

How Are Alberta's Young Children Doing?

November 2016

FACT sheet

A Lunch and Learn Companion Fact Sheet

The Early Development Instrument measured the development of kindergartners over five years. How are Albertan kids doing?

The EDI

From 2009–2013, the Government of Alberta ran a research study on early childhood development. They used the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a standardized method to measure the development of five-year-old-children. Kindergarten teachers filled out questionnaires about the development of each child in their classrooms in order to report on children's social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development. In total, 86,564 children were included in this process. Not every five-year-old in Alberta was included, however, because kindergarten is not mandatory. Despite this, the sample size is large enough to make it a useful tool for analyzing the development of Albertan children in general. It is important to remember that the EDI is not a diagnostic tool, only a standard.

economic status and the characteristics and resources of the children's communities in order to draw some conclusions as to why children are developing the way they are. This way, we can have actual data on whether poverty, home life, and neighbourhood amenities affect the development of children (they do).

What Does the EDI Study?†

The EDI looks at five areas of development:

Physical health and well-being

- ▶ fine and gross motor skills (e.g. can hold a pen, crayons or brush, able to climb stairs)
- ▶ independence in looking after own needs (e.g. able to go to the washroom independently most of the time)
- ▶ physically prepared for school (e.g. dressed appropriately, well nourished and rested)
- ▶ able to sustain energy levels throughout the school day

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The EDI was developed by the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University. Since its inception in 1998, it has been used to collect data on almost 300,000 children in Canada.

The EDI data is combined with socio-

Social competence

- ▶ plays and gets along with other children
- ▶ able to follow rules and instructions
- ▶ able to follow routines
- ▶ accepts responsibility for actions
- ▶ shows respect for others

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Emotional maturity

- ▶ able to deal with feelings at an age-appropriate level
- ▶ able to separate from parent/guardian
- ▶ not too fearful, not too impulsive
- ▶ able to focus

Language and thinking skills—These relate to early academic skills, including:

- ▶ an interest in reading, writing and language-related activities
- ▶ age-appropriate reading, writing and counting skills
- ▶ recognition of shapes, sizes and colours
- ▶ can easily remember things

Communication skills and general knowledge

—These relate to general communications skills and knowledge, including:

- ▶ ability to communicate needs and wants in socially appropriate ways
- ▶ ability to tell stories
- ▶ can say words clearly
- ▶ age-appropriate knowledge about life and the world
- ▶ ability to take part in imaginative play

Using the EDI²

The EDI uses three categories to assess children:

Developing appropriately: includes scores that reflect most or all of the developmental skills and abilities usually demonstrated by the time children are in kindergarten; scores above the 25th percentile of the Canadian norm.

Experiencing difficulty: includes scores that indicate probable delays in some areas of development; scores between the 10th and 25th percentile of the Canadian norm.

Experiencing great difficulty: includes scores that suggest significant delays in development; scores below the 10th percentile of the Canadian norm.

Results

Only 46.4% of children are developing appropriately in all five areas. 19.0% of children are developing appropriately in four areas; 12.8% in three; 8.7% in two; 6.8% in one; and 6.3% are not developing appropriately in any area. Children with severe disabilities were excluded from the study.

Communication skills and general knowledge is the domain in which most children struggle: more than 31% of children studied fall into the experiencing difficulty or experiencing great difficulty categories.

In general, girls do better than boys. 54.5% of girls and 38.8% of boys are developing appropriately in all five areas. Boys and girls are nearly matched in language and thinking skills.

Each participating community had its socio-economic status (SES) graded according to the socio-economic index (SEI). The children's results were then compared to the SES in order to determine if there was a correlation between SES and development.

“Although most communities are relatively close to the ‘best fit line’, there are several communities that do not conform to the general trend. ... Other factors than the SES are influencing these results.”

Large percentages of children living in communities with low SEI scores have low EDI scores. However, “the largest number of children experiencing difficulties is found in the middle socio-economic level communities,” because most households fall into this socio-economic category.

Interestingly, the resources available in a community did not correlate with early childhood outcomes. There was a significant positive correlation between the SEI (which does have an effect on outcomes) and the availability of resources in a community. Communities with a higher SES have more early childhood resources.

Sources

- 1, 2 Quoted directly from <http://www.ecmap.ca/findings-maps/what-you-need-to-know-first.html>
- http://www.ecmap.ca/images/results/ECMap_Final_Report_20141118.pdf