A.15 Description of the Fair Start Preschool Screening Program, 2004

Every Child Deserves a Fair Start

In Thunder Bay, a partnership of community agencies and school boards (listed on the side) delivers a comprehensive program of early identification to children in our community, beginning at 18 months. The 18 month screen is building in popularity and we are finding that about 30% of children entering JK have been previously screened by Fair Start, either through our Child Care initiatives or our community screenings. Early screening information is made available to the school with the consent of the parents.

However, when any child enters JK in any of the three systems in our community, they participate in the JK screening process. Parents are given a Fair Start Preschool Screening Booklet as part of their registration package. Parents are asked to complete the booklet and return it to the school as quickly as possible so that it can be scored by the school and the results returned to the parent. The purpose is to provide any needed intervention as early in a child’s life as possible. The Fair Start booklet is produced in English and in French. Developmental areas covered in the booklet include hearing, vision, speech & language, social development, gross and fine motor skills. In addition, there is information provided for parents about helping with transitions, tips from the teacher, healthy snacks, etc.

The Fair Start JK Booklet is not a screening tool as such but rather, is part of the JK Screening process in Thunder Bay. As well as designing the booklet, community partners work together to ensure completion and scoring of the booklet, providing feedback to parents, followup intervention, and ongoing evaluation and modification. This booklet has changed significantly over time and will continue to evolve in response to information collected from all stakeholders.

Training:

➤ Each year in January, Fair Start committee members from partner agencies provide a half-day training session to all special education teachers in the City of Thunder Bay on the administration and scoring of the booklet.
➤ Representatives from each partner agency discuss the services their agency can provide to children and answer any questions teachers may have.
➤ Fair Start participates in an annual training session organized for school secretaries organized by Lakehead Public Schools.
➤ Fair Start provides annual training to potential special education teachers through Lakehead Public Schools.
➤ Fair Start participates in all JK information nights to present to parents on the importance of early ID and to provide information on completion of the booklets.
➤ Fair Start trains retired teacher volunteers to help out at identified schools where parents might have difficulty with the literacy requirements posed by the booklet.
Every Child Deserves a Fair Start

Evaluation:

Fair Start’s Screening Subcommittee (clinical member from each of the partners, including special education teachers from each Board) meets monthly to review statistics and information on booklet completion and make recommendations to improve. Areas evaluated included:

- Participation rates
- Identification rates
- Followup rates
- Appropriateness rates
- Waiting list times
- Parent satisfaction
- Teacher feedback

Fair Start’s Evaluation Committee meets to consider specific areas. In 2005, they are addressing the effectiveness of Social Development screening both in early Fair Start and in the JK Fair Start booklets.

A key to Fair Start is the interactive web-based database at www.fairstart.ca. It enables teachers and service providers to communicate concerns and outcomes about each child that is identified through the school.

In addition the database enables us to track trends and to make improvements to the program each year to address concerns that are identified in this way.

Fair Start has created a training package that we use to train Special Education staff in the administration of the booklet. Templates of letters to parents are included in the package and are forwarded electronically to schools following the training session so that each school can insert their own letterhead.

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