

MEDIA ADVISORY

YORK REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD ANNOUNCES SUCCESS OF MARKHAM SCHOOL READINESS PROJECT

Monday, September 29, 2008 – Markham, ON – The York Region District School Board (YRDSB) will be joined by Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti and Markham MPP Michael Chan on **Tuesday, September 30 at 9:30 a.m. at Wilclay Public School in Markham** to celebrate the completion of its first school readiness screening project and the preliminary results.

Over 1,200 junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten children at 11 Markham area schools participated in a month-long screening of vision, oral health and nutrition to identify deficiencies or need for referrals to appropriate health professionals. A healthy start is part of school readiness affecting a child's growth, development and self-esteem.

"Good health is vital to enable all children to learn to their full potential. On behalf of our school communities, we thank all the health professionals, regulatory colleges, local sponsors and Town of Markham officials who contributed to this program's success," said YRDSB Bill Hogarth, Director of Education.

"Vision is one of the most important of the five senses," stated Caroline MacIsaac-Power, Registrar of the College of Opticians of Ontario. "Sight plays a crucial role throughout childhood and beyond. When a child's vision suffers chances are schoolwork does too and with up to 25% of children tested demonstrating vision challenges, screening becomes a critical tool," added MacIsaac-Power.

"Good oral health can affect a child's eating and sleeping habits as well as impact social interaction," stated Fran Richardson, Registrar of the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario. "We were delighted to have dental hygienists participating in this project and being able to identify children at need of referral to local dentists to deal with any signs of cavities and gum disease," added Richardson.

Nutri-Step is a new and simple way to assess eating habits and identify nutrition problems. It is a parent-administered 17-item questionnaire identifying nutrition risk among children aged 3 to 5 years. "Childhood nutrition affects early childhood development, school readiness, academic performance and social well-being," stated Mary Turfryer, lead nutritionist involved in the YRDSB project.

The YRDSB screening project is modeled on a successful and on-going program in the United Kingdom that has had a profound impact on improving academic performance, reducing smoking and bullying and a range of other behaviours. Wilclay Public School is located at 60 Wilclay Ave., east of Brimley Road, south of Denison St.

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