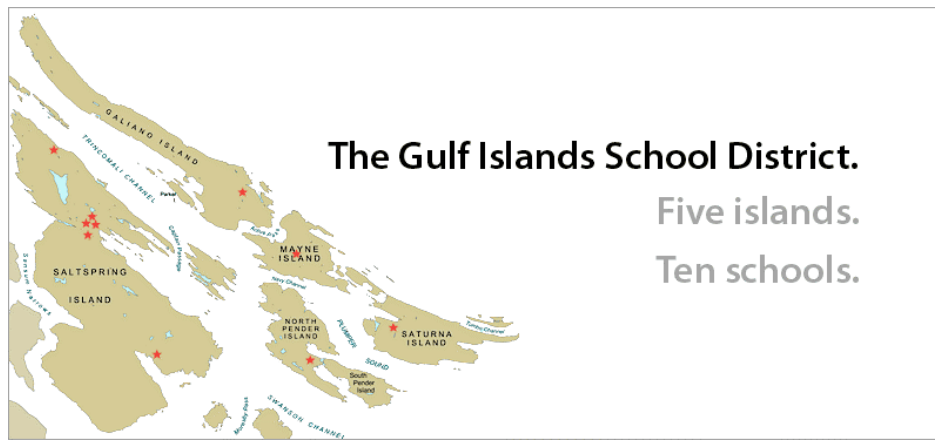


# District Literacy Plan School District 64 (Gulf Islands) July 2009

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## Context

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School District 64 is comprised of five island communities in the Southern Gulf Islands of British Columbia – Galiano, Mayne, Pender, Saturna, and Salt Spring. The Gulf Islands enjoy Canada's mildest climate with cool wet winters and warm dry summers. The area is home to a widely varied population in socio-economic terms, boasting many artists and artisans who draw their inspiration from the surrounding natural beauty. The Gulf Islands School District has ten schools, six of which are on Salt Spring Island. The School Board office is located in Ganges, also on Salt Spring.

Approximately 640 students in grades 9 through 12 attend **Gulf Islands Secondary School**, the district's largest school. GISS is home to a relatively large and successful **International Education Program** as well as the **Gulf Islands School of Performing Arts (GISPA)**.

Many high school students in the district have blended programs where they access educational services in their home community on their home island and also at GISS on Salt Spring. Some of this blending is achieved through a combination of electronic and face-to-face learning environments, while many students travel each day to Salt Spring Island via water taxi.

Each of the other schools in the district serves its respective neighbourhood or island. The schools are:

- Fernwood Elementary School (K to 5)
- Fulford Community Elementary School (K to 5)
- Galiano Community School (K to 12)
- Mayne Island School (K to 12)
- Pender Islands Elementary/Jr. Secondary School (K to 12)
- Phoenix Elementary School (alternative K to 7)
- Salt Spring Elementary School (K to 5)
- Saltspring Island Middle School (6 to 8)
- Saturna Island School (K to 12)

Populations on each island range from 360 on Saturna Island to just over 12,000 on Salt Spring Island. Much of our work this year was establishing a clear picture of our district context with respect to community literacy needs. Fortunately, our district has always had a good connection with literacy organizations and libraries on each of the islands. For that reason, starting the conversation about what the needs are and how we can coordinate efforts was not a difficult one.

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## Literacy: Early Learning – Progress to Date

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The 2008-09 school year was a big one for literacy at the early learning level in our district. We started our third Strong Start Centre on Salt Spring Island, bringing in 260 families in our three centres over the course of the year. As a result, we will be adding another centre for September 2009 on Galiano Island. It had been part of the Outreach Pilot, but was so popular it requires a full-time program. We will continue our outreach pilots for 2009-10 that has seen Strong Start outreach programs on Mayne, Saturna, and Pender Islands.

Coordinated largely through our participation in the early learning network that was created three years ago, we have been able to support a number of varied programs throughout the district to meet the unique needs on each island, outside the support offered by the Strong Starts.

In 2008-09, early literacy programs were again run on Mayne, Galiano, and Pender Islands, with the addition of Salt Spring and Saturna. Each program included a weekly pre-school program with a parent support discussion group.

Training was provided for the PALS (Parents in Early Literacy Support) program, and our facilitators started the program throughout the district. It will continue for the 2009-10 year. Roots of Empathy programs were supported in two schools this year and will expand to one on Galiano and four on Salt Spring for the 2009-10 school year.

Two sessions on Literacy for new parents were offered to families on all islands. Sessions were well attended, helping us continue to make positive, early connections with our future students' families. Much of the emphasis of these sessions was about early reading and other unstructured play activities that allow for healthy development, ultimately supporting children when they reach reading-readiness.

We saw the first year of implementation for our transition program from pre-school to Kindergarten. The program works by providing release time for next year's Kindergarten teacher to meet with this year's pre-school educators and to observe their future students in action in those pre-school settings. This will continue into the 2009-10 school year.

We continue to offer professional development for district-employed and community-based early learning program staff, building community capacity and helping us all speak a common language based on best practice. This connection continues to help us get a sense of the literacy picture and to tailor needs for our kindergarten children before they even set foot in the classroom.

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**Literacy: K to 12 – Progress to Date**

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As in all districts in BC, literacy has been playing a central role for some time. In ours, we updated our inventory (included in the Salt Spring Literacy inventory) of various programs and practices that support literacy directly in the K to 12 system:

**School District 64 (Gulf Islands):  
Literacy/Reading Programs and Strategies**

<b>Program/Strategy Name</b>	<b>Grades/Students</b>	<b>Description</b>
Adult mentors and volunteers	K – Gr. 12	We are lucky to have several parents who are professional writers. They have modelled the writing process and led classes through the art and craft of writing. Other parents assist in the classroom with reading or writing tasks.
Buddy reading	K – Gr. 8	Older students are paired with younger students and read to one another. Older students guide younger students; younger students help older students solidify their understanding through teaching.
Early Success	K – Gr. 2	Students receive extra assistance with phonemic awareness in a small group setting. Students graduate from this group when they develop these important pre-reading skills
Eat and Read	Gr. 1 – 5	Teacher reads aloud to students daily while students eat lunch.
Guided Reading	K – Gr. 8	Daily reading instruction in small groups using “just right” texts with students of similar reading abilities. Groupings change based upon development and need. Generally, a mini lesson is followed

		by students reading the same text as the other members of their small group.
Home Reading	K – Gr. 5	Students take reading material home to practice reading with parents/siblings, grandparents each night. This is the main form of “homework” in these grades.
Journal Writing	K – Gr. 12	Students write (or draw in K-1) from personal experience. Teachers reply to writing with a comment or question that often acts as a prompt for further writing on the subject.
Literature Circles	Gr. 3 – 12	Students choose novels to read, form small groups based on common books, and gather to have discussions about their reading. Students usually write about their reading in response logs and often do comprehension activities after reading.
Men with Books	Gr. 3 – 6	Male students discuss common books and articles that they have read. The discussion often leads to related topics, demonstrating to the students the social value associated with reading.
PAWS to Read	K – 5	This is a program we had last year and hope to continue this year. Selected students read to a specially trained therapy dog and her owner. It was very motivational to the students involved.
Personal Narrative Writing	Gr. 3 – 5	Students write on individual experiences in narrative form.

School wide writes	Gr. 3 – 11	Students in the entire school engage in a similar writing assignment. Sometimes the purpose of these writes is for assessment. Sometimes they are for celebration. Each year Fulford school publishes a writing anthology.
Shared Reading	K – Gr. 12	Students read as a group – choral reading, Reader’s Theatre, poetry.
Writing workshop	Gr. 1 – 5	Students are involved in the process of writing with guidance from teachers and peers. They select a piece of writing and take it through drafting, editing and publishing.
Word Wall Spelling	K – 3	Students construct personal spelling dictionaries as they discover new words.

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## Literacy: Community – Progress to Date

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School District 64 (Gulf Islands) has begun in earnest to plan for the coordination and eventual enhancement of literacy efforts throughout the district.

### **Salt Spring Island:**

The Salt Spring Literacy Foundation has continued to evolve and to grow. Our connection has also evolved, becoming stronger and more integrated. The goals of the Salt Spring Literacy Foundation include:

1. To provide centralized community services
2. To provide literacy services for adults
3. To support current early learning and family literacy work

The Salt Spring Literacy program inventory has been updated and is posted on the Salt Spring Literacy website, and now includes our own district's inventory. A PDF version of this colour-coded inventory (to match resources with different aged clientele) has been appended to this report.

Last Spring (2008) we began to take stock of existing programs on our four smaller islands as a means of finding out what the service gaps might be. This has now been updated for 2009 as shown below:

### **Pender Island:**

#### Overview

The Penders (North and South) are a community of 2235 people with 1930 (86%) over 19 (adults). Of these 1405 (73% of the adult community) are over 50. In general the literacy level is high with opportunities for involvement in reading and many forms of the arts.

#### Strengths

- *The Pender Post*, a monthly community newspaper of over 60 pages, gives information about coming events, connects people with similar interests, and helps those in need of specific services.
- The new Strong Start Outreach Pilot has made literacy connections and offered support to dozens of new families.

- The Pender Lender, the library, is open 2 days a week (and one evening during the summer). It is a separate well-designed building with operating expenses from taxes. It contains mostly fiction, some non-fiction, CD versions of some books, DVDs and Internet use (with help if requested). The books etc. are supplied through grants, donations, and used book sales. Staff is made up of 50 volunteers. Inter-library loans are available and this library has one of the highest usages of this service in the province--primarily because people are doing research.

Since last year's report it has increased its under-50 clientele by introducing new kids reading programs and adding a large number of new kids titles to its collection.

- The Student Learning Centre (SLC) at Pender School welcomes adult learners. This year, one adult graduated, and two others completed Math 11 and some science courses.
- There are 3 book clubs on the island.
- There are a number of successful local authors (William Deverell, Andrea and Dave Spalding) who support literacy at our school and in the community generally.

#### Weaknesses or Needs

- The Penders are very spread-out with no central commercial or social core and provide no transportation system. It may be difficult for young adults (e.g. single moms) to get to the school or library.
- There are a number of young adults who have specific needs who would benefit from a volunteer with specialized training.
- There are several young adults who could use a "reader" in order to complete courses such as the Boat Operator's Course or FoodSafe to increase their employability.
- Some young parents at the Strong Start pilot program show signs of discomfort with literacy tasks (e.g. filling out a form) but many have still not revealed their need for help.



## Galiano Island:

### Overview

Galiano is a community of 1260 people with 1125 (89%) adults over 19. Of these, 750 (67%) are over 50 and 375 (33%) are younger than 50. Literacy is a core value on the island and I found many people happy to talk about their experiences.

### Strengths

- *The Active Page* is a 70+ monthly magazine for Galiano residents which gives information, connects people and provides resources. It also celebrates literacy, for instance, publishing Galiano Community School Writers Corner stories and enticing its readers to research with questions like, "Where do oystercatchers go at high tide?" (with the answer the following month)
- The Galiano Library is open three days a week, and although small in size, seems to be well-used by a variety of ages. It is manned by volunteers and supplied through donations and sales. Its location is central --next to the Trincomali Bakery--in South Galiano. The Galiano Library is actively pursuing an opportunity to relocate to an annex it would build, attached to the Galiano Community School. This would allow them to display their entire collection and to expand it. They could also share computer resources and Internet access with the school.
- The Galiano Conservancy (next to the library) has a number of non-fiction titles about the natural world that are available to those who want to do research, etc. This resource is open twice a week.
- Galiano has a community bus (called the "Day Tripper") which allows people to be involved whether or not they have a vehicle.
- The Student Learning Centre at Galiano Community School has 5 adults currently enrolled working towards adult Dogwood diplomas. Two adults graduated this year.
- The bookstore, Galiano Island Books, is exceptionally well-stocked and successful. The storeowners work hard to bring many different kinds of readers into the store.
- A number of successful authors live on the island (e.g., Audrey Thomas). However, the legacy of Jane Rule was mentioned as even more important. Not only was she a successful author, but also very deeply involved in the literacy of the community. (A library reading room is to be named for her.)

- A new project, "Island Mosaic" has just completed its first year. It involves adult mentors working with students on topics such as natural history, First Nations and immigration on their islands. This has encouraged literacy-based activities across the generations.

### Weaknesses or Needs

- Community Services are only available via Salt Spring so needs may not be recognized or addressed.
- A number of young adults have been identified as having minimal literacy skills, and are unemployed or underemployed with a corresponding feeling of disenfranchisement.
- Approximately 15 adults are suffering from serious mental health problems with literacy as a side issue.

## **Mayne Island:**

### Overview

Mayne Island is a community of 1,110 people, 91% of whom are adults over 19, and 76% of these adults are over 50. Mayne's community is literate and concerned with literacy issues.

### Strengths

- *The MayneLiner*, a monthly community news magazine of 60+ pages keeps Mayne Island residents informed about coming events, connects people with similar interests, and directs people to specific services.
- The Mayne Island Library is located in a beautiful facility and currently contains 8000 books as well as CDs, and DVDs. It also offers Internet access. There is ample space for meetings and expansion of the collection. It is used by people of all ages. There is a storytelling hour once a week for children.
- The SLC on Mayne is available for adult learners.
- The bookstore, Miners Bay Books, has been in operation for over seven years and has a rich selection of new and used books. The clientele includes young adults as well as older members of the community.
- Mayne Island Little Theatre has been a vibrant force on the island for more than 20 years.

- There are at least 3 book clubs.
- There is a supportive writers' group which meets monthly and includes young adults as well as older writers.
- Mayne Island is home to published authors, Robert Harlow and Kit Pearson, as well as winning documentary film directors, Bev Reid and Peter Kellington.
- A spoken-word poetry evening for local writers began in September 2008 and will start up again this coming September.
- There are many capable retired volunteers on the island, including those who have worked in the fields of literacy and special education.

### Weaknesses or Needs

- The library is used primarily by people over 50, with very little use from 21-40 year olds.
- While young parents may have good literacy skills, they are often not modelling reading, possibly because they are too busy.
- There are 8-10 young adults (primarily young men) who have basic literacy skills, but could use help with such skills as resume writing, critical reading, and cheque balancing. However, these young adults would not want this "help" forced on them.
- There are a number of adults with literacy difficulties because of learning disabilities or brain injuries. Specialized knowledge would be needed to help these individuals.
- There are a number of older adults who are experiencing the first stages of dementia/Alzheimer's, which have affected their literacy skills. Possibly some aspect of literacy (or being read to) might enhance the quality of their lives.

## **Saturna Island:**

### Overview

Saturna is the southernmost Gulf Island with a small, closely-knit community of 355, 94% of whom are adults. Of the adults, 79% are over 50. Being involved and working together are strong values in this community.

## Strengths

- *The Scribbler*, a monthly newsletter, keeps Saturna residents informed about local happenings. This paper has strong historical connections with the Saturna School.
- The Saturna Library was started in 1990 and now has a "Reading Room" grant and has tax revenues, as well as fund-raising, donations to buy books etc. The library is open twice a week and is run by 25 volunteers and includes large print books, CDs, videos and a computer without charge (although people seemed to be donating a loonie). There is story time twice a week for children.
- There is a new bookstore (part of the small store above the Saturna Pub) which opened in July 2008.
- Volunteerism is a strong value in this community.
- Since the Saturna Ecological Education Centre (SEEC) program began, the idea of mentorship has taken hold and could be extended to literacy mentorship, possibly.
- Author, Bill Schermbrucker, (winner of the Ethel Wilson prize for literature) lives on Saturna. He has also helped other Saturna residents who are trying to write their own books.
- There is an enthusiastic play-reading group on the island.

## Weaknesses or Needs

- The library has very little use from young adults or teens. There is an awareness of this and a desire to buy books that will interest young adults. The library also lacks the capacity to make inter-library loans available.
- Volunteer "burnout" is a real concern because of the limited number of people who seem to volunteer in many different areas.

Because of the relatively small size of these outer-island communities, we have also seen the merging of early learning conversations with literacy conversations, preventing duplication of effort and providing a healthy context for examining literacy programs. Our early learning efforts have included support of various kinds for early learning literacy programs in each of these communities. Our early learning coordinator (operating on 0.125 FTE) is in regular contact with all early learning providers on each of the islands, as has been the case for a number of years.

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## Next Steps

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Next steps in our literacy coordination efforts will include continued conversation on each island, as we work toward further developing plans of action, based on need and existing strengths, like we have already done on Salt Spring.

Now that the Salt Spring Literacy Foundation has hired a coordinator, they will assist with training volunteer literacy tutors on Salt Spring and on the other islands. The school district has agreed to allow volunteer adult literacy tutors from the outer islands to ride the water taxi to access training on Salt Spring.

It is hoped that the coordinator role will help us simplify the complex structure that is literacy in BC today. The coordinator will help us to set priorities for the next several years throughout the district, making Salt Spring Island the hub.

Our district continues to “blur the lines” between school and community wherever appropriate, and literacy is no exception. Some examples of this integration included adult-student reading groups, blending our own adult education programming with community literacy programming, and the joint organization of literacy events in each of our communities. We now offer professional development for different agencies and foundations that provide literacy support as an integrated part of our K-12 teacher professional development.

We struggle with a meaningful relationship with our affiliated colleges, as we are too geographically separate to truly feel a sense of cohesiveness. We are hoping to strengthen our ties with Camosun and are beginning talks of having a satellite campus on one or more of our islands.