

# The Middle Years Development Instrument



The MDI offers children a voice and an opportunity to share their thoughts, needs and wishes.

It is the first survey of its kind in Canada to gather information about the lives of children inside and outside of school, from their own perspective.

The middle years are a time of great opportunity but also heightened risk. Middle childhood – the time between 6 to 12 years of age – marks a distinctive period in human development. Children experience important cognitive, social, and emotional changes that establish their identity and set the stage for development in adolescence and adulthood.<sup>1</sup>

## ABOUT THE MIDDLE YEARS DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT (MDI)

The MDI is a survey that children fill out in Grade 4 and 7. It asks them how they think and feel about their experiences both inside and outside of school. The survey includes questions about five areas of development: social and emotional development, connectedness, school experiences, physical health and well-being, and use of after-school time.

The MDI is the first survey of its kind in Canada. There is no other population-level research in Canada for this age group. It is also unique because it records children's own voices. It was developed in 2006 at the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) by researchers at University of British Columbia (UBC) in partnership with the United Way of the Lower Mainland and Vancouver School Board. It was tested extensively in the Vancouver, Coquitlam, and Revelstoke school districts and is now being implemented in over 20 school districts across British Columbia. The MDI has also been piloted in Australia and Peru.

## MDI MEASURES OF DEVELOPMENT

Social & Emotional Development	Optimism, empathy, happiness, prosocial (caring, helpful, cooperative) behaviour, self-esteem
Connectedness	Availability of supportive adults in school, families, and neighbourhoods, sense of belonging with peers
School Experiences	Academic self-concept, school climate, victimization at school (experiences with physical, verbal, social, and cyber bullying)
Physical Health & Well-being	General health, body image, nutrition and sleeping patterns
Use of After-school Time	Time spent in youth organizations, school/ non-school sports/ lessons, time spent watching TV, time spent playing video games

<sup>1</sup> Eccles, J. S. (1999). The development of children ages 6 to 14. *The Future of Children*, 9, 30-44.



"I like how it made the class focus on the world as it relates to them. [Students] probably don't often stop to think about the people in their lives who want them to be happy and successful."

- Grade 4 teacher

"Children love thinking/talking/writing about themselves. Children love it when people are interested in them."

- Grade 4 teacher

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## HOW DOES THE MDI WORK?

- The MDI is completed in November during class time. Children taking the survey are supervised by a classroom teacher, principal, or other school adult. The Grade 4 survey is read aloud to ensure children understand each question;
- Completed MDI surveys are sent to a secure data processing lab at the University of British Columbia;
- Each participating community, school and school district receives a report that summarizes the feedback students have provided on the MDI;
- Children's participation in the MDI is completely voluntary. Any parent can request that their child not take the survey by contacting their classroom teacher or school principal. Children are also told that they can withdraw from taking the survey at any point.

## HOW IS MDI INFORMATION USED?

Researchers at UBC's Human Early Learning Partnership prepare summary MDI reports. These include maps and visuals to make the information easy to understand. All of the information is posted on HELP's website (earlylearning.ubc.ca).

- Schools use MDI results to improve their programs and to build connections with local children's organizations;
- School boards use MDI results to inform community-school partnerships and to develop services in their areas;
- Communities and community programs use MDI information to help identify children's needs and to create after-school activities and school aged child care programs;

## THE MDI IS

- ✓ The MDI is a population level survey;
- ✓ The MDI provides information on the whole child, not just one aspect of their development;
- ✓ The MDI records children's feelings, thoughts, assets, strengths, needs, and wishes;
- ✓ Teachers often use the time when children are answering the MDI survey as a learning opportunity;
- ✓ The MDI gives schools and communities important information about whether their programs and services meet the needs of their children; and,
- ✓ The MDI can be used to improve supports and services for children in schools and communities.

## THE MDI IS NOT

- ✗ The MDI does not diagnose children with specific learning disabilities or developmental delays;
- ✗ The MDI does not assess the success or failure of individual children;
- ✗ The MDI does not identify individual children or teachers; and,
- ✗ The MDI does not compare classrooms or schools.

- Not-for-profit organizations that support children's programs in the community, such as the United Way of the Lower Mainland, use MDI results to decide how to invest in programs.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

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**If you are a Parent** and need further information, please refer to the Parent Information Letter that is sent to parents of all participating children.

**If you are a Teacher** and need further information, please refer to the Teacher Information Letter that is sent to teachers in all participating schools.