

A group of children are sitting on a wooden dock, looking towards a large pond. In the center of the pond, a fountain is spraying water high into the air. The background features a line of trees and several tall industrial smokestacks under a clear blue sky. The children are wearing various hats and jackets, suggesting a cool day.

KINDERGARTEN HANDBOOK



Dear Equinox Kindergarten Parents/Guardians,

Welcome to Equinox! Congratulations on being accepted into our school's unique outdoor full-day kindergarten program.

As parents/guardians ourselves, we know how exciting and stressful it is to start at a new school, especially if this is your first child. Most families are eager to learn as much as possible about a new program before it starts in the hopes that they will be better prepared.

The Equinox School Council, a group of parent/guardian volunteers, has created this Kindergarten Handbook containing helpful tips, insights and advice from those whose own children have successfully participated in the Equinox Outdoor Kindergarten Program. It contains everything we experienced and/or wished we knew when our own families started kindergarten. So, grab a beverage, sit back and enjoy this handbook.

If you still have any more questions about Equinox after reading this handbook, please feel free to contact the Equinox School Council anytime through our Facebook page or by email at chair@equinoxschool.ca.

Sincerely,

Equinox School Council

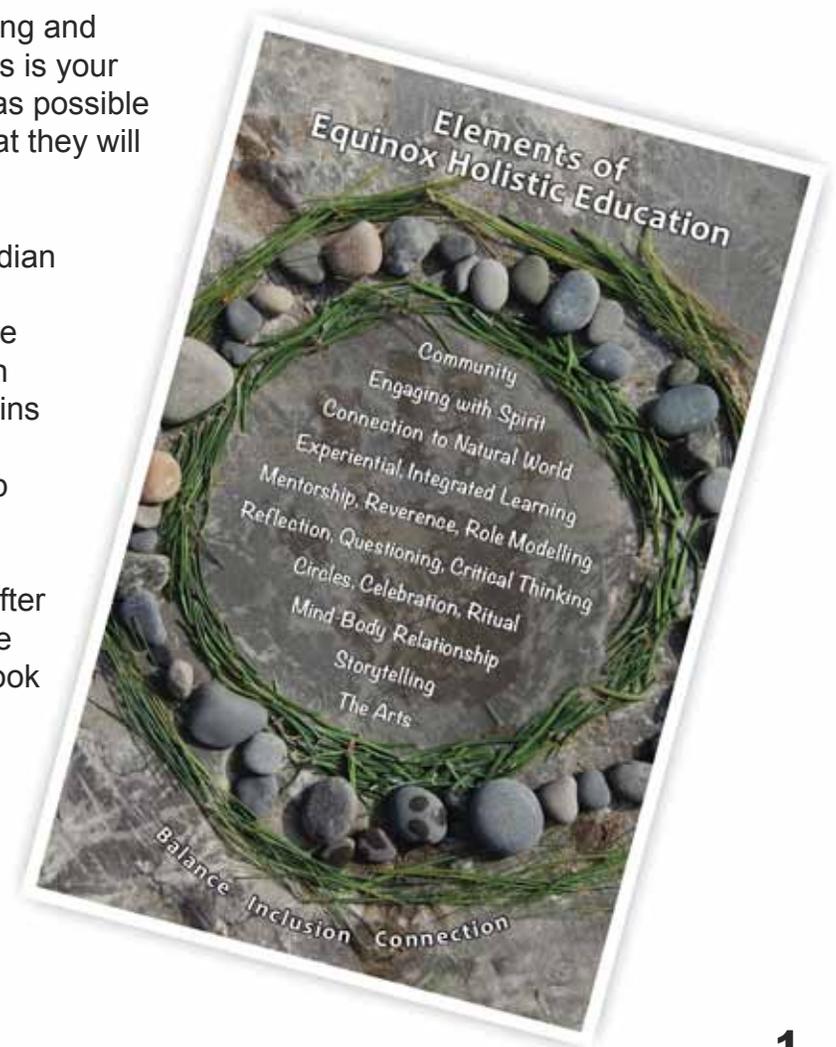


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Community Building

Between now and September is a wonderful opportunity to meet other kindergarten families and/or get a jump start on a few skills to prepare your child for kindergarten.

Weekly Summer Play Dates

During the summer, Equinox families from all grades are invited to weekly park meet-ups. It's a great way to meet other families from Equinox and to get the kids outside to play. These events are organized by a parent volunteer. Check the Equinox Facebook in June for more information or email chair@equinoxschool.ca.

Welcome Kindergarten Picnic

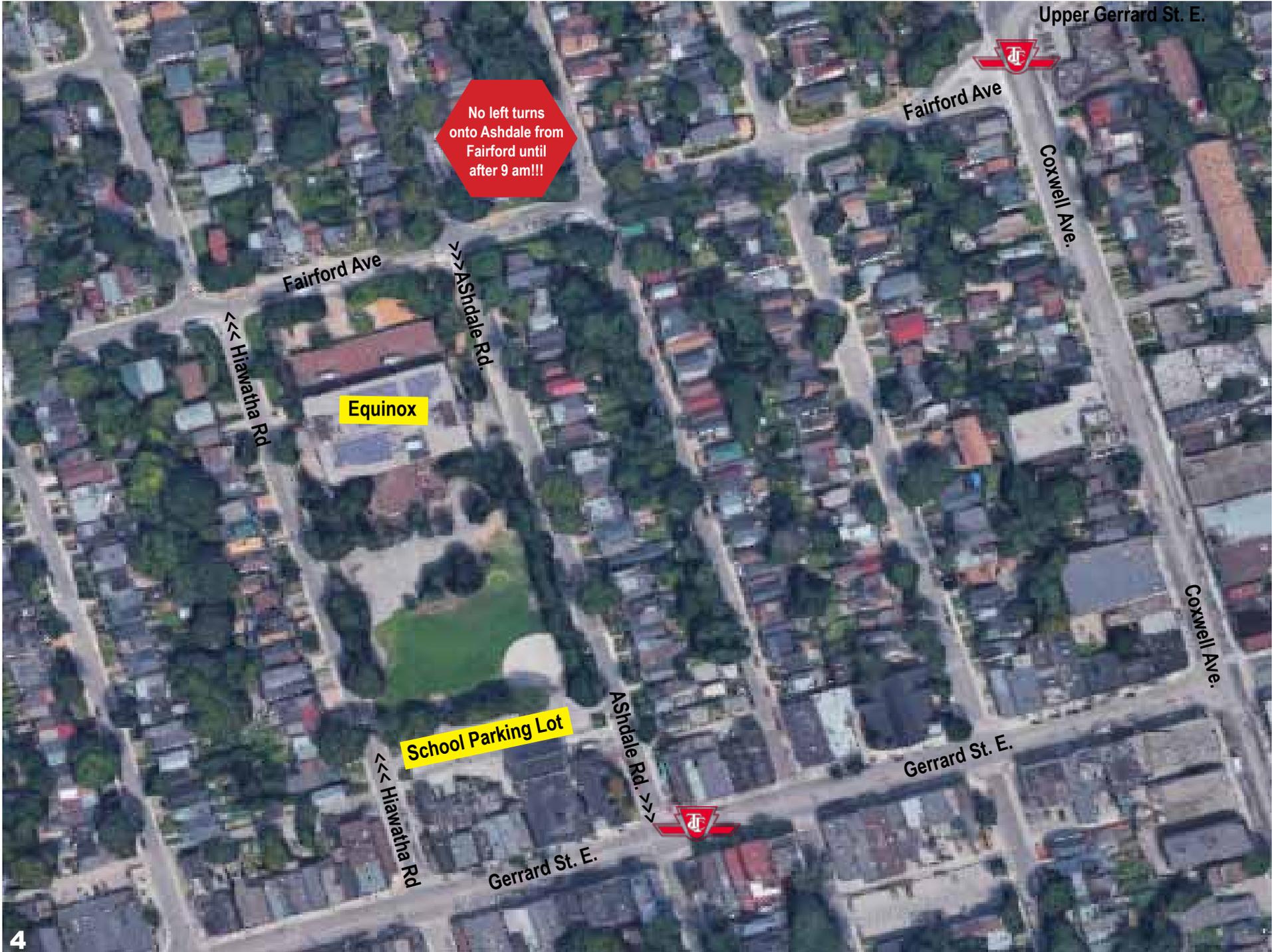
Equinox full-day kindergarten (FDK) families will be invited to attend a Welcome to Kindergarten Picnic the last week of August. The kindergarten staff will be on-site for this casual meet-and-greet. This is a great opportunity for families to connect with your child's teacher/ECE. Check the Equinox Facebook page over summer for more information or email chair@equinoxschool.ca.

Kindergarten Parent/Guardian Contact List

Your family will be invited to join a shared kindergarten parent/guardian contact list. This online contact list is a fabulous tool for Equinox kindergarten families to be able to set-up future play dates or send out birthday invites, etc. Please take the time to add your family's contact information to this document if you want other kindergarten families to be able to contact you in the future.

School Community Events

Throughout the year, volunteers organize social events such as bonfires, clothing swaps, and our annual social night. You are welcome to suggest or plan additional events. Please contact the chair@equinoxschool.ca for more information.



Upper Gerrard St. E.

Fairford Ave

Coxwell Ave.

No left turns
onto Ashdale from
Fairford until
after 9 am!!!

Fairford Ave

Ashdale Rd.

Hiawatha Rd.

Equinox

Coxwell Ave.

School Parking Lot

Ashdale Rd.

Hiawatha Rd.

Gerrard St. E.

Gerrard St. E.

First Day Tips & Reminders

The first day of school is exciting and scary for many families. Here are a few tips and reminders to help make it a bit easier.

1. Arrive early, before 8:45 am, to avoid the morning rush. This will help make it less overwhelming for your whole family. Kindergarten starts at 8:55 am and finishes at 3 pm.
2. If you are driving west on Fairford Ave. to school, please note there are no left turns onto Ashdale Rd. before 9 am.
3. There is limited street parking available on Ashdale Ave. adjacent to the school, approx. 4-6 spots marked between two signs. The rest of the street has no parking signs, except with a permit or after 6 pm. The Green P parking lot at the south end of the school yard, near Gerrard St. E., is **free school parking** between 8 am and 6 pm. After 6 pm onwards it's a paid Green P parking lot. Note: the Green P app does not work for this lot, a paid ticket is required from the machine anytime after 6 pm.
4. A few road safety law reminders: double-parking and parking on sidewalks is not allowed, please follow the posted school zone reduced speed limits, do not idle your vehicle next to the outdoor kindergarten classrooms nor school yard, always make a full stop at stop signs, and lastly remind your child to cross the street at designated areas vs. between parked cars. Let's work together to keep our community safe.
5. Before school starts, your family will learn which class your child is in, either the Linden or Maple kindergarten class and where to meet the class the first day of school.
6. Students should carry their own backpacks to/from school and pack/unpack them themselves so they know it is their responsibility and where they placed their belongings.

7. Be sure to sunscreen your child before they arrive at school and that they are wearing a sun hat. As an outdoor program, your child will be outside most of the day rain or shine. On very hot days the children will be able to take breaks from the heat in our air conditioned school building.

8. Student backpacks should include the following when you drop them off at school: extra sunscreen, a snack in a separate labelled container, a labelled lunch container, a labelled water bottle, an extra change of labelled clothes in a plastic bag (the bag is used for soiled clothes) and an extra pair of labelled indoor running shoes. Running shoes are mandatory for gym class.

9. When your family arrives you will be greeted by your child's teacher/ECE and be given instructions on what to do next. For example, where your child should put their bag.

10. Some students will need additional support as they transition into the kindergarten program, especially during morning drop-off. Parents/guardians are more than welcome to discuss this process with Equinox staff. Many parents/guardians recommend taking the morning off from work the first day of school. You'll have the peace of mind knowing that if your child has a meltdown during the morning drop-off that you don't have the added stress of rushing off to work. And, if your child is fine during the first day of school, then you'll have a free morning all to yourself—enjoy!

11. The first two weeks of school, the kindergarten program asks for no volunteers as the staff builds relationships and routines with students.

Snacks/Lunch

Try to keep snacks and lunches healthy, easy and quick to eat. Finger foods are great! As any past kindergarten family can tell you, complex meals often go uneaten by kids and will simply come right back home to you. Snack/lunch breaks are an exciting time for students to socialize. The best food advice, give your child food that is easy to hold and quick to eat in small increments such as cut up veggies, cut up cheese, cut up fruit (to save them from having to peel), crackers, etc. Due to severe food allergies at our school, especially in kindergarten, nuts, fish and seafood are banned.

Finger foods are even more important when students go on nature trips. Your child may be in full snow/rain gear trying to eat their snack outside at Monarch Park or the ravine. They will want something quick and easy to consume.

Please note, the school nutrition program provides one free healthy snack each afternoon to all students, such as fruit and vegetables.

Equinox kindly asks families to please send their children to school with only healthy food choices. This promotes good nutrition and prevents students from experiencing extreme sugar highs and then emotional crashes in the classrooms. It also stops conflicts among students over treats. As a parent/guardian, imagine having 20+ kids ramped up on sugar and then all of them crashing. Or, one fruit roll-up and 20 kids staring at it. Please be thoughtful and save the sugary treats for home. Help make everyone's school day a little calmer and better.

Our school is eco-friendly. Students are expected to bring in litterless lunches/snacks. This means anything you send into school with your child will go home with your child. Keep this in mind when packing things like yogurt and apple sauce. If they do not have resealable lids, they will leak all over your child's bag. Peels, half eaten fruit, empty wrappers etc. are also sent home.

The teacher/ECE will show your child where to place their individual belongings the first day of school. Students are expected at the start of each day to unpack and place their individual belongings in the appropriate spots themselves, such as their backpack, water bottle, lunch and one snack that is packed separately.

The walking trips start in early October and are usually half a day (i.e. morning or afternoon). Only the separately packed snack container and water bottle in your child's backpack will go with them on the walking trip. This reduces how much weight each student has to carry on their back during the walking trip. Every student is expected to carry their own backpack on the class nature hikes. So, please remember to get your child a backpack that is both small and light for them to carry.

Children feel successful when they are independent and can do things for themselves. One to two weeks before school starts, please take the time to test and practice with your child their backpack and snack/lunch containers.

Pack their containers with real food, such as their breakfast, lunch or dinner. Have your child practice taking the containers out from their closed backpack themselves. Let them open and close the backpack and containers unassisted. Don't forget to test the water bottle too! If your child struggles, please consider getting them different containers/bag before school starts.

All TDSB schools encourage families to take their children home for lunch to give them a break from the school day. This request is also made by TDSB to try to help reduce the overall student to lunch supervisor ratios at the lunch break. The Equinox kindergarten students eat lunch in their own classrooms. There are two lunch supervisors for approx. 40 kindergarten students in total. In the older grades, students eat in the gym and there are approx. 100 students per one lunch supervisor.

Although taking your child home for lunch is recommend by TDSB, realistically most parents/guardians work and it is impossible to take your kids home in the middle of a work day. Only a handful of students go home for lunch everyday. The majority stay for lunch at school and are supervised by the lunch supervisors.



Breakfast Club

By mid-September a free Breakfast Club starts for both Equinox and Roden students. The Breakfast Club is located on the main floor by the front office. It offers healthy free breakfasts made on site most weekdays between 8:30 am and 8:50 am.

The Breakfast Club is a NOT a free before-care service. All young students who use the Breakfast Club are required to be accompanied and supervised by their own parent/guardian .

Clothing & Accessories

“There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing.” - Sir Ranulph Fiennes

Clothing is a priority in being ready for the outdoor elements. Half of each day, and sometimes more, will be spent outside regardless of rain or shine.

Over the summer, please have your child practice putting on their own shoes, clothing and backpack by themselves. Be sure to give them clothing without any buttons, ties, snaps etc. or anything too tight if they are not able to manage them easily by themselves. The goal is to be as independent as they can be.

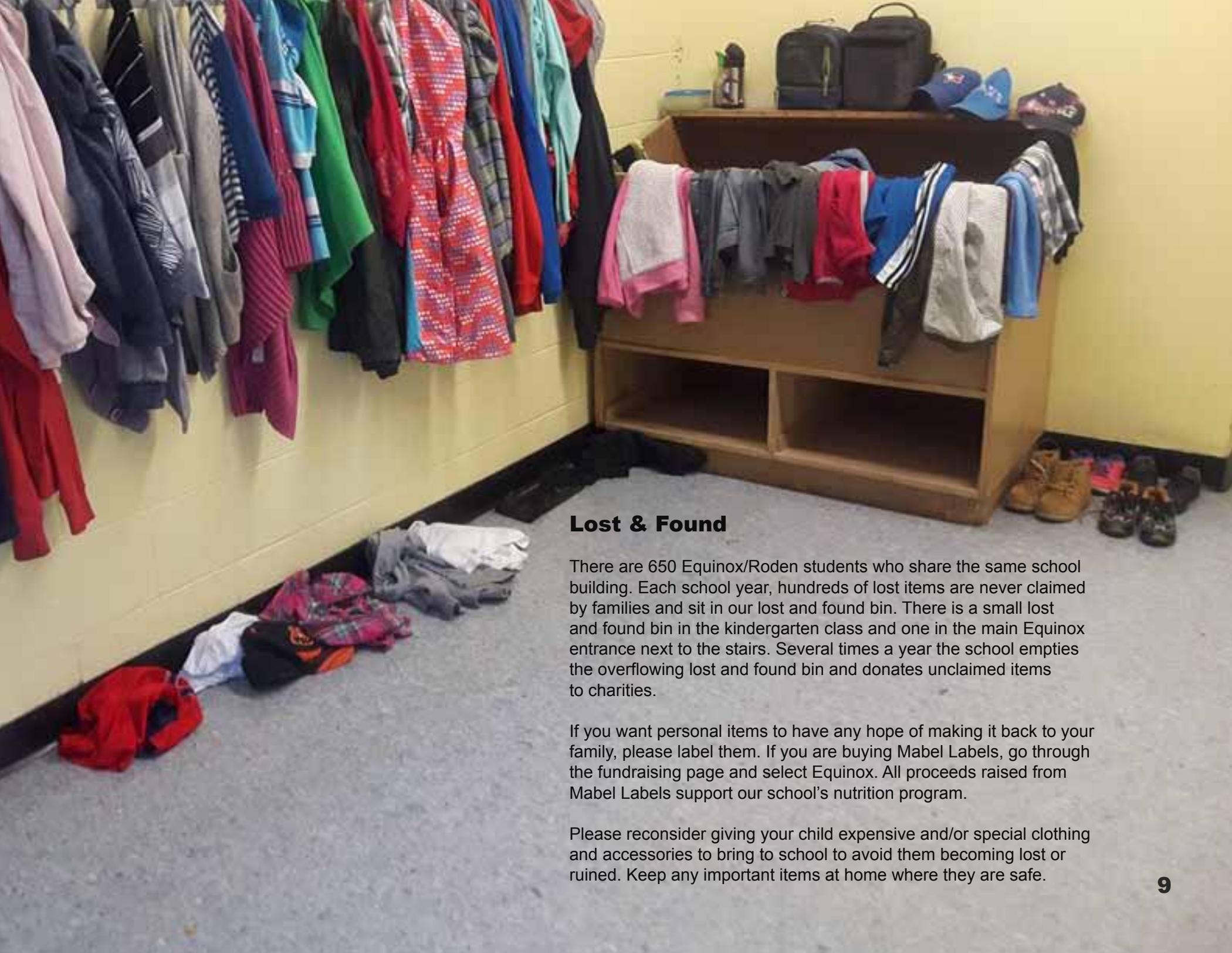
Students will need at least two of everything, including footwear. Invest in quality rain and snow gear. Children outgrow clothing quickly, please consider buying gently-used items second hand and save. Please label all clothing and accessories!

If students happen to get wet and/or muddy in the morning (which most do in our nature program), they will need another pair of dry inside/outside clothing for the afternoon. Schools do not have dryers to dry clothing and/or accessories. If a student gets wet and/or muddy and they do not have a change of clothing available, then they will have to stay in their wet and/or muddy clothing the rest of the day which can be very unpleasant.

Students are not allowed to bring toys, jewelry, or any other non-essential items with them to school. This prevents conflict amongst students wanting to use them or the risk of the item being lost/broken. Please keep much loved objects safe at home. Practice before school starts by leaving loved items, such as a favourite stuffed toy, at home when going shopping, to the park or to visit family and friends.

Clothing for Kindergarten Year

- Rain coat, waterproof rain pants, rain boots
- Snow suit, mitts/gloves, boots
- Warm wool socks
- Layered fall/spring clothing
- Wide-brimmed sun hat that covers the ears and the back of the neck
- Closed-toed shoes that are suitable for the outdoors.
- No flip flops or dress-up heels.



Lost & Found

There are 650 Equinox/Roden students who share the same school building. Each school year, hundreds of lost items are never claimed by families and sit in our lost and found bin. There is a small lost and found bin in the kindergarten class and one in the main Equinox entrance next to the stairs. Several times a year the school empties the overflowing lost and found bin and donates unclaimed items to charities.

If you want personal items to have any hope of making it back to your family, please label them. If you are buying Mabel Labels, go through the fundraising page and select Equinox. All proceeds raised from Mabel Labels support our school's nutrition program.

Please reconsider giving your child expensive and/or special clothing and accessories to bring to school to avoid them becoming lost or ruined. Keep any important items at home where they are safe.

School Pick-Up

After a long active day at school, kids become very hungry. Try to bring your child an extra healthy snack to eat right at pick-up. This will greatly reduce the chance of your child having a hangry attack on the way home.

Be prepared in the early months of starting kindergarten for your child to be extremely tired after school. You may discover that they need to eat dinner and go to bed much earlier than normal. Don't worry, your child will eventually transition back into their normal routine as they adjust to the busy school schedule.

Some families found feeding their child a very early dinner, as early as 4:30 pm, separate from the rest of the family and then putting them to bed earlier worked well to prevent full meltdowns from occurring in the evening. If you work full time and are using an aftercare service, it may be helpful to have a dinner/snack prepped ahead of time that you can give your child in the car, on the walk home or as soon as you get into the house.

Before/After School Care

Please visit www.EquinoxSchool.ca/before-after-school-care/ to see a full list of before/after school care local providers.

Volunteer

Parents, grandparents, and family members are encouraged to sign up and volunteer in the Equinox Outdoor Kindergarten Program. There are many ways to volunteer whether that's on a walking field trip, in the class, or even helping cut fabrics and paper for crafts at home for the class to use, etc. On walking field trips the class requires a minimum of three adult volunteers, otherwise the walks are cancelled due to a lack of supervision support.

TDSB requires all volunteers to complete a police check for their files. The forms are available in the front office. Volunteers need to be aware and present while helping supervise students. Personal phone usage should be kept to a minimum and be for emergency use only. TDSB has strict policies on photography. To ensure students and staff privacy is protected, please do not take photos.





Nature Calls

Picture your child outside laughing and enjoying their hands-on learning experience through Equinox's unique kindergarten program, but then nature calls? So what does your child do, where do they go to relieve themselves? Depending on where your child is at the time, there is a different answer.

Indoor Classroom

Equinox and Roden kindergarten students share bathrooms located inside the school building. These bathrooms are visible from the indoor kindergarten classrooms to make staff supervision easier. Kindergarten students can quickly access these indoor facilities whenever they need them.

Outdoor Classroom

There are no washrooms located outside the school building. Students are taken as a whole class several times a day to use the bathrooms inside the school building by staff.

Field Trips

Equinox kindergarten classes go on biweekly walking trips starting in October. Students are always encouraged by staff to go to the bathroom before the trip starts for a "just in case pee"; however, if a student needs to go to the bathroom during the 1-2 hour walking trip, they may be required to go outside as washrooms are not always easily accessible in parks, forests and ravines.

Communications

Equinox makes every effort to make information readily available to families; however, it is the parent/guardian's responsibility to read it so they may stay informed about what is happening in their child's school. Below is a list of the type of communications you may expect in the coming year.

Weekly Class Email

A weekly email is often sent to kindergarten families outlining what has happened that week in their child's class and what to expect in the upcoming week.

Facebook

Be sure to sign up for the Equinox School Council Facebook page. This page posts several times a week updates about school activities and other important information.

www.facebook.com/EquinoxAlternative/

School Newsletter

Once a month the principal sends out a Roden/Equinox School Newsletter. It covers key dates and important school information. The newsletter will be emailed to you and is also posted on the school community bulletin board.

School Emails

The school administration and the Equinox School Council regularly sends emails to the parent/guardian community. Please be sure to read every one of them. A quick heads-up, in November and December you may notice an big increase in emails about Equinox's upcoming Winter Fair. This is the School Council's largest fundraiser of the year, raising over 50% of the extra funding we provide to the school. Please be patient during those months. The emailing will go back down to normal afterwards.

Posters

Any big school community events are often promoted not only by email, newsletter and Facebook, but also posters around the school.

Website: www.EquinoxSchool.ca

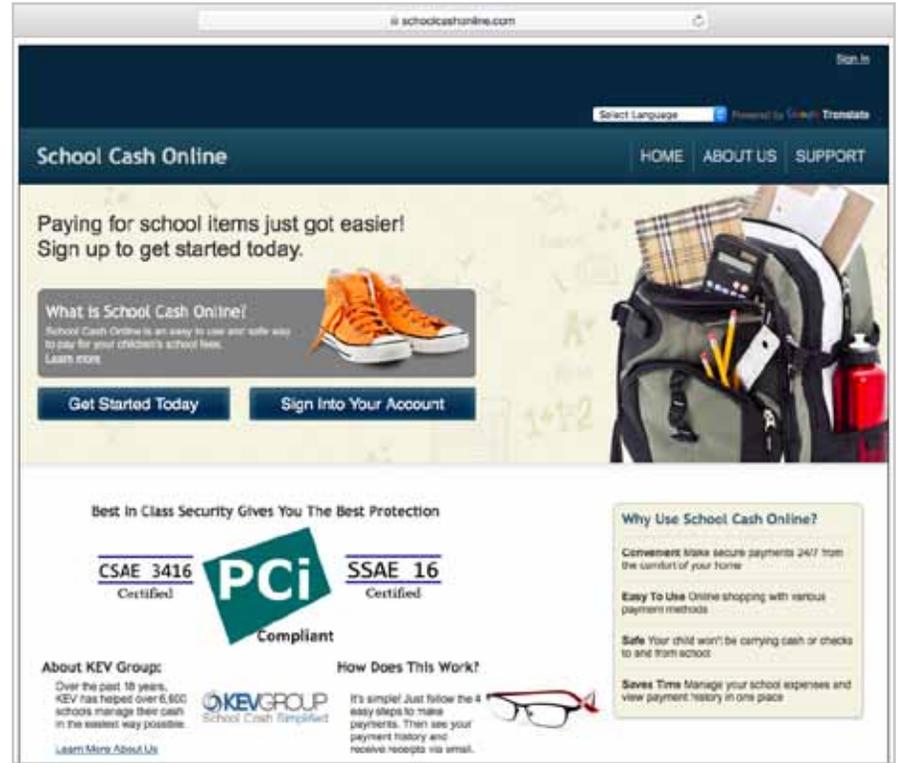
The Equinox website is managed by the School Council. It is regularly updated. Be sure to read the council meeting notes posted online to stay informed about important school activities, such as school renovations, health and safety, staffing models, fundraisers and more.

School Cash Online

School Cash Online is a payment portal used by TDSB schools for things like field trips, events and fundraisers. It even sends out payment email reminders to families. In September, your family will receive information about creating a School Cash Online account which you may log into to pay for various school items. TDSB prefers families make payments through School Cash online vs. paying by cash to reduce the risk of error or cash going missing. If you must pay by cash, only exact payment will be accepted through the front office administration. Please do not give cash to the teachers as they will not accept it.

Although field trip payments are processed through School Cash Online, the online system has not yet been set-up for parents/guardians to give their permission for their child to participate on field trips through that forum. That option is still coming to School Cash Online. So, for now, paper permission forms are still being used. Field trip permission forms are placed in student backpacks to take home. Please review the form, fill it out and return it to your child's teacher as soon as possible—AFTER you make the field trip payment (if required) online through the School Cash Online.

www.schoolcashionline.com



The screenshot shows the homepage of the School Cash Online website. The browser address bar displays "schoolcashionline.com". The page features a dark blue header with the site name and navigation links for HOME, ABOUT US, and SUPPORT. A language selection dropdown is set to "English". The main content area has a light green background with the headline "Paying for school items just got easier! Sign up to get started today." Below this, there is a section titled "What is School Cash Online?" with a sub-headline "School Cash Online is an easy to use and safe way to pay for your children's school fees. Learn more." and two buttons: "Get Started Today" and "Sign Into Your Account". To the right of this section is an image of a school backpack filled with supplies. Below the main content, there is a security section titled "Best in Class Security Gives You The Best Protection" featuring "CSAE 3416 Certified", "PCI Compliant", and "SSAE 16 Certified" logos. To the right of this is a box titled "Why Use School Cash Online?" with three bullet points: "Convenient Make secure payments 24/7 from the comfort of your home", "Easy To Use Online shopping with various payment methods", and "Safe Your child won't be carrying cash or checks to and from school". Below the security section, there is an "About KEY Group" section stating "Over the past 18 years, KEY has helped over 6,600 schools manage their cash in the easiest way possible." and a "How Does This Work?" section stating "It's simple! Just follow the 4 easy steps to make payments. Then see your payment history and receive receipts via email." with an image of glasses. A "Learn More About Us" link is at the bottom left.



Steps to Address Your Questions or Concerns

In any situation, your child's classroom teacher is the first point of contact, followed by the school's principal, the school superintendent and your trustee.

Step 1 - Classroom Teacher

The first place to go about any classroom-related question or concern is your classroom teacher. They can help you with: any questions about the classroom, classroom rules and consequences, homework and assignments, etc.

Step 2 - Principal

If you would like more information or if you have questions that are beyond the classroom, talk to your principal. They can help you with: student registration, schedules, suspensions, report card concerns, code of conduct, safety and security, budget and fundraising, and the School Council.

Step 3 - Superintendents

Superintendents are responsible for a network of schools. They support school staff and can be contacted if you have questions that have not been answered by your school or help with: alternate attendance request or suspension appeals.

Step 4 - Trustee

Trustees are your elected community officials. They are available to help you with the following areas of TDSB: concerns about your community, ideas and suggestions for the board, items on board agendas, board policies under review, board budget, collective bargaining.

Don't Skip Steps!

If you try to skip any of these steps, it will only delay the process in having your questions or concerns addressed.

Send an Email

As any parent/caregiver knows trying to have an adult conversation with kids around is hard. Now imagine having 20+ kids around. It is extremely challenging for teachers and staff to supervise students at the same time as trying to address your questions or concerns, especially during the busy drop-off and pick-up periods.

If you want to have a discussion with your child's teacher, it is always best to email them. This gives your child's teacher the opportunity to reply back to you when they have a free moment with an answer and/or to set-up a specific time to speak.

Putting your questions and concerns in writing is also a helpful and easy way to track, share and escalate them if required.



WELL-BEING

Physical Development

Equinox encourages students to connect with their environments. Climbing, running, riding a bike, catching a ball or balancing on a rock are all great forms of physical development and learning coordination. As a family this summer try to connect with nature by exploring your local parks and ravines. It's a great form of entertainment and free!

Little hand muscles can be developed by using play dough, painting, drawing, writing, cutting with scissors and helping cook and/or bake. Puzzles are another fantastic activity to build eye-hand coordination and work on basic problem-solving skills.

There is no nap time in kindergarten. A good nights sleep routine is very important as it will ensure your child is ready to tackle a full-day of active learning.

Consider having your child's hearing and vision checked before school starts. Problems with hearing and vision can make learning more difficult.



Lice, Yes We Said It.

Even reading the word lice can make a head itch. It is something no family wants to hear, Inevitably, ever school year a few students get lice. Our School Council helps cover the cost of three professional school-wide lice checks.

There are several ways to prevent lice:

- Discourage your child from head-to-head contact and the sharing of hats, scarves, hair brushes, combs, etc.
- Tie long hair back in braids.
- Tea tree oil, coconut oil, menthol, eucalyptus oil, lavender oil, and rosemary oil are said to deter lice.

Don't worry if you get a call from the school that your child has lice. You are not alone. Other families have had lice before and survived to tell the tale. Below are two great websites with treatment recommendations for your consideration:

- https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/head_lice
- <http://nitwits.ca>

If you get a prescription from your doctor for lice treatments, OHIP will cover the fee.

Pin Worms

We've all heard of lice before, but maybe not pin worms. Pin worms are small worms that can live in the intestine and crawl out and lay their eggs around the outer anus. They are very common amongst children. Often when a child has pin worms they will have an itchy bottom or complain their bottom hurts, especially shortly after they fall asleep.

There are several ways to prevent pinworms:

- Keep finger nails short, discourage nail biting and putting fingers in their mouth.
- Teach your child how to wash their hands well and regularly with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom.
- There are also a few natural home remedies some claim work well such as Diatomaceous Earth (Food Grade) and raw garlic.

If your child gets pin worms, most likely the whole family has been exposed to it. Your family doctor may recommend a two-dose prescription for over-the-counter medicine which will be taken two-weeks apart. This reduces the chances of reinfection.



Feelings

How Equinox students feel is important. It is something that is often discussed in the class. Take the time to talk to your child about feelings. Help them develop words to name and describe their own emotions, such as I feel happy, sad, mad, angry, or frustrated. Teach your child how to identify and label not only their own emotions, but those around them. For example, ask them how they think another person is feeling by looking at them. Are they smiling, frowning, crying, etc? Being able to understand these basic social cues is important and will help your child better interact with others.

Come up with a list together of ways to recognize when strong and sometimes overwhelming emotions may start to show in their own bodies. Think of ways together how they could deal with these strong feelings. Creating an *emotional tool kit* will aid them in developing valuable coping skills in stressful situations. For example, they feel anger starting in the bottom of their tummy and slowly climbing up into their chest and throat. As anger makes their bodies want to yell, hit, kick or bite, what could they do instead? How about giving themselves a tight hug and taking three deep breaths. Then they could check in on their anger again and see if it is feeling a little better (has it gone from their throat back down into their tummy?) or does their anger need a longer hug and some more breaths. Hugging themselves is a great way to reduce the chances of lashing out when negative emotions are strong.

Be a role model and use similar language with your child. Describe how both positive and negative feelings rise up in your own body. What do those emotions make you want to do? How are you dealing with those feelings instead? Did something make you happy and is that why your face now has a big smile?

Read stories and talk about the feelings of the characters. Discuss how the characters resolved their conflicts. Support your child with thinking through how conflicts could and should be resolved. Pretend play is a great way to practice with your child how best to address potential conflicts in life. Have your child practice using their emotional tool kit when they are calm. This will make it easier for them to access those coping strategies when they are in highly stressful situations. Praise your child when they find appropriate solutions.

Encourage your child to show empathy for others by demonstrating it yourself. Show and talk about how you feel empathy towards those around you.

Give your child lots of opportunities to play with other children so that they may learn how to take turns, share and cooperate with others.

Also be sure to discuss with your child what they should do if another child pushes, hits, kicks, or bites them. They shouldn't push, hit, kick, or bite back, but instead go and find an adult to help address the situation.

Let's be honest, even as adults we continue to struggle and learn how to deal with our own feelings and the feelings of those around us. This is an ongoing project, but at least we can start the conversation with our children about feelings and social interactions. They will continue to learn more about this topic in their kindergarten class.



Gratitude & Respect

Students at Equinox are encouraged to connect to the world around them. To recognize, understand and learn to be respectful to themselves and others. In school, they will often be encouraged to take time out in the day to say aloud what they are grateful for in their life. Paying tribute the small things like a warm sunny day or the worms giving us better soil helps them better connect with their environment.

Show your child that listening to others is important by listening and responding to them. "I am listening to what you have to say. I respect what you are saying..." How we speak and listen to one another is a sign of respect. Taking turns, waiting quietly to speak and not interrupting are all ways we can teach our children how to show others that we respect and value them.



Reading

Starting in September there is a free ReadUp Reading Club in the school library on Tuesdays between 3:30 pm and 4:30 pm. Each student who attends the ReadUp Reading Club will be loaned a book bag with several different books in it at their specific reading level. Students are encouraged to take the books home to practice reading. The following Tuesday students may exchange their books for new ones. A reading specialist is onsite to help confirm the best reading level for each child and to answer any questions families may have.

JK students often start with read-aloud books which their parents/guardians can read to them or simple sight word books parents/guardians can help their child read (Level A or DRA 1 Reader Books). Volunteers are also available on site to read with students.

The ReadUp club is a wonderful way to get your child excited about reading. For more information about the Roden-Equinox ReadUP club or any of the other ReadUP clubs please visit: www.readup.ca.

The friendly Toronto Public Library Gerrard-Ashdale branch is located next door to our school. Sign your child up for a library card and start a lifelong reading habit.



Thank you...

Lastly, thank you for choosing to join the Equinox school community.
We look forward to welcoming you and your family to Equinox this September.
Until then, enjoy your summer!

Equinox School Council

EQUINOX
PARENT SCHOOL COUNCIL

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