



PARENT HANDBOOK



Purpose of the Handbook

The Birchbark Discovery Centre is a pilot program based on best practice research that emerged from the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE).

It began in September 2018 as a partnership with YK1 and the NWT Montessori Society.

As such, this handbook was designed to support the families enrolled in the Birchbark Discovery Centre (BBDC), help them understand the intent of the program and the tools and strategies it uses and support them in their learning and development journeys.

We are very pleased to have your family as part of the BBDC program!



Table of Content

What is BBDC?	3
Guiding BBDC Principles	4
A Day at a Glance: Homeroom	6
A Day at a Glance: Specialty Classes	7
Conflict	9
Collaboration	10
Classroom Support	11
Program Oversight	12
Social and Emotional Lens	13
Student Evaluation	14
Clubs at School	15



What is BBDC?

Birchbark Discovery Centre is a community-based alternative education opportunity for children in grades one to six in Yellowknife, NT. The goal of BBDC is to give children the freedom to focus on whole learning based on competencies, not specific and limiting objectives per subject matter. Children need to experience concepts that relate directly to their lives, that fuel and encourage their curiosity and support their emotional and academic growth. Much of BBDC's program is based on the Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment's research paper titled "Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change", which supports the current education research that echoes the concepts of moving farther away from a model of objective, silo-based learning towards a model of self-directed, inquiry-based learning in the community of learners.

The program completed its three year pilot in the 2020-2021 school year and will be splitting into two classes (grade 1-3 and grade 4-6) moving forward.

It is important to keep in mind that since BBDC is still early in its development, we are constantly observing and considering what is working for the children, families and teachers and what adjustments need to be made. Please consider your involvement in this program, and any feedback you can provide is incredibly valuable to measure the success of this program.





Guiding BBDC Principles

The following five principles guide the program in its entirety:

- Children are at the centre of their own learning
- Learners are encouraged to be creative and innovative and take risks
- Diverse and flexible learning pathways are supported
- Learning is a partnership
- Everyone is a learner, and everyone is a teacher





A Day at a Glance

Due to BBDC's location at MHS, BBDC is invited to participate in some of MHS' daily routines such as DPA (Daily Physical Activity) in the mornings, recess time, assemblies and other school events.

At times, various grades of MHS will be invited to join the same classroom in MHS in a field trip or other grade-specific activities.

The purpose of this is to cultivate a sense of inclusion in their immediate community of MHS as well as to expand social relationship opportunities with peers outside of the BBDC program.





A Day at a Glance: Homeroom

When not participating in whole-school activities, BBDC learners divide their time in various ways.

This includes blocks of time with their homeroom teacher, where the topics addressed are cultivated from the children's interests and often span across various curriculum areas so that they may include elements of geography, history, science, math and language naturally. Brendan capitalizes on resources available, such as the weather, proximity to various community locations such as the Frame Lake Trail behind the school, Frame Lake or the green space behind the school area to bring learning opportunities to life.

Mildred Hall School also has its own bus which can be borrowed as needed to take the class within YK city limits without needing to create a formal field trip form. For trips that require extra support, special materials, or for trips that may occur outside YK city limits, parents will be requested to sign a field trip waiver and may be requested to join the class for adequate support and supervision.



A Day at a Glance: Specialty Classes

BBDC learners attend specialty classes alongside their MHS peers.

These classes serve a few purposes, including giving their homeroom teacher some needed preparation time if the whole class is together, or it provides the homeroom teacher with time to focus on some developmentally specific considerations with isolated BBDC grades while some of their peers are out of the classroom.

The specialty classes also provide opportunities to immerse the BBDC learners with their MHS peers.





A Day at a Glance: Specialty Classes



Music

BBDC learners attend music with similar grades at the times of MHS class schedules.



Language (ILC or French)

At the start of the school year, families can indicate if they want to participate in either ILC (Indigenous Language and Culture-Based Education) or Core French. Students attend their selected option alongside their MHS peers.



Homeroom ILC

Together, the BBDC learners attend Homeroom ILC, which gives them a chance to get further immersed in the language and culture of the indigenous community on whose land BBDC and MHS reside.



Phys Ed

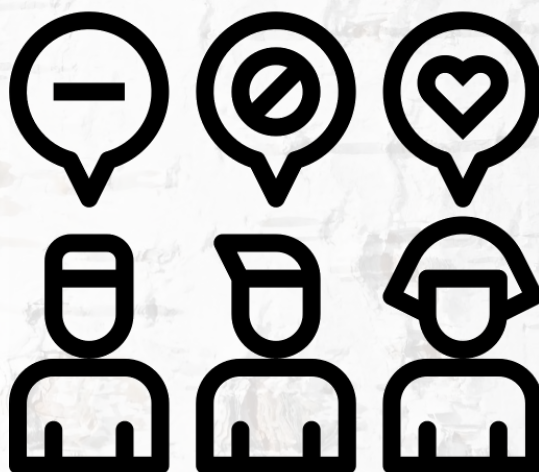
BBDC learners are taught physical education by both their homeroom teacher and MHS's designated phys ed instructor. Within the program, there is a great focus on a balanced, healthy lifestyle, both from a physical and a social/emotional perspective.



Conflict

In the BBDC, conflict is handled with a collaborative, community-minded approach. Although there have been no major behaviours so far, disputes and disagreements come up as they would in any classroom.

When these things do arise, students are brought together, and with the guidance of the homeroom teacher, discussions are had about how students are feeling, what is causing the conflict and how the students can be supported to resolve it. Much of this fits in within the BBDC's work with social and emotional learning, which will be touched on later.





Collaboration

BBDC values the idea that learning does not begin and end at school, but rather is a continuous experience. In recognition of this concept, BBDC encourages families and learners to initiate conversations about how to best support their child's learning, both during the program as well as at home.

BBDC will provide structured opportunities for families to connect further with the program, but if caregivers identify further opportunities to connect learning to their child's world, they are invited to share their thoughts with Brendan or the BBDC Parent Advisory Committee.

Further examples of collaborative opportunities include surveys to BBDC caregivers, teachers and the learners themselves. This feedback is typically collected in the early spring to allow for time to share it with all applicable stakeholders and to consider adjustments for the remainder of the year as well as for the upcoming year.





Classroom Support

The BBDC is supported by the staff of MHS which include Principal Elizabeth Brace, Vice Principal Ryan Nichols, administrative assistant Donna Meister, program support teachers, a social-emotional learning support teacher, guidance counsellors, and a literacy intervention teacher.

If there was a need for the support of an educational assistant in the room, one would be allocated to the classroom.

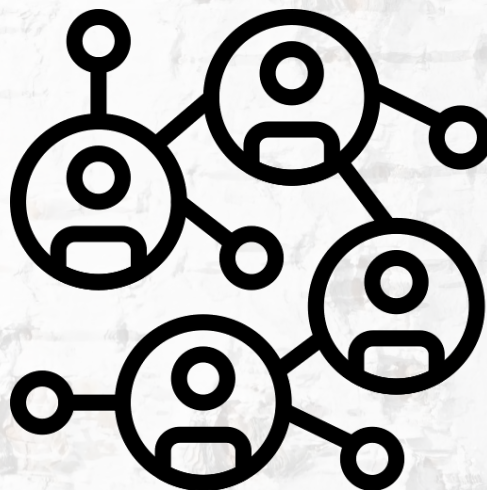




Program Oversight

The BBDC is well-supported through these first years as a pilot program. Although they're not involved on a day to day basis, ECE and YK#1 have backed the program and are there for any support when needed. The program is supported at a school level by the MHS administration and Brendan.

The BBDC also has a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) of its own, separate from the MHS PAC. This committee is made up of administration and the homeroom teachers from MHS as well as BBDC parents. If you would like to connect directly with the BBDC PAC, feel free to email Brendan Callas at brendan.callas@yk1.nt.ca.



Social and Emotional Lens

A big focus of the BBDC is social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions.

SEL has five core competencies which are self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible-decision making. Decades of research have proven that when these areas are fostered and communicated openly with students, there is an increase in academic achievement and improvement in student behaviour. In order for students to be able to focus and engage in topics that interest them to the best of their abilities, a foundation in SEL is important. In the BBDC, SEL is taught through targeted lessons, the use of the Zones of Regulation and everyday interactions between the students and staff.





Student Evaluation



BBDC students are evaluated through two lenses. The first is the standard report card prescribed by ECE, which is the same as all report cards received by students attending schools in YK#1. This report card provides comments and grades in Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, Health, Dene Kede, Music, French, ILC, and Physical Education.

The second form of evaluation is a document called “Growth as a Learner”. This document is also received by all students in YK#1 and talks about the student regarding the areas of social intelligence, critical thinking, problem-solving, and metacognition.

BBDC has taken this document and expanded on it to include comments on other areas such as creativity, risk-taking, communication, sense of personal identity, collaboration, innovation, self-regulation, and citizenship. The homeroom teacher and the students are also focusing more on self-evaluation and self-reflection, which the students will be able to share with their families during the “Celebration of Learning” events that take place at the end of each reporting term. This may look like photos taken to showcase a child’s work or progress in a certain area, pieces selected by children to contribute to their portfolio, or journal entries that described their key learnings in any given area.



Clubs at School

BBDC students are invited to participate in any of the clubs that they desire to join that MHS offers. Although the types of these clubs vary each year, past clubs at MHS have included the Art Club, Garden Club, STEM Club, Lego Club, Magic the Gathering Club, Wrestling Club, and more! Some of these clubs have been altered/suspended due to COVID-19 precautions and will continue as soon as they're safely allowed to do so.





BIRCH BARK

• DISCOVERY CENTRE •