



UNICEF CANADA'S RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

Overview: Across Canada, schools and their communities are working with UNICEF Canada to transform their school environments using an innovative, rights-respecting approach. Ensuring Canadian children are brought up with an understanding of their rights, and how to respect the rights of others, creates more equitable societies with engaged citizens. UNICEF knows that to transform the world we need to reach every child, and Canadian children are no exception.

UNICEF Canada's Rights Respecting Schools (RRS) initiative uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a basis for building an inclusive and respectful school culture. In these schools children's rights are adopted as guiding principles that inform a common set of values shared by all members of the school community. These common values create a sense of community and become the lens through which students, teachers, school administrators and parents make decisions and participate at their school.

Research on more than 1,600 UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools in the United Kingdom demonstrates that students attending Rights Respecting Schools have improved self-esteem and are more engaged in their learning. Students have been shown to become engaged by learning how to voice their opinions, participating in decision-making, resolving conflict peacefully, and understanding global social justice issues. They are also found to have a positive attitude towards diversity, which has led to a reduction in prejudice and bullying.

UNICEF Canada is working more and more in partnership with organizations, school boards and ngos across Canada to deliver the RRS workshops to teachers. Embedding this process at a local level with local partners will ensure the success, sustainability and growth of RRS across Canada.

UNICEF Canada also works with faculties of education across Canada to train and support professors in educating future teachers on rights-respecting teaching practices. As these teachers graduate and begin working in our schools, the rights-respecting approach to education will become a movement, making an incredible difference for children across Canada.

Status update:

Schools:

UNICEF Canada is now working with 15 Rights Respecting Schools across Canada, reaching over 4400 students and more than 350 teachers, administrators and school support staff. Watch our new graphic recording, which demonstrates how easy and rewarding it is to use this initiative as a basis for enhancing and inclusive, participatory and respectful school culture for children and adults:

www.rightsrespectingschools.ca



We have also moved into Francophone schools earlier than originally planned, to address the interest from Quebec and New Brunswick. Our first RRS francophone school is École Coeur Soleil in Québec, and we are collaborating with the Child and Youth Advocates' Office in New Brunswick to work with French schools there in 2013. In Quebec, RRS provides the support schools need to meet the requirements as set out by the new anti-bullying law: Bill 56, including a well developed action plan.

Recognition:

The Rights Respecting Schools Initiative was identified as a Best Practice in education by a Deloitte/Learning for a Sustainable Future joint project. UNICEF Canada staff and the principal at Evansdale Elementary in Edmonton were invited to join in national roundtable discussions on *Preparing Youth for 21st Century Responsible Citizenship*, joining key stakeholders from government, faculties of education, school boards and teachers' federations. It was identified as a Best Practice in Education by the Quebec Advisory Board on English Education and by the Jasmin Roy Foundation in Quebec.

Hélène Moise, our Quebec Global Classroom Manager, was invited to present on the Rights Respecting School Initiative at an international conference on Global Citizenship Education, titled "Educating for Tomorrow" (Forum Éduquer pour demain), in Toulouse, France. Over 1500 education professionals from 40 francophone countries attended.

UNICEF was invited by the British Columbia Teacher Federation to present on Rights Respecting Schools at the BCTF Summer Leadership Conference, with participants from all BC School Districts, at Thompson River University in Kamloops.

Research Partnerships:

We are partnering with [PREVNet](#) over the next four years to measure the implementation and impact of the Rights Respecting Schools Initiative. UNICEF Canada presented at their national conference this spring– *Creating Healthy Relationships to Prevent Bullying: Get the Tools to Take Action*, and they are currently gathering data from our Rights Respecting Schools, and will produce a research report in the spring of 2013.

We partnered with the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM) on a literature review of rights respecting practices, which will be available in French and English in 2013. A UQAM Graduate Student will be assessing RRS at École Coeur Soleil publish her results through her Masters' thesis.

Using our experience in elementary RRS, we partnered with researchers at the University of Ottawa to hold focus groups and conduct research with secondary students this past spring to understand how youth can be involved in planning and implementing whole school change within a rights respecting framework. This truly participatory process will guide our development of the Secondary RRS Initiative.



Delivery Partnerships:

University of Ottawa: We are partnering with faculty at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa to connect B. Ed students from the Global Perspectives Student Cohort with Rights Respecting Schools at the Ottawa Catholic School Board. UNICEF conducted the Rights Respecting Schools Professional Learning and Facilitator Certification (train the trainer course) for faculty members, grad students, school board members and principals, and they are now certified RRS trainer, able to deliver RRS workshops in Ottawa schools. B.Ed. students were also trained on children's rights education and are working one-on-one with school staff to develop their RRS action plans.

New Brunswick Child and Youth Advocate: We are collaborating with the office to deliver RRS to English and French schools in New Brunswick. UNICEF spoke on children's rights and RRS at The Showcase and Sharing Dialogue with the New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network and the Child and Youth Advocate at St. Thomas University this past spring. We delivered the Rights Respecting Schools Professional Learning and Facilitator Certification (train the trainer course) for staff and external school board officials, and are currently working with the office and local trainers in the delivery of the Initiative.

John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights: We are partnering with the [John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights](#) in Edmonton to support our existing RRS and to deliver workshops to new RRS. Their deep knowledge of rights based approaches in the schools and their strong participatory engagement practices with students and teachers will enrich our program and increase our scope.

Funding Partnerships:

The [Jasmin Roy Foundation](#) works in the field of violence prevention by funding projects which promote a culture of respect in schools. They are currently funding a full time position at Westmount Park School in Montreal to support the implementation of RRS. We are exploring further opportunities to fund positions within the school board to support the RRS Train the Trainer model.