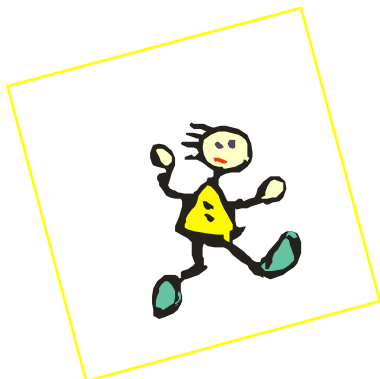
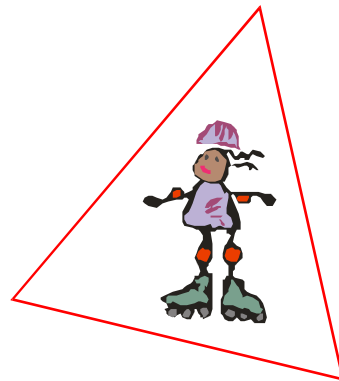


Understanding the Early Years Early Childhood Development in North York



Sarah Connor
Applied Research Branch
May 2001



Strategic Policy
Human Resources
Development Canada

Politique stratégique
Développement des
ressources humaines Canada



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in North York



Sarah Connor
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Study Highlights

Understanding the Early Years is a national initiative that provides research information to help strengthen the capacity of communities to make informed decisions about the best policies and most appropriate programs to serve families with young children. It seeks to provide information about the influence of community factors on children's development and to enhance community capacity to use this data to monitor both early childhood development and to create effective community-based responses. Understanding the Early Years uses three main components (discussed on page 6) to collect data about the community's children from their parents, teachers and the children themselves. It also gathers information about the community environment in which the children are living.

This report is based on research conducted in the community of North York, Ontario – now incorporated into the new city of Toronto as the North Quadrant. The community is both ethnically and culturally diverse, with a large immigrant population and many children whose mother tongue was other than the official languages. Nearly one-quarter of the kindergarten children in the North York sample were living in lone-parent families. Close to half of the parents had completed a college or university degree.

The children in North York scored better on all indicators of behaviour than national and provincial averages, but scores on receptive language assessments were poorer than national and provincial averages. Most of the children were in good health.

Positive parenting practices have been associated with positive behavioural development, which the research in North York confirms. It has generally been accepted that a mother's education has an important impact on a child's level of vocabulary development – a finding also confirmed with this research. Use of educational resources was also linked to enhanced development. Lower scores on learning assessments, however, were seen in children whose families felt they encountered many barriers to participation in community programs and services.

Overall, most parents had positive views of their neighbourhoods and of the larger North York community. Resources were perceived to be readily available and families were functioning with high levels of social support and highly-rated parenting skills.



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1. Introduction



There is increasing evidence to support the importance of investing in the early years of children’s development. New research shows that these formative years are critical. The kind of nurturing and stimulation that children receive in their early years can have a major impact on the rest of their lives.

The citizens of the former city of North York recognized the importance of this period in a child’s life and, under the leadership of the Early Years Action Group (EYAG), took up the challenge to better understand how their children aged six years and under were developing, and how the community could better focus its resources to nurture the development of children in this age range. The EYAG is a broad-based coalition of individuals and organizations committed to meeting the needs of children in their early years.

.....
: **Understanding the Early Years is a national** :
: **initiative that provides research** :
: **information to help strengthen the capacity** :
: **of communities to make informed decisions** :
: **about the best policies and most** :
: **appropriate programs to serve families** :
: **with young children. It seeks to provide** :
: **information about the influence of** :
: **community factors on children’s** :
: **development and to enhance community** :
: **capacity to use this data to monitor both** :
: **early childhood development and to create** :
: **effective community-based responses.** :
.....

Their goal is to ensure all children in the community are ready to learn when they start school.

Concurrently, the Understanding the Early Years (UEY) initiative was being developed by Human Resources Development Canada

(HRDC). Together, the community and HRDC were successful in implementing the UEY research program in North York, which gathered information about children’s early years from many members of the community. This report delivers the research results to the community.¹

More specifically

A. We talked to teachers – the Early Development Instrument

With the support of the Toronto District School Board, teachers of all kindergarten children attending English-language public schools in the community were asked to complete the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a short checklist about the behaviours and development of each child in their class. This information was used to assess how ready the community’s children, as a whole, were for school.

B. We talked to parents and guardians – the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth Community Study

In order to get more detailed information about the experiences of children and families in the community, a random sample of children was selected to participate in the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY). The sample was selected from all of the children in the school district. Children completed assessments which asked them to draw, count, and identify pictures and shapes. Their families provided Statistics Canada with information about their social and economic backgrounds, their children’s activities and involvement in the community, and their health, their social, emotional and behavioural development.

¹ All data were collected in the spring and summer of 1999.



C. We talked to community agencies – the Community Mapping Study

Finally, the Community Mapping Study (CMS) was implemented to give the community a picture of the distribution and scope of programs and services being provided to the families in the area. It includes information about the physical conditions of the neighbourhoods (e.g., volume of traffic, lighting), the kinds of resources that were available for children aged zero to six years old and their families (at the time the study was completed) and where they were located, the demand for existing services and the perceptions of service providers.² The data were geographically mapped to provide the community with information about how and where its resources are distributed. The maps give a visual representation of North York's resources, socio-economic and physical environments relative to the distribution of families with children.

This report highlights some of the key findings from the information that was collected from teachers, parents and children. It examines the overall development of children in senior kindergarten (through the EDI) and provides a more detailed look at the outcomes of a selected group of these children (through the NLSCY). It suggests some of the unique strengths the community can work from – and some challenges to meet – in continuing to build a collective commitment to ensure the health, well being, and positive development of their children.

² Detailed results of the CMS are available in Connor, S., Norris, C., & McLean, S. (2001). *Community Research in Child Development: Results of the Community Mapping Study in North York*.



2. The North York Community... Where we started



The following map (Map 1) is a geographic look at the North York community and the approximately 800 neighbourhoods it contains. Neighbourhoods, for the purpose of this study, are defined and referred to using the geographical boundaries of Enumeration Areas (EAs). Thus, the terms EA and neighbourhood are used interchangeably in this report. An EA is the smallest standard geographic area for which census data are reported. Having such a small unit of analysis allows for a detailed and objective look at the community's characteristics.

According to the 1996 Census, there were about 53,000 children aged zero to six living in the community. Their distribution is represented on Map 1 by the purple dots (one dot represents 10 children). The total population was close to 600,000; almost 108,000 families with children (approximately 51% of households).

There were several neighbourhoods where the density of children was very high (over 100 children in the neighbourhood). The number of children was generally higher in neighbourhoods near the parks and green spaces and lower around the industrial areas.

Map 1 – Where the Children in the North York Community Lived





3. Results of the Early Development Instrument... What we learned from teachers



Key findings

- Most children were doing comparatively well on measures of health, social competence, emotional maturity, cognitive development and communication skills.
- However, 31.8% (1,507 children) may have difficulty learning due to below – average development in two or more components.
- Out of the five components of readiness, children had the most problems in social competence.

Components of readiness to learn

The teacher checklist (the EDI) was used to collect information on all of the senior kindergarten children (just over 4,800) in English-language public schools in the community. Teachers used their familiarity with the children in their classes after several months of classroom/school interaction to complete the questionnaire.³ The results provided the community with an idea of how ready their children were to learn when they started school. The instrument is an age-appropriate measure that indicates how children in a classroom are developing and cannot be used to assess an individual child's development.

³ Children were assessed in the spring of their senior kindergarten year.

It looked at five components of readiness to learn, including:

- ▲ physical health and well-being,
- ▲ social competence,
- ▲ emotional maturity,
- ▲ language and cognitive development and
- ▲ communication skills and general knowledge.

Teachers answered the following types of questions on the EDI about each child in the class. The EDI contained more than 70 questions in total.

- How often is the child too tired to do school work?
- Is the child well co-ordinated?
- Would you say this child follows instructions, accepts responsibility and works independently?
- Would you say this child is upset when left by a caregiver, has temper tantrums, appears worried, cries a lot?

Teachers were also asked to comment on the child's use of language to communicate, his or her interest in books and his or her abilities related to reading and writing. They were also asked about the child's communication skills and general knowledge.

For each of the components, thresholds were established to determine which children fell within the normal range of development and which children were below it. The thresholds represented the children who fell in the lowest 25% of the distribution based on the over 11,000 children who were assessed in Canada in 1998-1999. So the results of the children in North York have been compared to the results of all of the children across the country who were assessed using the EDI in the same year.



In this instrument, higher scores indicated poorer development and scores closer to zero indicated better development (the instrument has since been revised). This means that having a score above the threshold indicated poorer development in the component in question. A score equal to or below the threshold indicated normal development. Figure 1 displays the percentage of children who fell above the threshold according to the teacher ratings. Children scoring above the thresholds were more likely to display the following:

Physical health (threshold set at 11) – Average or poor motor skills, flagging energy levels, tiredness and clumsiness.

Social competence (threshold set at 17) – Regular problems with one or more of the following: getting along with other children, accepting responsibility for their own actions, ability to work independently, self confidence, tolerance.

Emotional maturity (threshold set at 18) – Minor problems with aggression, restlessness, distractibility or inattentiveness, or excessive sadness on a regular basis.

Language and cognitive development (threshold set at 16) – No mastery of the basics of reading and writing, little interest in books, reading, and/or problems with numerical skills (e.g., recognizing numbers, counting).

Communication and general knowledge (threshold set at 16) – Problems understanding or communicating in English, articulating clearly and/or little general knowledge.

According to the teachers' ratings, approximately three-quarters of all children in North York were in the normal range of development in each of the components when they started school. **More children (over 80%, which represented 3892 children) fell within the normal range of physical development** compared to the proportion within the normal range of development in the other components. Between 20 and 25% of children were having at least some problems in each of the other components.

Figure 1 – Percentage of children scoring poorly (above the threshold) in the five components of teacher checklist (EDI Instrument)



Overall readiness to learn in North York

Scoring in the “poorer” range on one component of the checklist did not necessarily imply that a child would have a problem with readiness for school and learning. However, children rated as having regular minor problems in two or more of the five areas (31.8% or 1,507 children) were more likely to have difficulty learning. The results showed that almost one-third of the children in the community had problems in two or more of the five areas of development.

Mapping the community

The children were dispersed in schools and neighbourhoods throughout the community (as seen in Map 1). Children were assessed shortly after entering the school system. The results therefore served as an indicator of a community’s capacity to prepare its children during the pre-school years for learning and entry into school. The results did not evaluate individual children, specific schools or the performance of teachers. Instead, the EDI gives the community an understanding of how well prepared its children are for school, as well as giving the school an indication of where the children entering the school system are starting from.

The following five maps (Maps 2 to 6) look at the average scores obtained on each of the components of the teacher checklist (EDI) by children living in different neighbourhoods, attending different schools and being part of different school populations.⁴ Therefore, the

⁴ Although many children who attend a particular school live in the neighbourhood that makes up the school’s catchment area, some children also live outside of the catchment area. The EDI was collected on a school-by-school basis. Therefore, the scores reflect the scores of all of the children who attended a particular school regardless of whether they lived in the neighbourhood/school catchment area or not.

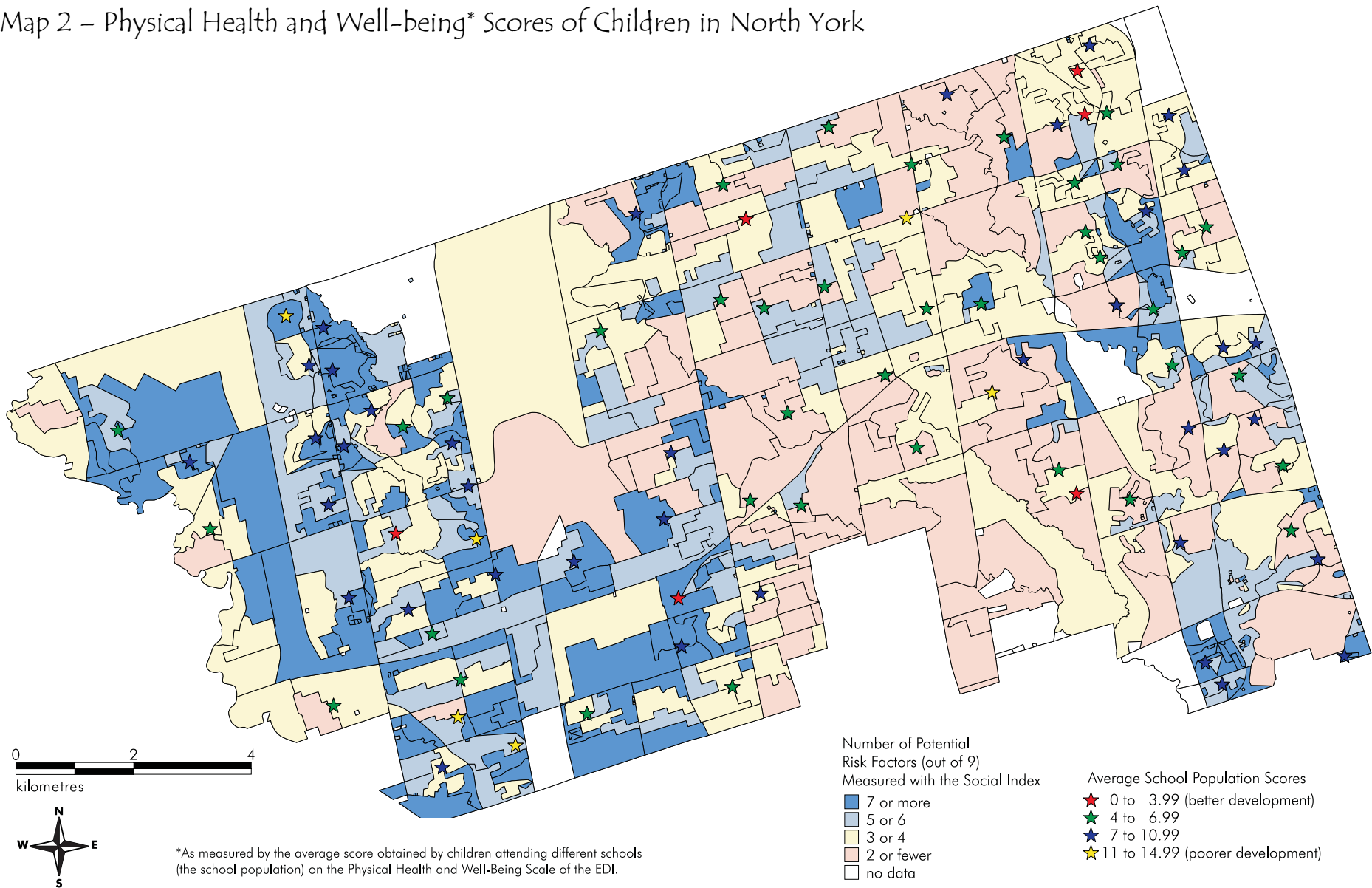
scores represented the school population’s average score. The categories were developed based on the percentile scores in each component for the distribution of all children in Canada who were assessed with the EDI in 1998-1999. Thus children in North York were compared with the development patterns of children in Canada.

The following indicators made up the Social Index (the Canadian averages for the indicators are in brackets).

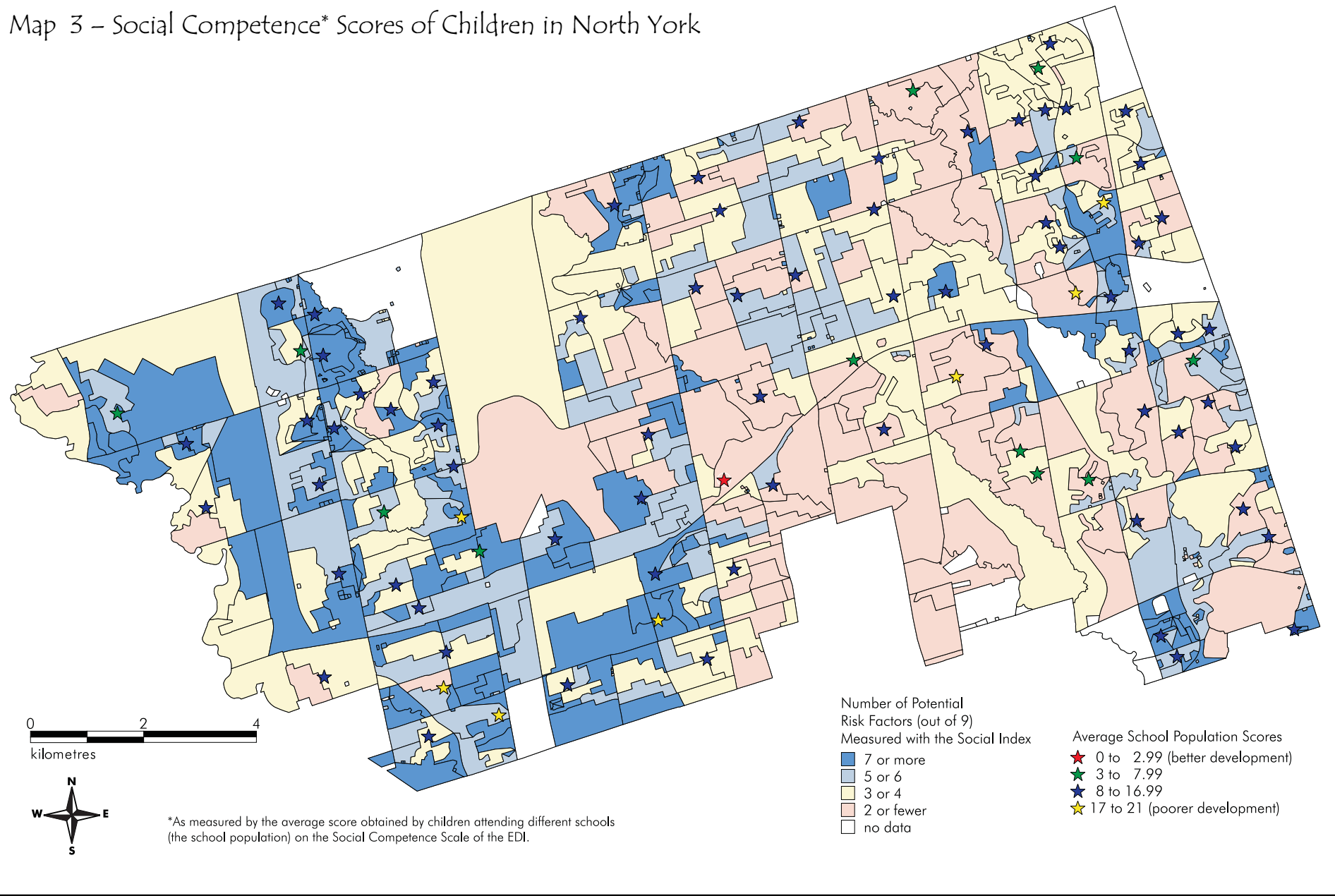
- Prevalence of low-income status of individual residents (18.6%).
- Proportion of males 15 and over who worked full-time, full year (39.7%).
- Proportion of individuals 15 years and over without a high school diploma (37.0%).
- Proportion of families with children headed by a lone parent (22.7%).
- Proportion of the population speaking neither official language (1.4%).
- Proportion of the population that immigrated to Canada since 1991 (3.2%).
- Mobility or moves into and out of the neighbourhood in one year (16.0%).
- Home ownership (64.8%).
- Proportion of the total income of the neighbourhood coming from government transfer payments (i.e., CPP, Child Tax Benefit, provincial social assistance payments) (18.5%).

All data were from the 1996 Census. Each indicator was considered a risk factor if the community percentage was lower than the national one. The total number of risk factors made up the Social Index.

Map 2 – Physical Health and Well-being* Scores of Children in North York

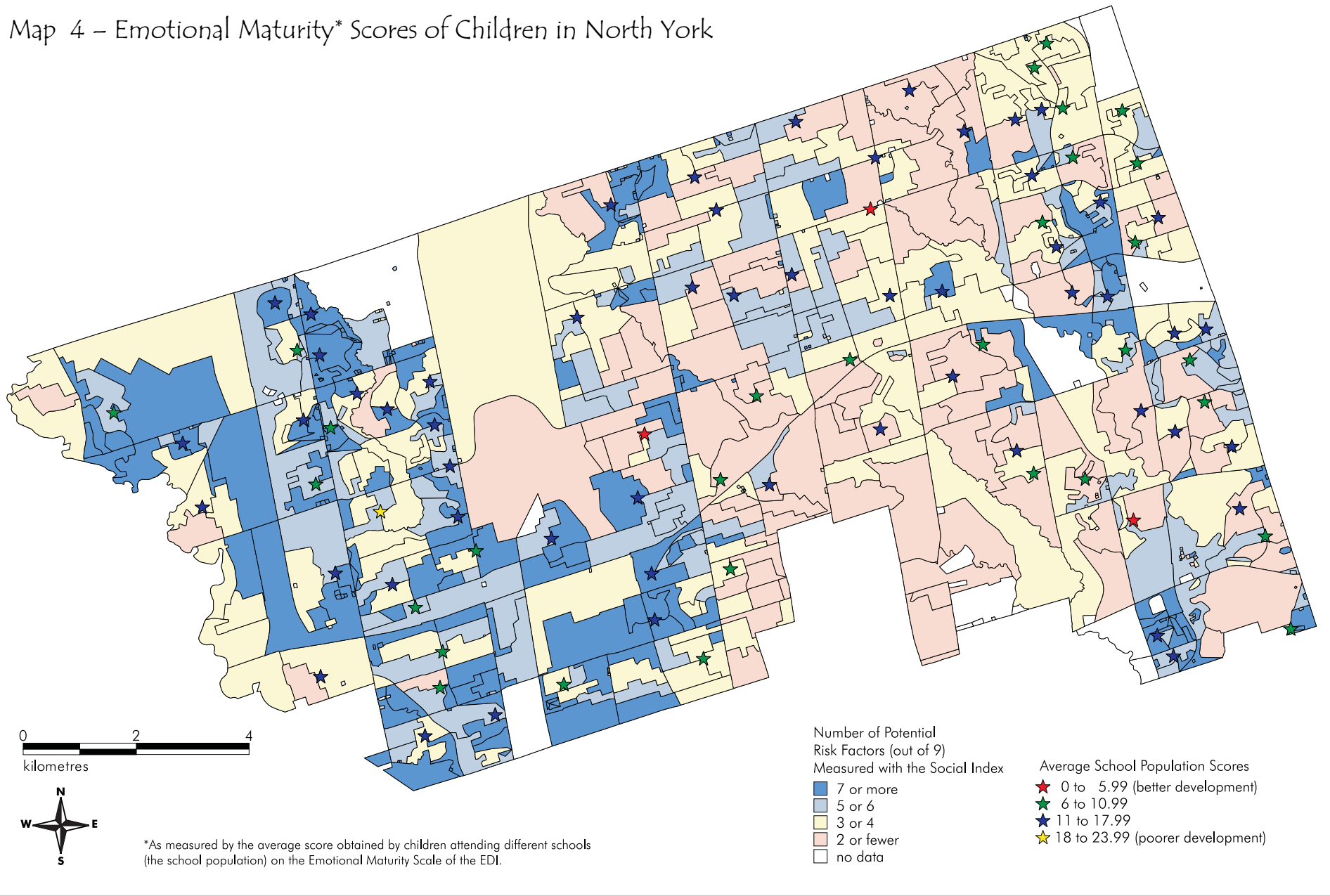


Map 3 – Social Competence* Scores of Children in North York

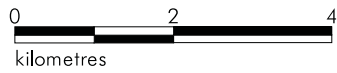
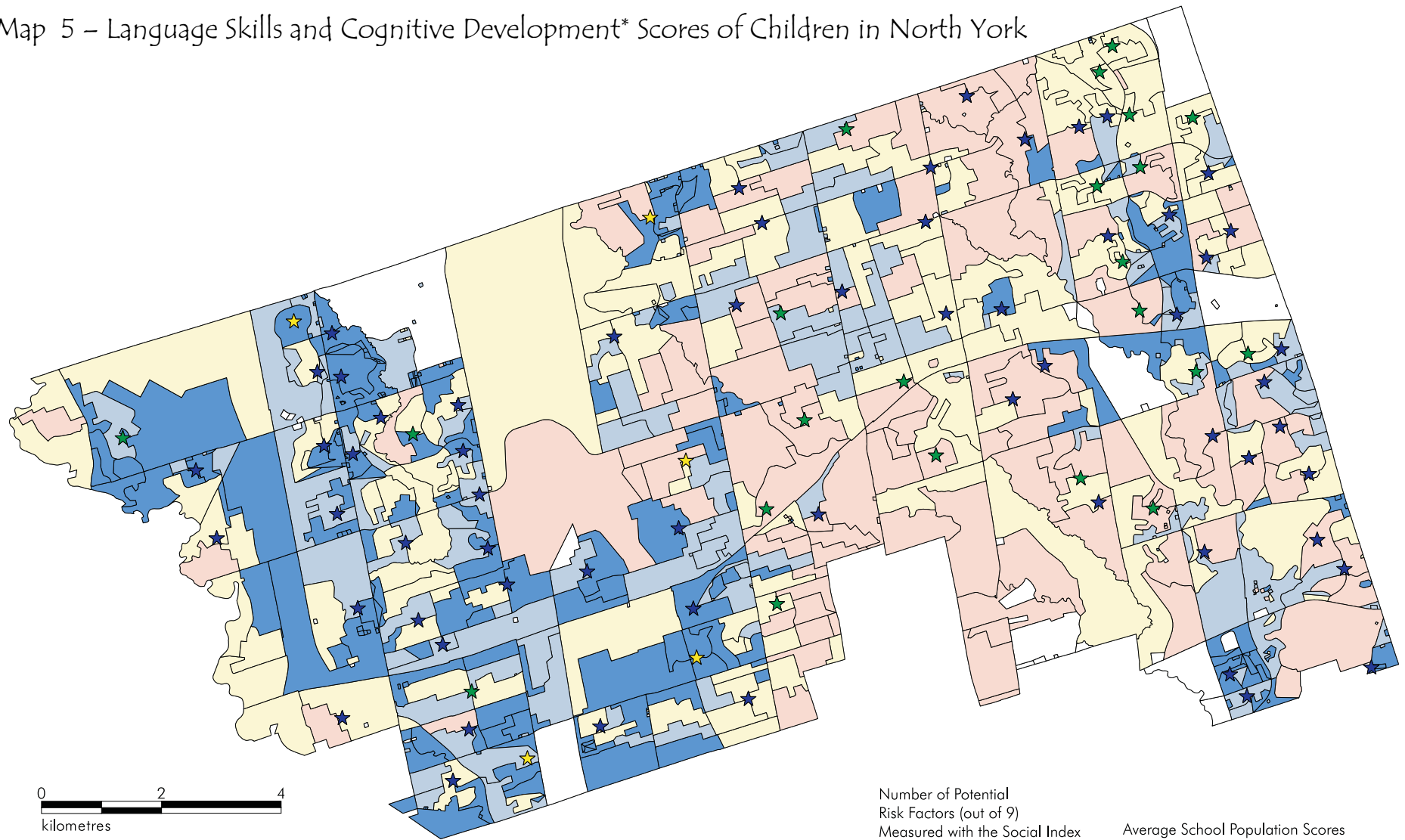


*As measured by the average score obtained by children attending different schools (the school population) on the Social Competence Scale of the EDI.

Map 4 – Emotional Maturity* Scores of Children in North York



Map 5 – Language Skills and Cognitive Development* Scores of Children in North York



*As measured by the average score obtained by children attending different schools (the school population) on the Emotional Maturity Scale of the EDI.

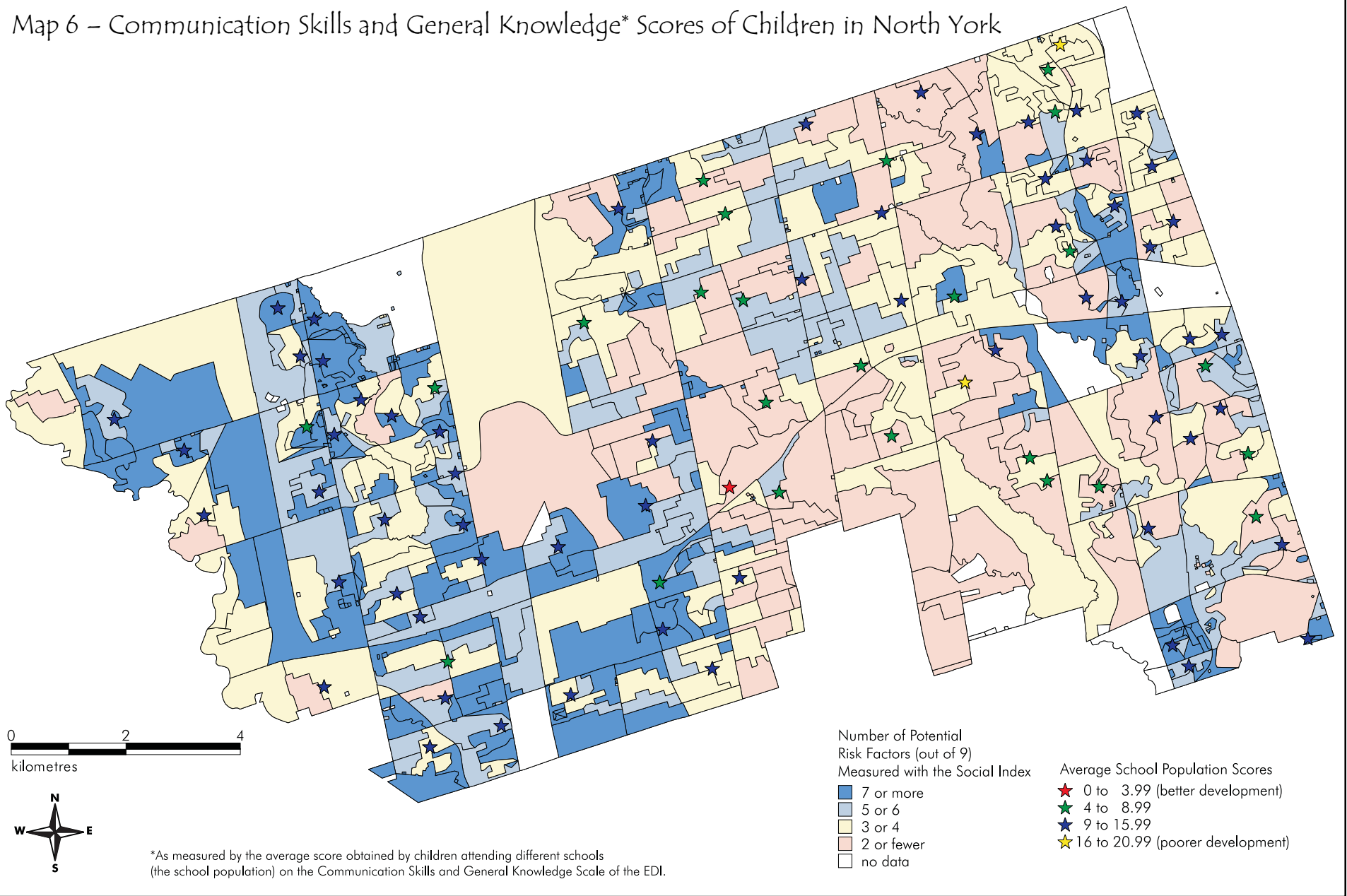
Number of Potential Risk Factors (out of 9) Measured with the Social Index

- 7 or more
- 5 or 6
- 3 or 4
- 2 or fewer
- no data

Average School Population Scores

- 0 to 1.99 (better development)
- 2 to 7.99
- 8 to 15.99
- 16 to 20.99 (poorer development)

Map 6 – Communication Skills and General Knowledge* Scores of Children in North York





Scores closer to zero (red stars on the maps) represented more advanced development in each component, while higher scores (yellow stars) indicated poorer development in each component for each school population. Red stars represented school populations where the average score of the children exceeded the top 25th percentile score; green stars, those who scored between the 25th and the 50th percentiles; blue stars, scores between the 50th and 75th percentiles; and yellow stars, school populations where the average score of the children was in the lowest 25th percentile (those showing signs of poorer development for each of the components). Data were collected from 88 schools.

In order to examine some of the social and economic factors of each neighbourhood, which could affect the results, the scores in each component are shown on the maps, which also indicate the Social Index for each neighbourhood. The Social Index was developed in order to create a profile of the level of socio-economic well-being in the neighbourhoods. It was created by combining social and economic risk factors into one score so that the characteristics of each neighbourhood could be considered individually and in relation to the rest of the neighbourhoods in North York. The Social Index assigns each neighbourhood a point for each potential risk factor. Risk factors included such variables as having a higher unemployment or poverty rate, or a larger proportion of lone-parent families than the national average. Higher scores indicated the presence of more potential risk factors.

Overall, children in most of the neighbourhoods scored well on each of the teacher-rated components of the EDI.

Though all schools had children who faced difficulties, only a few schools had average scores for all their children falling below the thresholds. Most school populations scored in the middle range on all components.

There was a great deal of variability within the scores for a population attending a particular school in each of the components. For instance, although children scored best on the physical health component, the average score for each school population for this component showed a wide distribution. There were several school populations with a higher average because a greater number of children scored very well on this component (red stars) while several schools had a lower average because a higher number of children were having problems in the physical health component (yellow stars). This indicated that the developmental level of the population of children attending a particular school was quite varied.

The scores for the different school populations often depended on which component was being examined. For example, one population of school children on the western side of the community (about half way down the map) scored in the highest category for the physical health component, the lowest on emotional maturity and in the middle two categories in all the other components. This suggested that interventions before children enter school need to be examined on a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood basis, as the mix of outcomes for children in each neighbourhood are quite different. However, because lower-than-desired scores were obtained by children throughout the community in all components, community-based efforts should still be broad enough to support all children who have difficulties in any of the components wherever they might live.

The Social Index, based on the social and economic characteristics for each of the neighbourhoods, showed clusters of low- and high-risk areas in the community. Most of the higher-risk areas appeared to be located in the western portion of the community and in isolated areas on the eastern side.



In some instances, schools with the best average school population scores (red stars) tended to be located in the neighbourhoods that also had fewer risk factors, and those with poorer average school population scores were often seen in the higher risk (blue shaded) areas. However, this was not always the case. There were also several low-risk neighbourhoods where the average school population score was lower on all components, indicating that the children were developing well. Some school populations in neighbourhoods in higher-risk areas also had high average scores for many of the components of development.

Summing up

Although three-quarters of children were developing normally in each of the components of development, a significant number were showing regular signs of problems in at least one or more of the components.

According to teacher ratings, fewer children in North York had difficulties with physical health and a greater number had problems with social competence. There was a great deal of variability in the components, however, in different neighbourhoods across the community as measured by the average score of each school population. This indicates that some schools have children entering school with lower levels of development. Supports and programs in the early years could be provided to prevent this. It also argues for programming to help children overcome these difficulties once they enter the school system.

Results were also examined in relation to the Social Index based on social and economic risk factors in the community. This information can serve as a tool to help communities allocate resources to meet the needs of all children and families by allowing them to understand the multiple demands placed on their services. There are, of course, other individual and family factors that can affect the development of an individual child.

Resources could be targeted to specific areas experiencing particular problems and those having multiple indicators of delayed development. But a base level of services for prevention and support could also be provided to all families with children. Both strategies may be required to ensure that all children are ready to learn when they enter school.



4. Results of the NLSCY... What we learned from parents and guardians



Key findings

- Almost half of the children in the North York sample had a mother tongue other than English or French.
- North York parents scored well on measures of parenting style.
- Almost one-quarter of children were living in lone-parent families.
- The biggest barriers to resource utilization were time, program costs and lack of awareness about programs and services.

The NLSCY provides information about the outcomes of children in the community and some of the family and community factors that can help explain the outcomes. As part of the study, Statistics Canada interviewers collected detailed information from a sample of almost 746 children in North York using instruments from the NLSCY. Because the questionnaire was also used across the country in a national survey, comparisons can be made to national averages.

The three following chapters are based on the analysis of the responses of these families to the NLSCY instrument. About two-thirds of the children in the sample were five years of age and the rest were six years old. Just over half of the children were boys. The parents of these children provided a great deal of information that will help their community better understand the needs and experiences

of the children living there. The sample is statistically representative.

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 • When interviewers contacted families in the community, they asked to speak to the "person most knowledgeable" (PMK) about the child. This person answered the survey questions. We use the term mother and PMK interchangeably because in most cases the PMK was the child's mother.

What parents said...about their children

Cultural diversity

North York is an ethnically and culturally diverse community. Although most children in the sample were born in Canada (81%), a large number of their parents (about three-quarters) were born outside of this country. The mother tongue of almost half of the children in the North York sample (47%) was a language other than English or French – considerably higher than the provincial or national figures (14% and 10% respectively). Similar numbers of parents reported that their children were unable to conduct a conversation in English or French (48%). Such diversity will lead to both unique strengths and challenges for community members when preparing their children for school.

Residential mobility and social relationships

Moving causes breaks in social and institutional ties to an area, which can have negative effects on children. Moving numerous times (three or more times) has been associated with an increase in child problem

⁵ Dewit, D.J., Offord, D.R., & Braun, K. (1998). *The relationship between geographic mobility and childhood problem behaviour*. HRDC, Applied Research Branch Working paper W-98-17E.



behaviours.⁵ Almost one-in-five children in the North York sample had lived in their home for one year or less; about one in three had moved within the previous three years. Almost 33% of the families lived in neighbourhoods characterized as high mobility areas (those where 20% or more of families had moved in the year preceding the 1996 Census).

Despite the high mobility rates in the community, most parents reported that their children were engaged in frequent social interactions with others. Almost all parents reported that their child knew other children who lived within walking distance from their home – only 3.4% of parents indicated otherwise. Moreover, most children knew several other children. **Nearly 70% of parents reported that their child had four or more friends in the neighbourhood.** As well, children in the North York communities visited each other fairly regularly. A full three-

quarters (75.4%) of parents indicated that children visited with friends at least weekly and often on a daily basis. Only 10% of children never visited with other children in the neighbourhood. Parents also reported that most of the interactions between children in the community were positive, although about one-quarter (23.2%) state that their child had experienced frequent or occasional problems, such as bullying, with older children.

Resource utilization

Children also benefited from resources in their communities. This is significant because the quality, quantity and use of resources in one's community are believed to have important implications for development. The following tables show the participation rates of children in various educational, recreational, sport and entertainment resources.

Table 1 – Percentage of five and six year old children using educational and recreational resources

	<i>At least once a week</i>	<i>At least once a month</i>	<i>A few times a year</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
Educational resources				
Library	52.1	25.0	13.0	9.9
Book clubs or literacy programs (e.g., Dial a Story)	22.5	11.0	13.2	53.2
Educational centres or workshops (e.g., Science Centre)	5.9	8.7	37.7	47.8
Family or parent resource centres, support services or programs (e.g., Parent Child Resource Centre for Mom and Tots, Family Support Network)	4.1	4.7	13.8	77.4
Recreational resources				
Parks and play spaces	84.9	10.9	2.9	1.4
Recreational or community centres	27.9	18.7	21.0	32.4
Indoor, outdoor or wading pools	30.4	16.2	30.6	22.7

Table 2 – Children’s participation rates in sports and recreational activities in North York, Ontario, and Canada (Percentages)

	A few times a week or more			Once a week			Almost never*		
	NY	Ont	Can	NY	Ont	Can	NY	Ont	Can
Sports with coaching/instruction	9.4	12.8	16.0	20.1	27.9	22.1	70.5	59.4	61.9
Other organized activity with coaching/instruction (e.g., dance, gymnastics or martial arts)	6.7	3.9	7.5	16.4	28.6	22.4	76.9	67.5	70.1
Unorganized sports or physical activity	42.9	50.4	51.1	17.7	16.2	13.8	39.4	33.5	35.0
Lessons in music, art or non-sport activities	4.0	1.3	2.6	14.1	9.9	9.0	81.9	88.7	88.4
Clubs, groups or community programs with leadership	2.9	0.6	0.8	15.5	23.8	20.8	81.5	75.6	78.5

* Includes a very small proportion of children who were monthly participants.
Source: NLSCY

Almost all parents reported that their child used at least one type of educational or entertainment resource and over 80% reported the child’s involvement in sports or recreational resources (Tables 1 and 2, Figure 2). **Kindergarten children in North York had higher participation rates in music, art and other non-sport activities than children in the rest of the province or country.** Participation in sports activities and community programs with leadership (e.g., Scouting or Guiding movements), however, was somewhat lower compared to the national and provincial percentages. Rates of non-participation in many of the resources were high (in some cases as many as 80% of children were not participating in certain resources) – see Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 2 – and were often higher in North York than in the rest of the province and country.

Factors associated with community resource utilization

A child’s exposure to educational, recreational and other resources can increase his or her opportunities for interaction with other children and adults and is thought to contribute to their physical, social and language development.

In North York, participation rates in community resources seemed to be associated with family characteristics. Children using educational resources were more likely to live in families where:

- ▲ mothers had higher levels of education;
- ▲ at least one parent was employed; and
- ▲ where English was the first language learned at home and where household incomes were higher (in the case of educational centres).



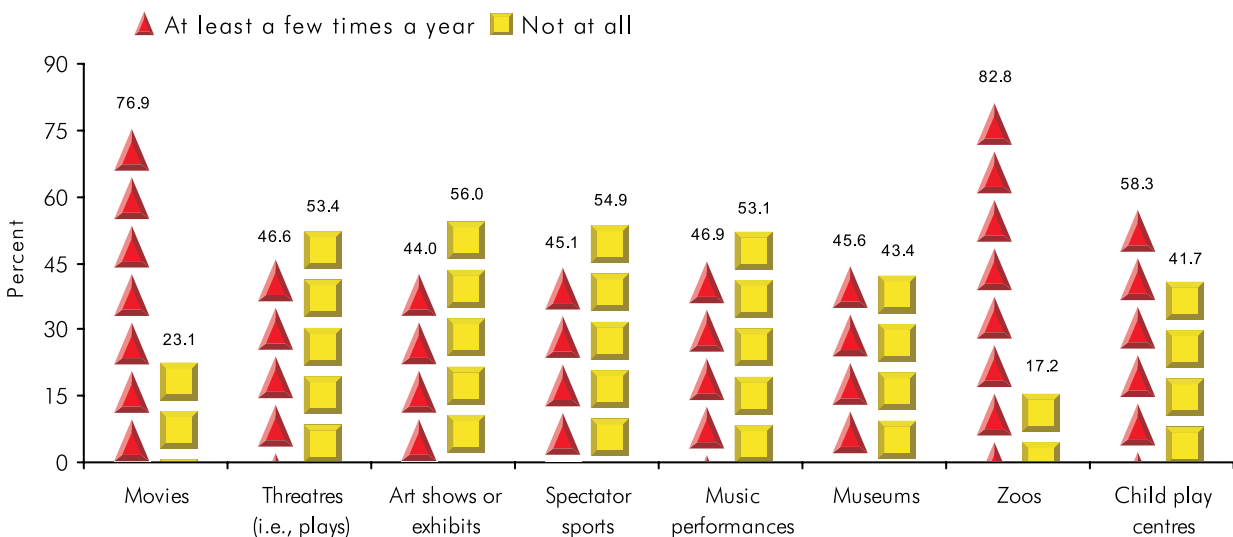
Organized sports, recreational centres, pools and entertainment resources were in most cases more likely to be used by children in families where:

- ▲ there were two parents;
- ▲ mothers were older and had higher levels of education;
- ▲ at least one parent was employed;
- ▲ English was the first language learned at home;
- ▲ the mother was not a recent immigrant; and
- ▲ household incomes were higher.

language was English (69%) than those who first language was a language other than English (59%) and more children with household incomes that were above \$60,000 were involved in unorganized sport activities.

Most parents in North York said that educational and recreational resources were within walking distance of their homes (88% and 85% respectively). Fewer thought that entertainment resources were as readily available within their immediate neighbourhoods (59% of parents). There was a tendency for resources to be used more often by children who lived within walking distance or a short drive or bus ride.

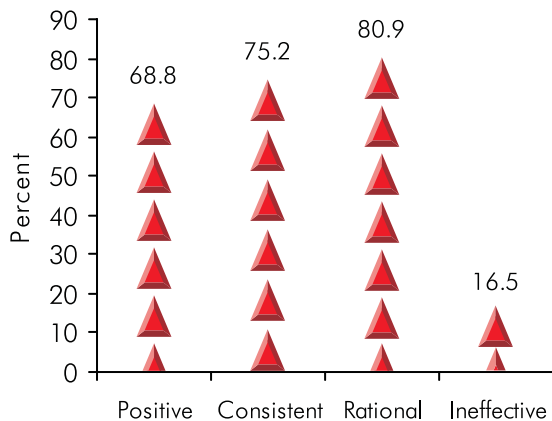
Figure 2 – Percentage of kindergarten children using entertainment and cultural resources



There was no clear link between a family's characteristics and a child's involvement in *unorganized* sports and their use of parks and play spaces. However, household income and language first learned at home were exceptions: more children whose first

Parental involvement was also related to a child's use of community resources. Parents who participated in music, arts or sports groups themselves were significantly more likely to have children who also participated in them.

Figure 3 – Parenting styles in North York



In addition, children who watched two or more hours of television per day were less likely to participate in physical activities (e.g., general sports, dance, gymnastics, martial arts), leadership programs (e.g., Beavers) and music, art or other non-sports lessons. Children who spent any amount of time using computers were also less likely to be involved in organized sports and lessons in music, art and other non-sport activities.

Sixty-two percent of children watched two or more hours of television per day and two-thirds of parents indicated that their children spent time using a computer outside of school hours.

Overall, children in North York were benefiting from a variety of resources and opportunities in their community. However, there were cases where participation rates differed in relation to family characteristics.

What parents said...about their families

Parenting

Parenting style has been gaining research attention as a key variable influencing children's outcomes – often more important

than a family's income, educational level or work status. As was the case in Canada as a whole, most parents in North York engaged in positive rational, consistent and effective parenting practices.

Parenting styles

POSITIVE CATEGORY - The positive interaction scale asks parents how often they praise their child; how often they talk and play with them; and how often they laugh together. Higher scores indicate a higher degree of positive parenting.

RATIONAL CATEGORY - These are the types of questions used to classify rational parents: when your child breaks the rules or does things he or she is not supposed to, how often do you: raise your voice? scold or yell at your child? calmly discuss the problem? use physical punishment? and describe alternative ways of behaving that are acceptable?

INEFFECTIVE CATEGORY - Parents scoring higher on the ineffective scale were those who were more likely to indicate that they often got annoyed with their child for saying or doing things he or she was not supposed to; they often got angry when they punished their child; they often had to discipline the child repeatedly for the same thing.

CONSISTENT CATEGORY - Questions included in the consistent parenting scale include: how often does your child get away with things that you feel should have been punished? When you give your child a command or order to do something, what proportion of the time do you make sure he or she does it?

Parents in the community had high levels of social support (only 12.5% reported that they lacked social support). Good family

functioning characterized 88% of families (e.g., adequate problem solving, communication skills and emotional responsiveness amongst all family members). Few symptoms of depression were reported, with 9% who reported many depressive tendencies.

Economic and demographic characteristics of families in the North York sample

Most parents in North York were working at the time this information was collected; in 85% of families, at least one parent was employed. Fewer mothers were working than were spouses (60% and 85% respectively) although this is common for young families. More than half of the families in North York (59.9%) rented their homes and, of these, about one-fifth (21.4%) were subsidized.

Family structure

Nearly one-quarter (23.5%) of the kindergarten children in the North York sample were living in lone-parent families. This figure is 10% higher than the provincial rate and 6.3% higher than the overall rate for Canada.

Income

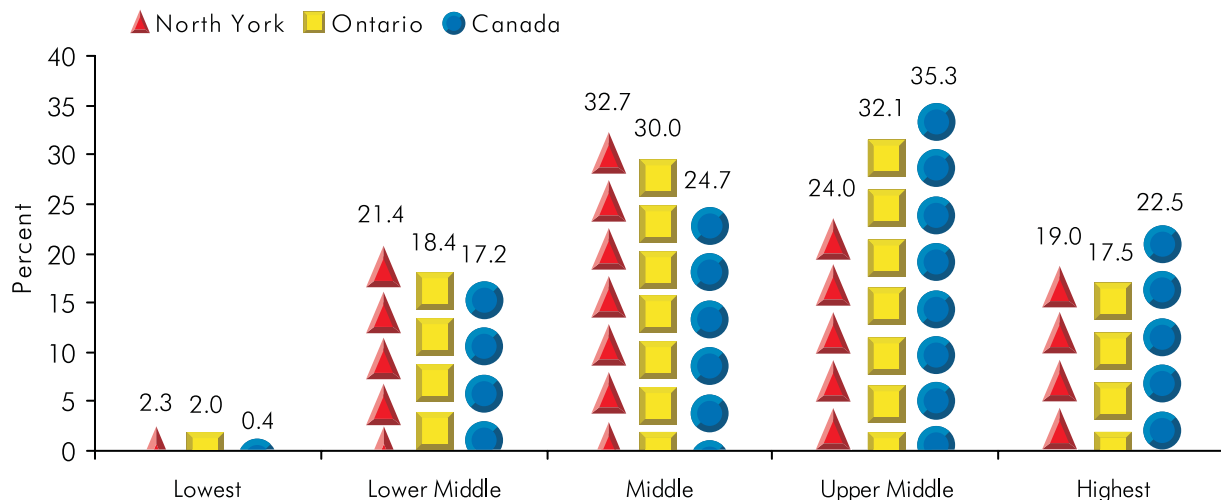
Household income provides an indication of a family's economic situation. In order to better understand the actual circumstances in which children live, however, the absolute value of household income must be considered in relation to the size of the family and its geographic place of residence. Families are doing worse than the average if they fall below the "low income cut-off" (LICO), calculated using this approach. Families are then classified into one of five income categories: "lowest," "lower middle," "middle," "upper middle," and "highest."

More families in the North York sample tended to fall in the low and lower middle income categories (23.7%) and fewer in the two highest categories (43.5%) compared to Ontario and Canada as a whole.

Education

Because parents are a child's first teachers and maternal education has an important influence on a child's development, the educational profile of a community is important for understanding the kinds of resources that would be beneficial in

Figure 4 – Income levels of families in the North York sample





supporting families with children. Close to half of mothers had completed a college or university degree (45.3%) – exceeding the proportion of similarly educated parents in the rest of the country (43.2% in Canada), but lower than the proportion in Ontario (49%). However, there were also a substantial number of parents who had not completed high school, and, in the case of mothers, this proportion (16.2%) was much higher than the provincial average (8.8%). Considering educational levels in the community is important when making decisions about the kind of community-based programming that may be appropriate.

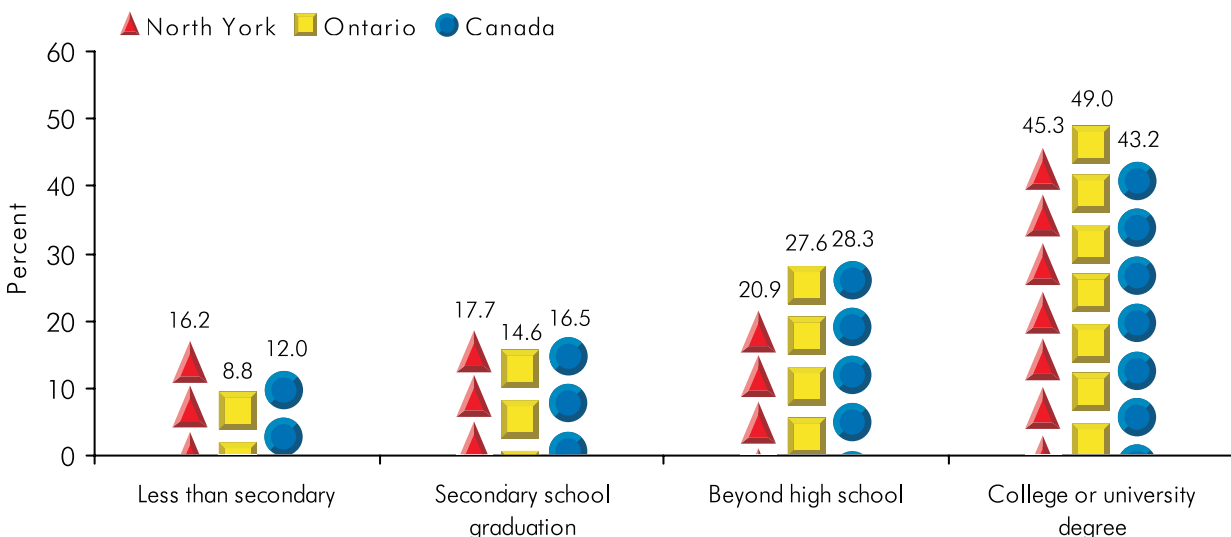
What parents said...about their neighbourhoods

The majority of parents had favourable perceptions of their neighbourhoods. They saw them as being safe and clean, with good schools, good access to public transportation and adequate services for children. Just over 60% felt they never had to worry about their children’s safety because of the rate of crime in their neighbourhood.

Table 3 – How did parents rate their neighbourhoods? (Percentages)

	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Lots of families with children	32.8	37.0	18.5	7.3	4.5
Good schools, nursery schools	34.8	50.0	11.3	3.1	0.8
Adequate facilities for children	31.7	43.5	13.1	6.3	5.4
Safe and clean community	30.9	42.5	13.1	8.4	5.0
Presence of health facilities	29.0	49.7	14.8	4.0	2.5
Active involved residents	17.3	39.2	24.0	11.4	8.1
Accessible public transportation	48.8	42.0	6.1	2.0	1.1

Figure 5 – Educational levels in the North York sample





Almost all of the families that had recently moved into a new neighbourhood also felt they had moved to a higher quality neighbourhood than their previous one. Almost three-quarters of parents believed that their new neighbourhood was an “excellent” or “good” place to raise children in comparison to their old one. Just under 10% felt that they had moved to a neighbourhood that was either “fair” or “poor” in comparison to their old one.

Community involvement

Active and involved membership in neighbourhood organizations is a clear sign of a community’s willingness to work together for the common good. Parents were asked to indicate whether or not they participated in any local volunteer organizations. More than half (55.4%) of parents in North York indicated they were members of at least one such type of community organization, usually a religious group (33.9%) or a school association (27.4%).

Table 4 – Family involvement in the community (Percentages)

	Participation	
	Yes	No
A school association	27.4	72.6
A religious affiliated group	33.9	66.1
A neighbourhood, civic or community association	11.3	88.7
A cultural or ethnic affiliated association	15.8	84.2

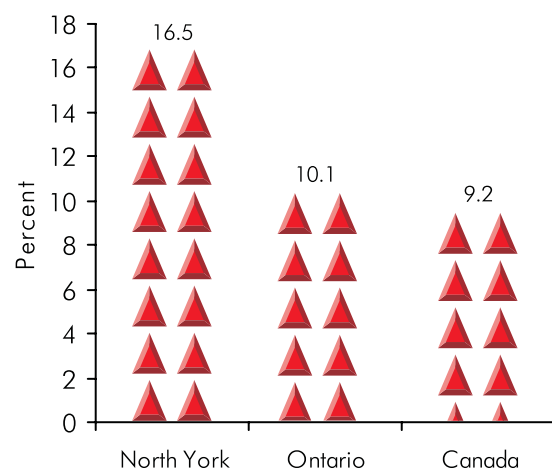
Voting for elected officials is another important indicator of civic participation. Among citizens who were eligible to vote, 85.6% indicated they voted in elections “always” or “most of the time.” Only 8.5% reported they “never” voted in elections.

Neighbourhoods that were high in social cohesion had neighbours who were willing to look out for trouble, help each other out, keep an eye on each other’s children, and get together to deal with problems.

Community cohesion

A cohesive community is one where families know, trust and help one another. This factor was measured by asking parents whether their children had adults they could look up to in the neighbourhood; whether other neighbours could be counted on to watch that children were safe; and if neighbours would keep their eyes open for possible trouble when others were away from home. Most parents felt that their community had a good degree of social cohesion. The results, however, suggested that the level of cohesion in North York was slightly lower than in the rest of Ontario and the country. About 16.5% of parents scored the social cohesion of North York at 7 or lower on a scale of 1 to 15 – compared to 10.1% of Ontarians and 9.2% of Canadians rating their communities on this scale.

Figure 6 – Proportion of parents reporting low levels of social cohesion in their neighbourhoods





Obstacles to community involvement

Although most parents held generally positive perceptions of their neighbourhoods and reported that they felt they had good facilities to meet their children’s needs, they sometimes had problems gaining access to the services they required. Facilitating access may be an important goal for those in the community who are involved in planning and administering programs.

According to parents, the three most common barriers to participation in community resources were:

- ▲ lack of time;
- ▲ costs associated with programs; and
- ▲ lack of awareness that the resource existed.

Given the cultural diversity of the community, one might have expected language to be a fairly significant obstacle to overcome in order to gain access to certain programs and services. Though an issue for some families, language was one of the least frequently cited barriers to participation.

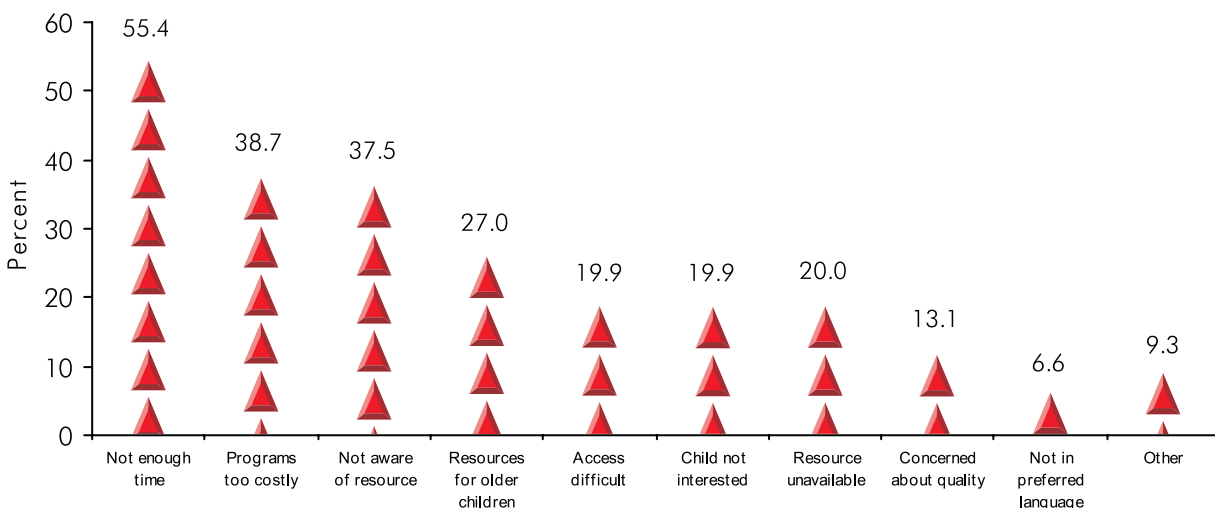
Summing up

Most parents had positive views of their own neighbourhoods and of North York. Resources were perceived to be readily available. Generally, families were also functioning with adequate levels of support and good parenting skills.

The community, however, is both ethnically and culturally diverse with a large immigrant population and many children whose mother tongue was neither English nor French. Although such diversity can provide increased opportunities for awareness and learning about other cultures, this study found that immigrant children with limited working knowledge of either English or French sometimes did not participate in the community resources studied to the same extent as non-immigrant children.

Social and economic circumstances – in North York as in other communities – can also enhance or hinder opportunities for community involvement depending on the levels of resources that a family has available to them.

Figure 7 – Reasons parents cited for not using community programs and services





Increased socio-economic resources (e.g., higher incomes, higher educational levels) were associated with increased participation in community programs and services where cost was a factor.

Participation rates in programs and services that involved minimal costs (e.g., use of libraries, parks and play spaces, unorganized sports activities), however, were higher across all socio-economic groups.

Increased involvement in community activities enhances children's opportunities for social interaction and physical activity, mental stimulation, learning and language development. In addressing barriers to such activities, communities may want to examine issues such as promoting awareness of activities and their importance for child well-being, as well as cost and availability of programs for children in the pre-school years.



5. What we learned about the children from the NLSCY



Key findings

- Most children were in good health.
- Children in North York scored better on all indicators of behaviour than national and provincial averages.
- Scores on receptive language assessments were poorer than national and provincial averages.
- Children scored better on assessments that were less language dependent.

The NLSCY measures children’s outcomes and provides information about the child, the family and the community, so variations in results can be explained and understood in the context of the child’s environment.

Physical health

Over 84% of parents rated their children as being in excellent or very good health. Only about 7% of parents reported that their children had experienced an injury serious enough to warrant medical attention.

Although about one in five reported that their child suffered from a long-term condition (e.g., allergy, bronchitis, mental handicap, epilepsy), less than 4% felt this condition limited their children’s participation in school, at play, in sports or other activities.

Although their overall health was rated as very good by their parents, more of the children

Measuring behaviour

Six measures of behaviour were used in this study: pro-social, hyperactivity/inattention, emotional disorder/anxiety, physical aggression, indirect aggression and property offences. Examples of questions asked are shown.

- *Pro-social behaviour*: does the child show sympathy to someone who has made a mistake; volunteer to help clear up a mess someone else has made; comfort a child who is crying or upset; invite others to join in a game?
- *Hyperactivity*: parents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement to eight statements pertaining to their child, including: your child can’t sit still; is restless; fidgets; has trouble sticking to any activity; can’t concentrate; and has difficulty waiting for his or her turn in games.
- *Emotional disorder* is characterized by feelings of anxiety or depression. The scale includes statements such as: your child seems unhappy, sad or depressed; cries a lot; and is nervous, high-strung or tense.
- *Physical aggression* included getting into fights, perpetrating physical attacks, making threats against people, cruelty and bullying.
- The *indirect aggression* score was formed by parents’ responses to five statements, such as: when your child is mad at someone, he or she tries to get others to dislike that person; and says bad things behind the other’s back.
- While relatively few children engaged in behaviours such as stealing or vandalizing, some parents reported their children lied, cheated or destroyed things belonging to others - behaviours that were indicative of problems measured by the *property offences* scale.



(8%) in North York were reported to have had a low birth weight (less than 2500 grams at birth) than in Ontario or the country as a whole. Low birth weights have been associated with long-term chronic illness and delays in development.

Behaviours

Kindergarten children in North York obtained better results than the provincial (Ontario) and national scores on all six behavioural measures – 81.7%⁶ scored highly on the measure of pro-social behaviour (compared to 78.4% in Canada and 79.7% in Ontario). About one fifth of children exhibited behaviours consistent with those seen in the measure of indirect aggression, and a smaller percentage had problems in other areas (hyperactivity/inattention, emotional disorder, physical aggression, property offences).

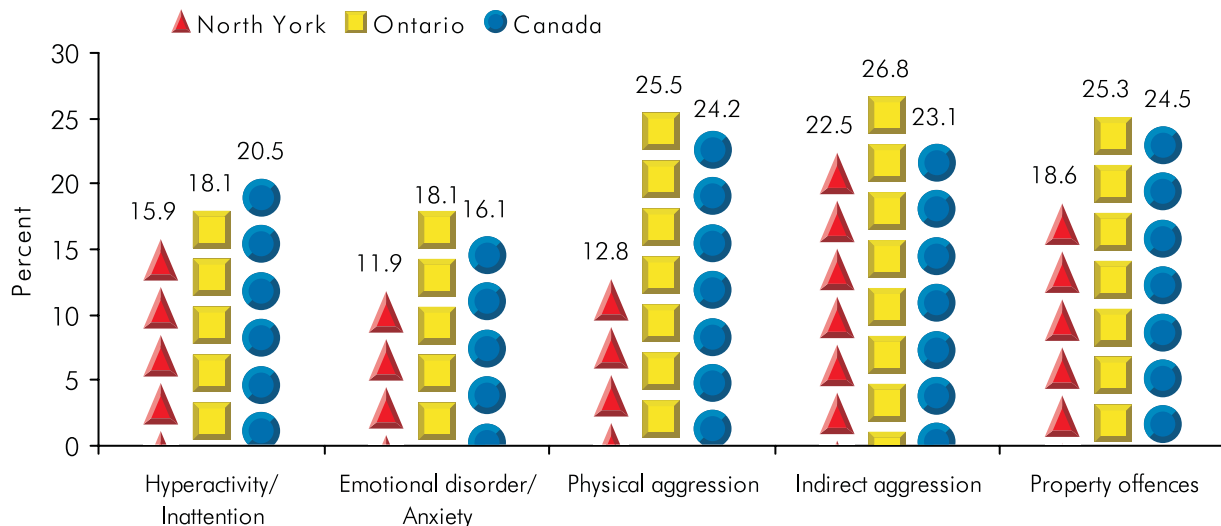
Learning and language

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Revised)

Two measures were used to assess kindergarteners' language and learning skills in English. First, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Revised (PPVT-R), and second, the Who Am I? instrument.

The PPVT-R assessed a child's receptive or hearing vocabulary. The children heard a word said aloud and were then asked to point to one of four pictures they believed corresponded to the word. Based on their scores, almost 38% of children in the community were classified as being at a level of "delayed verbal development." This is about twice the provincial and national rates for children of the same age and equivalent grade level. Almost 7% of children in North York showed skills associated with "advanced verbal development," compared to about 13% of Ontario and Canadian children.

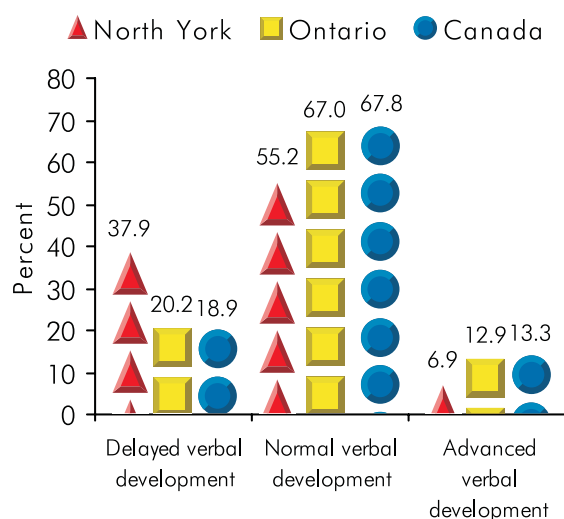
Figure 8 – Percentage of children showing signs of behavioural problems



⁶ All thresholds for behaviour scales were based on the score obtained by the bottom 20% (or the lowest percentile observed in the distribution) of kindergarten students in the cycle 2 NLSCY national sample.

The ethnic diversity of the North York community may explain some of the low results obtained by the kindergarten students. By its very nature, the PPVT-R requires that subjects have a good understanding of the language in which the test is administered (English or French). Since 47% of children in the North York sample first learned to speak a language other than English, lower scores for receptive vocabulary in English were not a complete surprise. When English was the first language spoken at home, the percentage of children showing “delayed verbal development” dropped to a rate of 20.3%, similar to that of the rest of Canada. In households where English was not the child’s first language spoken, a full 63% of children showed “delayed verbal development” by PPVT-R standards. However, past research has shown that the deficit in literary skills among immigrant youth was reduced with each additional year of English use (Willms, Statistics Canada and HRDC (1999)).⁷

Figure 9 – Vocabulary scores of the children in the community



⁷ Willms, J.D., Statistics Canada, HRDC. (1999). *Inequalities in literacy skills among youth in Canada and the United States*. Co-published by Human Resources Development Canada and National Literacy Secretariat. Statistics Canada catalogue no. 89-552-MPE, no.6.

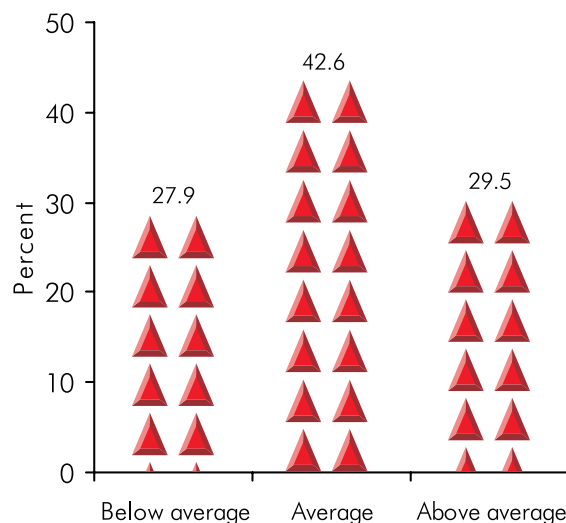
Therefore, language support to children, parents, pre-schools and schools may be an important priority for the North York community.

Who am I?

Children were asked to write their names, and some numbers, letters and words when the Who Am I? instrument was used. They also copied some figures (circles, squares) and drew a picture of themselves. Who Am I? was used to assess broad stages of development and learning, visual motor integration and fine motor skills. Because the tasks are not dependent on language, it can be used to assess the development of children whose knowledge of English or French is limited.

About 42% of children scored in the average range on this test, but high numbers of children scored either above (29.5%) or below (27.9%) the average range.⁸ Fewer children

Figure 10 – Who Am I? scores of the children in the community



⁸ These categories were based on Australian norms, as this is the first time this assessment was administered in Canada; thus, no Canadian norms exist. Thresholds set for Australian children in the equivalent grade level were used to classify the North York results into these categories.



did poorly in this test than in the PPVT-R (38%) – as expected because the test is not as dependent on language as is the PPVT-R, but the percentage doing poorly is still significant. This indicates that for most children, developmental skills were progressing well despite language delays.

Summing up

Though a smaller percentage of children had behaviour problems compared to their counterparts in the rest of the country, a higher percentage than the national average showed delayed or below average vocabulary development. It appears these effects are at least partially related to the fact that the assessments are conducted in English or French and a high proportion of the children did not speak either as their first language. However, the consequences of this finding remain significant as they will likely impact on a child's ability to excel in the school system. Provision of language development programs and/or services for younger children may be helpful.



6. What factors affect these children's outcomes?



Key findings

- Positive parenting practices were associated with positive behavioural development in children.
- A mother's level of education was strongly related to her child's level of vocabulary development.
- Use of educational resources was linked to enhanced development in children.
- Lower scores on learning assessments were seen in children whose families felt they encountered many barriers to participation in community programs and services.

All findings discussed in this chapter are based on the results of logistic regression analysis⁹ on the sample of children whose parents responded to the NLSCY.

Behaviours

Most children in North York exhibited signs of positive behaviours, but a small percentage showed signs of behavioural problems. In order to understand the factors affecting behavioural problems among children in the sample, two groups were examined in greater detail. The behaviour of the children in the first group was classified as being highly positive or pro-social, while the children in the other

group had problems in two or more of the additional five areas of behavioural development (hyperactivity, emotional disorder, physical or indirect aggression and property offences).¹⁰

Each group was analyzed in terms of the child's personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age) the family's characteristics (e.g., mother's education, parenting style) and neighbourhood characteristics (e.g., safety, sports programs).

Factors associated with pro-social behaviours

Children who exhibit higher levels of pro-social behaviours are more likely to try to help and comfort others. They may offer to help pick up objects that another child has dropped or offer to try to help a child who is having trouble with a difficult task, and perhaps also invite their peers to join in a game.

Children who used educational centres or workshops (such as science centres or other learning programs) where they may get the opportunity to interact with other children of the same age while they learn about new things, were much more likely to show these positive behaviours. This was the strongest factor associated with pro-social behaviour in the children. Girls were also more likely to exhibit these types of behaviours than boys.

The manner in which a child's parent reacts when the child breaks rules or does things they are not supposed to also seems to be important for pro-social behaviour. The more often a parent reacts by trying to calmly

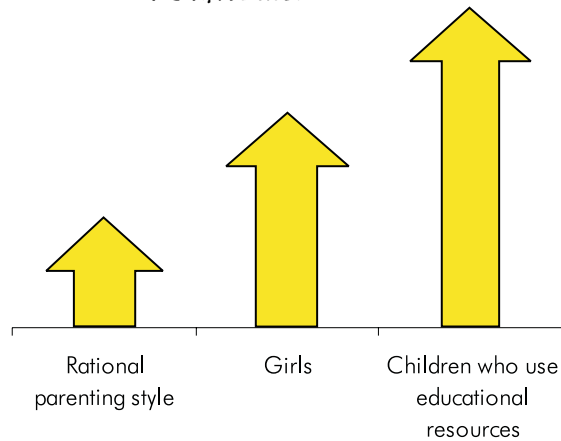
⁹ Logistic regression is an appropriate statistical technique to examine the relationship between the characteristics of a child, his or her family and community and his or her likelihood of having a certain outcome (e.g., behaviour problems).

¹⁰ These children scored below the score of the lowest 20th percentile nationally on two or more of the behavioural scales (excluding the pro-social behaviour scale).



discuss the problem, by describing alternative ways of behaving, and by avoiding yelling and scolding their child, the more likely that child is to show pro-social behaviours.

Figure 11 – Which children are more likely to exhibit pro-social behaviours?



Factors associated with behaviour problems

In general, children were less likely to exhibit behaviour problems in the following circumstances:¹¹

- ▲ Their parents had more effective parenting styles.
- ▲ They lived in neighbourhoods that had many other families with children.
- ▲ They did not have a long-term condition such as bronchitis, epilepsy or allergies.
- ▲ Their families had higher levels of family functioning (they communicated well, were able to work together to solve problems, had good relationships with and were responsive to one another).
- ▲ Their families had attended religious services or meetings in the past year.

¹¹ Factors with the strongest relationships to children's behaviour problems are listed first.

- ▲ They were rated by their parents as being healthier.
- ▲ The language they first learned at home and that they still understood was a language other than English or French.
- ▲ And finally, girls were less likely to show signs of behavioural problems than boys.

Learning and language

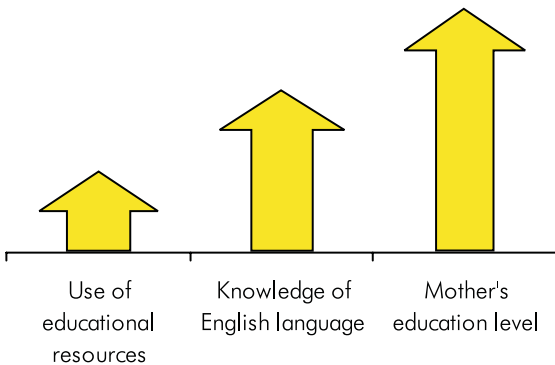
Factors associated with vocabulary development

Many factors seemed to be related to a child's vocabulary development (as measured by the PPVT-R). The strongest factor by far was the level of education of the child's mother. Mothers who had graduated from high school were much more likely to have children with normal or above-normal levels of vocabulary development. Those who had completed a university degree (or more) were even more likely to have children who scored in the higher ranges on vocabulary development.

Not surprisingly, children who were less able to speak English well enough to conduct a conversation were significantly less likely to have scored well on this assessment, which tests vocabulary in English.

Vocabulary development was also influenced by children's use of educational resources within their communities, such as libraries, book clubs, literacy programs, educational centres or workshops, and family and parent resource centres. Not only did it matter whether or not a child ever used these resources, it mattered how often they used them. The children who had used more of these kinds of resources more often were those who did better in the measure of vocabulary development.

Figure 12 – Factors associated with vocabulary development



Other factors appeared to be associated with better vocabulary development. The frequency with which a parent reads to a child, for example, or a child's use of sports and recreational resources within his or her community can be important. However, when the factors were all analyzed together, the mother's education, the child's knowledge of English and the child's use of educational resources had the strongest impact on vocabulary skills.

Factors associated with development and learning outcomes

What factors were associated with average or above-average scores on this learning/development assessment (as measured by the Who Am I?)? Results are listed in order of the strength of their relationship with Who Am I? scores, with the strongest factors coming first.

- ▲ Girls were more likely to score higher.
- ▲ Six year olds performed better than five year olds.
- ▲ Children whose mothers had immigrated to Canada (as compared to children whose mothers were born in Canada) scored more favourably.

- ▲ Children whose parents were involved in community voluntary organizations such as a school association scored better.
- ▲ Children who read on a daily basis scored better than those who read to themselves only weekly, monthly or rarely.
- ▲ Children whose parents reported that they faced more barriers to participating in community organizations were less likely to score in the average or above-average range. Barriers they faced included lack of time, costs associated with program participation, lack of awareness about community resources, or transportation difficulties.

Summing up

Knowing which factors are associated with positive child development offers choices for interventions that are more likely to succeed.

Child factors

Knowledge of English as a second language is important for learning at school and, in North York, language was an important factor associated with the children's levels of language development. Although children who could not speak English were more likely to have problems on the vocabulary assessments, this was not the case in the Who Am I? instrument, which was a much broader measure of learning and development. This could be an indication that these children will perform better on similar assessments as their English improves. These same children were also more likely to be doing better on the behavioural assessments than their English- and French-speaking counterparts, perhaps because of different cultural norms for child rearing.



Family factors

Children whose families were functioning positively, where parents were parenting in a more positive and rational manner, and where the educational levels were higher, had better outcomes as measured by most of these assessments. When considered with all other factors, income did not appear to be a crucial factor. However, family characteristics that can be associated with income, such as levels of education and health status, were related to these outcomes. Support for families can be a key factor for children's development. This support can come through increased information (i.e., about the importance of reading with their children), skill development (i.e., to enhance parenting skills), support programs for families who are having problems, and encouragement of those who are not.

Community factors

Several community characteristics also played a role, even after the effects of family characteristics were considered. Children were more likely to be well behaved if they lived in neighbourhoods with many other families with children, possibly because of the opportunities for social interaction this can provide. Better outcomes were also seen in children who read every day and were more involved in their communities by making use of libraries, book clubs, and educational centres, as well as those who had parents who were involved in voluntary organizations.

Barriers to community participation are a real issue for many families. The types of barriers that families face vary a great deal and may include economic, physical and social obstacles. Their effects, however, are identifiable and cumulative. The more barriers a family faced, the more likely it was that their child would experience problems. This emphasizes the need to promote social interaction and integration within a community, to promote awareness about community resources and their importance, to ensure resources are available, and to address barriers to access.



7. Looking Forward

Overall, the children of North York were healthy and most showed strong signs of positive development and readiness for learning. Parents were operating with self-reported good levels of social support, strong parenting skills, good family functioning and low levels of depression. Neighbourhoods were safe and clean and, in general, had accessible services.

Although many Canadian communities likely share at least some of these broader characteristics, each community also exhibits a variety of more unique features that set it apart from all others. This is one of the reasons community-based research is so important. Research allows a community to understand how its youngest citizens are developing and lends insight into how the obtained results came about. Investments for families and children as well as for children's development can be monitored over time so that effectiveness and efficiency of community effort can be improved.

What makes North York unique?

Four features stand out

Cultural diversity

North York is a highly multicultural community, with many families whose members have no working knowledge of English or French. In some cases, these characteristics were associated with higher behavioural and learning development in the children. In others, however, they were associated with lower vocabulary scores.

In the teacher checklist (EDI), between a fifth and one quarter of children had problems in at least one of the components and close to one third showed problems in two or more – which for these children could translate into difficulties when learning. This is an important issue for the community to be aware of as readiness for learning and for school sets the basis for lifelong learning and future health and competence. Readiness to learn at this age can give a child the ability to “benefit from all that school has to offer, both academically and socially, which allows them to develop self-respect and self-esteem to tackle the challenges of learning and growing up.”¹²

Socio-economic composition

The social and economic make-up of the community is also distinct. The average income levels in the sample of families that took part in the survey was slightly lower than the Canadian averages; the proportion of lone-parent families is higher; there is polarity in education levels of residents; and the mobility rate is also high. In most cases (at least for the outcomes examined in this report), these factors were not directly related to poorer children's outcomes. However, the potential stresses and potential lack of opportunity known to be associated with these characteristics could have implications for these children.

Conversely, the reverse of these characteristics (e.g., higher levels of education of residents and higher income levels) are related to positive child outcomes. In North York, for instance, higher levels of maternal education were associated with higher receptive vocabulary scores in children of those mothers with higher education.

¹² Doherty, G. (1997). *Zero to Six: The Basis for School Readiness*. HRDC, Applied Research Branch Research paper R-97-8E.



There was also a great deal of social and economic diversity in individual neighbourhoods within the larger community, with higher and lower socio-economic areas tending to cluster together. Because neighbourhoods of different socio-economic resources have different needs and different requirements for child-based services, having information on individual neighbourhoods is crucial as it provides the information to allow services/programs to be customized on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis. It gives communities insight into areas with multiple problems or multiple strengths.

Parenting

Parenting styles in North York were similar to those in the rest of the country. It is important to recognize parenting style as a determinant of children's outcomes, which could feasibly be addressed in community-based interventions. In North York, more rational and positive parenting approaches were associated with enhanced behavioural development in the children. Research, based on the national sample of the NLSCY, has demonstrated the importance of positive, consistent, rational and effective parenting practices, both as a determinant of a child's healthy development as well as a strong protective factor against potential risks in a child's life. Increased awareness of the importance of good parenting and strategies and methods for improving parent-child interactions could form the basis of a community-based effort to enhance child development. In some communities, schools play an important role in providing information. This is already happening in many neighbourhoods in North York.

Resource utilization

Although many children used recreational facilities such as parks and play spaces and educational services such as libraries, their participation rates were somewhat lower than

those in the rest of the province or country in other activities. The rates of children "almost never" participating in organized and unorganized sports and recreational activities were higher than the rest of the country in almost all activities. Participation was also associated with the social and cultural make-up of the community with, for instance, more children in two-parent families, higher household incomes, and English as their first language using resources than those who did not share these characteristics.

Participation in activities and use of child-oriented resources is important to a child's social, behavioural and physical development. Children's participation in supervised and unsupervised sports and arts-oriented activities is associated with increased psychosocial development.¹³ This emphasizes the importance of addressing existing barriers to resource use such as time, cost and the distribution of certain resources. Because children and their families were not using existing resources to their full potential, their importance for development could be promoted and their presence in the community advertised.

Summing up

North York is the prototype site for the Uey Initiative. As the initiative expands to more communities throughout the country, valuable lessons will be learned about the needs and strengths of communities with different economic, social and physical characteristics, and how they are working to improve children's outcomes as well as the relative success of their efforts (both in terms of more successful and less successful projects).

¹³ Offord, D.R., Lipman, E.L., & Duku, E.K. (1998). *Sports, the Arts and Community Programs: Rates and Correlates of Participation*. HRDC, Applied Research Branch Working paper W-98-18E.



How citizens in communities work together to improve children's developmental outcomes will be determined by communities. Results from the UEY Initiative will inform the discussion along with the knowledge that comes from living in a community. At the same time, it is a societal responsibility – that of governments, educators, community agencies, neighbourhoods and families – to make sure improvements take place for all children. Strategies that require the community to look at itself as a whole community, as well as neighbourhood by neighbourhood, will likely have more enduring effects. UEY is able to provide research results to support both. For example, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, families may undertake to improve their outdoor playspaces, and on a community level, concerned agencies and organizations could undertake to improve community-wide strategies to integrate disadvantaged groups. As communities document their efforts as well as their results, effective practices will be identified.

Any community response must take into account the unique features of the area. In North York, for example, interventions must be sensitive to its linguistic, cultural and socio-economic diversity. The importance of a co-ordinated approach involving families, teachers and all community members must be emphasized, as each has been shown to be important in enhancing a child's development. Governments, community institutions, schools and the voluntary sector in North York must continue to work together, as each can make a unique and important contribution. Support for families with children from the larger community network is critical.

The children of North York are fortunate because in this case a great deal of support for the early years has already been established, and the continued work of the EYAG and other members of the community will maintain this commitment. With decisions based on research evidence, effective practices can be developed and the North York community can continue to work towards achieving the goal of ensuring every child enters school ready to learn.