intimidating.*

(Facilitator)





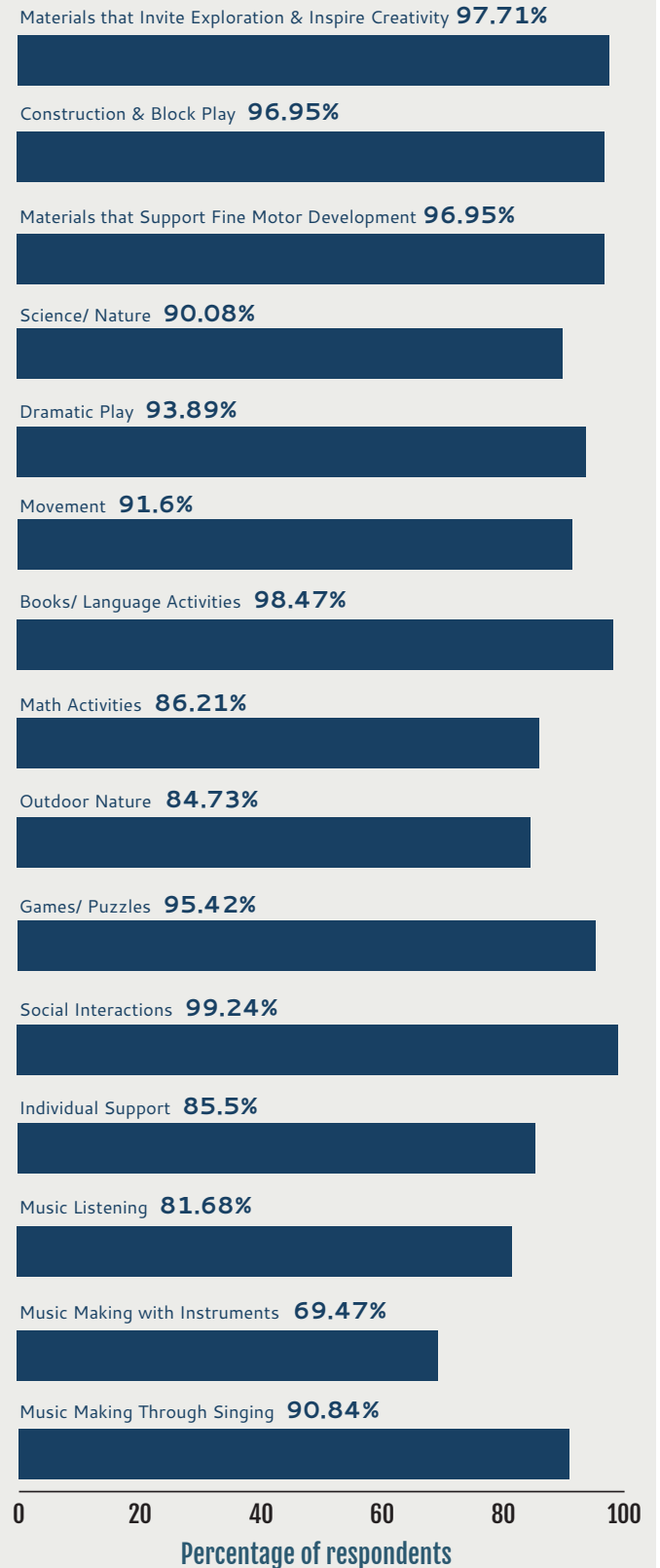
Facilitators and other ECE professionals consider programs operated by the school district a good place to work. StrongStart BC provides a better pay structure and benefits than is common in the early childhood sector, as well as opportunities for professional recognition and support for ECE pedagogical skills. The consensus is that programs work best when directly operated by the district because they offer more connection to the school and the school community, and provide more seamless transitions for children to kindergarten. In general, work satisfaction is higher for facilitators employed by school districts.

*When StrongStart is ingrained in a school and is part of the school district and woven throughout the school, it is at its best — having an opportunity to talk to other staff and show what we do makes it seamless for kids and families and really makes a difference.*

(Facilitator)

A facilitator’s job is a demanding one (Figure 5.3.1). Job requirements include program planning and facilitation intended to help children grow across developmental domains, while creating a family-friendly environment respectful of cultural values and meeting program goals and expectations. They do this not knowing who or how many may show up on a daily basis. They model early learning activities while encouraging parental participation in the program, and facilitate parent referrals to the appropriate community agencies. In addition, facilitators keep records, shop for and prepare nutritious snacks and maintain supplies and equipment. Facilitators also promote awareness of the

**Figure 5.3.1** StrongStart BC facilitator responses\* key program components



\*Only top responses are included

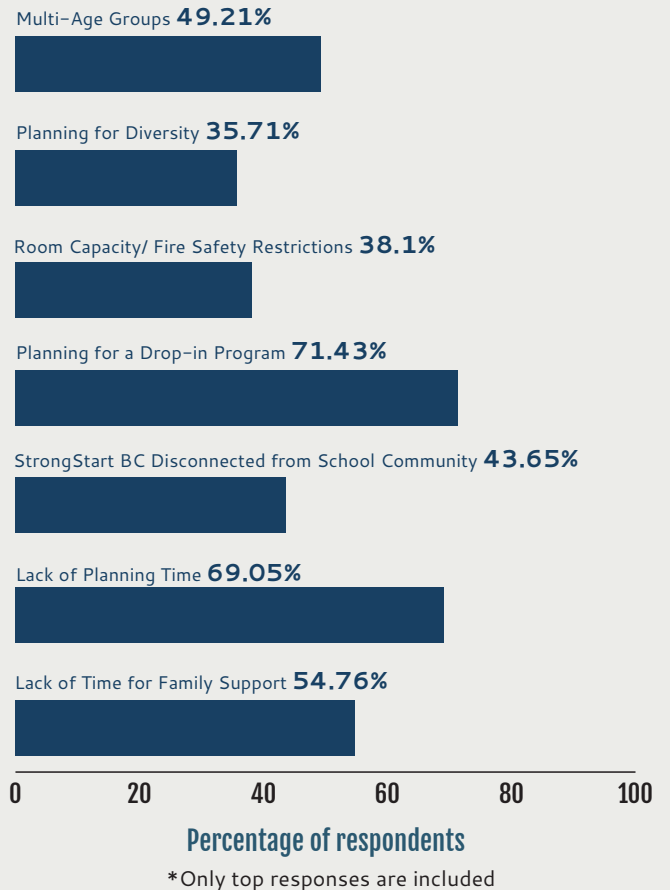
program and foster strategic partnerships with clients, school staff and community partners. Promotion includes everything from producing newsletters to participating in community events and liaising with various stakeholders. In sites where StrongStart BC shares space with another service, they set up and take down the program daily.

Facilitators accomplish these tasks within four hours a day – three paid hours of direct programming and one paid hour for preparation, shopping, planning and the rest. Half the facilitators interviewed report working an additional part-time job. The disconnect between the facilitator’s and the school’s hours reduce opportunities to connect with other educators and stakeholders in the school. The drop-in nature of the program makes planning activities for a wide age group difficult. Facilitators would like more time to:

- plan and collaborate
- meet with principals, early years leads and teachers
- document children’s developmental progress
- follow up with specialists or agencies on behalf of families
- explore professional development
- engage in community outreach, and
- reflect on their own practice (Figure 5.3.2).



**Figure 5.3.2** StrongStart BC facilitator responses challenges in program planning and implementation\*



*I would like to have more than a passing conversation with [facilitator] in the hall. I would like to sit down and discuss her goals for the program, her plans for the year and offer some real support.*

(Principal)

*We need more time for prep work and for evaluating the program. We don't have the time to reflect on how to meet the children's individual needs.*

(Facilitator)

*If you have a family in crisis and there is a lot of follow up it takes more time.*

(Facilitator)



When facilitators are included in the school’s staff communications, they feel part of the school community and are more effective in planning around school events and sharing information with families. In addition, when accommodations are made to include facilitators in the school’s processes, their own programming is informed and they can bring their skills to the school’s learning environment.

Facilitator workloads vary across school districts. Some districts assist by centrally ordering and delivering food, program supplies and materials. Others centralize registration and attendance data. Facilitator access to paid joint professional development and program planning time with kindergarten teachers is mixed depending on administration practices and sometimes in response to labour relations. While facilitators are invited to attend staff meetings and other professional development activities in the school, they are often not paid for their time. Tapping into existing school structures and having the support of the principal and early learning leads are identified as critical supports.

*The principal’s support is critical to help me collaborate with the kindergarten teachers, librarian and others in the school to achieve program goals and plans.*

(Facilitator)

Given the focus on supporting families, not all facilitators feel their ECE training adequately prepared them for work in StrongStart BC. The majority of the facilitators have a one-year ECE certificate or a two-year ECE diploma as their pre-service training (Figure 5.3.3). Training includes little emphasis on family relationships.

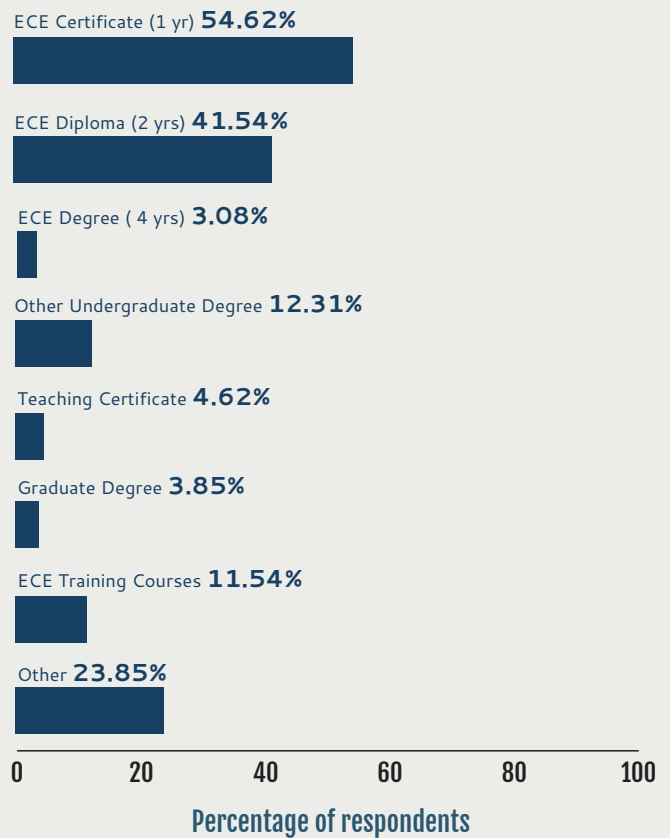
*The school district is moving into a redesigned curriculum — I attended the events and presented to the staff team on play-based early learning and emergent curriculum.*

(Facilitator)

*I share my documentation with kindergarten teachers — they know they can come in anytime to get inspiration. I also visit the kindergarten to help support early writing, early math, learning through play and inquiry.*

(Facilitator)

**Figure 5.3.3** Strong BC facilitator responses regarding educational qualifications



Not all educators studied the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* (ELF) as part of their course work. The ELF is the provincial guide for educator practice in early years settings. ECE practicum placements in StrongStart BC or similar family support programs did not occur. Facilitators identified challenges in programming for age groups ranging from birth to kindergarten.

Some stated that ELF is more suited to a preschool setting, and is not as useful a resource for working with families. The Reflecting on Quality tool, which is reviewed each year at each site and submitted to the ministry, does capture these elements. It is employed in different formats. In some districts the early learning lead and the facilitator fill it out, while in others the leads bring administrators, kindergarten teachers and facilitators together in a joint review and planning exercise.

The ELF is a perfect foundation for the new K–12 curriculum approach and its emphasis on peer co-operation and experiential, project-oriented and self-motivated learning. While the K–12 curriculum has changed, educators feel the alignment between StrongStart BC and kindergarten remains strong, and efforts were made at the district level to include facilitators in the launch of the revised curriculum.

After the need for more time, professional development dominated discussions with educators. Like teachers, facilitators work alone in their classrooms, but unlike teachers they do not have daily contact with their peers. Facilitators working in remote and rural areas can feel very isolated. An often-remarked wish of facilitators is for more networking opportunities. The most frequently requested topics for professional development include working with families, infant development, culturally-appropriate programming and supporting children with special needs.

*We are modelling the behaviours of how to work with kids, but we need to learn how to communicate to the parents as we do this so that they understand the learning and impact of the activity on the child. ECEs don't always have the training or language for this because there is only one course on working with families.*

(Facilitator)

*In the beginning we used to meet regularly at conferences and get ideas for programming, but now we are pretty much on our own.*

(Facilitator)

*We definitely need more training with the Early Learning Framework.*

(Facilitator)



Some districts have given professional development considerable attention.

This whole-school approach to learning pays off when facilitators' expertise is valued in schools. At one site, the grade 5 teacher borrowed the StrongStart BC sand table to help her class demonstrate volume and weights — a result of the administrator's practice of holding regular sessions with all the school's staff on how learning happens. Kindergarten teachers report visiting the StrongStart room and talking to facilitators to get ideas for learning centres and how to integrate play-based learning in their classrooms.

Facilitators have worked in the program an average of six years and the majority see themselves remaining with StrongStart BC for the foreseeable future. In some communities, administrators note difficulties recruiting and retaining facilitators. Dual college credits in early childhood education are being offered to secondary school students as a means of expanding interest in the field. This approach has met with modest success. However, students who go away to college, particularly those from Aboriginal and rural and remote communities, often do not return to their communities

upon graduating (Ball, 2014). No district reported a roster of replacements they could call in when staff members are absent. The lack of replacement staff places additional responsibilities on the facilitator.

The part-time, part-year nature of StrongStart BC may be a good fit for facilitators raising their own children or as an early career choice, but the pay and few routes to advancement are barriers to the professionalism of the field. Some districts have taken steps to construct full-time positions by complementing the facilitators' StrongStart BC hours with work as educational assistants, lunch monitors or preschool teaching.

Despite the challenges, facilitators are enthusiastic envoys of StrongStart BC, with a belief that the program is making a real difference to children and families. At times they may not feel their role is sufficiently appreciated. Only 58% say they feel supported in their work (Figure 5.3.4). Yet every administrator interviewed for this study expressed a sincere admiration for the skills and dedication of facilitators.

*We need to invest in educators' learning. We recruit quality instructors, and we don't do one-offs. We pick a topic and have several sessions throughout the year and give educators time to reflect. We provide feedback and they reflect some more. This is how to change practice and improve outcomes for children.*

(Administrator)

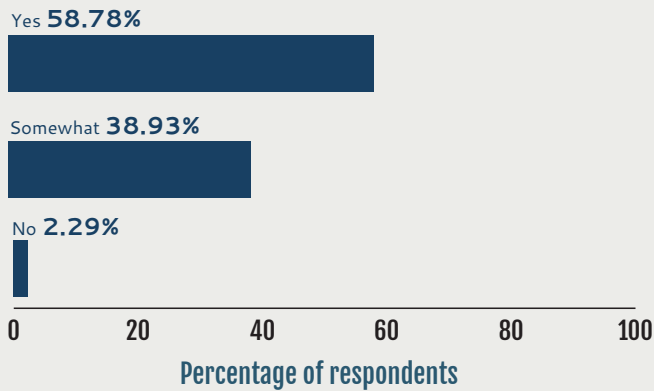
*I take my class to the StrongStart room every Friday afternoon. The children responded to the self-directed learning and I get ideas from how [facilitator] sets up her learning centres.*

(Kindergarten teacher)

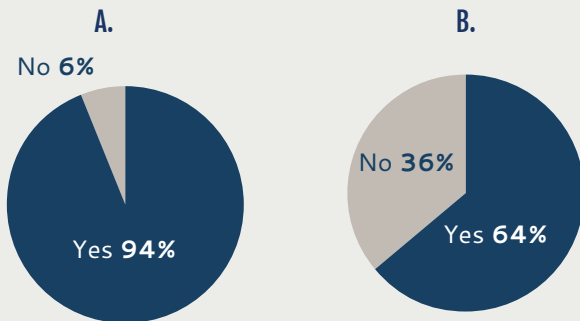
*I ask if I'm really sick enough to take a day off because if I do the program won't open. I worry about those moms who have struggled to get there and see a closed sign on the door.*

(Facilitator)

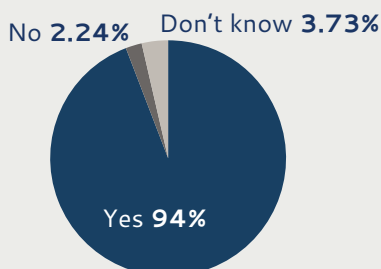
**Figure 5.3.4** StrongStart BC facilitator responses regarding feeling supported in their work



**Figure 5.4.1** Administrator responses regarding program benefits for children A) Those with StrongStart BC in their school B) Those without StrongStart BC in their school



**Figure 5.4.2** Administrators' (with StrongStart BC in their school) responses regarding StrongStart BC as a support for children's kindergarten participation



## 5.4 ADMINISTRATORS

While 94 percent of administrators with a StrongStart BC centre in their school see the benefits for children, only 64 percent without a program in their school see benefits. The response gap suggests the role of StrongStart BC in amplifying a deeper understanding of the value of early learning (Figure 5.4.1).

Overall, administrators understand the evidence connecting early childhood experiences to later school outcomes. They credit StrongStart BC with children's positive introduction to kindergarten (Figure 5.4.2). They remain concerned, however, by the number of children arriving at school with no preschool experiences and who struggle to participate. In response, districts have adopted strategic plans to improve the well-being of young children by expanding access to supports and services (Provincial Office for the Early Years, 2015).

To support these initiatives, districts appoint early learning leads. Districts find funding for the position since there is no dedicated allocation from the province. The work may form part of the duties of a superintendent, principal or curriculum specialist, or there may be a role dedicated to early learning. Leads support the work of the StrongStart BC facilitators and often represent the district at community planning tables. Depending on the district, they may also be responsible for some – or all – other early years programming. Ready, Set, Learn; Roots/Seeds of Empathy; Kindergarten; Grade 1; and liaising with programs in schools operated by outside agencies. Leads differ in terms of their longevity in the position and their capacity to support facilitators.

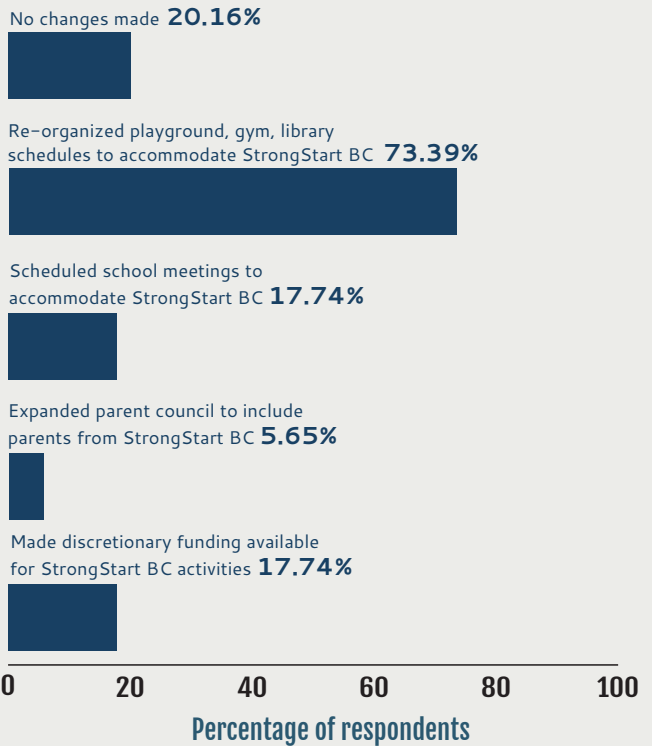


Principals have day-to-day responsibility for the program but sometimes feel ill-equipped to support it. StrongStart BC is new to many. Most reported receiving no, or a cursory orientation, and have no background or training working with family support and preschool programs.

Districts are making an effort to develop a stronger understanding of early development. For example, some include early years knowledge as part of the criteria for hiring new administrators. Others bring together facilitators, kindergarten teachers and principals for professional development devoted to early learning. Still others make early learning a standing item on their monthly supervisors' agenda.

Most principals reorganize school schedules to accommodate StrongStart BC's use of gyms, libraries, and other school facilities and resources (Figure 5.4.3). But even this can be a challenge, particularly in the lower mainland where administrators struggle to find adequate space for mandated classes.

**Figure 5.4.3** Administrator (with StrongStart BC in their school) responses to changes made to school operations to accommodate StrongStart BC



## 5.5 FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAMS AND OTHER COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Administrators report working closely with their early years partners to map community resources, use data to assess the challenges confronting families with young children and set goals to improve outcomes. Agreements allow agencies to take advantage of StrongStart BC facilities and staff to offer preschool, additional supports to refugee families and other needed resources. As part of their early years mandate, school districts collaborate with United Way, Children First, Success by Six, Family Resource Programs and other community agencies on various projects aimed at building capacity within neighbourhoods.

Community provider opinion of StrongStart BC is overwhelmingly positive. Typically larger agencies enjoy a mutually advantageous relationship. Libraries circulate books among the centres and public health delivers its services at sites on a rotating basis. In general, agencies view the program as an important addition to family programming (Figure 5.5.1).

Smaller providers feel less connected to StrongStart BC. During interviews, some described how the program replaced or duplicated their work. Others report losing access to school facilities with the advent of StrongStart BC and experiencing more difficulties recruiting and retaining ECEs because of wage differentials. There is

an impression among independent providers that they operate at a disadvantage without the same access to resources as available to StrongStart BC. They are also less enthusiastic about any potential expansion.

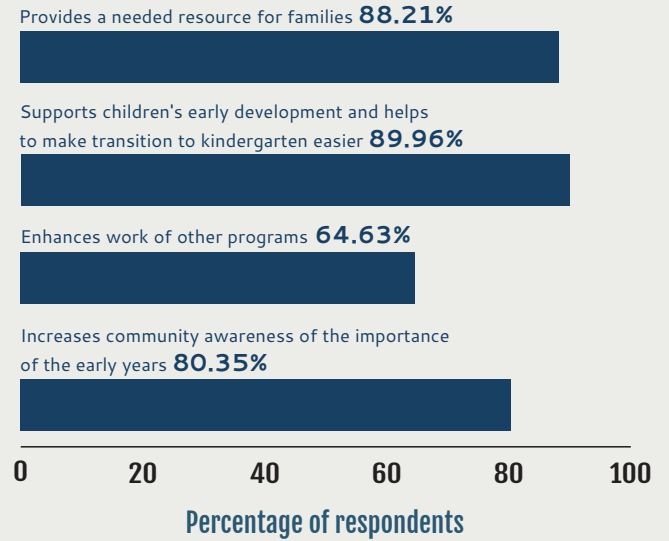
In school districts that initially contracted out StrongStart BC development and management to community operators, and later assumed direct delivery, the transition was not always smooth. Operators felt destabilized, and many lost trained staff, or their programs were displaced from the school. Even when there was no material fallout to community programs, vitriol remains high long after the change.

*People felt that the school district had no business getting into the early years. Once we did, we should never have contracted out [StrongStart BC]. Feelings were running high. It was miserable. We have never recovered from it.*

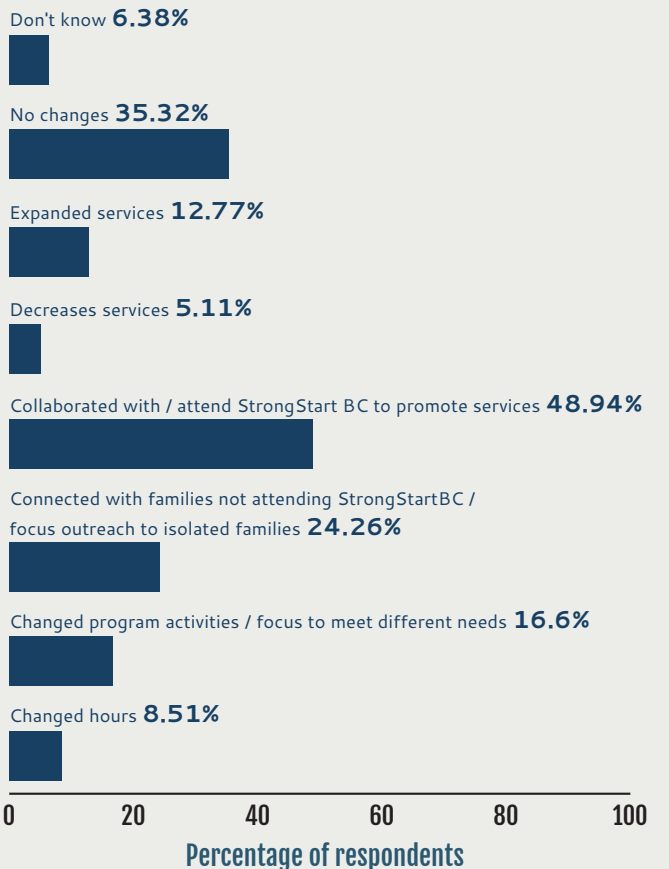
(Administrator)

StrongStart BC facilitators are charged with outreach and developing relationships with community partners. In some districts the early years lead assumes this responsibility. Nevertheless, the number of community early years coordination tables is daunting. The perspective of some is that Early Years Centres add another layer. Smaller agencies cannot maintain regular representation at the tables. Aboriginal representatives feel particularly stretched trying to ensure their perspectives are voiced. Community partners and school staff appreciate the information-sharing offered at the tables. Almost 50 percent collaborate with or attend StrongStart BC to promote their services (Figure 5.5.2). Most service changes that occurred were associated with personal relationships, some of which had their genesis at a community table.

**Figure 5.5.1** Community provider responses regarding the benefits of StrongStart BC



**Figure 5.5.2** Community providers responses regarding changes made to services as a result of StrongStart BC.





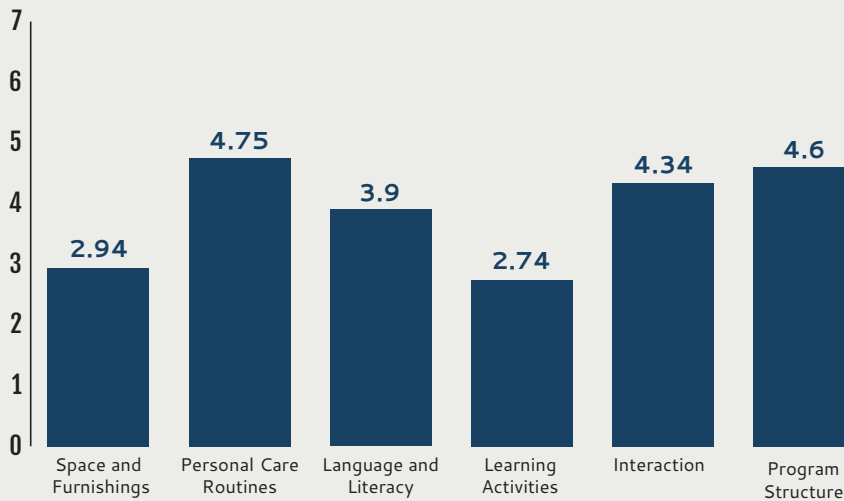
## 6 • EVALUATING QUALITY. ECERS-3 QUALITY RATING OF STRONGSTART BC

Evaluating quality in early childhood settings involves multiple processes, including using validated measurements; reviewing related factors such as funding, educator training, leadership and pedagogical support; and examining the role of parent engagement. Measuring quality includes a review of both social and educational contexts.

The active involvement of parents and other caregivers in StrongStart BC complicates the use of measurement tools, which are designed to measure quality indicators in early learning environments primarily attended by children. However, such tools do provide a snapshot of the elements that impact quality, including a consistent approach to evaluating the physical environment; access to toys, equipment and materials and the effectiveness of interactions between adults and children to support enhanced language and social development. These elements of quality remain constant across early childhood settings. Exploring quality in StrongStart BC centres can help inform a plan of action to sustain high-quality practice and revise processes that require adaptation.

Eleven StrongStart BC centres were observed using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-3), Third Edition (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2015). The ECERS tool reliably measures six components of quality assurance in early childhood programming including, space and furnishings, personal care routines, language and literacy, learning activities, interaction and program structure. ECERS is a validated tool used across Canada and internationally.

**Figure 6.1** Average ECERS-3 ratings across 11 StrongStart BC sites on a scale of 1-7 where 1= inadequate and 7= excellent



A trained evaluator administered the tool using an observation period of approximately three hours, ensuring that children’s arrival and departure times were covered. ECERS-3 includes 35 items for evaluation across the six subscales. Each item is given a score of 1 (inadequate) through 7 (exceptional). The average score for the StrongStart BC programs in the study was in the 3–5 range on most items

(Figure 6.1). Subsequent figures in this section illustrate the number of programs (N=11) scoring at or above 4.5 on the described items.

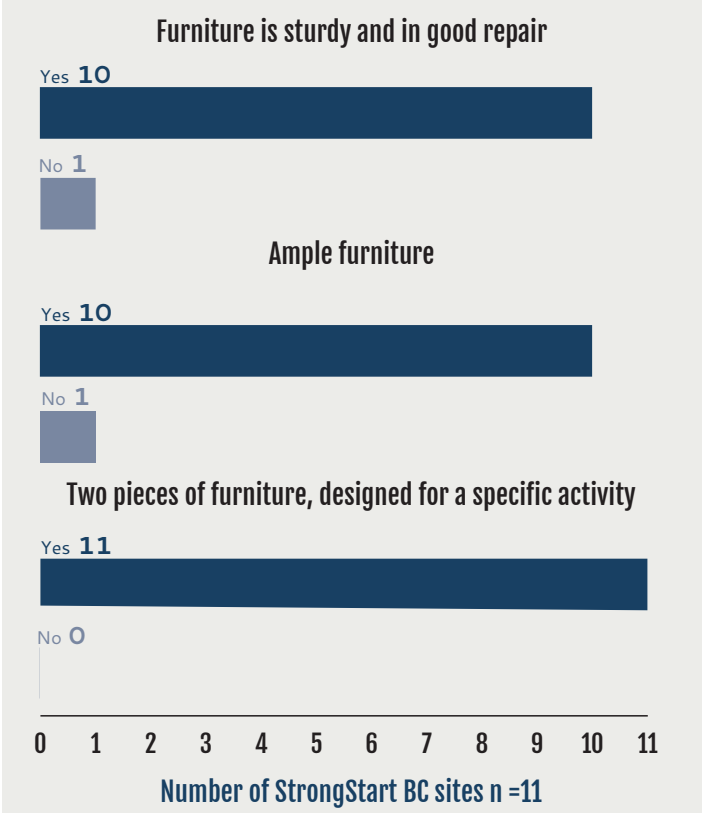
StrongStart BC programs offer a variety of learning opportunities in spaces appropriately designed for young children. The facilitator’s role involves planning a program for children and supporting parents to engage with their children. There is a concerted effort on the part of the facilitators to provide activities that meet the needs of a variety of children ranging in age from early infancy to kindergarten. In some locations, however, the popularity of the program creates limitations as to how effectively the space can accommodate the numbers of children and adults attending. In addition, most programs need new materials and re-furbishing.

Classroom size impacts attendance. Depending on space and location, between 25 and 75 children and adults cycled through daily, with families attending for reduced hours in the more crowded centres. These high numbers, combined with limited access to ongoing support, make it nearly impossible for facilitators to attend to the individual learning needs of children. According to the ECERS-3 evaluation, closer consideration needs to be given to space and staffing to ensure that facilitators have more meaningful learning interactions with the children. Although the facilitators are generally responsive in their interactions, these are mainly limited to managing a large group rather than providing numeracy, socio-dramatic and literacy support to small groups or individual children. In a StrongStart BC environment, facilitators’ active engagement with children provides an opportunity to model appropriate strategies for parents.

Facilitators are often called upon to attend to the needs of the adults as much as the children. In communities where parent/caregiver needs are high, the facilitators are exceptionally skilled at juggling the multitude of demands placed on them.



**Figure 6.1.1** ECERS-3 findings for number of StrongStart BC sites with adequate furnishing for play and learning



## 6.1 SPACE AND FURNISHINGS

This component includes items such as indoor space, furnishings for care and learning, room arrangement, lighting and ventilation, and space for privacy. It considers examples of child-related display, space and material for gross motor play. Programs in the case studies have space for play and learning, offering a variety of materials including water, blocks, art supplies and science-related activities such as gardening and an ant farm (Figure 6.1.1). Children are free to explore play areas with very few restrictions. However, facilitators have limited capacity to circulate in the program during free play to scaffold learning. They are more focused on greeting families as they arrive and managing large groups of children and adults in the program spaces.

Due to the large numbers of participants, privacy for quiet reading and individual play is not always feasible. Displays of children’s art are limited across all programs. Displaying children’s work adds visual learning opportunities and supports the development of children’s self-esteem. Posting children’s work also provides opportunities for families and caregivers to understand the meaning behind art or print through the documentation of children’s development. More effort could be made to remove ready-made material from display boards and add more of the children’s contributions at their eye level. Literacy opportunities would be enhanced by adding printed words to describe the children’s art.

Active play is a critical component of social experiences and can benefit children’s developmental skills and positive behaviour. Most programs have 15 minutes a day in the gym during the school’s recess. Gross motor play is rich when available in the



school gym, and children can access a range of equipment serving a multitude of skill levels. Some of the equipment is risky for younger children, requiring the close attention of parents. Facilitators focus on setting up the gym and, where possible, lead group-based gross motor experiences.

Outdoor space use is limited across all programs and can be enhanced with minimal changes to the program schedule. Outdoor spaces are rarely used since the programs are focused on following a set indoor schedule. There is opportunity for the same activities to be offered outdoors. In some locations, the addition of a fence would create an outdoor classroom.

### **6.2 PERSONAL CARE ROUTINES**

This component includes items related to meals and snacks, health, toileting and safety practices. Parents and other caregivers are primarily responsible for their children's hygiene. Since StrongStart BC operates in half-day time blocks, full meals are not served. Snacks are provided and include cheese and fruit, water, crackers and nut butter. It is evident that some children have their first meal of the day in the program. The process of serving food varies at each site. Facilitators either



serve or organize families and caregivers to take on this role. During meal times, conversations with the children about the food or about their play are limited because facilitators are busy organizing the food. Examples of positive interactions between adults and children were observed in programs with fewer children including encouraging turn taking, and offering snack options.

All facilitators wash their hands regularly with soap. Children's hand washing varies depending on what their parents/caregivers do. Toileting activities were not directly observed to respect privacy. Two-thirds of the programs observed have accessible washrooms within the playroom; the remainder use facilities outside the classroom. In one site, the washroom is more than 60 metres away, creating challenges for families with more than one child and increased traffic in school hallways during instructional time.

Facilitators put safety parameters into place by limiting how much equipment is made available to children. Families help in putting toys away and clearing pathways. In two sites, the equipment in the gym is not developmentally appropriate for the age group.

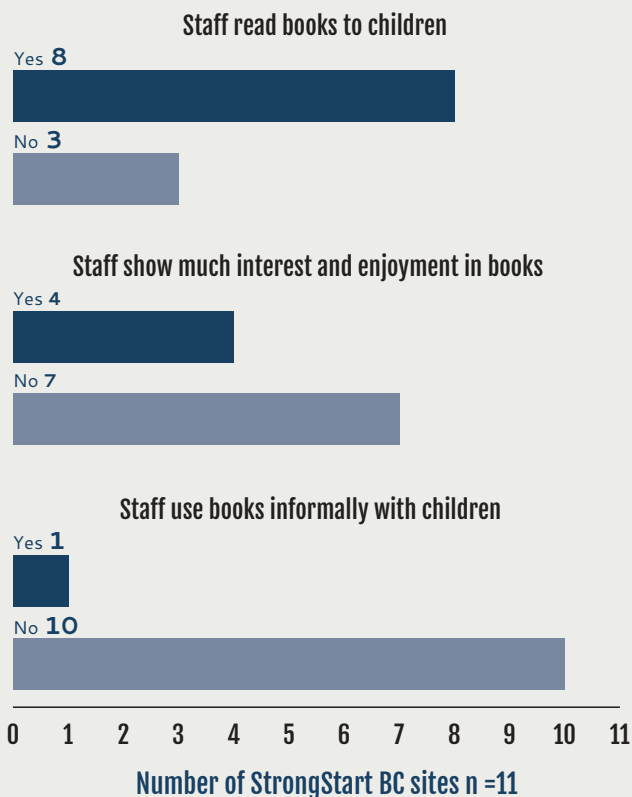
### **6.3 LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

Language and literacy skills in children can be effectively supported through a print-rich environment and high-quality conversations with adults and with other children. Educators further children's vocabulary by describing materials and activities and asking children questions. This, combined with telling stories

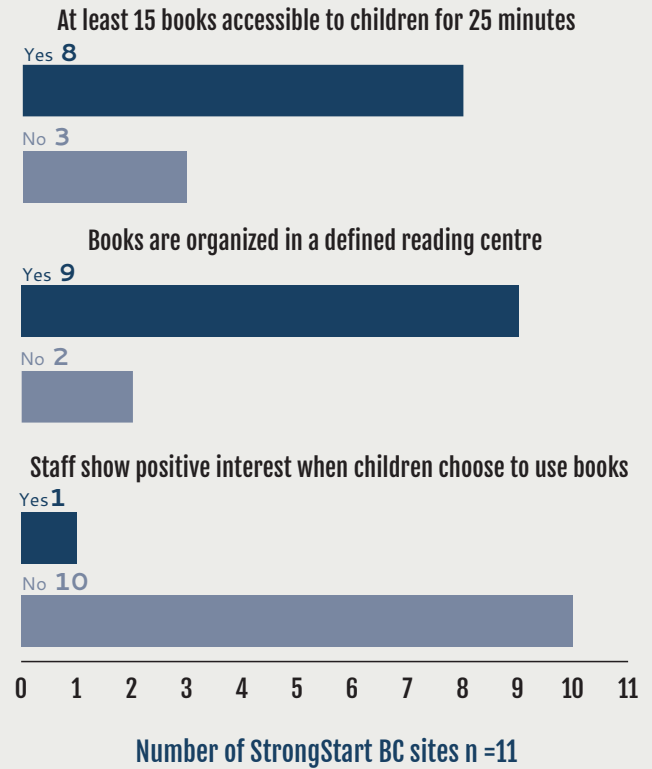
and sharing experiences, enhances language development. In the ECERS-3 evaluation, the language and literacy component refers to items that help children expand vocabulary and use language. It is supported through staff use of books with children, encouraging children to use books and helping them become familiar with print (Figure 6.3.1/ 6.3.2/ 6.3.3).

Facilitators consistently use the names of things, places and activities. However, expanding vocabulary to include new themes and explaining the meaning of new words was not observed. Group story time was a period when facilitators read to children. Some facilitators used props and others did not. Few read with animation and enjoyment.

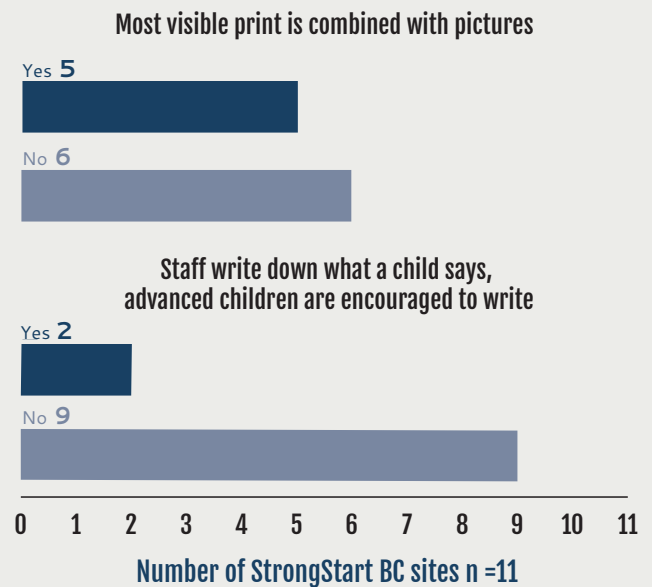
**Figure 6.3.1** ECERS-3 findings for staff use of books with children



**Figure 6.3.2** ECERS-3 findings for encouraging children’s use of books



**Figure 6.3.3** ECERS-3 findings for encouraging children to become familiar with print



In general facilitators do not engage in any extended conversations with children, nor do they engage with children about their art, missing opportunities to promote language, document the children’s stories and model ways that parents can further their children’s verbal and print understanding. Parents do make use of books.

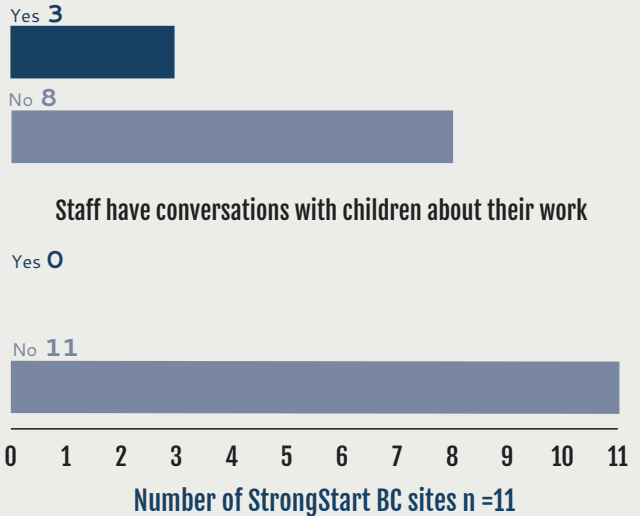
### 6.4 LEARNING ACTIVITIES

This component represents fine motor, art, music, blocks, dramatic play, nature and science, math, numeracy, diversity and use of technology. A wide variety of resources are made available to children, including building materials, manipulatives, puzzles, art supplies, reading and writing materials, and sensory activities. Again, high enrolment makes it difficult for facilitators to engage with children during activity time; this time is used for overall group supervision and conversations with adults rather than providing opportunities for children to share stories through their art (Figure 6.4.1).

All program spaces are available and children freely choose their activities. Centres in the Lower Mainland are particularly crowded, making the design and effectiveness of the learning activities more challenging. For example, in one program the adults gather on the floor of the block area, making it difficult for the children to access the materials. Art supplies are freely available but few sites include large or messy painting activities. The activities are instead contained and cleaned up when finished, with few opportunities for children to continue working on their projects the following day.

Socio-dramatic play is limited across programs with few materials and little space available to engage in long-term imaginary play. Children who

**Figure 6.4.1** ECERS-3 findings for art  
**Children use art materials in their own way**





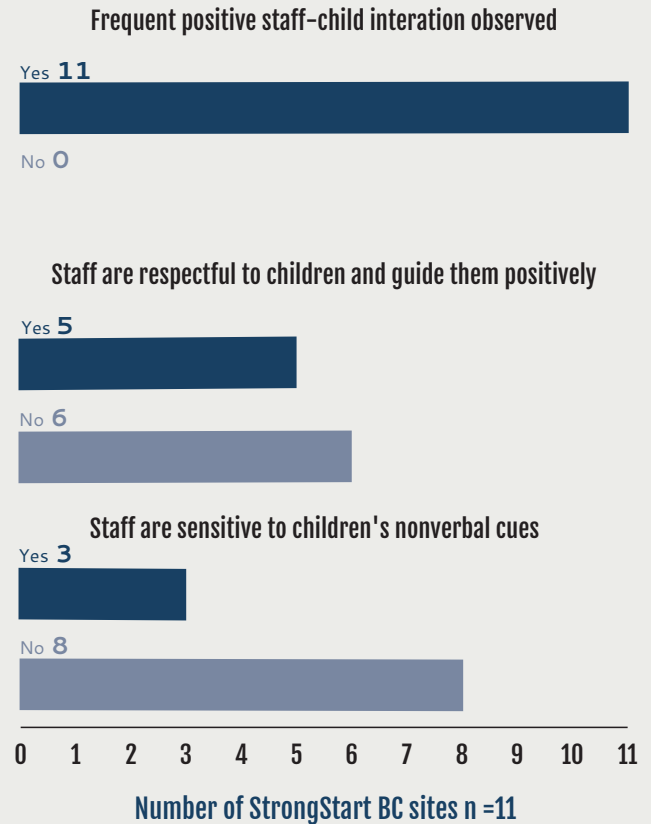
were observed in dramatic play participated in solitary and parallel play for up to 15 minutes without getting distracted. Only one facilitator was observed actively engaged with the children’s play.

## 6.5 INTERACTIONS

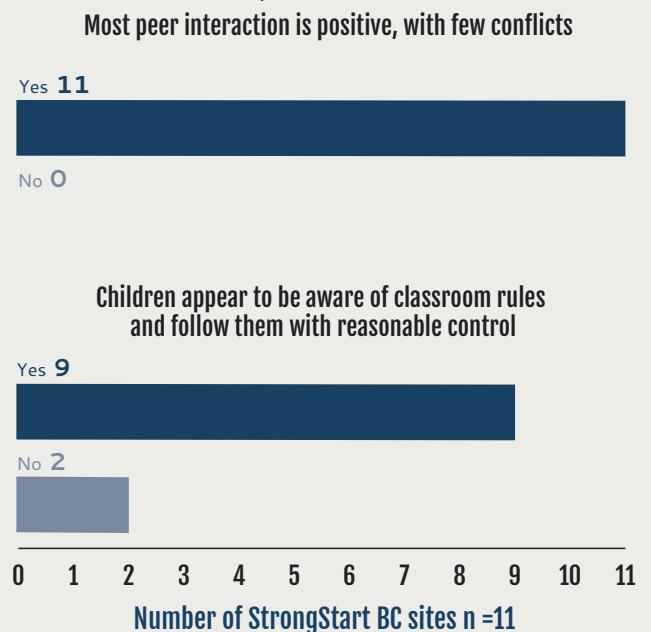
This component relates to supervision of activities, individualized teaching and learning, staff–child interaction, peer interaction and behaviour guidance (Figure 6.5.1a, b, c). Each facilitator shares a warm welcome with all children and adults in the early part of the day. However, as programs become more crowded, it is difficult to observe this welcome. Positive examples of interactions were observed, and very few, if any, interactions were related to the behaviour guidance of children. When this is necessary, parents become the lead.



**Figure 6.5.1a** ECERS–3 findings for staff–child interactions



**Figure 6.5.1b** ECERS–3 findings for peer interaction and discipline



Children are involved in peer interaction in an active way and older children support younger children by staying close and offering toys and books. Despite high attendance, the interactions remain remarkably calm. The only place chaos ensued was in the gym where children become excited by the equipment and the large space to run in – a necessary experience that can be joyous but dangerous when babies are crawling among running preschoolers.

The role of facilitators can be improved by engaging more purposefully with individual or small groups of children. This will only be made possible with additional space, reduced enrolment or additional staffing to enable some degree of splitting groups.

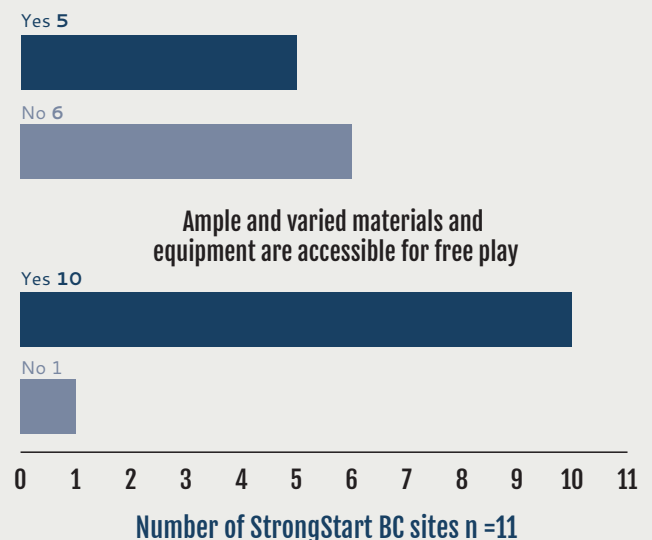
### 6.6 PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The program structure component includes adult supervision, transitions and waiting times, opportunities for free play and whole group activities (Figure 6.6.1 a, b, c). The facilitators consistently limit wait times for children and make efficient use of transitions. There are opportunities for children to sing, practice body movements and listen for signals for the next activity. Free play is made available during the early part of the program with adequate materials available. Busier programs seem chaotic but no overt conflicts were observed among children. Typical to most early learning environments, sand tables and water tables create more crowding. This could be alleviated by improved use of outdoor space. Most children and adults participate in whole group activities. On occasion a child may slip away, but parents are held responsible for supervising their children. Overall, the program structure is effective within the limitations of resources available to it.

**Figure 6.5.1c** ECERS-3 findings for interaction  
Almost all staff-child interaction is positive

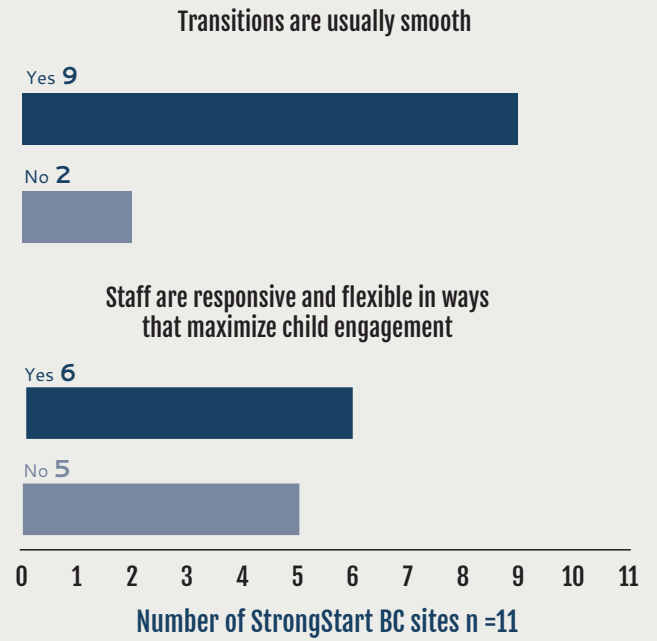


**Figure 6.6.1a** ECERS-3 findings for free play  
Free play takes place for at least 1 hour, including time inside and outside (weather permitting)

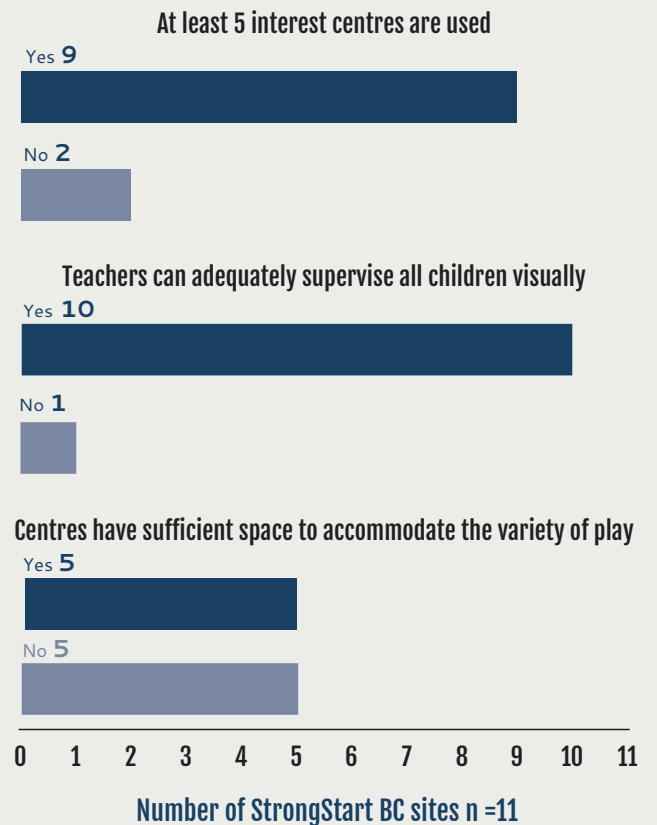




**Figure 6.6.1b** ECERS-3 findings for program structure



**Figure 6.6.1c** ECERS-3 findings for play and learning







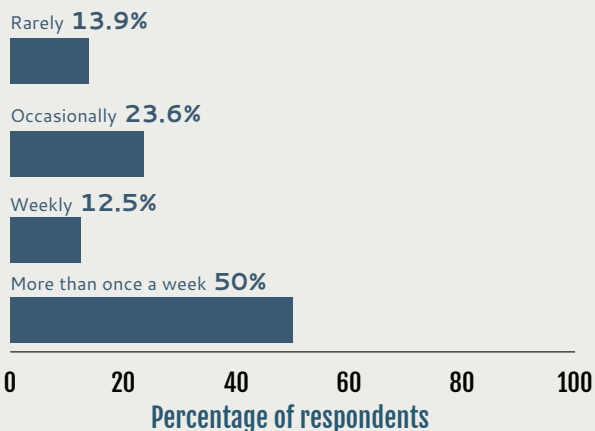
## 7 • CHALLENGES

### 7.1 CAPACITY

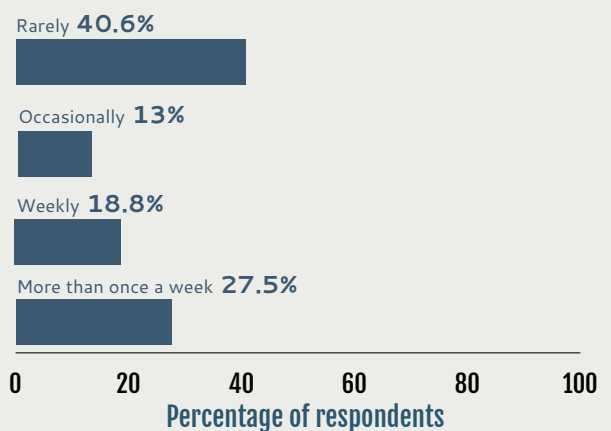
Many StrongStart BC centres are over subscribed. More than two-thirds of the programs surveyed regularly operate at capacity (Figure 7.1.1a). The ECERS-3 evaluation indicates programs at capacity are challenged to maintain quality (see Section 6).

Almost 50 percent of facilitators consistently turn families away (Figure 7.1.1b). This figure is likely underrepresented. Families know programs reach capacity quickly, so they forego attending on days when they get a late start. The need to expand the number of centres was the most frequent suggestion heard across the range of stakeholders in the evaluation.

**Figure 7.1.1a** StrongStart BC Facilitator Responses: How often is your StrongStart BC program at capacity?



**Figure 7.1.1b** StrongStart BC Facilitator Responses: How often do you turn families away from your program?





*The challenge is around scanning and supervising little bodies that you see through big bodies. Today the room was chock-a-block — if you have 20 it is much more manageable, but we had 45 today.*

(Facilitator)

*When you are feeling depressed, getting out of the house is all you can handle sometimes. If I managed to get us there and was turned away, I would have felt even more depressed and stopped coming.*

(Parent)

*There needs to be a big enough dose to see positive child outcomes and limiting how often families can come is going to dilute the impact of the program.*

(Facilitator)

Packed programs and those with attendance restrictions deter families who could most benefit from participation.

Overcrowded programs can cause real pain. The Ministry of Children and Family Development uses the sites for supervised visits, and a full centre means a missed reunion for parent and child.

Parents travel long distances to attend StrongStart BC and frequent different programs on different days. These are not options for families with transportation or other obstacles to participation. To manage demand, school districts curtail the attendance of family daycare providers and/or rotate attendance for families to two or three days per week.

A few programs offer days exclusively for licensed family daycare providers, but the more common approach is to exclude or severely restrict their participation. (Licensed providers may care for up to seven children; eight if they have an ECE.) Most providers do not have formal early childhood training. The children in their care would benefit

from exposure to the school environment and activities facilitated by a qualified educator. Providers may also be parents who would profit, both as parents and as caregivers, from the guidance of the facilitator and the social networks of other parents/caregivers.

## 7.2 ATTENDANCE AND OUTREACH

While programs struggle to manage overcrowding, all stakeholders are concerned that StrongStart BC is not reaching the most vulnerable families. None could identify a systematic approach to identifying preschool-age children in their community. There are few resources or avenues for advertising, and few facilitators have the time to visit families or reach out in other ways. School districts usually have some representation at community planning tables, but these are not identified as major sources of referrals. Most participants surveyed learned about the program through word of mouth.

For families without social networks, knowing about the program is one issue; attending regularly is another. Research indicates adverse outcomes for children when parents are depressed or isolated. Lone

mothers of preschoolers who do not participate in some form of group programming (e.g., childcare, library, playgroups) are twice as likely to say they have no supportive networks and remain isolated when their children are in school (Hancock, Cunningham, Lawrence, Zarb & Zubrick, 2015).

Registration forms and the necessity of providing a birth certificate are barriers for some families. Facilitators work with parents to obtain the necessary identification, and schools in some circumstances will cover the costs. Yet for families who move frequently or who are otherwise under duress, the process of obtaining and keeping the necessary paperwork can be overwhelming. Administrators and educators suggest an expanded and more flexible range of documentation be permitted.

Facilitators are quick to point out there are many forms of vulnerability. For example, postpartum depression can impact any mother. New arrivals to Canada are parenting without the support of extended families. Twin births or multiple young children, no access to a car or inadequate public transit can all leave families isolated.

Programs use various outreach strategies and the ingenuity of the facilitators is endless. Agencies supporting families whose children are in care or under supervision organize exclusive hours for their clients to familiarize them with program and its routines. Districts have adopted “pre-StrongStarts” where small groups of families use the StrongStart BC space after hours. Through building confidence and relationships, parents feel more comfortable attending the regular program. Facilitators buddy up parents for transportation; deliver the program in more familiar venues; arrange days exclusively for babies, for young parents or for dads; and operate evenings, weekends and over the summer breaks. Health days where the dental hygienist checks young teeth and visits by other professionals are also featured.

Food as a vehicle for socialization and for teaching food hygiene is a welcomed activity for all families. For some food security is an issue. Facilitators report that children and parents attend the program hungry. This was corroborated by evaluator observations. Some parents say the daily snack forms a vital part of their family’s diet.

Food can also be a source of contention. School rules that allow parents to bring only purchased foods to share at special events can stymie relationships.

*My children are eating much better since we came to StrongStart.*

(Parent)

*Sharing the food you’ve made is an international way of welcoming people. How do you show your culture with a pack of crackers?*

(Parent)

StrongStart BC is challenged to provide the language and cultural supports entitled to Francophone and Aboriginal families. The program’s open community access requirement limits its ability to provide a Francization experience for Francophone families. Many children attending the centre do not meet the criteria to enroll in the school. French-language teachers are recruited from Quebec but leave after a year or two because of the high cost of living in British Columbia. Compromised support for language development and high teacher turnover, together with third party operation by the Fédération des parents

francophones de la C-B, are barriers to the integration of the program into French-language schools. Principals and teachers report they are less aware of the program and its mandate and therefore less able to support it.

StrongStart BC is also tested to involve Aboriginal families. The legacy of residential schools and the availability of alternate programs such as Aboriginal Head Start present attendance challenges. In interviews parents echoed the finding of other reviews of Aboriginal education. Their children's skills are seen as problems, rather than an addition to the classroom. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015) They find the StrongStart BC model too restrictive and insensitive to an Aboriginal worldview.

When attending StrongStart BC, Aboriginal families were observed as less likely to socialize with non-Aboriginal parents. The connections between families and facilitators are also less developed. Some Aboriginal parents experience a hierarchy between them and the facilitator and felt observed and judged by other parents. In some schools with high Aboriginal enrolment, neither the school nor the StrongStart BC environment reflected an Aboriginal presence.

At one site, attendance was restricted to families in the school's catchment, coupled with a year-long outreach effort by the district's Aboriginal Education Enhancement Worker to encourage involvement. It is showing some success. The district early years lead is also working with Aboriginal PALS to expand the cultural understanding of facilitators. In another site, a StrongStart BC Aboriginal Advisory Group guides the work of the centre. As programs integrate Aboriginal knowledge, parents recognize their value.

*Many of the children in the centre are not eligible to attend the school. This challenges relationships and opportunities for collaboration between school staff and the program.*

(Principal)

*Our children are still playing outside after dark. They are too tired to get anywhere by 9 a.m., especially if they show up and can't get in because it is full.*

(Administrator)

*He was telling a story about his knife. He was told not to play with knives. He knows how to use a knife properly.*

(Parent)

*They brought drumming so children could learn respect for the drums.*

(Parent)

*I want my child to learn about her culture and that of her aunties. I want them taught not to be racists.*

(Parent)

*As we indigenize schools, there may be more of a shift to multi-age settings and intergenerational aspects.*

(Administrator)

*Why can't we make a case that StrongStart BC kids can also access Aboriginal Enhancement funds?*

(Administrator)

Parents stop attending StrongStart BC for a variety of reasons: their child starts kindergarten; they move out of the district; the facilitator changes; their friends no longer attend; or their child loses interest. Some find it more convenient or are more comfortable using online resources and chat rooms. Parents report their older children become bored and registration numbers drop when children turn four. About 18 percent of registrants are four- to five-years-old. Parents and educators see value in building on StrongStart BC by offering four year olds a dedicated transition year into kindergarten. They are supported by research indicating the enhanced effectiveness of family programming, which includes opportunities for children to attend on their own (Melhuish et al., 2010; Webster-Stratton, 1997; Behrman, 1999). Administrators feel a transition year would be beneficial preparation for children who receive no preschool programming.

*Parents from some cultures don't see the value of attending with their child, so something built onto StrongStart BC would be good.*

(Administrator)

*The facilities are already there, so if there could be direct bridging from StrongStart BC to kindergarten that a four-year-old program would provide it would be very powerful and so widely attended.*

(Administrator)

### 7.3 POLICIES

Although a school program, StrongStart BC is not an educational program under the School Act. Its secondary status contributes to programs being moved, relegated to schools with low enrolment or leftover space in portables or rooms separated off from the school. Administrators are reluctant to factor StrongStart BC into major planning, leading to a variety of daily challenges for parents and facilitators in the operation of the program.

Room size is often problematic considering programs are intended to accommodate large numbers of adults and children from infants to kindergarten age. Administrators report a lack of washroom facilities for adults and pressure on parking, classrooms and other school space and amenities (Figure 7.3.1).

*I used to average 15 to 20 kids a day until the other centre opened. Now we split those same families between the two of us.*

(Facilitator)

*If you are going to appreciate and value StrongStart BC, it has to have designated space, not the unwanted space.*

(Administrator)

How well StrongStart BC programs are integrated into the school depends on their location, the school culture and internal processes. Programs that are located away from the school centre identify as being less connected. Connectedness relies heavily on the skills of facilitators to negotiate with teachers and school administrators, and is often challenged by other demands on the facilitator as well as the principal's



understanding of the program. For example, in some sites fire drills are scheduled outside StrongStart BC hours to avoid interrupting its activities, but such practices could leave parents and children vulnerable in the event of an actual fire.

*It's up to administrators to do what they can to bring everyone together. This year we have a number of principals changing again — so we're starting all over. We're planning to bring in all the new principals and facilitators together to start talking and building.*

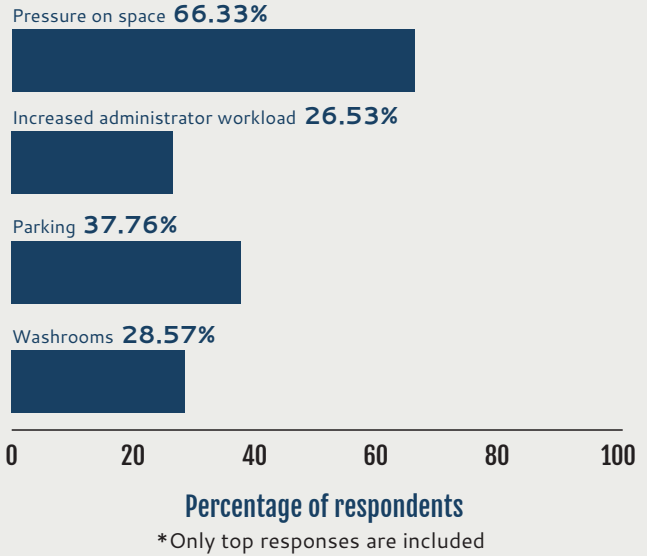
(Administrator)

### 7.4 FUNDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

StrongStart BC is funded the Ministry of Education. Boards of Education receive \$32,000 for each centre. Funding levels have not changed significantly since its founding in 2007, with only a small increase of \$2,000 per program in 2010/11. To meet wage and other program demands, districts report diverting resources from other activities. In some cases StrongStart BC is contracted out as a cost saving, but low wages paid by community providers can result in a high turnover of facilitators.

Observations show programs looking visibly tired. Books are tattered, blocks are bitten and appliances are starting to fail. Facilitators report spending unpaid hours cleaning or scavenging for affordable food and supplies. Districts are unable to pay facilitators to participate in staff meetings, to jointly program with kindergarten teachers or to take the training that would better equip them to support the changing communities they serve.

**Figure 7.3.1** Administrator responses regarding main challenges



## StrongStart BC

### 053

Schools may apply to the Ministry of Education for additional funding through Ready, Set, Learn (RSL) which supplies an annual \$2,450 grant to support children’s transition to kindergarten. Schools may collaborate with StrongStart BC and/or community programs such as Mother Goose and other school-readiness programs, to plan and deliver activities and recruit participants. Administrators interviewed for this study reported a range of one time, small-scale events. Funds are used to support school tours, welcome-to-kindergarten events, books and pajama evenings or other early literacy activities. Since StrongStart BC is a kindergarten readiness program, some districts justify using the RSL allocation to cover its funding shortfalls. Single events are unlikely to impact children’s transitions (OECD, 2013; Sylva et al., 2004) but may draw attention to the role of schools in the community. Children need regular exposure to early years programming to effectively prepare for kindergarten (Isaacs, 2012; Corter & Arimura, 2006; PHAC, 2009; Hall, Sylva et al., 2013; Whittaker et al., 2013; Nicholson, Berthelsen et al., 2010). An expanded StrongStart BC would be better able to deliver the intended results.

Record keeping is an overlooked expense. Birth certificates and proof of address are required for program registration. In some districts, the facilitators land the job of tracking down the documentation and completing the paperwork. In others, the school’s clerical staff is responsible, and in still others the district handles all registration and attendance records centrally.

The Personal Education Number (PEN) is allocated to each child at program registration but attendance systems are not adequately designed to capture when a child moves. Each year begins a new attendance cycle. It is an onerous process to oversee and does not work well for transient families, particularly when they are required to repeat the same process at kindergarten registration.

*At the end of every year you almost have to toss everyone out and re-register them because there is nothing that kicks out the ones that move on to kindergarten — something that we’re trying to work out to get an accurate read on how many kids we are servicing with StrongStart BC.*

(Administrator)





## 8 • MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Regular participation in high quality early childhood programs is associated with improved child outcomes and family benefits. Attendance data and program quality evaluations when linked to child outcome measures such as the Early Development Instrument (EDI), the Middle Child Instrument (MDI), the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA), grade retention, graduation rates and other pertinent data sets (i.e. population, health, justice, employment) provide a longitudinal assessment of the influences of policies, programs and practices on health and well-being.

This evaluation explored data sources that currently exist to analyze the performance of StrongStart BC programs, and identified data sources that could enable monitoring of children's outcomes in the long term.

Based on these findings, a scan of data linking systems in Canadian provinces (See section 14, Appendix A.A) and feedback from experts, it is suggested that the Ministry of Education undertake the following.

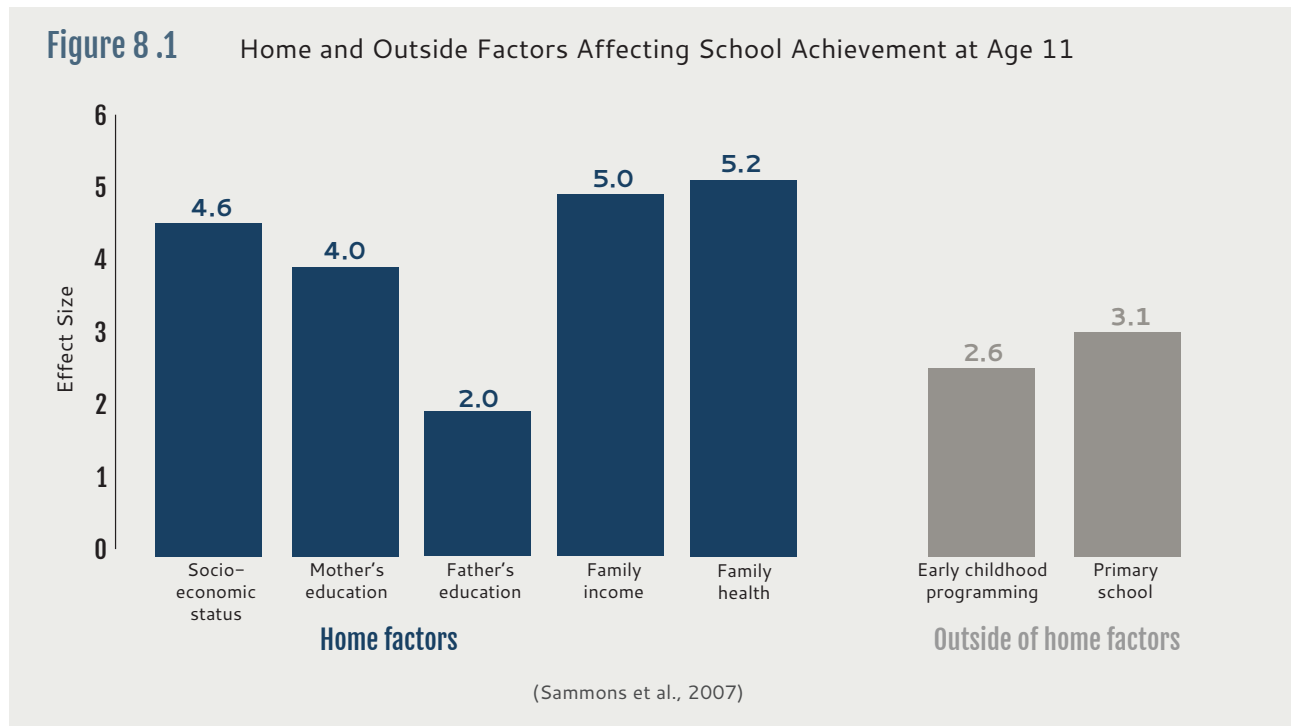
**Expand acceptable identification for StrongStart BC registration:** Children's birth certificates are now the only accepted form of identification to obtain the student number (PEN) assigned at StrongStart BC registration. The cost of certificates and/or access to birth registries, are barriers for some families. Other forms of government identification could be accepted including health, certificates of Indian, refugee, or immigration status or similar documentation.



**Address registration system deficiencies:** The information gathered through the StrongStart BC meta-data registration system includes child, family and neighbourhood data. These are all factors that influence child outcomes. The system did not maintain postal codes when families moved (necessary for neighbourhood identification) or readily identify children who age out of the program. This is now being addressed and when complete, the system will be able to identify the children registered and assess attendance.

**Capture children’s attendance rates:** Attendance dosage<sup>1</sup> is essential in assessing the impact of StrongStart BC on child outcomes. Short-term sporadic attendance is not associated with child effects. In the EPPE study in the UK, spending a longer time in higher quality programming generated similar effect sizes to higher maternal education and higher family income (Sammons et al., 2007). A 2012 OECD review associated 15 hours of week of early educational programming, attended for two or more years, with improved academic outcomes. This is a consideration for the ministry as over-crowding at StrongStart BC programs is managed by attendance restrictions.

**Expand the use of CHEQ:** Home influences (family income, social economic status, parent education, health) have the greatest influence on child outcomes. Early childhood program and primary schooling are the greatest outside the home influencers (Figure 8.1). In addition to StrongStart BC, children may attend a variety of other early childhood programs – childcare, headstart, library, recreation and other playgroups, etc. Some children will participate in no organized programming prior to kindergarten. These cumulative experiences influence children’s development and their transitions to school.



1 Dosage describes the amount of time a child is exposed to a program. Dosage can refer to the frequency (how often), the intensity (how much of the intervention is delivered in a session), duration, session length (full or half day), or cumulative dosage.



The Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (CHEQ) is a parent questionnaire filled out during kindergarten registration and designed to capture the range of children’s preschool experiences, including early childhood program attendance, literacy exposure and family and neighbourhood circumstances.

**Link CHEQ and attendance data with EDI findings:** StrongStart BC attendance, coupled with CHEQ and linked to findings from the EDI, allow for a more fulsome analysis of factors influencing child outcomes. Such findings provide an important evidence base to inform policies and practices and to identify underserved communities. They can be further linked to later assessments (MDI, FSA, academic records, etc).

**Invest in collection:** Data sets are only as useful as their response rate and accuracy. School districts report challenges maintaining StrongStart BC records. Parent surveys similar to CHEQ were distributed in other jurisdictions but low response rates resulted in data with limited use.

**Additional population-wide early learning screening tools are unnecessary:** Randomized control trials provide no evidence that screening children who do not present for developmental delays improves outcomes. Findings do suggest that commonly used screening tools lead to a high proportion of false positives, resulting in unnecessary anxiety for children and parents. They also divert resources from needed interventions (CMAJ, 2016).

**Judiciously use ECERS-3 to support program quality:** The quantity, quality and content of programs for young children impact child outcomes. The evaluation found quality challenges in the StrongStart BC programs observed. Most challenges are associated with high attendance and most could be alleviated by first addressing the structural barriers (funding, time, training) identified in this review.

StrongStart BC would benefit from periodic arms-length quality assessments. Validated quality assessments are designed for child care, preschool or similar programs. However the elements of quality measured (space, resources, interactions, health and safety) are applicable to all early childhood settings. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Third Edition (ECERS-3) is suitable for StrongStart BC. When used in combination with the *Reflecting on Quality* tool, the findings could isolate challenges and guide resource allocation and professional training.

In the longer term the Ministry of Education could work with other relevant ministries to:

**Expand utility of Personal Education Number (PEN):** A common identifier and consistent reporting mechanisms permit an assessment of the services children receive across sectors. Manitoba has assigned identifier numbers at birth since the 1990s. Ontario and Nova Scotia provide student numbers to children as they enroll in any preschool program. These latter models are too new to assess. PENs are assigned to children registering in StrongStart BC, however children may be assigned more than one PEN if they are attending more than one StrongStart BC location. This makes it difficult to make valid linkages between program use and child outcomes.

As with most Canadian jurisdictions, the formats for data collection in BC vary widely. Some early years interventions report client hours, childcare reports spaces, while other programs count registrations. A common identifier would address some of the barriers in assessing young children’s experiences, and facilitate linkages with academic and other outcomes.

**Expand Population Data BC:** PopData BC holds 19 health, citizenship, employment, immigration and educational data sets, including the EDI. It supports research access to individual-level, de-identified longitudinal data on BC residents. These data are linkable to each other and to external data sets. Data linkages across sectors advance an understanding of the interplay of influences on health, well-being and development and inform policy making and investment decisions. Expanding early childhood data sets would allow for more meaningful analyses of the factors influencing children’s development.

Appendix A.A provides a cross-jurisdictional comparison of PopData BC with similar data repositories in Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick.





## 9 • CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT

StrongStart BC is central to the province's early years services with a demonstrated value to families with young children. Overall, the program is meeting its objectives to support children's early development and their transitions to school. There are reciprocal benefits to locating StrongStart BC within education. It creates a foundation for lifelong learning, enhances community support for public education and provides the necessary infrastructure to grow and nurture the program. The following section provides suggestions for program enhancements organized around four areas: policy, staffing, capacity and evaluation.

### POLICY

The ministry of education should:

- ✓ **Encourage school districts to expand the Framework for Enhancing Student Learning to include programming for preschool-age children, including StrongStart BC.**

Including school-based early years programs within the Framework for Enhancing Student Learning would encourage a broader understanding of the foundational contribution of early learning to later school success. It would contribute to a more seamless approach to curriculum implementation and support the integration of StrongStart BC into the school environment.



- ✓ **Review the policy framework to encourage school districts to include StrongStart BC as a component of early learning in their planning and accountability documentation under the School Act.**

A strong policy framework could lead to guidelines for the design and resourcing of early years classrooms and outdoor space, and provide the program with equal consideration in the assignment of student supports and school facilities such as libraries, outdoor playgrounds, gyms, food preparation areas, etc.

## STAFFING

- ✓ **The Ministry of Education should work with the Ministry of Advanced Education to review ECE post-secondary training programs to reflect the new demands on the early childhood workforce by including family support content and a requirement for at least one practicum in a StrongStart BC program.**

Higher educator qualifications significantly correlate with higher quality early childhood programs. Across Canada, jurisdictions are updating their credential requirements for ECEs and developing additional requirements for pedagogical leaders to reflect the broadened demands on the sector.

At a minimum, ECE training in BC would benefit from better integration of the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* into course content, including ECE training practicums in StrongStart BC and providing opportunities to become more knowledgeable about settlement, children and youth, or similar family-support programs.

- ✓ **Ministry of Education funding to school districts should provide paid hours for StrongStart BC facilitators to participate in school staff meetings and professional development activities.**

Establishing a continuum of learning requires that all school staff participate in the events and processes that contribute to developing a common culture. Professional development organized around partnerships with Aboriginal peoples, inclusion of children with special needs, working with vulnerable families, and understanding the needs of newcomers would benefit all school staff.

- ✓ **The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with school districts, should develop and institute a StrongStart BC orientation for new district and school administrators.**



Many principals and early years leads interviewed for this evaluation are retiring or changing positions. New administrators would benefit from an orientation to StrongStart BC and/or peer mentoring. A recurring piece of advice offered by outgoing administrators to their replacements is to spend dedicated blocks of time in the program to become familiar with its activities, challenges and benefits.

- ✓ **School districts should provide opportunities for joint professional development to include facilitators, kindergarten teachers, principals and early years leads.**

Administrators and educators need to regularly exchange experiences and learn from early years research and program evaluation processes through professional learning opportunities, including access to webinars, conferences and related venues.

- ✓ **Ministry of Education funding to school districts should provide StrongStart BC with access to school support services.**

Early identification and interventions are more cost-effective than interventions delivered later in life. For this reason, more advantage could be taken of the StrongStart BC environment to provide a broader range of specialist services to families. Including StrongStart BC as an educational program would facilitate access to community outreach, student services and Aboriginal education enhancement. A resourced single provider would more appropriately respond to the needs of children and families and prevent the break in service that often occurs when children transition between early years programming and school.

## CAPACITY

- ✓ **In cooperation with school districts, the Ministry of Education should expand the number of StrongStart BC programs with priority given to high-growth, high-needs areas.**

In many districts StrongStart BC is groaning under the weight of its popularity. It is challenging for the program to deliver on its goals in the face of high demand and limited capacity. Many of the difficulties confronting the program would be addressed by expanding access. The need for more StrongStart BC centres was the most frequent suggestion heard across the range of stakeholders interviewed.

- ✓ **The Ministry of Education should review StrongStart BC budgets with a view to meeting actual costs.**

The quality of facilities and resources matter to parents, and appropriate funding and support should be available to establish and maintain these aspects of StrongStart BC. Provincial funding per StrongStart BC centre has stagnated. School districts are meeting staff contract requirements by diverting funds from other programs or by cutting back on equipment and supplies, which in turn impact program quality.

- ✓ **The Ministry of Education should work with school districts to develop guidelines for StrongStart BC classrooms.**

Variations in classroom design and furnishing are often dependent on space. Nevertheless as a parent/child program StrongStart BC should respond to the needs of both children and adults. Older caregivers and nursing mothers in particular appreciate appropriate seating. Places for coats and outside footwear are not always available. Appropriate washroom facilities, hand washing sinks and proper facilities for food storage should be featured in all centres.

- ✓ **Schools should feature StrongStart BC and its activities as part of their school communications.**

Parents want information about StrongStart BC on the school website, including the days and times of operation, program capacity and a processes to let families know when the program is full. StrongStart BC should be included in the school's calendar with regular updates about activities, special guests, field trips, etc.



## EVALUATION

The Ministry of Education should:

- ✓ **Expand identification requirements for StrongStart BC registration**
- ✓ **Expand use of CHEQ and link findings to EDI and attendance data**
- ✓ **Use ECERS-3 in conjunction with the Reflecting on Quality tool to support program quality**
- ✓ **Work with relevant ministries to expand early childhood data sets within Population Data BC.**

Regular participation in high quality early childhood programming is required to improve population-level child outcomes and derive family benefits. Attendance and program quality evaluations when linked to child outcome measures, such as the Early Development Instrument (EDI), the Middle Years Development Instrument (MYDI), school assessments and other pertinent data sets provide a longitudinal assessment of the influences of policies, programs and practices. Existing infrastructures such as the PEN and the Ministry of Education's own data warehouse can be improved with designation of PEN at birth, allowing associations to be made with StrongStart BC and other programs with longitudinal education indicators such as Foundation Skills Assessment and other provincial outcome measures.

The ministry has taken steps to address deficiencies in StrongStart BC attendance mechanisms, and now has improved access to EDI findings. Linking attendance and EDI data with findings from the Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (CHEQ), would provide a more fulsome picture of children's experiences prior to school entry.

Expanding acceptable identification to include health, certificates of Indian, refugee, or immigration status or similar documentation would alleviate a barrier to registration experienced by some families.

Quality is a challenge in many programs. Addressing program crowding together with the use of a program evaluation tool such as the Early Childhood Rating Scale, Third Edition (ECERS-3) could isolate challenges and serve as a guide to directing resources and for professional training.

In the medium term, the Ministry of Education should work with other relevant ministries to expand early childhood data sets in Population Data BC.



## 10 • CASE STUDY SITES

StrongStart BC features 326 programs in communities across British Columbia. StrongStart BC Early Learning Centres are publicly-funded, school-based drop-in programs for families and caregivers and their children from birth to age 5 years. No participation fees are charged. Centres operate five days per week for a minimum of three hours per day. The schedule aligns with the school calendar although some districts offer limited evening, weekend and summer hours.

Programs are ideally co-located in schools together with childcare or parent resource centres as part of an early years hub. StrongStart BC Early Learning Outreach Programs provide early learning experiences for children in rural and remote communities. Outreach programs operate on a flexible schedule to accommodate the number of locations served.

The study included 11 case studies selected from the 326 sites. School districts were invited to participate by the Ministry of Education with consideration for rural and urban areas, low to moderate socioeconomic status communities, Aboriginal/First Nations participation and geographic and regional representation.

The districts chose the sites. This study was not designed to allow a conclusive comparison between the selected sites. The findings can be used descriptively, however, to understand variations in StrongStart BC operations. All participating boards and individuals were ensured anonymity and confidentiality as the terms of their participation and therefore all interviews and focus group data have been aggregated and are not presented by region or persons.



**Table 10.1** School District: Abbotsford

<b>SD Number</b>	34
<b>StrongStart BC site location</b>	Abbotsford (city)
<b>CATCHMENT DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	
<b>Population</b>	133,497
<b>% Increase</b> (National % increase 5.9% since 2006)	7.4%
<b>Population 0–4 years</b>	6%
<b>% immigrants</b>	25%
<b>% non official language</b>	31.6%
<b>% Aboriginal</b>	3.40%
<b>% over 25 years with a post-secondary degree</b>	23.0%
<b>% population low income</b>	14.0%
<b>% low income under 18 years old</b>	16.9%
<b>% lone parent family</b>	14.3%
<b>Annual Income (2010 Average Income Levels)</b>	
<b>Couple-with-children families</b>	\$104,442
<b>Lone-parent families</b>	\$55,240
<b>STRONGSTART BC – DISTRICT-LEVEL INFORMATION</b>	
<b># StrongStart BC locations</b>	13
<b>Restricted attendance</b>	Yes
<b>District operated</b>	Yes
<b>Dormick Park Elementary</b>	
<b>Date of Visit</b>	11–May–16
<b>Children registered in centre</b>	126
<b>Centre capacity (adults + children)</b>	34+
<b>Average daily attendance</b>	15
<b>Centre location</b>	Portable
<b>Daily operating hours: Centre openings normally follow the school calendar</b>	8:30 – 11:30
<b>Annual spending per centre (Amounts over \$32,000 are funded by the district)</b>	\$32,000 Abbotsford district independently funds: 2 additional StrongStart BC centres; 2 on Saturdays; 4 summer StrongStart BCs
<b>Methods of communicating with families</b>	<b>DISTRICT:</b> StrongStart BC webpage, video, brochure, local advertising <b>SCHOOL:</b> Newsletter, Facebook, webpage
<b>Strong Start BC community partners</b>	District 34 participates on the Abbotsford Early Childhood Development Committee and partners with the following agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The Fraser Valley Child Development Centre</li> <li>· Family Centre Community Services funds two outreach workers who attend StrongStart BC centres.</li> </ul> <p>Parents attending StrongStart BC receive information from: Police &amp; Fire Department; Insurance Corporation of British Columbia for Child Safety Seats; Recycling Plant Library; Dental nurse from Fraser Health; The Triple P Positive Parenting; Fraser Valley Child Development Centre; EcoDairy; B.C. Dairy Farms.</p>

**Table 10.9** School District: Arrow Lakes

<b>SD Number</b>	10
<b>StrongStart BC site location</b>	New Denver
<b>CATCHMENT DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	
<b>Population</b>	504
<b>% Increase</b> (National % increase 5.9% since 2006)	-1.6%
<b>Population 0-4 years</b>	3%
<b>% immigrants</b>	8%
<b>% non official language</b>	3%
<b>% Aboriginal</b>	
<b>% over 25 years with a post-secondary degree</b>	85%
<b>% population low income</b>	8.7%
<b>% low income under 18 years old</b>	0%
<b>% lone parent family</b>	17.8%
<b>Annual Income (2010 Average Income Levels)</b>	
<b>Couple-with-children families</b>	\$80,064
<b>Lone-parent families</b>	n/a
<b>STRONGSTART BC - DISTRICT-LEVEL INFORMATION</b>	
<b># StrongStart BC locations</b>	5 with 3 outreach
<b>Restricted attendance</b>	No
<b>District operated</b>	yes
<b>Lucerne Elementary</b>	
<b>Date of Visit</b>	07-Oct-16
<b>Children registered in centre</b>	25
<b>Centre capacity (adults + children)</b>	25+
<b>Average daily attendance</b>	18
<b>Centre location</b>	Classroom
<b>Daily operating hours: Centre openings normally follow the school calendar</b>	M, F: 9:00 – Noon; T, Th: 2 – 5 pm; W: 5 – 8 pm
<b>Annual spending per centre (Amounts over \$32,000 are funded by the district)</b>	\$32,650
<b>Methods of communicating with families</b>	Lucerne Elementary: StrongStart BC webpage; weekly activity email
<b>Strong Start BC community partners</b>	District 10 works with the following agencies: Healthy Community Society; Columbia Alliance For Literacy.  School partners with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy</li> <li>· Slocan Lake Early Learning Society</li> <li>· Healthy Families Resource Group</li> <li>· Kootenay Kids</li> </ul>

**Table 10.2** School District: Burnaby

SD Number	41
StrongStart BC site location	Burnaby (city)
<b>CATCHMENT DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	
Population	223,218
% Increase (National % increase 5.9% since 2006)	10.1%
Population 0–4 years	5%
% immigrants	50.5%
% non official language	
% Aboriginal	1.5%
% over 25 years with a post-secondary degree	41.3%
% population low income	21.1%
% low income under 18 years old	23.1%
% lone parent family	16.2%
<b>Annual Income (2010 Average Income Levels)</b>	
Couple-with-children families	\$115,407
Lone-parent families	\$56,880
<b>STRONGSTART BC – DISTRICT-LEVEL INFORMATION</b>	
# StrongStart BC locations	13
Restricted attendance	Yes
District operated	Yes
<b>Cascade Heights</b>	
Date of Visit	09–May–16
Children registered in centre	279
Centre capacity (adults + children)	30
Average daily attendance	30+
Centre location	Classroom
Daily operating hours: Centre openings normally follow the school calendar	9:00 – noon
Annual spending per centre (Amounts over \$32,000 are funded by the district)	\$32,650
Methods of communicating with families	<b>DISTRICT:</b> StrongStart BC webpage <b>SCHOOL:</b> webpage (dates, calendars), activity reminders; daily conversations; pedagogical documentation
Strong Start BC community partners	District 41 participates on Early Childhood Development Table and partners with the following agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The Public Library – Visits and books</li> <li>· Parks and Recreation and Cultural Services – Information, Professional development</li> <li>· Fraser Health Authority – Dental screening</li> <li>· Ministry of Child and Family Development</li> <li>· Information Children – Private parent coaching</li> <li>· Burnaby Infant Development Program – Developmental delay and referrals</li> <li>· Early Childhood Community Consultant, Family Services of Greater Vancouver – Info + referrals</li> <li>· YMCA Childcare Resources and Referral</li> <li>· Burnaby Neighbourhood House – outreach</li> <li>· Burnaby Family List- addresses over-crowding</li> </ul>

**Table 10.4** School District: Comox Valley

SD Number	71
StrongStart BC site location	Courtenay
<b>CATCHMENT DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	
Population	24,099
% Increase (National % increase 5.9% since 2006)	9.4%
Population 0-4 years	5%
% immigrants	12.5%
% non official language	
% Aboriginal	5.10%
% over 25 years with a post-secondary degree	19.2%
% population low income	18.5%
% low income under 18 years old	26.4%
% lone parent family	15.3%
<b>Annual Income (2010 Average Income Levels)</b>	
Couple-with-children families	\$90,476
Lone-parent families	\$39,503
<b>STRONGSTART BC - DISTRICT-LEVEL INFORMATION</b>	
# StrongStart BC locations	10 with 3 outreach
Restricted attendance	No
District operated	Yes
<b>Queneesh Elementary</b>	
Date of Visit	13-May-16
Children registered in centre	42
Centre capacity (adults + children)	50
Average daily attendance	25
Centre location	Classroom
Daily operating hours: Centre openings normally follow the school calendar	M, T, F: 8:30-11:30; W: 8:30 am-2:30 pm
Annual spending per centre (Amounts over \$32,000 are funded by the district)	\$32,000
Methods of communicating with families	<b>DISTRICT:</b> StrongStart BC webpage: locations, community links <b>SCHOOL:</b> Newsletters, Facebook
Strong Start BC community partners	The Queneesh centre partners with the following agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Collaborative, Success by 6: Children’s Charter</li> <li>• Comox Valley Life Long Learning Association &amp; Vancouver Island Regional Library: Literacy</li> <li>• Healthy Families &amp; Island Health: health visits</li> <li>• Community Action plan: children’s network building</li> <li>• Father Involvement Network</li> <li>• Infant Development Association</li> <li>• Wachiay Friendship: Aboriginal support</li> <li>• Early Childhood Educators of BC: ECE advocacy</li> <li>• Early Years Conference Committee</li> <li>• Active Comox Valley promotes physical activity</li> <li>• North Island College ECE program: ECE student placements &amp; member of Community Advisory Board.</li> <li>• School District Early Years Association for professional development oriented to early years teachers and ECEs.</li> </ul>



**Table 10.10** School District: Conseil Scolaire Francophone de la Colombie

<b>SD Number</b>	93
<b>StrongStart BC site location</b>	Vancouver (city)
<b>CATCHMENT DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	
<b>Population</b>	603,502
<b>% Increase</b> (National % increase 5.9% since 2006)	4.4%
<b>Population 0–4 years</b>	4%
<b>% immigrants</b>	43.80%
<b>% non official language</b>	
<b>% Aboriginal</b>	2%
<b>% over 25 years with a post–secondary degree</b>	46.3%
<b>% population low income</b>	20.5%
<b>% low income under 18 years old</b>	22.4%
<b>% lone parent family</b>	16.3%
<b>Annual Income (2010 Average Income Levels)</b>	
<b>Couple–with–children families</b>	\$115,407
<b>Lone–parent families</b>	\$56,880
<b>STRONGSTART BC – DISTRICT–LEVEL INFORMATION</b>	
<b># StrongStart BC locations</b>	6 centres in Francophone schools with 4 outreach
<b>Restricted attendance</b>	No
<b>District operated</b>	No – Fédération des parents francophones de C.–B
<b>École Anne–Hébert</b>	
<b>Date of Visit</b>	02–Nov–16
<b>Children registered in centre</b>	65
<b>Centre capacity (adults + children)</b>	25
<b>Average daily attendance</b>	20
<b>Centre location</b>	Portable
<b>Daily operating hours: Centre openings normally follow the school calendar</b>	9:00 – noon
<b>Annual spending per centre (Amounts over \$32,000 are funded by the district)</b>	\$32,000
<b>Methods of communicating with families</b>	<b>DISTRICT:</b> Email; StrongStart BC webpage; Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie–Britannique: bilingual webpage, video & flyer <b>SCHOOL:</b> StrongStart BC webpage; activities
<b>Strong Start BC community partners</b>	The StrongStart BC facilitator of École Anne–Hébert attends the Francophone Early Years Table The program is also part of the Francophone Early Years Centre (CAFE).

**Table 10.5** School District: Coquitlam

SD Number	43
StrongStart BC site location	Port Coquitlam
<b>CATCHMENT DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	
Population	56,340
% Increase (National % increase 5.9% since 2006)	6.9%
Population 0–4 years	5%
% immigrants	29.4%
% non official language	31%
% Aboriginal	3.2%
% over 25 years with a post-secondary degree	28.3%
% population low income	13.5%
% low income under 18 years old	17.2%
% lone parent family	16.6%
<b>Annual Income (2010 Average Income Levels)</b>	
Couple-with-children families	\$107,385
Lone-parent families	\$56,030
<b>STRONGSTART BC – DISTRICT-LEVEL INFORMATION</b>	
# StrongStart BC locations	13
Restricted attendance	No
District operated	Yes
<b>Central Elementary</b>	
Date of Visit	10–May–16
Children registered in centre	237
Centre capacity (adults + children)	40
Average daily attendance	40+
Centre location	Classroom
Daily operating hours: Centre openings normally follow the school calendar	8:45–11:45 The center closes one morning a month for staff meetings.
Annual spending per centre (Amounts over \$32,000 are funded by the district)	\$32,000
Methods of communicating with families	<b>DISTRICT:</b> StrongStart BC webpage with centre locations <b>SCHOOL:</b> webpage with program description
Strong Start BC community partners	District 43 participates in the TriCities Early Childhood Development Committee and partners with the following agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simon Fraser Society for Community Living – Infant Development Consultant visits StrongStart BC centres</li> <li>• SUCCESS – English as an additional language</li> <li>• Early Years Centre and Avenues of Change – Parent connectors volunteer</li> <li>• Childcare Resource and Referral</li> <li>• Port Moody Public Library – Monthly story time, books</li> <li>• Coquitlam Public Library – Weekly visit by the Literacy Links (a mobile library)</li> <li>• Terry Fox Public Library – Story time, books</li> <li>• TriCities ECD – Early Learning Coordinator Pro-D for StrongStart facilitators and Family Resource staff</li> </ul>

**Table 10.6** School District: Prince George

<b>SD Number</b>	57	
<b>StrongStart BC site location</b>	Prince George (city)	
<b>CATCHMENT DEMOGRAPHICS</b>		
<b>Population</b>	71,974	
<b>% Increase (National % increase 5.9% since 2006)</b>	1.4%	
<b>Population 0–4 years</b>	6%	
<b>% immigrants</b>	9.7%	
<b>% non official language</b>		
<b>% Aboriginal</b>	12.8%	
<b>% over 25 years with a post-secondary degree</b>	19.4%	
<b>% population low income</b>	16.0%	
<b>% low income under 18 years old</b>	19.2%	
<b>% lone parent family</b>	18.0%	
<b>Annual Income (2010 Average Income Levels)</b>		
<b>Couple-with-children families</b>	\$111,136	
<b>Lone-parent families</b>	\$47,556	
<b>STRONGSTART BC – DISTRICT-LEVEL INFORMATION</b>		
<b># StrongStart BC locations</b>	10 with outreach	
<b>Restricted attendance</b>	No	
<b>District operated</b>	Yes	
	<b>Ron Brent Elementary</b>	<b>Quinson Elementary</b>
<b>Date of Visit</b>	04–Oct–16	03–Oct–16
<b>Children registered in centre</b>		
<b>Centre capacity (adults + children)</b>	41	41
<b>Average daily attendance</b>	35	35
<b>Centre location</b>	Classroom	Classroom
<b>Daily operating hours: Centre openings normally follow the school calendar</b>	8:30 – 11:30	9:00 – noon
<b>Annual spending per centre (Amounts over \$32,000 are funded by the district)</b>	\$31,967	\$33,430
<b>Methods of communicating with families</b>	<b>DISTRICT:</b> StrongStart BC webpage; program information + brochure <b>SCHOOL:</b> Newsletter; calendar	<b>DISTRICT:</b> StrongStart BC webpage; program information + brochure <b>SCHOOL:</b> Newsletter; calendar; webpage
<b>Strong Start BC community partners</b>	District 57 participates in: Child Youth and Family Network; Northern Attachment Network; Success by Six; Aboriginal Success by Six; Child Services Advisory Committee; Early Year Health Fair Planning Committee  Partners with the following community agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prince George Native Friendship Center (AIFD, ASCD, Hastate &amp; Daycare)</li> <li>• Public Library – collaborative programming</li> <li>• Teen Mothers Program – Program visits &amp; field trips</li> <li>• Child Care Resource and Referral – referrals</li> <li>• Central Interior Native Health – referrals</li> <li>• Northern Health – “It takes a Village” Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) screening event</li> </ul>	

**Table 10.7** School District: Prince Rupert

SD Number	52
StrongStart BC site location	Prince Rupert (city)
<b>CATCHMENT DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	
Population	12,508
% Increase (National % increase 5.9% since 2006)	-2.4%
Population 0-4 years	6%
% immigrants	13.3%
% non official language	11.4%
% Aboriginal	38.4%
% over 25 years with a post-secondary degree	19.5%
% population low income	23.3%
% low income under 18 years old	31.9%
% lone parent family	23.4%
<b>Annual Income (2010 Average Income Levels)</b>	
Couple-with-children families	\$102,380
Lone-parent families	\$49,525
<b>STRONGSTART BC - DISTRICT-LEVEL INFORMATION</b>	
# StrongStart BC locations	4 with 1 outreach
Restricted attendance	No
District operated	Yes
<b>Conrad Elementary</b>	
Date of Visit	05-Oct-16
Children registered in centre	35
Centre capacity (adults + children)	25
Average daily attendance	22
Centre location	Classroom
Daily operating hours: Centre openings normally follow the school calendar	M, T: 1 - 4 pm. W, Th: 9:00 - noon
Annual spending per centre (Amounts over \$32,000 are funded by the district)	\$39,566
Methods of communicating with families	DISTRICT: StrongStart BC webpage: poster & brochures linked
Strong Start BC community partners	n/a



**Table 10.3** School District: Sooke

SD Number	62
StrongStart BC site location	Colwood
<b>CATCHMENT DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	
Population	16,093
% Increase (National % increase 5.9% since 2006)	9.6%
Population 0-4 years	6.00%
% immigrants	10.90%
% non official language	
% Aboriginal	4.20%
% over 25 years with a post-secondary degree	20.4%
% population low income	8.1%
% low income under 18 years old	10.5%
% lone parent family	13.1%
<b>Annual Income (2010 Average Income Levels)</b>	
Couple-with-children families	\$110,969
Lone-parent families	\$51,981
<b>STRONGSTART BC - DISTRICT-LEVEL INFORMATION</b>	
# StrongStart BC locations	7 with 1 outreach
Restricted attendance	Yes
District operated	Yes
<b>Colwood Elementary</b>	
Date of Visit	12-May-16
Children registered in centre	
Centre capacity (adults + children)	45
Average daily attendance	45+
Centre location	Classroom
Daily operating hours: Centre openings normally follow the school calendar	8:45 - 11:45
Annual spending per centre (Amounts over \$32,000 are funded by the district)	\$32,000
Methods of communicating with families	<b>DISTRICT:</b> StrongStart BC webpage: program logistics, center locations, hours <b>SCHOOL:</b> webpage: hours, gym, library times, documents required, monthly activity calendars.
Strong Start BC community partners	District 62 participates on the Early Years Table and Regional Early Years Centre and partners with the following agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Sooke Family Resource Society</li> <li>· Community early childhood educators: professional development</li> <li>· Other agencies support the development of facilitators (ex. Coaching proactive parenting)</li> </ul>

**Table 10.8** School District: Surrey

SD Number	36
StrongStart BC site location	Surrey (city)
<b>CATCHMENT DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	
Population	468,251
% Increase (National % increase 5.9% since 2006)	18.6%
Population 0–4 years	6%
% immigrants	
% non official language	40.50%
% Aboriginal	2.40%
% over 25 years with a post-secondary degree	28.8%
% population low income	15.5%
% low income under 18 years old	18.7%
% lone parent family	14.9%
<b>Annual Income (2010 Average Income Levels)</b>	
Couple-with-children families	\$105,265
Lone-parent families	\$53,162
<b>STRONGSTART BC – DISTRICT-LEVEL INFORMATION</b>	
# StrongStart BC locations	20 with 20 outreach
Restricted attendance	Yes
District operated	Yes
<b>Hjorth Road Elementary</b>	
Date of Visit	30-Sep-16
Children registered in centre	216
Centre capacity (adults + children)	25
Average daily attendance	25+
Centre location	Classroom
Daily operating hours: Centre openings normally follow the school calendar	12:30 – 3:30
Annual spending per centre (Amounts over \$32,000 are funded by the district)	\$32,000
Methods of communicating with families	<b>DISTRICT:</b> StrongStart BC webpage; program information + brochure <b>SCHOOL:</b> Monthly newsletter
Strong Start BC community partners	District 36 participates in Children’s Partnership; Newton Early Years Centre; Avenues of Change Joint Leadership Team & Early Childhood Family Check-in Strategy; First Steps Joint Management Committee.  The Early Learning/StrongStart BC coordinators participate in: Newton Early Years table; Avenues of Change – Early Childhood Family Check-in Strategy; Children’s First table and collaborate on Surrey READS program; Surrey Children’s Festival; Newton Early Years Center Family Festival  StrongStart BC facilitators participate in Newton Early Years Centre to offer Baby & Me at partner locations  Community outreach counselor supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Avenues of Change program “Support on the Go”</li> <li>· Attends – Mary Jane Shannon Elementary, Holly Elementary, and Hjorth Road Elementary.</li> </ul>



## 11 • METHODOLOGY

This evaluation was commissioned by the BC Ministry of Education and the Provincial Office for the Early Years to assess the effectiveness of StrongStart BC. The review explores whether the program continues to meet its goals to expose preschool aged children to language rich environments and play-based early learning experiences to promote the skills, knowledge and dispositions needed to support their success in school. The evaluation was conducted by researchers from the University of Toronto. Drafts were regularly shared with ministry officials who approved the final recommendations.

The analysis included the use of surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus groups to gather the experiences and opinions of parents and caregivers, educators, school administrators and early childhood community service providers. Program quality was assessed using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale 3 (ECERS-3). A literature and document review guided the research.

### SAMPLE

Research participants included parents (all parents, guardians, caregivers, grandparents attending StrongStart BC), educators (StrongStart BC facilitators and kindergarten teachers with StrongStart BC programs in their schools), education administrators (early learning leads, district administrators and school principals with and without a StrongStart BC centre in their schools) and community service providers and partners. (Including FRPs whose mandate is to strengthen parenting and the healthy development of children within the context of the family). Data collection took place from May 2 to June 10, 2016 and again from September 30 to November 16, 2016; 2,429 parents/caregivers, 372 administrators, 493 educators and 271 community providers completed surveys or took part in interviews or focus groups.

## CASE STUDIES

Data collection was supplemented with 11 in depth studies of programs selected from the 326 StrongStart BC sites. Twelve out of BC's 60 school districts were invited to participate by the Ministry of Education with consideration of rural and urban areas, low to moderate socioeconomic status communities, Aboriginal/First Nations participation and geographic and regional representation.

The early learning lead in each participating school district was provided with details of the study, a copy of the assessment tools (the on-line surveys and focus group and interview questions), a description of the program observation tool (ECERS-3), a schedule for the site visit and sample flyers advertising the parent survey and focus groups. The district early learning leads selected the programs to be studied.

Five sites were visited between May 9 – 13, 2016 and a further six between September 30 and November 2, 2016. (See Table 10.1). Program observations using the ECERS-3 quality assessment were conducted. Focus groups were held at each site in addition to interviews with early years leads, principals, administrators, community partners, parents and StrongStart BC facilitators.

Site-specific data (governance, operating schedule, budget, program capacity, partnerships) was provided for each of the sites by the school district. Neighbourhood demographics, where available (including population, diversity, income strata, family composition) were obtained using the latest Census Canada data.

**Table 11.1** Selected case study sites included in the StrongStart BC evaluation

District	StrongStart BC Site	Address	Date of Visit
Burnaby SD 41	Cascade Heights	4343 Smith Ave. Burnaby BC V5G 2V5	May 9, 2016
Coquitlam SD 43	Central Elementary	2260 Central Ave. Port Coquitlam, BC V3C 1V8	May 10, 2016
Abbotsford SD 34	Dormick Park Elementary	32161 Dormick Ave. Abbotsford, BC V2T 1J6	May 11, 2016
Saanich SD 63	Colwood Elementary	3000 Wishart Rd. Colwood, BC V9C 1P4	May 12, 2016
Comox Valley SD 71	Queneesh	2345 Mission Rd., Courtenay BC V9N 9H1	May 13, 2016
Surrey SD 36	Hjorth Road Elementary	14781-104th Avenue, Surrey BC V3R 5X4	September 30, 2016
Prince George SD 57	Quinson Elementary	251 Ogilvie St. S. Prince George BC V2M 3M4	October 3, 2016
Prince George SD 57	Ron Brent Elementary	1401-17th Avenue Prince George BC V2L 3Z2	October 4, 2016
Prince Rupert SD 52	Conrad Elementary	825 Conrad St. Prince Rupert BC V8J 3B8	October 5, 2016
Arrow Lakes SD 10	Lucerne School	604 7th Avenue. New Denver, BC V0G 1S0	October 6, 2016
CSF Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique SD 93	Anne Hebert Ecole	7051 Killarney St, Vancouver, BC V5S 2Y5	November 2, 2016



## **SURVEYS**

This survey form was built on previous evaluations of similar programs and designed for parent/caregivers; educators (StrongStart BC facilitators and kindergarten teachers); education administrators (early learning leads, district administrators and school principals with and without a StrongStart BC centre in their schools); and community service providers. Drafts were shared with ministry officials, selected district early learning leads, representatives of La Fédération des parents francophones, the BC Association of Family Resource Programs.

An online link to all the surveys was distributed province-wide to school district administrators, school principals and StrongStart BC facilitators through the Ministry of Education's channels. The online link to the community partners survey was distributed through the Provincial Office of the Early Years and its regional centres and the BC Association of Children's Librarians and the BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. The BC Association of Family Resource Programs distributed the community survey to its members in conjunction with a survey of its own. La Fédération des parents francophones de C.-B. distributed the surveys through its networks. Surveys were distributed and collected during the Aboriginal PALS (Parents as Literacy Supporters) conference in Prince George, October 5, 2016.

To recruit parent/caregiver participants, facilitators were encouraged to post survey notices, draw parent attention to the survey, provide a computer on site and assist participants to complete the survey if requested.

Surveys were made available online through Interceptum, a Canadian-based survey company. Parent/caregiver surveys were translated into French, Simplified Chinese and Punjabi. Punjabi was not available online due to limited language character support. Electronic copies suitable for printing were made available through StrongStart BC centres to parents/caregivers upon request and mailed back by the school district to the researchers after completion. An invitation to participate in a follow up phone interview was on all surveys along with the name and contact information of a researcher. Fourteen parents, two administrators and one community provider requested phone interviews. Consent forms and survey questions are available in Appendix A.B.

## **FOCUS GROUPS**

Parent/caregiver focus groups were conducted at each of the 11 selected StrongStart BC sites. Families were notified of the evaluation and its purpose through their StrongStart BC centre. Invitational flyers were posted. Participants self-selected and registered for the groups either via email with the evaluators or through their facilitator. Sessions took place in space provided by the school. Each lasted about 60 minutes and were held during program hours, or immediately following. Snacks and a children's book for each participant were offered. When necessary, translators were provided by the school. In one group a researcher translated. The evaluation covered the cost of additional staff while parents/caregivers took part in the discussions. Parent/caregiver focus groups were well attended with

an average of 11 participants per site for a total of 112. All focus group sessions were recorded with permission and transcribed. Upon request researchers conducted phone interviews with parents who couldn't attend the groups.

Researchers attended the ECEBC's 45th Annual Conference (2016): *The Ripple Effect: Continuing the Journey Through Our Ethical Practices*, May 5/6, 2016 in Richmond, BC. ECEBC provided a list of StrongStart BC facilitators registered for the conference. Registrants were informed in advance via email of the evaluation and its purpose and invited to register for focus groups scheduled at the conference during lunch breaks and before dinner. A conference booth allowed researchers to familiarize delegates with the evaluation, to complete surveys and register for focus groups. Participants were provided with refreshments and a book bag. Five focus groups were held (approximately 20 participants each) and individual interviews were conducted with participants unable to attend the focus groups. All focus groups were recorded with permission and transcribed.

Focus groups were also held during the Conference of Aboriginal Educators, November 2, 2016 in Richmond, BC. Forty-eight (48) participated.

## **KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS**

The early learning leads in each of the visited school districts developed a list of key informants based on the sectors suggested by the evaluation team. These included district administrators, school principals, early learning leads, kindergarten teachers, community partners and the site facilitator. A researcher scheduled interviews for the day of the site visit via email. One person declined an interview. Eighty (80) face-to-face interviews were conducted each lasting approximately 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed. Interview questions are provided in Appendix A.B.

## **QUALITY ASSESSMENT**

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale 3 (ECERS-3) was used to assess quality in the StrongStart BC centres. The ECERS-3 is a widely used, validated, tool for assessing the quality of early childhood environments. It contains inclusive and culturally sensitive indicators of quality. The scale consists of 35 items that are organized into 6 subscales: space and furnishings, personal care routines, language and literacy, learning activities, interaction and program structure.

Program staff and participants were informed in advance that an evaluator would be observing the program. A typical observation took place over three hours to ensure the inclusion of children's arrival and departure transitions. The evaluator followed the group under observation as it went to the gym or outdoor play areas.

## **LITERATURE AND DOCUMENT REVIEW**

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to guide the evaluation process. The review includes policy documents, program evaluation reports and academic literature focused on services similar to StrongStart BC.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING**

A cross-jurisdiction scan of best practices on the collection and linking of data on children's development and programming was conducted (see Section 14, Appendix A.A).

## **LINKING CHILD OUTCOME DATA SETS**

The evaluation team met separately with representatives of the Human Early Learning Partnerships (HELP) at UBC and the Ministry of Education to discuss the possibility of using data collected using the Early Development Instrument (EDI) to inform the report. EDI assesses children's vulnerabilities at kindergarten. Access to EDI data prior to 2015 was not readily available and StrongStart BC registration data prior to 2015 was not in a format that would permit linking EDI data to StrongStart BC participation.

The BC Ministry of Education is in the early stages of linking StrongStart BC attendance data to student outcome measures. Preliminary analysis suggests a small positive impact on student grade four writing component of the Foundation Skills Assessment as a result of attending StrongStart BC. However, methodological flaws as noted above and a lack of explanatory variables make it difficult to make conclusions with certainty. However, these preliminary results provide a positive foundation for further evaluation.

## **LIMITATIONS**

There are several limitations to evaluations of this design. The 11 StrongStart BC sites were not randomly selected. Districts selected the sites and the key informants, potentially biasing results (i.e. selected sites may represent the district's best practices). In studies of this type, survey respondents and focus group participants tend to represent those with higher education, often English speaking, and more invested in the program. Surveys were made available in languages recommended by the districts in order to allow more inclusive participation. The participation rate in the study indicates the high interest among stakeholders.

## **PRIVACY**

A Privacy Impact Statement (PIA) was submitted and approved. All researchers completed privacy training with the Privacy and Information Sharing: Awareness Training for Contractors and Service Providers. Surveys, interview transcripts and notes and program observations are kept in a locked premise at the University of Toronto. Participants were assured their feedback would be reported at a group level and no individual participant, program, agency or school would be attached to comments or findings. See Appendix A.B.



## 12 • LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review guided the StrongStart BC evaluation. It includes policy documents, program evaluation reports and academic literature with a focus on evaluations of services similar to StrongStart BC such as Chicago Preschool, Perry Preschool, Abecedarian, Toronto First Duty, Effective Provision of Preschool Education (UK) and Australia's Children's Centres.

**Participation in early childhood programs influence child development:** There is strong evidence to support the importance of a variety of early childhood programs on children's developmental trajectories. Research has shown that early exposure to quality programming can improve child outcomes, support children's transitions to school (including social/emotional and language development) and promote health and well-being (Barnett, 2008; Jenkins, Boivin & Akbari, 2015; Yoshikawa, Weiland, Brooks-Gunn et al., 2013).

Nearly 30 per cent of BC's children are vulnerable in at least one developmental area (physical health and well-being, social competency, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development and communication skills) when assessed in kindergarten (BC Ministry of Health, 2015). Early childhood programs may be particularly beneficial and reduce risk for children with vulnerabilities (Smith, 2014; Laurin, Geoffroy et al., 2015).

**Parent/child playgroups within an ecological model:** A conceptual framework to analyse parent/child playgroups relies on ecological models acknowledging that individual health and development occurs within the context of the family, school and community, with each of these environments being influenced by economic, political, social and cultural forces. Changes in one setting can potentially influence changes



in others (Shankoff & Phillips, 2000). Experiences adults have may influence their children's development (McLean, Edwards, Colliver et al., 2014). The parent/child playgroup model is based on the contention that the early care and learning experiences children receive (especially from birth to age five) directly influences their ability to learn and succeed in school. Therefore supporting families during the period when their children's development is most rapid, will have a lasting influence on children throughout their lives (Jackson, 2011).

**Caregiver interactions impact early brain development:** Research highlights the importance of early interactions between caregivers and children on brain development and how these relationships help develop neurological pathways that may affect future health, learning and behaviour into adulthood; including creative and critical thinking and qualities of democratic citizenship (McCain, Mustard et al., 1999; 2007; 2011). This understanding reinforces the importance of sensitive responses by caregivers in early childhood, and lays the foundation for secure attachment in later years, based on the idea that early bonds and relationships between children and caregivers, contribute to the child's long-term psychological well-being. In addition they minimize the negative consequences of high levels of risk in the child's environment (Connor & Morrison, 2014; Britto, Williamson, Snow & Mankad 2013; Karoly, Kilburn & Cannon, 2005).

**Social networks influence parenting:** Parent involvement is a critical factor in children's early development. The ability of parents to develop positive relationships with their children is influenced by their own social networks. Research identifies social supports as a factor that strengthens maternal adjustment and infant wellbeing (Leahy-Warren, McCarthy & Corcoran, 2012). Social supports include professional and institutional supports as well as informal networks provided by family and friends. Social support is exceptionally important for maintaining good physical and mental health. Positive social support can enhance resilience to stress, help protect against developing trauma-related disorders and/or decrease their consequences (Ozbay, Johnson et al., 2007).

Parent/child playgroups can improve parents' social supports by connecting parents with other families experiencing similar life transitions. This can particularly be useful for families with limited social networks (Corter & Arimura, 2006; Commerford & Robinson, 2016). Being able to meet other parents and to share experiences have been identified as factors in reducing parenting stress and increasing parents' ability to care for their young children (Doyle & Zhang, 2011; Silver, Measelle et al, 2005; Timmons, 2008).

Evaluations suggest that parents value the supports and strategies they are exposed to through their participation in playgroups (Underwood & Killoran, 2012; Berman, Underwood et al., 2012). Participants often saw playgroups as a place to learn about activities that could be used in the home and to learn about effective behaviour management strategies (Berman et al., 2012; Landry, 2006; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1990; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2001). Parents also credited parent/child programs with supporting English language acquisition (Silver et al., 2005). Supported playgroups also have potential to be soft entry points linking families to formal supports when needed and delivering key messages promoting child health (Commerford & Robinson, 2016).

**Program facilitators play a critical role:** Research documents the critical role that trained early childhood educators play in shaping early learning (Barnett, 2008; McCain et al., 2011). The program facilitator plays a critical role in the value parents and children derive from playgroups because they can create settings that are inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of families (Jackson, 2013; Targowska et al., 2015). Program evaluations report that the degree of job satisfaction and facilitator training may be important factors in supporting families' rates of attendance (Commerford & Robinson, 2016). The research also suggests that the success of parent/child programs requires enhanced training and technical assistance for teachers to support high-quality practices (Gaylord, Spiker et al., 2012).

**Quality is the key to program impact:** High quality programming produces the greatest benefits for children, while low quality can be harmful. Quality in programming ensures optimal and accessible use of physical space and effective curriculum and pedagogy. Environments staffed with skilled teachers and characterized by warm positive interactions between staff and children, small class sizes, and high adult to child ratios and group sizes that allow for interactions have been shown to enhance children's cognitive and social development (Williams, Berthelsen et al., 2015; Doyle & Zhang, 2011; Moore, 2008; Linke, 2001).

Quality programs operate with the understanding that play-based learning is critical to children's development. Understanding play, and the benefits derived from it, are critical to the playgroup experience. Play should be freely chosen and directed, spontaneous and pleasurable. The benefits of play for children have been widely documented, with play being associated with the development of language and literacy, sociability and mathematical ability (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2009; Hewes, 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 1998).

**Program evaluations show positive outcomes:** StrongStart BC and Ontario's Parent and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) are similar school based programs with a strong play-based early learning and family support philosophy. In initial evaluations of StrongStart BC (HELP 2007, 2008) parents reported positive experiences of children's transition to school, including more opportunities for socialization, and enhanced social development including sharing, taking turns, and greater confidence making friends and interacting with peers and adults. Similarly, children's participation in the PFLCs was associated with improved school readiness, literacy and social development (Underwood & Trent-Katz, 2015).

The Community Action Program for Children (CAPC), which aims to support high-risk families, reported positive outcomes in children's social and emotional development, language development and vocabulary, as well as improved physical development, and cognitive benefits such as problem solving (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). Similarly, there is strong evidence from the Abecedarian project of long term educational benefits including improved literacy and academic achievement, reduced special education placements, as well as long term economic and social benefits (Campbell, Pungello et al., 2012). Children in Chicago's preschool programs generally improved in areas related to social-emotional development, which is an important indicator of school readiness (Gaylord, Spiker et al., 2012). Extensive evaluations of children's centres in the UK show enduring literacy and numeracy benefits at age 16 (Taggart et al., 2014).

**Sufficient participation is necessary:** Continued, regular and frequent participation in quality family-centred playgroups is necessary to derive the benefits for adults and children (Corter & Arimura, 2006; PHAC, 2009; Hall, Sylva et al., 2013; Whittaker et al., 2013; Nicholson, Berthelsen et al., 2010). Studies have shown that the dose, or amount of time spent in high-quality programming enhances development.

**Early childhood programs within education show benefits:** Schools as hubs for child and family programming have become more common across Canada and internationally (OECD, 2006, 2012; Akbari & McCuaig, 2014). Integrated kindergarten, childcare, preschool, playgroups, and other early childhood and community programs represent multiple microsystems where the interactions surrounding children can help support their early development.

The integration of education and community programs reduce transitions and stress on families, and can provide a supportive infrastructure for family involvement and access to community services (Corter et al., 2009, Janmohamed & Pelletier, 2010; Janmohamed, McCuaig et al., 2014). This was most evident when efforts moved beyond service coordination to a deeper engagement in shared resources, program planning and delivery. There is also evidence that integrated settings are higher in quality than their separate equivalents (Corter, Pelletier, Janmohamed et al., 2009; 2012; Melhuish, Belsky et al., 2010; Sylva, Melhuish et al., 2008).

Integrated child and family support programs such as Best Start in Ontario were also found to improve child development outcomes including social skills and confidence, language development and early literacy, and decreased anxiety with transition and separation from caregivers (Underwood & Killoran, 2012).

Schools are dynamic systems that can influence a broad range of dimensions of children's learning, including academic, social, and behavioural domains (Bascia, 2014). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recommends investing in universal access from the early years to at least the end of upper secondary as the most profitable educational policy. It stresses the importance of policies that ensure disadvantaged schools prioritize their links with parents and communities and improve their communication strategies to align school and parental efforts (OECD, 2012a).

The BC government has moved to individual learning and 21st century models in education and there is a strong research rationale to support early years services as part of the learning continuum from birth through school age, given the strong link to positive outcomes in later years. The OECD reports that in most countries, education begins before children are 5 years old. Some 74 percent of 3-year-olds are enrolled in education across OECD member states and in 80 percent of European Union countries (OECD, 2015). Enrolment in preschool type programming rose from 52 percent of 3-year-olds in 2005 to 72 percent in 2013, and from 69 percent of 4-year-olds to 85 percent in 2013 (OECD, 2013).



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## 14 • APPENDICES

### A.A DATA REPOSITORIES

Outside of small scale, time limited research projects there are few Canadian examples of data collection systems with the capacity to link all or some health, socio-economic, educational, program quality assessment and child outcome findings over time. This review does however provide four models to build on.

The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) contains 71 health, education, social service and justice data sets. MCHP is examined in more detail below. Ontario's Institute for Clinical and Evaluative Sciences (ICES) houses the largest number of data sets (72) but is primarily health focused. Population Data BC is the smallest of the three data repositories, containing 19 health and demographic data sets and a small collection of education data. It is working to expand its current education holdings. The New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data and Training (NB-IRD) is the newest repository in development. Table A.A.1 and A.A.2 compare the four data sets.

#### **Case Study: Manitoba Centre for Health Policy**

The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) is the main centre for collecting, linking, and analyzing information about the population of Manitoba. MCHP is a part of the Department of Community Health Sciences in the College of Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba. The Centre was established in 1991 and is funded by the Government of Manitoba. The MCHP retains data on health (administrative health, clinical health, survey health), education, social studies (Survey Social, Healthy Child, Community Services), registry (birth, deaths, marriages), and justice.

#### **Authority to hold data and conduct research**

The Population Health Research Data Repository was developed by the MCHP to facilitate inter-sectoral research. The repository currently contains 71 databases, each of which is owned by the Manitoba organization that contributed the data. A complete list of every database is available on the MCHP website. For privacy protection, all data in the repository is stored in a de-identified form, meaning that all identifying



information (e.g. names and addresses) is removed prior to transferring the data to the repository. The MCHP is under contract to the Manitoba government for five research projects a year. Non-MCHP scientists may apply to access data for external projects. Data use is regulated under the *Manitoba Personal Health Information Act* and the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*

### **Data linking and security**

In order to link de-identified data, the MCHP uses a five-step Record Linkage Process: 1) Data Pre-Processing, 2) Searching and Selecting Variables, 3) Matching Records, 4) Separation, and 5) Linkage Validation. Data pre-processing investigates data quality with the intent to enhance and standardize the data. Deterministic and probabilistic techniques, as well as manual review are used to match record pairs and to determine the agreement level between records. Separation involves removing linked records from the data sets, and re-processing the remaining unlinked records.

The MCHP has a team of more than 60 university researchers and graduate students, data managers, systems analysts, research coordinators and research support staff. The environment in which the research is conducted is tightly controlled and all staff and collaborating researchers are required to sign confidentiality agreements. Access to certain areas in the workplace is restricted to staff with additional levels of security clearance and the computers storing databases are housed in a restricted area accessible only to authorized personnel.

### **Researcher data access conditions & analysis information**

Remote Access Sites (RAS) enable data analysts and researchers to access the repository from locations outside of the physical MCHP office areas. These sites only provide terminal access to specific applications within MCHP and there is no opportunity for direct data transfer or printing. Remote analysts can request aggregate data and statistical results may be transferred off of the system through an electronic vetting request.

To access data from the repository, external researchers must submit a proposal and complete the MCHP Project Feasibility form. Approved proposals must meet the requirements of the MCHP, the Health Information Privacy Committee (HIPC), and the University of Manitoba and all relevant affiliates. Permission from the Manitoba organization, which originally contributed, and therefore owns, the data of interest must be obtained. There is no access to MCHP data for non-academic purposes. For public use, there is a list of all databases held in the repository on the MCHP website. This list includes general information about the data provider, the available years of data, and the category of data as well as a link to a summary description of each database within the repository.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of the Centre's products are related to health and population health outcomes. Two listed reports focus on children: *How are Manitoba's Children Doing?* (Brownell M, Chartier M, et al., 2012) and *The Educational Outcomes of Children in Care in Manitoba* (Brownell M, Chartier M, et al., 2015).

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1 [http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/health\\_sciences/medicine/units/community\\_health\\_sciences/departamental\\_units/mchp/resources/repository/index.html](http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/health_sciences/medicine/units/community_health_sciences/departamental_units/mchp/resources/repository/index.html)

Table A.A.1		Manitoba Population Health Data Repository	Population Data BC
Location, scope	<b>Location</b>	Manitoba	British Columbia
	<b>Official Date of Inception</b>	1990	2008
	<b>Type of data holdings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Population and Demographic</li> <li>• Social Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Population and Demographic</li> <li>• Occupational</li> <li>• Education</li> </ul>
	<b># of data sets</b>	72	19
	<b>Fees charged</b>	Yes for data extract preparation, analyst services	Yes for training, coordination of data extracts and data extraction
Authority to hold data and conduct research	<b>Type of holding</b>	Data Repository	Trusted Third Party for Linkage & Data Repository
	<b>Designated research entity</b>	Yes	No
	<b>Legislation governing data access for research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Health Information Act (PHIA) section 24 – MCHP is a research organization</li> <li>• PHIA section 24 governs disclosure to researchers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) section 33 in accordance with section 35</li> </ul>
	<b>Data ownership</b>	Resides with the data provider and housed via data sharing agreements	Resides with the Data Steward as a public body and housed via data sharing and information sharing agreements
	<b>Conducts research</b>	Yes	No
Data Linking and Security	<b>Are Identifier Data transferred?</b>	Identifier Data are transferred to Manitoba Health. It creates an encrypted PHIN (unique ID). This is transferred to MCHP for linking between datasets.	Identifier Data are transferred to Population Data BC for creation of a unique ID for linking between data sets.
	<b>Where is the Unique ID used for linking created</b>	Manitoba Health using identifying data to create an encrypted Personal Health Identification Number (PHIN)	Population Data BC using identifying information to create PopData ID
	<b>Where does linking take place?</b>	MCHP	Population Data BC
	<b>When is data linked?</b>	Data is linked on an ad-hoc basis using the encrypted PHIN attached to the content data file for each data set	Data is linked on an ad-hoc basis using the PopDataID attached to the content data file for each data set
Researcher Data Access Conditions & Analysis Information	<b>Where can a researcher access data?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MCHP Site</li> <li>• Remote access sites (9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population Data BC site</li> <li>• Remote access via VPN</li> </ul>
	<b>Researcher Data Access Requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signed UM-MCHP researcher agreements</li> <li>• Manitoba Health Information Privacy Committee (HIPC) and UM Health Research Ethics Board ( HREB)</li> <li>• Completion of Accreditation Process</li> <li>• Pledge of confidentiality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethics Approval</li> <li>• Scientific merit</li> <li>• Signed Research Agreement with Data Steward(s)</li> <li>• Signed Confidentiality Agreement</li> <li>• Privacy Training</li> </ul>
	<b>Who conducts analysis?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MCHP analysts</li> <li>• Identified external analyst(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researchers</li> <li>• Named team members</li> </ul>
	<b>Non academic access to data</b>	Project may be funded externally however tenured researcher leads the project and all analysis must be conducted by MCHP staff and students	Not available at this time.

Table A.A.2		Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES)	NB Institute for Research, Data and Training (NB-IRDT)
Location, scope	Location	Ontario	New Brunswick
	Official Date of Inception	1992	2015
	Type of data holdings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Population and Demographic</li> </ul>	Health records, social assistance, justice, training, education (In development)
	# of data sets	73	12, more in development
	Fees charged	Yes for coordination, extraction, data analysis and reporting	
Authority to hold data and conduct research	Type of holding	Data linkage & Data Repository	Data linkage & Data Repository
	Designated research entity	Yes	Yes
	Legislation governing data access for research	Personal Health Information Protection (PHIPA) section 45/PHIPA section 44/ Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act FIPPA section 21 (1e)	Personal Health Information Privacy and Access Act/ (PHIPPA) Right To Information and Protection of Privacy Act (RTIPPA)
	Data ownership	ICES but governed by data sharing agreements	Resides with the data provider and housed via data sharing agreements
	Conducts research	Yes	Yes
Data Linking and Security	Are Identifier Data transferred?	Identifier Data are transferred to ICES. Values are coded and used for linking between data sets	Data with temp identifier added and direct identifiers removed
	Where is the Unique ID used for linking created	Using OHIP number and identifying information to create an individual ICES number (IKN)	NB-IRDT using identifying data to create an encrypted Personal Health Information Number (PHIN)
	Where does linking take place?	ICES	NB-IRDT
	When is data linked?	Data is linked on an ad-hoc basis per project using the IKN attached to content data files for each data set	Per project
Researcher Data Access Conditions & Analysis Information	Where can a researcher access data?	ICES Site/Remote access sites	Secure virtual research environment
	Researcher Data Access Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Privacy Impact Assessment</li> <li>• Meeting the requirement of respective data sharing agreements</li> </ul>	Research Ethics Board approval
	Who conducts analysis?	ICES analysts	Researchers/Students
	Non academic access to data	No	No



## **A.B QUESTIONNAIRES**

Surveys and interview/focus group questions were developed by the evaluation team based on similar evaluations and in consultation with the Ministry of Education, the BC Association of Family Resource Programs, the La Fédération des parents francophones de C.-B. and community libraries. Survey drafts were vetted by the Ministry of Education to ensure that data collection captured stakeholder interests. Surveys were distributed province wide to parents / caregivers, administrators, and facilitators through the StrongStart BC network. Community providers were reached through several avenues including public libraries, and Family Resource Programs. All surveys were made available online through Interceptum, a Canadian-based survey company and were translated into French, Simplified Chinese and Punjabi. Punjabi was not available online due to limited language character support. Paper copies were available on site at all StrongStart BC centres and sent back to the evaluation team after completion. Telephone surveys were conducted as follow-ups with interested participants.



## Parent / Caregiver Survey

### Evaluation of the StrongStart BC program

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Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
University of Toronto

Revised April 25 2016



## Survey for Parents/Guardians/Caregivers in the StrongStart BC Program Terms of Consent

Dear Parent/Guardian/Caregiver

Thank you for your interest in participating in this survey.

The Ministry of Education is working with a team of researchers from the University of Toronto to evaluate the effectiveness of the StrongStart BC Early Learning centres based on the program's goals and policies.

The purpose of this study is to inform the long term planning of StrongStart BC, and to investigate the program's impact on young children's development and its impact on parents, caregivers, educators, administrators and the community.

All information is collected under the authority of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) Section 26(c). All information collected in this survey will be kept strictly confidential.

Participants, children, and schools will not be identified individually. Your answers are only seen by the researchers and are not shared with the StrongStart program, the school, or the Ministry of Education.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip questions or stop answering questions at any time. Please do not provide any third-party information (i.e. talk about others) or other information about yourself in any open-field responses. If third-party information is provided it will be removed before the information is stored.

You may cancel your survey at any time and your answers will not be saved or submitted. You may withdraw your submitted survey at any time by contacting the researcher named below.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Emis Akbari at [strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com](mailto:strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com).

Thank you for your participation.  
Sincerely,

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Emis Akbari, Ph.D.  
Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
University of Toronto  
252 Bloor Street West | Toronto | ON | M5S 1V6  
E-mail: [strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com](mailto:strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com).

If you wish to speak to someone not connected to this study please contact: Joanne Murrell, Ministry of Education, at [Joanne.Murrell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Joanne.Murrell@gov.bc.ca)

**Clicking "next" indicates your agreement to participate in the survey. You will now be taken to a separate page.**

By clicking here, you agree to take part in this study.	No Thanks
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Are you a:  
**Parent/ Legal Guardian**  
**Grandparent/Caregiver**

The above will appear as a drop down menu. Depending on the selected answer, the participant will be funneled into the appropriate survey

**StrongStart BC – Early Learning Program Review**  
**PARENT/GUARDIAN SURVEY**

This survey is for parents/guardians with a child(ren) in the StrongStart BC program, or who's child(ren) has/have participated in the StrongStart BC program in the past. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Questions include information on your background, how StrongStart BC has benefited your family, your child's development, and his/her school readiness.  
**We thank you for your participation.**

1. How many children do you have?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4+

2. How many of your children are currently attending the StrongStart BC program?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4+

3. What are their ages?

- Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- Age: \_\_\_\_\_

4. If you have older children who participated in the StrongStart BC program in the past, please indicate their current age below.

- Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- Age: \_\_\_\_\_

5. How long have you been using StrongStart BC?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 to 3 years
- 3 to 5 years
- More than 5 years

6. What is your postal code? \_\_\_\_\_



7. How long have you lived in your neighbourhood?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 to 3 years
- 3 to 5 years
- More than 5 years

8. Are you:

- Male
- Female
- Other

9. What is your citizenship status?

- Canadian
- Permanent Resident
- Convention Refugee
- Work permit (including live-in-caregiver)
- Study permit
- Other
- Prefer not to say

10. Do you identify as:

- First Nations on reserve
- First Nations off reserve
- Metis
- Inuit
- Aboriginal/Indigenous
- None of the above

11. What is your marital status?

- Married/ Common Law
- Single

12. What is the primary language(s) you speak at home? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Were you born in Canada?

- Yes
- No

14. If you were born outside of Canada, how many years have you been in Canada? \_\_\_\_\_

15. What is your current employment situation? (Please select all that apply)

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Homemaker
- Student
- Maternity Leave / Paternity Leave
- Sick Leave
- Other



# StrongStart BC

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16. What is your approximate family income?

- Less than 40,000 per year
- 40,000 to 60,000 per year
- 60,000 to 80,000 per year
- 80,000 to 100,000 per year
- 100,000 to 150,000 per year
- More than 150,000 per year

17. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Have not completed formal schooling
- Completed secondary/high school
- Completed community college or technical college
- Completed undergraduate university degree
- Completed graduate/advanced university degree

18. Who lives in your home?

- Parents with child(ren)
- Single parent family
- Extended family (parents, child(ren), and other relatives)
- Grandparents with child(ren)

19. How many days per week do(es) your child(ren) attend the StrongStart BC program?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

20. Who attends the StrongStart BC program with the child?

- Mother
- Father
- Older sibling
- Grandparent
- Nanny/Caregiver
- Other

21. My child(ren's) social and emotional well being has/have benefited from the StrongStart BC program (i.e. gets along with others, more independent)

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

22. My child(ren's) language has/have benefited from the StrongStart BC program (i.e. enjoys books, identifies numbers and letters)

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

# StrongStart BC

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23. I am happy with the quality of the program.
- Agree  
 Disagree  
 Somewhat  
 Not sure
24. As a parent I enjoy attending the StrongStart BC program.
- Agree  
 Disagree  
 Somewhat  
 Not sure
25. My child(ren) enjoy attending the StrongStart BC program.
- Agree  
 Disagree  
 Somewhat  
 Not sure
26. I am comfortable talking to the StrongStart BC staff.
- Agree  
 Disagree  
 Somewhat  
 Not sure
27. Staff of the StrongStart BC program ask my opinion.
- Agree  
 Disagree  
 Somewhat  
 Not sure
28. My opinion is valued by the StrongStart BC staff.
- Agree  
 Disagree  
 Somewhat  
 Not sure
29. My child has made friends as a result of attending the StrongStart BC program.
- Agree  
 Disagree  
 Somewhat  
 Not sure
30. StrongStart BC has helped me with information and access to other community programs.
- Agree  
 Disagree  
 Somewhat  
 Not sure



31. I have made friends in the StrongStart BC program.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

32. The StrongStart BC program has provided extra support for my family.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

33. The StrongStart BC program has helped me with effective strategies to help my child(ren) learn and grow.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

34. I feel my child will settle quickly and comfortably into Kindergarten because of their participation in StrongStart BC.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

35. I feel more connected with the school community because of my participation in StrongStart BC.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

36. I would like to see StrongStart BC continue in my community.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

37. What is the primary reason you attend the StrongStart BC program? (Please select all that apply)

- Build my social network
- To get and share parenting tips
- So my child is happy starting kindergarten
- So my child can play with toys
- So my child can read books
- Access to school events
- Access to a free snack
- The support of the StrongStart Facilitator
- For my child to make friends
- Other



38. How do you travel to the StrongStart BC program? (Please select all that apply)

- Bus
- Walk
- Drive
- Taxi
- Other

39. How would you like to see the StrongStart BC program improve? (Please select all that apply).

- Longer hours
- More parent focused activities
- More parent education
- More activities connected to the school community
- More StrongStart BC programs (to create centres that are less busy)
- A broader range of children's activities
- More activities designed for children with special needs / exceptionalities.
- More flexible hours (i.e. evenings / weekends)
- Other – Please explain

40. Have you ever been turned away from the program because the program was full?

- Yes
- No

41. How well do you feel families with young children are served in your community?

- Very well
- Well
- Not well
- I don't know

42. How did you find out about StrongStart BC?

- Flyers / Brochures
- School district website
- Door knocking
- Local media
- Referrals from other community agencies
- Home visitor
- Family physician / health provider
- Friend / neighbor
- Social media (Facebook, e-newsletter)
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Please provide your name and email address only if you would like a researcher to contact you for a follow up interview.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

----- END OF SURVEY -----





**StrongStart BC – Early Learning Program Review  
COMMUNITY CAREGIVER/ GRANDPARENT SURVEY**

This survey is for caregivers and grandparents who accompany a child(ren) to the StrongStart BC program. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Questions include information on your personal background, how StrongStart BC has benefited the child's development, and his/her school readiness.

**We thank you for your participation.**

1. Are you the:
  - Caregiver
  - Grandmother
  - Grandfather
  - Other
  
2. How many of the children in your care attend the StrongStart BC program? Answer: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What are their ages?
  - Age: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Age: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Age: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Age: \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is your postal code? \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How long have you been using StrongStart BC?
  - Less than 6 months
  - 6 months to 1 year
  - 1 to 3 years
  - 3 to 5 years
  - More than 5 years
  
6. How long have you lived in your neighbourhood?
  - Less than 6 months
  - 6 months – 1 year
  - 1-3 years
  - 3-5 years
  - More than 5 years
  
7. What is the primary language you speak to the child(ren)? \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Do you live with the family of the child(ren) you care for?
  - Yes
  - No
  
9. Who lives in the home with the child(ren)?
  - Parents with child(ren)
  - Single parent family
  - Extended family (parents, child(ren), and other relatives)
  - Grandparents with child(ren)
  - Other



10. How many days per week do you attend the StrongStart BC program with the child(ren)?
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
11. Who else attends the StrongStart BC program with the child(ren)? (Please select all that apply)
- Parent
  - Older sibling
  - Grandparent
  - Nanny/Caregiver
  - Only me
  - Other
12. The child(ren) in my care has/have benefitted socially and emotionally from the StrongStart BC program (i.e. gets along with others, more independent)
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Not sure
13. The child(ren) in my care has/have benefitted in language skills from the StrongStart BC program (i.e. enjoys books, identifies numbers and letters)
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Not sure
14. I am happy with the quality of StrongStart BC.
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat
  - Not sure
15. As a caregiver/ grandparent I enjoy the StrongStart BC program.
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat
  - Not sure
16. The child(ren) in my care enjoy(s) attending the StrongStart BC program.
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat
  - Not sure
17. Staff of the StrongStart BC program ask my opinion.
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat
  - Not sure



18. My opinion is valued by the StrongStart BC staff.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

19. I have made friends as a result of attending the StrongStart BC program.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

20. The child(ren) in my care has/have made friends as a result of attending the StrongStart BC program.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

21. StrongStart BC has helped me with information and access to other community programs.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

22. I am more involved in this child's learning because of the StrongStart BC program.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

23. The StrongStart BC program has given me extra support for caring for this/these child(ren).

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

24. I would like to see StrongStart BC continue in my community.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Somewhat
- Not sure

25. What is the primary reason you attend the StrongStart BC program?

- Build my social network
- To help the child(ren) in my care to make new friends
- To help the child(ren) in my care to prepare for school
- The child(ren)'s parent(s) have asked me to attend the program
- So the child(ren) in my care can play with toys



- So the child(ren) in my care can read books
- Access to play based learning
- Access to the school community
- Access to a free snack
- Other

26. How do you travel to the StrongStart BC program? (Please select all that apply)

- Bus
- Walk
- Drive
- Taxi
- Other

27. Have you every been turned away from the program because they were at capacity?

- Yes
- No

28. How would you like to see the StrongStart BC program improve? (Please select all that apply)

- Longer hours
- More parent focused activities
- A broader range of children's activities
- More activities designed for children with special needs / exceptionalities.
- More flexible hours (i.e. evenings / weekends)
- More StrongStart BC programs (to help manage participant numbers at sites)
- Other – Please explain.

Please provide your name and email address only if you would like a researcher to contact you for a follow up interview.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

----- END OF SURVEY -----



## Educator Survey — English

### Evaluation of the StrongStart BC program

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Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
University of Toronto

Revised April 25 2016



Survey for StrongStart BC Facilitators and Kindergarten Teachers  
Terms of Consent

**Dear StrongStart BC Facilitator/ Kindergarten Teacher**

Thank you for your interest in participating in this survey.

The Ministry of Education is working with a team of researchers from the University of Toronto to evaluate the effectiveness of the StrongStart BC Early Learning centres based on the program's goals and policies.

The purpose of this study is to inform the long term planning of StrongStart BC, and to investigate the program's impact on young children's development and its impact on parents, caregivers, educators, administrators and the community.

All information is collected under the authority of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) Section 26(c). All information collected in this survey will be kept strictly confidential.

Participants, children, and schools will not be identified individually. Your answers are only seen by the researchers and are not shared with the StrongStart BC program, the school, or the Ministry of Education.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip questions or stop answering questions at any time. Please do not provide any third-party information (i.e. talk about others) or other information about yourself in any open-field responses. If third-party information is provided it will be removed before the information is stored.

You may cancel your survey at any time and your answers will not be saved or submitted. You may withdraw your submitted survey at any time by contacting the researcher named below.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me, at [strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com](mailto:strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com).

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

---

**Romona Gananathan, Ph.D.**

Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development  
University of Toronto  
252 Bloor St. West  
Toronto | ON | M5S 1V6

If you wish to speak to someone not connected to this study please contact: Joanne Murrell, Ministry of Education, at [Joanne.Murrell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Joanne.Murrell@gov.bc.ca)

**Clicking “next” indicates your agreement to participate in the survey. You will now be taken to a separate page.**

By clicking here, you agree to take part in this study.	No Thanks
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Are you a:  
**StrongStart BC Facilitator**  
**Kindergarten Teacher**

The above will appear as a drop down menu. Depending on the selected answer, the participant will be funneled into the appropriate survey

**StrongStart BC – Early Learning Program Review**  
**STRONGSTART BC FACILITATOR SURVEY**

This survey is for staff/facilitators of the StrongStart BC program and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.  
**We thank you for your participation.**

1. What best describes your position?  
 StrongStart BC staff/facilitator  
 Placement student/volunteer  
 Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the postal code for your StrongStart BC program? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What education have you completed?  
 ECE Training Course(s):  
 ECE Certificate (1 year)  
 ECE diploma (2 years)  
 ECE degree (4 years)  
 Other undergraduate degree  
 Teaching Certificate  
 Graduate Degree  
 Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many years have you worked in:  
 The early childhood sector? \_\_\_\_\_  
 The education sector? \_\_\_\_\_  
 A StrongStart BC program? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Who is your employer?  
 School District  
 Other
6. Do you have a job description?  
 Yes  
 No
7. Who is your supervisor?  
 School District Administrator (Director of Instruction/Assistant Superintendent)  
 School principal  
 Early years lead (Early Years Coordinator)  
 Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

# StrongStart BC

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8. Do you get clear program guidelines from your supervisor/employer?
- Yes  
 No
9. Do you have access to an early learning lead for programming and planning support?
- Yes  
 No  
If YES please explain: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you have access to professional development activities?
- Yes  
 No
11. Who provides professional development?
- School District  
 My professional association i.e. ECEBC  
 Community college  
 Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
12. How many hours of professional development are you provided by your employer each year? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Are you paid to participate in professional development by your employer?
- Yes  
 No
14. With whom do you engage in program planning? (Please select all that apply)
- I plan alone  
 With other StrongStart BC staff  
 With the Kindergarten teacher  
 With other teachers  
 Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
15. Do you get paid planning time?
- Yes  
 No
16. Do you feel supported in doing your work?
- Yes  
 Somewhat  
 No
17. Does a union represent you?
- No  
 Yes, what is the name of your union \_\_\_\_\_
18. What is your hourly rate? \_\_\_\_\_
19. How many hours do you work each day? \_\_\_\_\_



20. How many days do you work each week? \_\_\_\_\_

21. What are some key components of your program and learning environment? (Please select all that apply)

- Materials that invite exploration and inspire creativity
- Construction and block play materials
- Materials that support fine motor development
- Science/nature
- Dramatic play
- Movement
- Books/ Language activities
- Math activities
- Outdoor / natural environment
- Games/ puzzles
- Social interactions
- Individual support
- Music-listening
- Music-making with instruments
- Music-making through singing
- Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

22. What challenges do you have in planning and implementing your program? (Please select all that apply)

- Multiage groups
- Planning for diversity (including language)
- Parent / caregiver to child ratios
- Not enough trained staff
- Room capacity/fire safety restrictions
- Not enough support from school / school district
- Drop-in (not sure who will be present)
- Drop-in (difficult to plan ongoing projects)
- Access to washrooms and running water
- Access to resources and supplies
- Access to gym, playground and library
- StrongStart BC is disconnected from school activities and staff
- Lack of time for planning
- Lack of time to support families individual needs
- Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

23. What opportunities do you see in your program? (Please select all that apply)

- Sharing information about resources
- Referrals to other services in the community
- Modeling strategies for parents/caregivers to use with children
- Providing play based learning activities
- Providing opportunities for social/emotional development
- Creating respectful environments welcoming to all families
- Attracting hard-to-reach and/or vulnerable families
- Building on unique strengths of children and families
- Connecting families to the school community
- Providing a culturally relevant environment that reflects Aboriginal history and culture.
- Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_





24. How often does the StrongStart BC program refer children for additional services?

- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely

25. Is the StrongStart BC program an effective resource for children who may have developmental/behavior challenges?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat
- Don't know

26. Is there a maximum capacity for the StrongStart BC program?

- Yes
- No

27. Please, provide the number of parents/caregivers and children able to participate at any one time.

\_\_\_\_\_

28. How often is the centre at capacity?

- More than once a week
- Weekly
- Occasionally
- Rarely

29. How often do you need to turn away families because the centre is over capacity?

- More than once a week
- Weekly
- Occasionally
- Rarely

30. How does the school include StrongStart BC in its daily operations? (Please select all that apply)

- Participants are invited to all school special events
- Participants are invited to school assemblies
- Participants are encouraged to take part in the school library program with a book exchange
- StrongStart BC has regular use of the school gym
- Older buddies from the school participate in the StrongStart BC program
- StrongStart BC staff are welcomed in the staffroom and are considered part of the school team
- StrongStart BC staff have access to equipment, materials and resources
- StrongStart BC staff are consulted in the decision-making processes that impact the program
- Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_



31. Does the StrongStart BC program collaborate with other early years programs? (Please select all that apply)

- As part of community early years planning tables i.e. Success By 6 / Children First
- Plan together and provide joint activities
- As part of Kindergarten transition activities i.e. Ready, Set, Learn or Welcome to Kindergarten
- Shared professional development and training
- Share staff
- Share space
- Our StrongStart BC program is contracted out to a community program
- Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

32. What other early years programs/services might you refer families to? (Please select all that apply)

- SUCCESS (newcomer families)
- Parenting information resources
- Child care
- Preschool information
- Early Years Centre
- Early Intervention (Infant Development Program/Supported Child Development)
- Aboriginal Early Childhood Development i.e. HeadStart
- Speech & Language Therapist
- Health Programs i.e. Dental, Hearing, Vaccinations
- Libraries
- Recreation
- Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

33. Are you working/collaborating with the local BC Early Years Centre in your community?

- Yes
- Not yet
- We do not have a BC Early Years Centre in our community

34. I conduct small group activities with children and parents/caregivers

- Always
- Very often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

35. I work in partnership with Kindergarten teacher/s

- Always
- Very often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

If yes, please describe the kinds of activities you engage in together: \_\_\_\_\_

36. Are other early years services co-located with StrongStart BC?

- Yes
- No



37. How well do you feel families with young children are served in your community?

- There is a wide range of activities and supports
- A selection of services is available
- Need to do much better
- Don't know

Thank you for our participation.

Please provide your name and email address only if you want a researcher to contact you for a follow up interview.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

----- END OF SURVEY -----



**StrongStart BC – Early Learning Program Review  
KINDERGARTEN TEACHER SURVEY**

This survey is for Kindergarten teachers and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.  
**We thank you for your participation.**

1. What best describes your position?  
 Kindergarten teacher  
 Special education teacher  
 Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the postal code of your school? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What training or education have you completed? (Please select all that apply)  
 Teaching Certificate  
 Graduate Degree (Masters or PhD)  
 ECE Diploma/ Certificates  
 Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
4. Does your school have an onsite StrongStart BC program?  
 Yes  
 No
5. If no, is your school linked to a StrongStart BC program or outreach program?  
 Yes  
 No
6. Do you think the children and families in your community benefit from the StrongStart BC program in your school?  
 Yes  
 No
7. If no, why not  
 Other early years programs in the community fill this need  
 Community programs are better able to meet the needs of preschool children and their families  
 There are not enough resources and space in the school to accommodate additional programming  
 Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
8. How many years have you worked in a school with a StrongStart BC program \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you think children are better prepared for Kindergarten because of the StrongStart BC program?  
 Yes  
 No
10. If yes, how? (Please select all that apply)  
 Enhanced literacy skills  
 Enhanced social/emotional skills  
 Enhanced numeracy skills



- Reduced behavioural challenges
- Opportunities for early identification

11. How often do children enter Kindergarten and struggle to participate due to developmental or behavioural challenges?

- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely

12. Do you think it is important for children to participate in early learning programming before they start Kindergarten?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

13. Do you think it is helpful for children and their families to be familiar with the school environment before they start Kindergarten?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

14. What are some key components of your Kindergarten program? (Please select all that apply)

- Materials that invite exploration and inspire creativity
- Construction and block play materials
- Materials that support fine motor development
- Science/nature
- Dramatic play
- Movement
- Books/ Language activities
- Math activities
- Outdoor / natural environment
- Games / puzzles
- Social interactions
- Individual support
- Music-listening
- Music-making with instruments
- Music-making through singing
- Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

15. What are the key challenges you see for children entering kindergarten? (Please select all that apply)

- Stress/anxiety
- Not able to self-regulate
- Toileting and independence
- Language challenges i.e. ELL, language delays
- First time away from parent/main caregiver – separation
- Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

16. What opportunities do you see that the StrongStart BC program provides? (Please select all that apply)

- Offering resources to families
- Referrals to other services in the community
- Modeling and sharing strategies for parents/caregivers
- Providing play-based learning activities





- Providing opportunities for social/emotional development
- Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

17. I work in partnership with StrongStart BC staff

- Always
- Very often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

19. How well do you feel families with young children are served in your community?

- There is a wide range of activities and supports
- A selection of services is available
- Need to do much better
- Don't know

***Thank you for your participation.***

Please provide your name and email address only if you want a researcher to contact you for a follow up interview.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

----- END OF SURVEY -----

## Community Provider Survey — English

### Evaluation of the StrongStart BC program

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Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
University of Toronto

Revised April 25 2016



## Survey for Community Children's Service Providers Terms of Consent

### Dear Community Children's Service Provider

Thank you for your interest in participating in this survey.

The Ministry of Education is working with a team of researchers from the University of Toronto to evaluate the effectiveness of the StrongStart BC Early Learning centres based on the program's goals and policies.

The purpose of this study is to inform the long term planning of StrongStart BC, to investigate the program's impact on young children's development and its impact on parents, caregivers, educators, administrators and the community.

All information is collected under the authority of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) Section 26(c). All information collected in this survey will be kept strictly confidential.

Participants, children, and schools will not be identified individually. Your answers are only seen by the researchers and are not shared with the StrongStart BC program, the school, or the Ministry of Education.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip questions or stop answering questions at any time. Please do not provide any third-party information (i.e. talk about others) or other information about yourself in any open-field responses. If third-party information is provided it will be removed before the information is stored.

You may cancel your survey at any time and your answers will not be saved or submitted. You may withdraw your submitted survey at any time by contacting the researcher named below.

Thank you for your participation.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Kerry McCuaig at [strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com](mailto:strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

---

Kerry McCuaig  
Early Childhood Policy  
Atkinson Centre, OISE, University of Toronto  
9-234, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto ON M5S 1V6  
Email: [strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com](mailto:strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com).

If you wish to speak to someone not connected to this study please contact: Joanne Murrell, Ministry of Education, at [Joanne.Murrell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Joanne.Murrell@gov.bc.ca)

**Clicking "next" indicates your agreement to participate in the survey. You will now be taken to a separate page.**

By clicking here, you agree to take part in this study.	No Thanks
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**StrongStart BC – Early Learning Program Review  
COMMUNITY CHILDREN’S SERVICE PROVIDER SURVEY**

This survey is for community children’s service providers and will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.  
**We thank you for your participation.**

1. What type of agency do you work for:
  - Family Resource Program / Centre
  - Aboriginal Program
  - Military Family Resource Centre
  - Multi-Service Agency
  - Neighbourhood House
  - Parent/Family Literacy Centre
  - Early Years Centre
  - Child Care Resource and Referral program
  - Library
  - Other – Please explain.
  
2. How many of these programs does your agency operate?
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4+
  
3. What is the postal code of your place of employment? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is your position?
  - Board member
  - Administrator
  - Program staff
  - Supervisor
  
5. Where is your program located? (Please select all that apply)
  - In a school
  - In a public building in the community i.e. a library, community centre, etc.
  - A stand-alone location in the community
  - A mobile unit
  - As part of a multi-service agency
  - Other – Please explain.
  
6. Are you co-located with a StrongStart BC program?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Other – Please explain.



7. What services does your agency provide? (Please select all that apply)
- Resources for service providers
  - Parent resources / support (e.g. parenting classes, counselling)
  - Playgroups / parent-child drop-in programs
  - Early identification and referrals (e.g. Supported Child Development/Infant Development Programs)
  - Other – Please explain.
8. Is there a StrongStart BC program in your community?
- Yes
  - No
  - Don't know
9. Are you aware if families who use your program also attend the StrongStart BC program, and if so, how often?
- Frequently
  - Sometimes
  - Rarely
  - Don't know
10. If you serve the same families as the StrongStart BC program, do your services overlap or are they complementary?
- Complementary, families have more alternatives
  - Overlap, service hours sometimes overlap
  - Overlap, programming and services sometimes overlap
  - Overlap, but programs meet different needs of families. Please describe \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other – Please explain.
  - Don't know
11. Have you made any changes to your services as a result of StrongStart BC? (Please select all that apply)
- Changed service hours
  - Changed program activities or focus to meet different needs
  - Connected with families not attending StrongStart BC or focused our outreach to isolated families.
  - Collaboration – attend StrongStart BC to promote services
  - Reduced services
  - Expanded services
  - No change
  - Don't know
  - Other – Please explain.
12. Does your agency collaborate with StrongStart BC in any way? (Please select all that apply)
- As part of community early years planning tables (e.g. Success By 6 / Children First)
  - Plan together and provide joint activities
  - As part of Kindergarten transition activities (e.g. Ready, Set, Learn or Welcome to Kindergarten)
  - Shared professional development and training.
  - Attend StrongStart BC to promote services
  - Deliver our programs at the StrongStart BC site (early identification, intervention, language learners)
  - Share staff
  - Share space
  - Our agency operates the StrongStart BC program
  - Other – Please explain.



# StrongStart BC

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13. In addition to the services offered by your agency, what other early childhood programs/services might you refer families to? (Please select all that apply)

- Family Resource Program
- Child care
- BC Early Years Centre
- Early Intervention (Infant Development Program/Supported Child Development)
- Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (e.g. HeadStart, other)
- Speech & Language Therapist
- Health Programs (e.g. Dental, Hearing, Vaccinations, Food bank)
- Recreation
- Library
- SUCCESS (newcomer families)
- Other – Please explain.

14. Would you agree that the StrongStart BC program... (Please select all that apply)

- Provides a needed resource for families
- Supports children's early development and helps to make the transition to Kindergarten easier
- Enhances the work of other programs
- Has raised community awareness of the importance of the early years
- Other – Please explain.

15. Do you have any concerns regarding the StrongStart BC program? (Please select all that apply)

- Can have an impact other community programs
- Sometimes confusing to families to have multiple agencies providing similar services
- Inadequate collaboration with other community programs
- Takes needed resources from other programs
- Overly subscribed
- Other – Please explain.
- Have no concerns
- Don't know

16. If the StrongStart BC program could be enhanced or changed what would you recommend? (Please select all that apply)

- Offered on different days/times (e.g. Saturday, Sunday, evenings, afternoons)
- Longer hours
- More parent focused activities
- More parent education
- More collaboration with the school
- A broader range of children's activities
- More activities designed for children with learning support needs / exceptionalities
- More collaboration with other early years services
- The StrongStart BC program is fine as it is
- Our community would benefit from more StrongStart BC programs
- Don't know
- Other – Please explain.



17. In general, how well do you feel families with young children are served in your community?

- There is a wide range of activities and supports available
- A selection of services are available
- Need to do better
- Don't know

Please provide your name and email address only if you would like a researcher to contact you for a follow up interview.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

----- END OF SURVEY -----

## Administrator Survey — English

### Evaluation of the StrongStart BC program

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Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
University of Toronto

Revised April 25 2016



**StrongStart BC – Early Learning Program Review  
ADMINISTRATOR/PRINCIPAL SURVEY**

**Terms of Consent**

**Dear ADMINISTRATOR/PRINCIPAL**

Thank you for your interest in participating in this survey.

The Ministry of Education is working with a team of researchers from the University of Toronto to evaluate the effectiveness of the StrongStart BC Early Learning centres based on the program’s goals and policies.

The purpose of this study is to inform the long term planning of StrongStart BC, to investigate the program’s impact on the development of young children and its impact on parents, caregivers, educators, administrators and the community.

All information is collected under the authority of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) Section 26(c). All information collected in this survey will be kept strictly confidential. Participants, children, and schools will not be identified individually. Your answers are only seen by the researchers and are not shared with the StrongStart BC program, the school, or the Ministry of Education.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip questions or stop answering questions at any time. Please do not provide any third-party information (i.e. talk about others) or other information about yourself in any open-field responses. If third-party information is provided it will be removed before the information is stored. You may cancel your survey at any time and your answers will not be saved or submitted. You may withdraw your submitted survey at any time by contacting the researcher named below.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Kerry McCuaig at [strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com](mailto:strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

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Kerry McCuaig  
Early Childhood Policy  
Atkinson Centre, OISE, University of Toronto  
9-234, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto ON M5S 1V6  
Email: [strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com](mailto:strongstartbc.evaluation@gmail.com).

StrongStart BC Early Learning provides rich learning environments designed for early learning development – language, physical, cognitive, social and emotional. The overall learning experience is shared as parents and caregivers attend with their children, and are encouraged to get involved in activities such as telling stories, playing games and serving healthy snacks. Parents/caregivers learn ways to support their children’s learning, get information about community programs and services and make valuable connections with others attending the program - **From StrongStart BC mandate statement**

If you wish to speak to someone not connected to this study please contact: Joanne Murrell, Ministry of Education, at [Joanne.Murrell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Joanne.Murrell@gov.bc.ca)

By clicking here, you agree to take part in this study.	No Thanks
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**StrongStart BC – Early Learning Program Review  
ADMINISTRATOR/PRINCIPAL SURVEY**

- What best describes your role?
  - I am a principal with a StrongStart BC program in my school.
  - I am a principal without a StrongStart BC program in my school.
- I am a principal with district level responsibilities for early years programming.
  - I am a district lead for early years programming.

**Survey 1 - for administrators without a StrongStart BC program in their school**

This survey is for administrators/principals without the StrongStart BC program in their school. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.  
**Thank you for your participation.**

1. What best describes your position:
  - School principal
  - Vice-principal
  - Other – Please explain.
2. What is the postal code of your school? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Is your school linked to a StrongStart BC program located in a nearby school or in the community?
  - No
  - Yes, in a nearby school
  - Yes, in the community
  - Yes, by a StrongStart BC outreach program
4. Do you or the school's staff participate with the StrongStart BC program in anyway?
  - As part of a community table (For example: Early Years Centre/Success By 6/Children First)
  - Developing joint activities
  - As part of Kindergarten transition activities (For example: Ready, Set, Learn/Welcome to Kindergarten)
  - Other – Please explain.
5. Are the children entering your school ready to participate in the Kindergarten program?
  - Yes, most are
  - No, most are not
  - Somewhat
  - No comment
6. How often do children enroll in Kindergarten at your school and struggle to participate due to developmental or behavioural challenges?
  - Frequently
  - Sometimes
  - Rarely





7. Do you consider it important for School Districts to ensure children have access to preschool, child care, or other early years programs before Kindergarten entry?
- Yes  
 No  
 Don't know
8. In your opinion, would the children and families in your community benefit from a StrongStart BC program in your school?
- Yes  
 No  
 Don't know
9. If "no", why not?
- Other early years programs in the community fill this need  
 Community programs are better able to meet the needs of preschool aged children and their families  
 There are not enough resources/space in the school to accommodate additional programming  
 Other – Please explain.
10. Would you describe your school's relationship with community agencies serving young children and families as:  
(For example: child care, libraries, playgroups, recreation, early childhood support and/or parent information programs, etc.)
- Very connected  
 Somewhat connected  
 Infrequent connections  
 We do not have these programs in our community
11. Do other early years programs operate in your school? (i.e. child care, playgroups, recreation, early childhood support and/or parent information programs, etc.)
- Yes, they offer ongoing programs i.e child care  
 They offer regular programming i.e. weekly, bi-weekly  
 Occasionally upon request  
 Rarely  
 We do not have these programs in our community
12. What other early childhood programs/services might you refer families to? (Please select all that apply)
- StrongStart BC  
 SUCCESS (newcomer families)  
 Parenting information resources  
 Child care  
 Preschool information  
 Early Years Centre  
 Early Intervention (Infant Development Program/Supported Child Development)  
 Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (For example: HeadStart)  
 Speech & Language Therapist  
 Health Programs (For example: Dental, Hearing, Vaccinations)  
 Libraries  
 Recreation  
 Other, please explain. \_\_\_\_\_



13. Are you working/collaborating with a BC Early Years Centre in your community?

- Yes
- Not yet
- We do not have a BC Early Years Centre in our Community

14. How well do you feel families with young children are served in your community?

- There is a wide range of activities and supports available
- A selection of services is available
- Need to do much better
- Don't know

***Thank you for your participation.***

Please provide your name and email address only if you would like a researcher to contact you for a follow up interview.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

----- END OF SURVEY -----



**Survey 2 - for administrators with a StrongStart BC program in their school**

This survey is for administrators/principals with the StrongStart BC program in their school and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

**Thank you for your participation.**

1. What best describes your position:  
 School principal  
 Vice-principal  
 Other - Please explain
  
2. What is the postal code of your school? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Is the StrongStart BC program an Outreach Program / a mobile program?  
 Yes  
 No
  
4. How long has your school been associated with the StrongStart BC program? \_\_\_\_\_ years
  
5. In your opinion, does the StrongStart BC program support children to better participate in Kindergarten?  
 Yes  
 No  
 Don't know
  
6. How often do children enroll in Kindergarten at your school and struggle to participate due to developmental or behavioural challenges?  
 Frequently  
 Sometimes  
 Rarely
  
7. Does the StrongStart BC program offer resources or referrals for children who may struggle due to developmental or behavioural challenges?  
 Yes  
 No  
 Don't know
  
8. Does the School District provide additional resources or equipment to support children in the StrongStart BC program who may have special needs or exceptionalities?  
 Yes  
 No
  
9. Do you work collaboratively with an early childhood lead to support program planning for the facilitators of StrongStart BC?  
 Yes  
 No
  
10. Do you consider it important for children to participate in early years programming before Kindergarten entry?  
 Yes  
 No  
 Don't know

# StrongStart BC

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11. Does StrongStart BC provide parents/caregivers with strategies to support their children's development?
- Yes  
 No  
 Don't know
12. What are the top 3 most important skills a child should have when entering Kindergarten?
- Emergent literacy (For example: to know how to follow a story, recognize letters, basic words and colours)  
 Ability to get along with peers and teachers  
 Age appropriate ability to self-regulate  
 Independence – dress themselves, take care of their belongings  
 Communicate effectively  
 Emergent numeracy (For example: count to 20)  
 Other – Please explain.
13. In your opinion does participation in a StrongStart BC program help children develop the skills indicated above?
- Yes  
 No  
 Don't know
14. How do families with young children in your community find out about StrongStart BC? (Please select all that apply)
- Flyers/brochures  
 School district website  
 School website  
 PAC  
 School newsletter  
 Door knocking  
 Media  
 Referrals from other community agencies, home visitors, family physicians/health providers  
 At Kindergarten registration  
 Social media (Facebook, etc.)  
 Word of mouth
15. Is there a maximum capacity for the StrongStart BC centre?
- Yes  
 No
16. Please, provide the number of parents/ caregivers and children able to participate at any one time. \_\_\_\_\_
17. How often is the centre at capacity?
- More than once a week  
 Weekly  
 Occasionally  
 Rarely
18. How often does the program turn away families because the centre is over capacity?
- More than once a week  
 Weekly  
 Occasionally  
 Rarely  
 Don't know



19. How do you and/or the school's staff participate with StrongStart BC? (Please select all that apply.)
- In collaboration with the contracted agency that operates StrongStart BC
  - In collaboration with the school district early learning lead
  - On management committees
  - Direct oversight/supervision of the program
  - Joint planning
  - Including StrongStart BC in school events
  - Support for the StrongStart BC from the PAC
  - Developing joint activities, special events, field trips, etc.
  - As part of Kindergarten transition activities
  - Other – Please explain
20. How does your school include StrongStart BC in its daily operations? (Please select all that apply.)
- StrongStart BC is included in all school special events
  - StrongStart BC has a regularly scheduled library time with book exchange
  - StrongStart BC has regularly scheduled gym time
  - Older buddies from the school participate in the StrongStart BC program
  - StrongStart BC staff are welcomed to the staffroom and are considered part of the school team
  - StrongStart BC staff have access to equipment, materials and resources
  - StrongStart BC staff are consulted in the decision-making processes within the school
21. Have you made changes to school operations because of StrongStart BC? (Please select all that apply.)
- No
  - Reorganized playground, gym, school library or other schedules to accommodate StrongStart BC activities
  - Scheduled or designed school meetings to accommodate StrongStart BC staff
  - Expanded the parent council to include parents who participate in StrongStart BC
  - Made discretionary funding available for StrongStart BC activities
  - Other – Please explain
22. Does the Provincial StrongStart BC program adequately meets its mandate to ensure positive transitions to Kindergarten for children?
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat
  - Don't know
23. Do you agree that School Board Office / District staff are aware and supportive of StrongStart BC?
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Don't know
24. In your opinion, has the presence of a StrongStart BC program enhanced parent/community connections with the school?
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Don't know





25. Would you describe your school's relationship with community agencies serving young children and families as: (i.e. child care, playgroups, recreation programs, programs offering early childhood supports or parent information etc.)
- Very connected
  - Somewhat connected
  - Infrequent connections
  - We do not have these programs in our community
  - Don't know
26. Do other early years agencies use the StrongStart BC space when the program is not in session?
- Yes
  - No
27. Do other early years agencies operate in your school? (i.e. child care, playgroups, community recreation programs, or other agencies offering early childhood supports or parent information etc.)
- Yes, they offer ongoing programs i.e child care
  - They offer regular programming i.e. weekly, bi-weekly
  - Occasionally upon request
  - Rarely
  - We do not have these programs in our community
28. What early childhood programs/services might you refer families to? (Please select all that apply)
- SUCCESS (newcomer families)
  - Parenting information resources
  - Child care
  - Preschool information
  - Early Years Centre
  - Early Intervention (Infant Development Program/Supported Child Development)
  - Aboriginal Early Childhood Development i.e. HeadStart
  - Speech & Language Therapist
  - Health Programs i.e Dental, Hearing, Vaccinations
  - Libraries
  - Recreation
  - Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_
29. Are you working/collaborating with the local BC Early Years Centre in your community?
- Yes
  - Not yet
  - We do not have a BC Early Years Centre in our community
30. Are StrongStart BC staff employed by the School District?
- Yes
  - No

# StrongStart BC

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31. If the StrongStart BC program could be enhanced or changed, what would you recommend? (Please select all that apply.)

- Offered on different days/times (e.g. Saturday, Sunday, evenings, afternoons)
- Longer hours
- More parent focused activities
- More parent education
- More joint school community activities
- More collaboration with the school
- A broader range of children's activities
- More activities designed for children with learning support needs / exceptionalities
- More collaboration with other early years services
- The StrongStart BC program is fine as it is
- Our community would benefit from more StrongStart BC programs
- Operate preschool / 4-year old program in StrongStart BC when program is not in session
- Program is fine as it is
- Don't know
- Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

32. What are the main benefits StrongStart BC provides to you as a school administrator? (Please select all that apply.)

- Enhanced child/parent comfort with the school
- Smoother transitions for children into Kindergarten
- Enhanced community connections
- Supports the integration of new Canadians into the community and school
- Provides opportunities for early intervention / identification
- Enables parents / caregivers to connect with others
- Brings more vulnerable and/or hard-to-reach families into the school earlier
- Aboriginal children and families feel more welcomed and connected to the school
- Schools are better prepared for children entering Kindergarten
- Other – Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

33. What are the main challenges you face with the StrongStart BC program? (Please select all that apply.)

- Pressures on space
- Disruptions to other school activities
- Security concerns
- Parking
- Washrooms
- Increased administrative workload
- Lack of support from School District / District staff
- Pressure on financial resources
- Pressure on other school staff
- StrongStart BC is disconnected from school activities and staff
- Other – Please explain.

34. How well do you feel families with young children are served in your community?

- There is a wide range of activities and supports
- A selection of services are available
- Need to do better
- Don't know

# StrongStart BC

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***Thank you for your participation.***

Please provide your name and email address only if you would like a researcher to contact you for a follow up interview.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

----- END OF SURVEY -----



**Survey 3 - For early years administrators with district level responsibilities for early years programming**

This survey is for **administrators with district level responsibilities for early years programming**. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.  
**We thank you for your participation.**

1. What best describes your position: (Please select all that apply)
  - School principal/Vice-principal with district responsibilities for early learning programming
  - District staff with lead responsibility for early learning programming (Early learning is the main focus of your work)
  - District staff with early learning programming as part of your responsibilities
  - Other – Please explain.
  
2. What is the postal code of your place of employment? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How many schools in your district have a StrongStart BC program on site or linked to the school? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What percentage of schools has a StrongStart BC program on site or linked to the school?
  - 10% or fewer
  - 11 to 25 %
  - 26 – 50 %
  - 51 – 75%
  - More than 76%
  
5. How do you participate with the StrongStart BC program?
  - As part of community early years planning tables i.e. Success By 6/Children First/Early Years Centres
  - Developing/participating in professional development for early years staff/StrongStart facilitators
  - Ensuring StrongStart is linked to other early learning activities: i.e. Ready, Set, Learn or Welcome to Kindergarten
  - Other – Please explain
  
6. In your opinion, does the StrongStart BC program support children to better participate in Kindergarten?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Don't know
  
7. How often do children in your district enroll in Kindergarten and struggle to participate due to developmental or behavioural challenges?
  - Frequently
  - Sometimes
  - Rarely
  
8. Do you consider it important for School Districts to ensure children have access to early years programs, before Kindergarten entry?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Don't know



9. In your opinion, do the children and families in your community benefit from StrongStart BC programs?
- Yes
  - No
  - Don't know
10. If "no", why not?
- Other early years programs in the community fill this need
  - Community programs are better able to meet the needs of preschool aged children and their families
  - There are not enough resources/space in the school to accommodate additional programming
  - Other – Please explain.
11. Would you describe the relationships of your district schools with community agencies serving young children and families as: (i.e. child care, libraries, playgroups, recreation, early childhood support and/or parent information programs, etc.)
- Very connected
  - Somewhat connected
  - Infrequent connections
  - We do not have these programs in our community
12. Do other early years agencies operate in your districts schools? (i.e. child care, playgroups, recreation, early childhood support and/or parent information programs, etc.)
- Yes, they offer ongoing programs i.e child care
  - They offer regular programming i.e. weekly, bi-weekly
  - Occasionally upon request
  - Rarely
  - We do not have these programs in our community
13. What other early childhood programs/services might families be referred to? (Please select all that apply)
- SUCCESS (newcomer families)
  - Parenting information resources
  - Child care
  - Preschool information
  - Early Years Centre
  - Early Intervention (Infant Development Program/Supported Child Development)
  - Aboriginal Early Childhood Development i.e. HeadStart
  - Speech & Language Therapist
  - Health Programs i.e. Dental, Hearing, Vaccinations
  - Libraries
  - Recreation
  - Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_
14. Are you working/collaborating with the BC Early Years Centre in your community?
- Yes
  - Not yet
  - We do not have a BC Early Years Centre in our community





15. How well do you feel families with young children are served in your community?

- There is a wide range of activities and supports
- A selection of services is available
- Need to do much better
- Don't know

*Thank you for your participation.*

Please provide your name and email address only if you would like to have a researcher contact you for a follow up interview.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

----- END OF SURVEY -----



**StrongStart BC – Early Learning Program Review  
Key Informant / Focus Group Questions**

Thank you for your interest in participating in this interview/focus group.

The Ministry of Education is working with a team of researchers from the University of Toronto to evaluate the effectiveness of the StrongStart BC Early Learning centres based on the program’s goals and policies.

The study will support the long term planning of StrongStart BC by investigating the program’s impact on young children’s development and its impact on parents, caregivers, educators, administrators and the community.

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Your participation is completely voluntary. You may skip questions or stop answering questions at any time. You may cancel your participation at any time and your answers will not be saved or submitted. You may withdraw your participation at any time by contacting the researcher named below.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Kerry McCuaig at [kerry.mccuaig@utoronto.ca](mailto:kerry.mccuaig@utoronto.ca).

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Kerry McCuaig  
Early Childhood Policy  
Atkinson Centre, OISE, University of Toronto  
9-234, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto ON M5S 1V6  
Email: [kerry.mccuaig@utoronto.ca](mailto:kerry.mccuaig@utoronto.ca)  
Phone: 647 295 2808

StrongStart BC Early Learning provides rich learning environments designed for early learning development – language, physical, cognitive, social and emotional. The overall learning experience is shared as parents and caregivers attend with their children, and are encouraged to get involved in activities such as telling stories, playing games and serving healthy snacks. Parents/caregivers learn ways to support their children’s learning, get information about community programs and services and make valuable connections with others attending the program - From StrongStart BC mandate statement

If you wish to speak to someone not connected to this study please contact: Joanne Murrell, Ministry of Education at [Joanne.Murrell@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Joanne.Murrell@gov.bc.ca)

**Your signature indicates that you understand the terms of this study and have agreed to participate.**

**Name: Please print:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

### Parent/caregiver questions

1. How did you hear about the StrongStart BC program?
2. How frequently do you attend with your child? Would you like to attend more often?
3. What makes it possible for you to attend? What keeps you from attending?
4. What are your child's favourite activities?
5. Please describe any changes you have seen in your child— socially, emotionally, language-related, physically or others.
6. What is the most important skill your child has learned?
7. Has attending the program benefited you as a parent? How?
8. Has your view of the school changed as a result of participating in StrongStart BC? If so, how?
9. What is working well in the program?
10. What suggestions do you have to improve the program?
11. Do you and your family feel welcomed in the program?
12. Do you see your culture/language reflected in the program?

### Administrators – Principals, Early Years Leaders

1. How long have you been principal at the school?
2. How long has the StrongStart BC program been in your school?
3. Has the presence of a StrongStart BC program in the school changed parent/community perceptions of the school? If so, how?
4. Do you have an estimate of the percentage of children entering your school's Kindergarten that have attended the StrongStart BC program?
5. Are the families attending the StrongStart BC program reflective of the families in the school's catchment/community?
6. Has the children's transition to Kindergarten benefited from participation in the program? How?
7. Please describe any changes you have seen in children's development as a result of attending StrongStart BC — socially, emotionally, language-related, physically or others.
8. Are the StrongStart BC staff part of the school community? How? (Do they attend staff meetings, use the staff room, have access to space, resources, and equipment?)
9. When StrongStart BC opened in your school were you provided with resources/training to support the program?
10. What do you find challenging about managing the program?
11. If the program could be enhanced, what would you recommend?
12. What advice would you give to principals who are new to StrongStart BC?

### StrongStart BC Facilitators

1. Could you describe your early childhood training and experience?
2. How long have worked in a StrongStart BC program?
3. Is this the first StrongStart BC program you have worked in? How many others?
4. What attracted you to StrongStart BC?
5. Do you have other paid employment outside of your work for StrongStart BC? How many hours per week do you work at your other job(s)?
6. Are you a school board employee? If not, who is your employer?
7. Has working in a school board affected your professional status as an ECE?
8. Do you feel part of your school's staff team? Why? Why not?

9. Are there opportunities for you to meet with Kindergarten or primary school teachers? For example, for program planning, to discuss children's development or transitions, etc.?
10. Do you have an estimate of the percentage of children entering Kindergarten at your school who have attended the StrongStart BC program?
11. Are the families attending the StrongStart BC program reflective of the families in the school's catchment/community?
12. In your opinion, what benefits does the program provide for the children? For the families?
13. Has children's transition to Kindergarten benefited from participation in the program?
14. Has the presence of a StrongStart BC program in the school changed parents' perceptions of the school? If so, how?
15. What is the greatest challenge of the program?
16. What is the greatest strength of the program?
17. If the program could be enhanced, what would you recommend?
18. What impacts your ability to coach parents and model/demonstrate strategies?
19. How do you promote the program? Flyers, brochures, door knocking, social media, etc
20. What beliefs, values and ideas about learning are you working with in your program?

### Kindergarten/Primary School Teachers

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. How long have you been a Kindergarten/primary grade teacher?
3. Do you have an estimate of the percentage of children entering Kindergarten at your school who have attended the StrongStart BC program?
4. Has children's transition to Kindergarten benefited from participation in the program?
5. Please describe any changes you have seen in children's development as a result of attending StrongStart BC — socially, emotionally, language-related, physically or others.
6. Has the presence of the StrongStart BC program school changed parents' perceptions of the school? If so, how?
7. Are there opportunities for you to meet with the StrongStart BC educators for program planning, to discuss children's development or transitions, etc.
8. What is the greatest challenge of the program?
9. What is the greatest strength of the program?
10. If the program could be enhanced, what would you recommend?

### Community Partners

1. What is your position?
2. What services does your agency provide to the community?
3. How does your agency intersect with StrongStart BC?
4. What kinds of collaborative activities take place between your agency and the StrongStart BC program that help build or strengthen the relationship?
5. Do you serve the same families? How?
6. Have you made any changes to your service provision as a result of StrongStart BC?
7. In your opinion does StrongStart BC provide a necessary service for families in your community?
8. What is the greatest challenge of the program?
9. What is the greatest strength of the program?
10. If the program could be enhanced or changed what would you recommend?
11. What might the benefits be of a closer collaboration between early childhood service providers in your community?