



SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 73
(Kamloops-Thompson)

2025-2026 Early Learning and Child Care Annual Report

School District No. 73 (Kamloops-Thompson)

May 2026

Secwepemcúl'ecw yi7élye ell, re tmicws re Secwepemc n7élye.

School District No. 73 (Kamloops-Thompson) acknowledges that we reside in Secwepemcúl'ecw and recognizes the Secwépemc as the keepers of their traditions and knowledge.

We are grateful to be guests on the territory of seven Secwépemc First Nations: Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, Sexqeltqin (Adams Lake Indian Band), Skwílāx te Secwepemcúl' ucw, Neskonlith, Simpcw, Pellt'iq't (Whispering Pines Clinton Band), and Skítsesten (Skeetchestn Band).



Our Mission: Supporting learning opportunities and environments which inspire students to thrive.

Our Vision: Fostering educated and resilient citizens empowered to contribute to a diverse, inclusive, caring, and sustainable society.

Our Values: Connections / Relationships, Equity, Well-being, Sustainability

SUMMARY

Building Strong Foundations for Learning, Belonging, and Well-Being

The 2025–2026 school year was marked by deepening impact, strengthened systems, and purposeful growth within the Early Learning portfolio in School District No. 73 (Kamloops–Thompson). One notable example is the implementation and use of the Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (CHEQ). Developed by the Human Early Learning Partnership at the University of British Columbia, the CHEQ is an online survey completed by parents and guardians that gathers information about children's experiences prior to entering Kindergarten. The survey provides valuable insights that support educators, school districts, and communities in understanding early childhood experiences and planning targeted supports for students.

The use of the CHEQ has strengthened system-level engagement with families by amplifying the voices of parents and caregivers. By positioning parents as experts on their children, the survey offers a holistic snapshot of each child prior to entering the K–12 system. This early insight supports a more informed and intentional transition into public education, allowing schools to better understand the strengths, experiences, and needs of incoming learners.

School teams across the district have demonstrated thoughtful use of CHEQ data as a decision-making tool to inform curriculum planning, guide inclusive education supports, and strengthen social-emotional learning scaffolds. This growing use of evidence reflects the district's commitment to responsive planning and ensuring that every child's early learning journey is supported from the outset.

Guided by the belief that early learning is foundational to lifelong success, the Early Learning portfolio focused on expanding access, enhancing quality, and building coherent, inclusive pathways for children and families from birth to age eight.

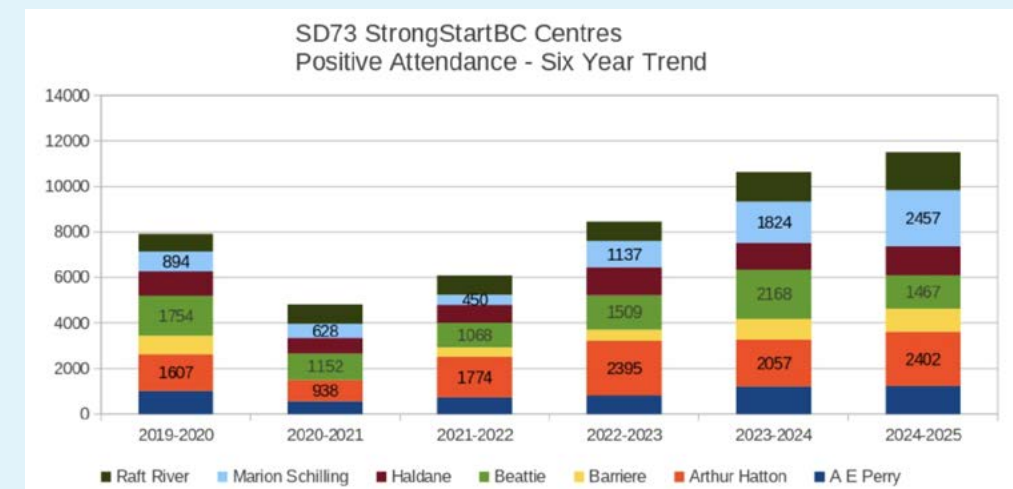
StrongStart BC programming continued to support the development of early learners within School District No. 73 (SD73). These programs are welcoming, inclusive spaces where children explore, play, and develop early literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills alongside their caregivers. Attendance trends reflected sustained community trust and engagement.

As evidenced by the chart below, 2024–2025 continued a trend of attendance growth in SD73 StrongStart centres. Last year's StrongStart attendance was the highest in the last six years and is indicative of the value StrongStart programming provides to early learners and families within the District.

Kindergarten transition continued to be an area of growth and success this year. Families received clear and consistent messaging through several initiatives, guided by the Early Learning Framework (ELF) and its focus on collaboration, family engagement, and continuity across early years settings. The Kindergarten Information Night Webinar on January 28, 2026, hosted by the Early Learning team with Inclusive Education and Indigenous Education, reached 153 families and provided practical information about curriculum, routines, and available supports.

At the *It Takes A Village* community partnership event, 101 families connected directly with services through 16 community tables and 28 staff representatives, leaving with resources, new contacts, and even one on-site vaccination.

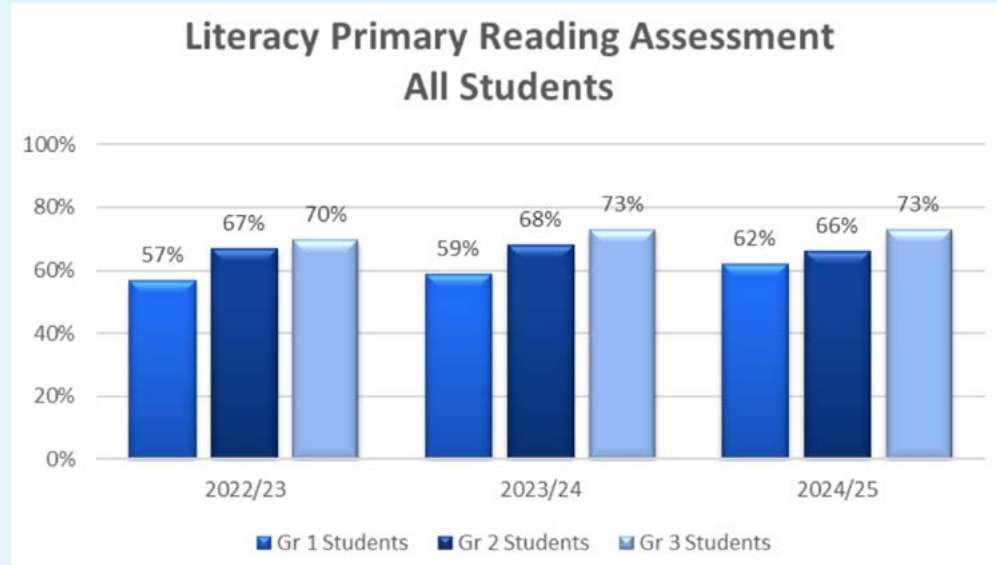
Across all elementary schools, Strong, Prepared and Ready for Kindergarten (SPARK) planning ensured that each school had a welcoming plan for incoming Kindergarten students. These sessions help children start school with confidence, familiar routines, and supportive relationships, which eases the stress of transitioning into Kindergarten for both students and their families.



During the 2025-2026 school year there was continued emphasis in primary students' literacy and numeracy development across SD73, with a focus on combining early learning approaches and evidence-based instruction. One focus area for early learning in both literacy and numeracy is the ongoing use of local learning assessments to inform teachers' instruction of what next

steps are needed to address students' growth areas most effectively.

One example of this is the District's Primary Reading Assessment (PRA) which is utilized by teachers in Grades 1 to 3. The PRA provides teachers with the opportunity to observe how students read words in



connected text, as well as assessing students' accuracy, retelling ability, and reading comprehension. Teachers use this information to provide immediate, actionable, and targeted instruction.

by 5% in three years. Reading performance for Grade 2 students has not seen the same growth year over year which signals the need to examine current Grade 2 reading instruction further. When examining student cohorts, there is consistent growth from Grade 1 to Grade 3. The same cohort of students who were reading proficiently or greater during their Grade 1 year in 2022-2023 increased 16% in their Grade 3 year (57% to 73%).

As presented in the charts above, the percentage of all Grade 1 students reading at a proficient or extending level continues to increase year over year, having increased

Literacy - Primary Reading Assessment					
Positive Response Rate	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	3 year avg.	3 year +/-
Gr. 1 Students	57%	59%	62%	59%	3%
Gr. 2 Students	67%	68%	66%	67%	-1%
Gr. 3 Students	70%	73%	73%	72%	1%
Gr. 1 Indigenous	40%	42%	40%	41%	-1%
Gr. 2 Indigenous	50%	54%	51%	52%	-1%
Gr. 3 Indigenous	55%	62%	59%	59%	0%
Gr. 1 Diverse Abilities	45%	48%	37%	43%	-6%
Gr. 2 Diverse Abilities	49%	36%	39%	41%	-2%
Gr. 3 Diverse Abilities	41%	54%	40%	45%	-5%
Gr. 1 Non Indigenous Students	62%	63%	67%	64%	3%
Gr. 2 Non Indigenous Students	71%	71%	69%	70%	-1%
Gr. 3 Non Indigenous Students	73%	76%	76%	75%	1%
Gr. 1 Non Diverse Students	59%	60%	64%	61%	3%
Gr. 2 Non Diverse Students	69%	71%	69%	70%	-1%
Gr. 3 Non Diverse Students	73%	76%	78%	76%	2%

When taking a deeper dive into the Primary Reading Assessment (PRA) data, similar trends to other measures of achievement data in SD73 persist. There are significant gaps in the reading proficiency of Indigenous students when compared to students who identify as non-Indigenous. Cohorts of Indigenous students see positive growth as they progress from Grade 1 to Grade 3, however this growth is slower than non-Indigenous students. This gap exists for students with diverse abilities as well. The difference in reading proficiency between students with diverse abilities and students without diverse abilities is greater as evidenced by the 31% gap in the 3 year average for Grade 3 students (45% to 76%).

An universal literacy screen was introduced in 2025-2026 to identify early signs of literacy development and learning needs, ensuring Kindergarten students could get timely, targeted support. Kindergarten teachers built oral language, phonological awareness, and vocabulary into play, daily routines, and inquiry-based learning, while using screening results to guide teaching and early intervention. This universal literacy screen will be expanded to include students in Grades 1 to 3 in 2026-2027.

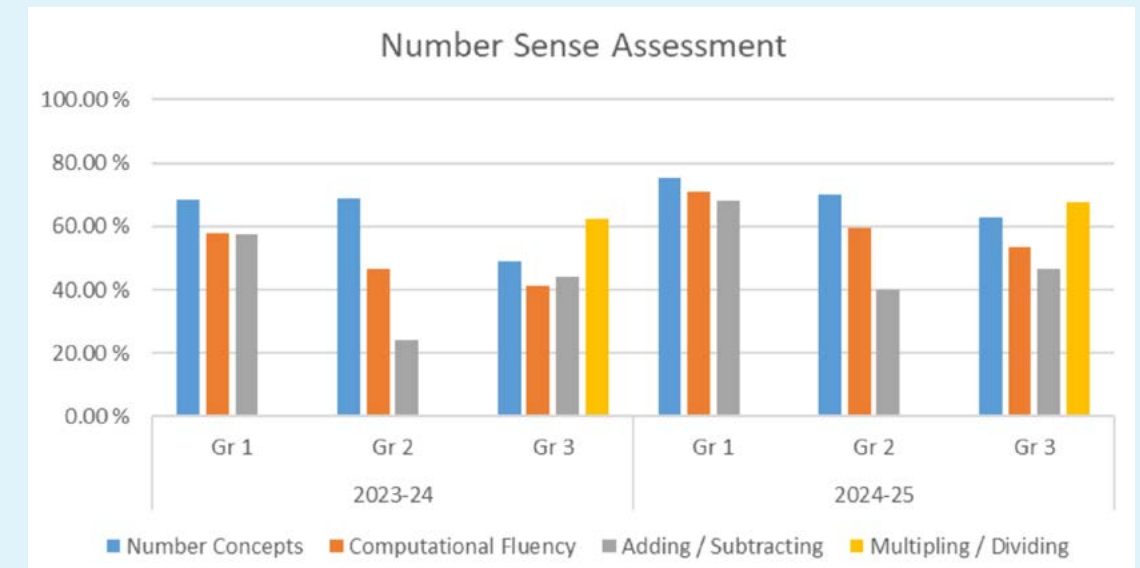
In numeracy, teachers used the District's Number Sense Assessment (NSA) with students in Grades 1 to 3 to guide teaching, support targeted intervention, and strengthen students' skills in number sense and operations. The assessment serves as a guidepost for number sense and computational grade level skills for the entire year. This purposeful focus on using the NSA supports the Strategic

Plan's focus on numeracy, allowing educators to meet individual student needs while building strong foundations alongside literacy and social-emotional development.

As shown in the chart below, students in Grades 1 to 3 demonstrate consistent strength in number concepts, indicating a solid foundation in understanding quantity and relationships. Greater variability is observed in students' adding and subtracting fluency particularly in Grades 2 and 3. Improvement from 2023-2024 to 2024-2025 is evident across most strands. These results suggest a need to strengthen connections between conceptual understanding and operational strategies, with a continued focus on adding and subtracting fluency.

Equity and inclusion were at the heart of all early learning work. We focused on supporting children with different learning needs, including those with suspected or undiagnosed developmental differences, by observing, adapting activities, and creating learning plans that fit each child. Working closely with community agencies, health professionals, and inclusion support teams helped us identify needs early, solve challenges together, and plan care that supports each child.

The top priority for growth is supporting student learning and development. Providing focused professional learning for educators and using data more effectively will help meet the needs of all learners.



EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

YEAR IN REVIEW

Department Mandate

The Early Learning and Child Care portfolio supports children from birth to age eight through programs and services that help them learn, grow, and feel included. By focusing on smooth transitions, a sense of belonging, and overall well-being, these programs give kids the strong start they need to leave Grade 3 as literate, numerate, and socially responsible learners. Working closely with families and across early learning opportunities, the portfolio makes sure every child has the support, relationships, and experiences they need to thrive.

Key Programs

StrongStart BC

7 play-based early learning programs supporting children and caregivers through relationship-based learning, early literacy, social-emotional development, and community connection.

Just B4 Preschool Programs

5 district-operated preschools provide play-based learning environments that strengthen early development, self-regulation, and readiness for Kindergarten.

School-Age Care on School Grounds

16 elementary schools have child care spaces for school age children. Twelve of these spaces are operated by a third-party provider and the remaining four are operated by SD73.



Strong, Prepared, and Ready for Kindergarten (S.P.A.R.K.)

District-wide transition events offer families hands-on learning experiences, resources, and connections that build confidence and support a smooth transition into Kindergarten.

Kindergarten Transition Expo: *It Takes a Village*

A collaborative community event connecting families with early learning, health, child care, and support services prior to school entry, reinforcing shared responsibility for early transitions.

TRU Nursing Student Projects: Health and Family Well-Being

A partnership with Thompson Rivers University Nursing students bringing health promotion and family well-being initiatives into StrongStart BC and preschool programs, with a focus on early prevention, nutrition, hygiene, and developmental awareness.

Moving Forward

In the year ahead, the Early Learning and Childcare portfolio will continue to align programs across family programming, preschool, and Kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms, supporting children's growth in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills. The District will continue to focus on strengthening

partnerships, deepening inclusive and trauma-informed practices, and using data to guide instructional and program decisions. CHEQ and EDI findings will continue to inform early prevention and well-being efforts, while maintaining high-quality, child-centred programming.





SUCCESS STORY

Kindergarten on the Loose with Mother Goose: Supporting Neurodiverse Families Through Partnership

Kindergarten on the Loose with Mother Goose continued to grow as a meaningful transition initiative supporting children with neurodiversity and their families across SD73. Delivered in partnership with Canucks Autism Network (CAN), the program offered inclusive, play-based experiences tailored to children who benefit from predictable routines, sensory-aware environments, and relationship-centred learning.

Sessions were intentionally designed to reduce barriers for families with children who have neurodiversity. Visual schedules, flexible pacing, and sensory-considerate spaces helped children feel safe and successful, while familiar songs, rhymes, and movement activities from the Mother Goose framework supported early language development and social connection. Families were encouraged to participate alongside their children, fostering relationships and confidence as they prepared for Kindergarten. One parent reflected, *“My child loved learning through music. That was really important to us.”*

A key strength of the initiative was the collaboration between YMCA early learning educators and CAN staff. Together, they shared expertise in neurodiversity-affirming practices, inclusive transitions, and family engagement, ensuring programming was responsive to individual needs while aligned with district transition goals.

Family feedback consistently emphasized the importance of belonging and connection. As one parent shared, *“It really felt like being part of a community. It was special to be around other neurodiverse families in such a safe, welcoming environment. I loved the feeling of an inclusive community.”*

Kindergarten on the Loose with Mother Goose provided a gentle, affirming introduction to the school system, reflecting SD73's commitment to inclusion, flexibility, and belonging for all learners from the very start.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Circle of Security at StrongStart: Building Relationships That Support Well-Being

Circle of Security programming continued for a second year within three StrongStart BC settings through a collaborative partnership with an SD73 Mental Health Clinician, strengthening support for caregivers and children's social-emotional well-being. The initiative focused on building caregiver capacity to better understand children's emotional needs and respond with confidence, empathy, and consistency.

Sessions were embedded within the StrongStart environment, allowing caregivers to participate while remaining connected to their children and the play-based learning context. The Circle of Security framework provided accessible, strengths-based language to help caregivers reflect on attachment, emotional regulation, and the importance of secure relationships in early development.

The partnership with district mental health services enhanced the impact of the program by bringing professional expertise into a welcoming, community-based setting. Educators also deepened their understanding of relational practice, trauma-informed approaches, and responsive interactions with families.

Parent feedback highlighted the significant impact of the program. One caregiver shared, *"This was one of the best experiences I've had with a group. I loved it so much and would do it again in a heartbeat."* Another noted that the sessions were *"very eye-opening and helpful in day-to-day life trying to navigate my child's feelings while also recognizing my own feelings."*

Families also described the program as transformative. One parent wrote, *"I cannot begin to explain how beneficial this group was. It gave me the knowledge and understanding I needed to support my parenting—10/10 would recommend."*

Circle of Security programming continues to reinforce StrongStart's role as a hub for early support and prevention, strengthening relationships between caregivers and children while supporting family well-being in the early years.



PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHT

Healthy Start in one of our Rural Communities: TRU Nursing Students Supporting Early Years

The Healthy Start program expanded its reach this year through a collaborative partnership with Thompson Rivers University (TRU) nursing students, providing valuable health and wellness support to rural StrongStart and preschool programs in Barriere. This initiative improved access to early health promotion for families facing geographic and service barriers. Our goal would be to continue to advocate for support in our various rural communities annually.

Guided by TRU faculty and the School District, nursing students engaged children and caregivers in developmentally appropriate activities focused on dental health, and overall well-being. The programming was interactive and relationship-based, aligned with the play-based philosophy of StrongStart and preschool environments.

For families, the presence of nursing students created opportunities to ask questions, access information, and build confidence around early health and development. For students, the partnership offered meaningful, hands-on learning experiences rooted in community engagement and prevention-focused care.

This collaboration demonstrated the value of cross-sector partnerships in supporting early learning and health, particularly in rural communities. By bringing Healthy Start programming directly into StrongStart and preschool settings, SD73 continues to strengthen equitable access to high-quality programming.



SUCCESS STORY

Seeing Growth Over Time: Strengthening Early Literacy Through the Universal Screener

The Universal Literacy Screener was implemented in Kindergarten classrooms across the school district during the 2025–2026 school year. In October 2025, as per the Ministry mandate to begin training, School District No. 73 trained all Kindergarten teachers, Learning Assistance Resource Teachers, and Principals/Vice-Principals. The screener was administered with support from the District Early Years Coordinator, building confidence in how the process was carried out. Though we are just getting started, we are eager for it to become a regular part of instruction and discussion in our Kindergarten classrooms.

After each assessment window, Kindergarten staff across the district alongside their school teams began looking at the data together and talking about what they were noticing in student learning. These conversations focused on patterns in early literacy development and next steps for instruction.

One teacher shared, *“Seeing the data gave me a clearer picture of where my students were developing and where they needed more support.”*

Another teacher added, *“The lunchtime conversations were really valuable. We*

could look at the information together and immediately think about what to adjust in our teaching.”

The Universal Literacy Screener and ongoing analysis supported more open professional conversations about literacy practice, including instructional programs, scheduling of literacy blocks, available resources, and areas for further professional learning. These discussions also highlighted variation in confidence with foundational literacy instruction. While not always easy, these conversations helped teams reflect on practice in meaningful ways.

One Kindergarten teacher reflected, *“We are being really intentional about play-based learning and small group instruction. The screener helps us see where to focus, but learning is still happening through hands-on, meaningful experiences.”*

Overall, Kindergarten screening, progress monitoring, shared programming, and ongoing collaboration is strengthening how staff work together around early literacy. For the 2026-2027 school year, all grades 1, 2 and 3 teachers will receive training on Universal Screening.



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