

Supporting the Kindergarten Educator Team

The Question

“How do I support and reinforce the knowledge, experience, and professional collaboration of the Kindergarten educator team to help deliver the most effective Kindergarten program possible?”

The Answer

There are five key elements to consider:

1. Understand the role of the educator team in creating a successful Kindergarten program
2. Understand the relationship between the members of the educator team
3. Help build a relationship of trust and respect
4. Model effective communication
5. Cultivate a culture of collaboration

1. Understand the role of the educator team in creating a successful Kindergarten program

Educators are the key to children’s growth in learning at school. Educators are competent, capable, curious, and rich in experience. They are knowledgeable, caring, reflective, and resourceful professionals who bring diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives to their understanding of children’s development within the Kindergarten program. Educators support children and families in high-quality play-based learning environments, using varied learning and teaching strategies and assessment approaches to address individual children’s needs and ensure meaningful learning opportunities for every child.

In Kindergarten classrooms that have an educator team, with a teacher and an early childhood educator (ECE), the team members have the benefit of a collaborative and reflective partnership. Educator team members have complementary skills that enable them to create a nurturing and stimulating learning environment that supports the unique needs of each child.



Every educator should feel he or she belongs, is a valuable contributor, and deserves the opportunity to engage in meaningful work.

[*The Kindergarten Program*](#) (2016), p. 10

2. Understand the relationship between the members of the educator team

Teachers and early childhood educators work in partnership to plan and implement the program and to maintain a healthy physical, emotional, and social learning environment. They collaborate in observing, monitoring, and assessing the progress and development of the children in Kindergarten and in communicating with families.

The teacher ensures that the appropriate Kindergarten Communication of Learning templates are fully and properly completed and processed.

While an educator team will reflect the uniqueness of its members, the hallmark of all successful partnerships is an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, and open communication.

3. Help build a relationship of trust and respect

School leaders are an integral part of the Kindergarten team, working in partnership with educators, families, and caregivers to ensure that every child has access to the best possible early learning experiences. School leaders know that trust and respect are essential to effective communication. They play an essential role in helping to build trust and opening up lines of communication to support educator teams in a culture of collaboration (see section 5).

Key strategies that school leaders can use to support trust and respect in their relationships with Kindergarten educators include:

- inviting the educator team(s) to share information about the Kindergarten program with the broader school community to help build an understanding of the importance of Kindergarten and of the team's unique working relationship;
- ensuring that both or all members of the educator team are included in formal and informal discussions, avoiding deference to any one member over another;
- welcoming ECEs to participate in staff meetings and after-school events, while recognizing that there may be no requirement for them to attend;
- expressing a desire to learn more about the nature of a play- and inquiry-based program and an interest in how the educator team is creating the learning environment and program;
- engaging meaningfully with the team, recognizing and supporting their work as the opportunity arises; and
- encouraging and providing opportunities for both or all members of the team to participate in professional collaborative inquiry.

As part of the transformation process, all education professionals will work together to build on Ontario’s solid foundation of achievements through the establishment of trusting relationships that value the voices of all, encourage reflection and support professional growth.

PPM No. 159, “Collaborative Professionalism” (May 31, 2016), p. 2

4. Model effective communication

By modelling effective communication regarding the Kindergarten program, both internally and externally, school leaders can enhance and support relationships among educator team members and between Kindergarten educators and all school staff. Some examples include:

- making reference to both or all educator team members in all internal and external communications about the Kindergarten program;
- ensuring that email messages, memos, and other communications about the Kindergarten program and about the school in general are sent to both or all educator team members;
- identifying both or all members of the educator team in newsletters, staff lists, and room name plates; and
- recognizing and acknowledging the competencies attached to the professional designations of both or all educator team members in communications with all staff and with the broader school community.

5. Cultivate a culture of collaboration

Members of the educator team work with each other, for extended periods of time, in an extremely busy learning environment. School leaders have a unique role in helping educator teams to identify and respond to conflicts as they arise. Effective school leaders proactively foster the necessary conditions to motivate and enable educator teams to learn with, and from, each other in a culture of collaboration. This may include:

- valuing all voices and creating an environment in which all opinions are accepted and regarded as learning opportunities;
- sharing ideas to achieve a common vision of learning, development, and success for all; and
- grounding the school culture in professional practices informed by research, evidence, and knowledge arising from the strengths, needs, and interests of children and education professionals.

References

Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010, S.O. 2010, c. 10.

Ontario Ministry of Education (2016). *The Kindergarten program*. Toronto: Author.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2016, May 31). Policy/program memorandum no. 159: Collaborative professionalism. Toronto: Author.