



**Media Release
For Immediate Release**

Monday, January 22, 2018

Infants offer elementary students unique opportunity to develop empathy

VICTORIA, BC - A baby and their parent will lead the classroom tomorrow at École Willows School to teach students about emotional literacy. This is part of a District supported elementary program called, Roots of Empathy, where a facilitator introduces an infant and their parent to the classroom to help youth develop a new level of emotional awareness.

By observing the relationship between the parent and baby, the students learn about the baby's needs, which in turn helps them identify their own feelings and the feelings of those around them. The baby and their parent continue to visit the classroom throughout the school year so students can also learn about infant development and see how their relationship grows, promoting healthy social interactions.

The Greater Victoria School District has been training facilitators and implementing the Roots of Empathy Program since 2000. The program has demonstrated an increase in social and emotional competence, a greater understanding and perception of caring and sharing, and a decrease in aggression.

"The program offers a great opportunity where the baby becomes the teacher," noted Edith Loring-Kuhanga, Board Chair. "Through the baby, the students learn the importance of connection and begin to explore non-verbal communication. They start reflecting on their own interactions and the emotions evoked by their actions."

Roots of Empathy reaches students all around the world from Kindergarten to grade eight. To date, nearly six thousand students and 85 babies and families have participated in the program in the Greater Victoria School District.

"Empathy is a gift of understanding that will remain with the students as they grow," shared Superintendent Piet Langstraat. "Understanding and managing emotions is a foundational skill for students to have so they can build meaningful relationships and develop the ability to respect multiple perspectives in collaborative settings or in complex situations throughout life."

The program's Founder/President, Mary Gordon, has international recognition as an award-winning social entrepreneur, educator, author, child advocate and parenting expert who has created programs informed by the power of empathy.

Mary Gordon will be present for the session at Willows Elementary. The media is invited to attend.

Media Opportunity:

Tuesday, January 23, 2018
École Willows Elementary School
2290 Musgrave Street, Victoria
10:30 a.m. – 11:10 a.m.

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For Media Enquiries:

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