

RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

How UNICEF Canada, schools and communities are working to transform whole learning environments with a consistent, rights-respecting approach.



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UNICEF CANADA AND RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

UNICEF Canada's Rights Respecting Schools initiative uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a basis for enhancing an inclusive, participatory and respectful school culture for children and adults.

As a framework for educational improvement, the initiative helps schools address the whole learning environment with a consistent, rights-based approach. The initiative is premised on the understanding that for children to want to achieve they have to feel included, that they belong and that they matter. It brings children into early contact with the universal ideals of respect for oneself and for others, in the school community and in an interdependent world.

"The children are involved in the government of the school. The children learn the curriculum of British Columbia, but they do it in a unique way, and it's really quite an extraordinary school."

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond

British Columbia's Representative for Children and Youth, Cape Horn Elementary School, Canada's first Rights Respecting School.

RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS AND STUDENT PARTICIPATION

The Rights Respecting Schools initiative has been shown to facilitate student participation by providing a common set of values across the school. Children's rights, as the guiding principle shared by students, teachers, and school administrators, creates a sense of community in the school. And respect for rights becomes the values framework students use to make decisions, choose behaviour and guide participation.

Becoming a Rights Respecting School, according to the research of Katherine Covell and Brian Howe, researchers at the Children's Rights Centre at Cape Breton University, also provides a number of benefits for both children and teachers.



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"Everyone is happier and everyone gets a say. It's just good to know your rights."

Kenna, Grade 5

Student at Cape Horn Elementary School in Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada's first Rights Respecting School.

WHY CHILDREN'S RIGHTS?

Children's rights are defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as conditions children should have for optimal survival, development and protection.

Canada ratified the Convention in 1991, committing provincial and federal governments to provide for and respect these rights. It outlines children's rights to participate in family, school and community life. Schools are the closest public institutions to the daily lives of children, in which the protection and provision of children's rights shapes their potential.

BECOMING A RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL

- Places the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the heart of the school's culture
- Teaches and incorporates understanding of the responsibilities people have for one another, and that societies have for children
- Gives coherence to daily tasks of teaching curriculum, administering policy, managing programs and dealing with issues, opportunities and challenges
- Provides opportunity for children to voice opinions about their school, to participate in school and classroom decisions, and to contribute to resolving problems

BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

- There is a decline in bullying and less disruption
- Children's approach to resolving conflict with each other and with adults is less adversarial
- Children show greater concern for themselves, each other and children in other parts of the world
- Children are more likely to use higher order thinking
- Children are less likely to be excluded
- Children are more likely to attend school
- Children learn the rights and responsibilities of citizenship

BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS

- Teachers say they feel empowered and many are reminded about why they started teaching
- Teachers have more time to teach, achieve good progress and higher standards for children, and there is less low level disruption
- Classroom and school atmosphere is healthier; teachers enjoy their jobs more

EXPLORING RIGHTS IN THE CLASSROOM

Grade 5 students read UNICEF books to explore what children need to survive and thrive. The students then created posters to post around the school to raise awareness of the universal right to education.



RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS IN QUEBEC

The Rights Respecting Schools initiative promotes a learning environment where all members of the school community are welcomed and respected. This approach directly supports educational policy initiatives in Québec such as the orientations of the Ministère de l'Éducation, Loisir et Sport on the *Complementary Educational Services* and the *Healthy Schools approach*.

From what is taught and learned in the classroom, to how students participate in school life, to administrative and policy decisions, to initiatives addressing diversity, bullying or special needs, Rights Respecting Schools reinforce provincial and territorial efforts to create a learning environment in which both children and adults feel respected and act responsibly. This in turn leads to a more positive, inclusive and peaceful school climate; higher rates of student achievement; lower absenteeism; and higher rates of teacher satisfaction.

Implementing the Rights Respecting Schools initiative provides schools with a holistic and integrated approach to student development.



To learn more about our Rights Respecting Schools initiative or to access useful educational resources, please visit rightsrespectingschools.ca

LINKS WITH THE QUEBEC EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Rights Respecting Schools initiative fits well within existing Quebec education program. Specific references to rights and responsibilities fall within the following curriculum:

- Preschool education
- Ethic and Religious Culture (Cycles 1, 2, 3)
- **Boards Area of Learning:** Health and Well-Being, Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities and Media Literacy

For more information contact:

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