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Office of the Premier
Ministry of Children and Family Development
Ministry of Education

Anti-bullying program branches out in B.C. schools

BURNABY - Joined by kindergarten children at Morley elementary school, Premier Christy Clark today announced the expansion in B.C. of the internationally recognized Roots of Empathy anti-bullying program.

"Children deserve to grow up without fear of bullying and as Premier I promised to provide programs to students that teach them core values like respect, kindness and empathy," said Premier Clark. "The Roots of Empathy program delivers on that promise and helps teach young children how to act towards each other. Bullying has no place in our schools and parents deserve to know their children are safe in school. Roots of Empathy will help accomplish that goal."

Premier Christy Clark, joined by Minister of Children and Family Development Mary McNeil, Richmond East MLA Linda Reid and Roots of Empathy founder Mary Gordon, announced the expansion of the Roots program into approximately 360 kindergarten classrooms across B.C. this year. The Seeds of Empathy program, which focuses on teaching four- and five-year-olds, will also be expanded into 22 preschools or child care settings in 2011-12.

The programs will be co-funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Ministry of Education. The two ministries have committed to jointly provide \$800,000 annually to support both of these programs over five years.

"Both of these programs offer an enlightened way of opening children's eyes to the world around them, and teaching young children about empathy, trust, and encouraging kindness with one another," said Mary McNeil, Minister of Children and Family Development. "We hope that children will take these positive values with them as they grow into teenagers and adults - supporting the development of safe, peaceful, and caring communities."

"We know that bullying can have a devastating effect on children and youth," said George Abbott, Minister of Education. "Roots of Empathy teaches kids early on that our own actions and words have real power, and can have a positive - or negative - effect on those around us."

An anti-bullying classroom program for elementary school students, the Roots of Empathy program actively promotes respectful, kind behaviour and addresses aggressive behaviours such as bullying, harassment, violence and intimidation. The program brings together a family with a young infant and volunteers in an elementary classroom 27 times over the school year. Students are coached to observe the baby's development, celebrate milestones, interact with the baby and learn about an infant's needs and unique temperament.

The Roots of Empathy program was founded in Canada in 1996 by Mary Gordon, an internationally recognized educator, social entrepreneur, author and child advocate. Roots of Empathy has grown across the globe, with programs offered in Canada, New Zealand, the United States, the Isle of Man, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

"My deepest gratitude to Premier Clark for reinstating support and funding to the Roots of Empathy program," said Mary Gordon, Roots of Empathy founder and president. "Research tells us that the thousands of B.C. children who receive the program will bully less, be more cooperative, caring and kind. This investment in children's social and emotional development is an investment in a more caring, peaceful and civil society."

Modelled on the Roots of Empathy program, Seeds of Empathy is designed for early childhood settings to foster social and emotional competence and early literacy skills in pre-school aged children (three to five years old). The Ministry of Children and Family Development currently supports the Seeds of Empathy program in 14 urban Aboriginal settings and First Nations communities throughout B.C. and has provided \$1.3 million in program funding for Seeds of Empathy since 2004.

"We know that children learn so much at an early age - that the foundations of behaviour are established early in life," said Linda Reid, MLA for Richmond East. "These fabulous programs help give our little ones the best start possible in school and in life, teaching them understanding and compassion and, ultimately, how to be a good parent to their own children."

Roots of Empathy and Seeds of Empathy are evidence-based programs with positive track records in promoting empathy and compassion in children. Evaluations have repeatedly proven that participants experience increased positive social behaviour, such as sharing, helping and including, and decreased rates of bullying and aggression.

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