

Early years are learning years



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The Supreme Education Council and the Education Institute have implemented a strategic plan for expanding educational opportunities for young children in the Independent Schools. A key component of this plan has been the construction of kindergarten buildings that have been designed specifically for young children's unique learning and developmental needs.

The design of the buildings promotes creativity, play and learning. In addition to administrative offices and a professional resource area for teachers, each building contains six or twelve classrooms, a library, computer lab, multi-purpose room, music room and two large indoor recreation areas with natural lighting throughout.

In September 2008, four of the new kindergarten buildings were approved for occupancy. Three additional buildings are now completed and are awaiting final SEC/Shared Services approval, pending electrical work. The SEC expects that several additional new KG buildings will be completed and approved for occupancy in November.

In total, there are plans for the construction of up to 30 new

kindergarten buildings, which will be assigned to primary school principals and operators. Many of these buildings will be ready for occupancy at the beginning of the 2009 school year. The SEC has proposed early learning buildings for all Independent primary schools by 2012.

As part of the building initiative, the Shared Services Department of the SEC, in collaboration with the Early Years team at the Education Institute, has awarded purchase contracts to several furniture companies to supply each new kindergarten building with administrative and classroom furniture and equipment. The Early Years Team at the Education Institute provide ongoing guidance and consultation for school leadership for the purchase of additional furniture and equipment within individual school budgets.

One of the challenges in this process has been to locate sufficient Arabic children's literature and resources that support language and literacy development in the bilingual classrooms.

Health and Safety Guidelines

In preparation for the expanding educational settings, the Early Years team at the Education Institute has developed a document outlining Health and Safety Guidelines for Early Years programs. This document, approved by the Education Institute has been sent to all primary school principals as well as to the Shared Services Department of the SEC.

During the 2008-2009 school year, the Early Years Advisory teacher in each primary school and kindergarten building will assist school leadership in monitoring the health and safety of the learning environments, conduct risk assessments, and make recommendations for improvements. Included in the guidelines are sample lessons for young children regarding fire, water and traffic safety. School leaders are expected to use these guidelines to ensure a high standard of health and safety of their facilities.



Qualified Early Years Teachers

Recruiting and retaining qualified teachers who have experience and credentials in early learning continues to be a significant challenge for principals in the Independent schools. Qatari universities do not currently offer undergraduate degree programs in Early Childhood Education. Therefore, many of the teachers in the kindergarten classrooms have bachelor's degrees in other areas.

For this reason, the Education Institute has contracted with two companies, Education Queensland from Australia and Nord Anglia from the United Kingdom, to provide each primary school and kindergarten with an early childhood Advisory Teacher (AT) for the 2008-2009 school year. The SEC-contracted Advisory Teacher works in the school four days each week with teachers and school leadership to provide guidance and ongoing professional development to enhance the knowledge and skills of teachers in kindergarten and Grades One and Two.

The Education Institute has also designed a career workforce strategy to

develop Early Childhood teachers upon graduation from secondary school. The program will take the prospective teachers through to a baccalaureate level program and will later provide continuing education (while in service) and professional development opportunities. Qatar University plans to offer an Early Childhood major within their new Teacher Education program in the near future.

The Early Years team and the Education Institute are also consulting with the Social Development Center and the College of the North Atlantic- Qatar to conduct a feasibility study for the development of an Early Years Teacher Training Center in Doha. With the support of the Education Institute and the SEC, there will be a substantial increase in the number of qualified Early Childhood teachers in the next few years.

Early Years Teacher Assistant Certificate Program

In the meantime, The Education Institute and Qatar University have agreed to continue the Early Years Teacher Assistant Certificate program for a second year. In June 2008, there

were 32 participants who completed the one-year certificate program, which was financed by the Education Institute of the SEC. The program included courses at the University and practicum experiences in the schools during the 2007-2008 school year. Thirty of these teacher assistants continue to be employed in the Independent Schools.

Currently, there are 96 participants enrolled in the one year Early Years Teacher Assistant Certificate program at Qatar University. This program is full time and includes courses in English and Technology. The Education Institute and the Early Years team will support the University in quality assurances for the program. Participants are expected to work as Teacher Assistants in the Independent Schools following completion of the certificate program. Many of the participants are also expected to pursue a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education as soon as programs become available.