

School District 84  
Vancouver Island West

District Literacy Plan

July 2009

Vancouver Island West School District 84 serves 442 students enrolled in the District's five schools:

<b>School Name</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Grades</b>	<b>Projected FTE 2009-10</b>
<b>Captain Meares Elementary Secondary School (CMESS)</b>	Tahsis	K-12	36
<b>Kyuquot Elementary Secondary School (KESS)</b>	Kyuquot	1-12	40
<b>Gold River Secondary School (GRSS)</b>	Gold River	8-12	121
<b>Ray Watkins Elementary School (RWES)</b>	Gold River	K-7	161.5
<b>Zeballos Elementary Secondary School (ZESS)</b>	Zeballos	K-12	60

Three of the schools, Kyuquot, Zeballos, and Captain Meares, are located in remote rural communities. Travel to these schools from the District Office in Gold River requires a commute by logging road of one and a half hours to Tahsis, two and a half hours to Zeballos and four hours to Kyuquot by logging road and water taxi.

The District serves a diverse community which includes:

	<b># of Students</b>	<b>% of Total Students</b>
<b>Aboriginal</b>	221	50
<b>Special Needs</b>	70	16
<b>English Second Dialect</b>	140	32

In the Achievement Contract 2009-2010, the District lays out two goals:

- 1) Improve student literacy
- 2) Improve the success of the District's Aboriginal students

The District recognizes that in order to address these goals successfully, we must be in partnership with our communities. To address the success of Aboriginal students, the District has signed and is implementing our first Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement. To improve student literacy, the District is working in partnership with our four community literacy committees.

## Gold River:

The community of Gold River has undergone substantial changes in the past 15 years as a result of the closure of the pulp and paper mill and more recently the downturn in forestry. As a result, the community has faced significant reductions or eliminations in many support services and the demographics have shifted as management and skilled workers and their families have left the community to seek employment.

The Gold River Literacy Committee was established to create opportunities for all citizens to improve their literacy skills, regardless of age. While recognizing that there were very few literacy support programs operating outside the school system, the Committee was able to identify and support those programs that were functioning. In addition, they are actively identifying gaps in the literacy services that are provided to Gold River residents. This allows them to carry through with their mandate of creating opportunities for all Gold River residents to improve their literacy skills.

The Gold River Literacy Committee had a few ups and downs since their plan was approved in December 2007. The main challenge for the first eleven months was in finding a literacy coordinator. The Committee persevered and was able to hire a coordinator in November 2008. Since then, the Committee has been on track implementing several programs in the Gold River area including eight \$1000 grants to support existing literacy initiatives in the community, a community wide literacy day, attendance by five Committee members at an early learning symposium, and a community wide literacy celebration to wrap up the school year.

Looking ahead, the Committee is investigating a literacy centre for Gold River as well as ways to support adult education in the area. Now that a literacy coordinator is in place, the largest challenge would appear to be sustainability of the coordinator position as the Committee is committed to continuing all the initiatives started this year and expanding them in 2009.

## Tahsis:

Due to extreme economic circumstances, the morale of people in the Tahsis community has been greatly diminished. The closure of the major employer in town, the Tahsis Mill, saw the disappearance of 1200 jobs and a decline in population from 2500 down to 350 people. Housing prices collapsed and a number of service and supply businesses have closed or relocated to other communities. More recently the downturn in tourism spurred by the global recession has caused further economic concerns. The community continues to face significant reductions or eliminations in many support services and the demographics continue to shift as families leave the community to seek employment.

The Tahsis Literacy Society was formed in September 2008 and has met at least monthly since. The first focus area has been to build the capacity of existing programs and to strengthen community partnerships in the delivery of programs from early literacy foundations to adult education.

Initiatives such as Literacy Kits, Adult Basic Education, Summer Reading Program, and Computer Skills for Seniors have elevated the importance of literacy skills in the Tahsis community and the Society has been able to reach a great many of the Village's 365 residents through their collaboration with community partners. The Society also held the first annual Tahsis Festival of Literacy and the Arts in 2009.

In the future, the Society would like to sustain their current programs and investigate other opportunities to expand literacy services. The major challenge for the Society is sustainability. There is a small pool of volunteers in Tahsis and most are involved in several areas. Having funding to hire a coordinator has allowed the Society to make the progress it did this year.

Kyuquot:

Our most remote community of Kyuquot is accessible by air or by logging road to Fair Harbour followed by a 30-40 minute water taxi ride. The majority of the community are members of the Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nation. The community faces major challenges with limited community capacity and employment opportunities.

The focus in Kyuquot has been on establishing an Adult Education program. The community sees this as a way to increase confidence and self esteem, enhance employment options, further formal education, and generally increase the life opportunities for the people of Kyuquot.

The Adult program started in January 2008 in the community's kindergarten/pre-school building which was graciously provided by the Band. The School District has provided the staffing through a grant from the Virtual Schools Society and there has been a remarkable turn out for the course offerings which range from Adult Basic Education to marine first aid and data management.

The community would like to see the Adult Education program continue and in fact grow over the next few years. Ultimately, it would be ideal for the Adult program to have its own facility on the reserve. The major challenge will be in securing funding in order to sustain and expand the program.

Zeballos:

The Village of Zeballos was once a bustling mining town, but now gets by on an economy of seasonal tourism, fish farms, fishing, logging, and hydro generation. The location of the Ehattesaht and Nuchatlaht First Nations near the community of Zeballos is a relatively recent development. Approximately 20 years ago, these two First Nations communities relocated to Zeballos from their reserves in Nootka Sound to gain closer proximity to school and services. In the past five years, the school has expanded to offer a K to 12 program but prior to this expansion, students wishing to continue their education beyond Grade 10, were required to leave the community.

The focus of the literacy plan for Zeballos has been on providing Adult Education. The School District provided the facility and staffing for the adult program which allowed the community to

focus its resources on transportation for those students who live outside of walking distance to the school as well as resources and materials to support the program. While the response to the adult program has been less enthusiastic than in other communities, the hope is that with some perseverance the program will grow. The major challenge in Zeballos has been communications as there are two separate reserves as well as the Village of Zeballos to serve and they all operate somewhat independently of one another.

SD84:

The District has worked with each community's literacy committee either through District or school staff. The District has opened its facilities for community literacy activities, started Adult Education programs in Tahsis, Zeballos, and Kyuquot, and is actively working through the Enhancement Agreement and other strategies to build the literacy of the students and communities we serve.

In January 2008, the District opened a dual site StrongStart program serving the preschoolers and parents of Tahsis and Zeballos. The Early Childhood Educator commutes between the two communities on a weekly basis and opens the Center two or three days per week in each community depending on the schedule for the week.

In 2006-07 school year School District 84 and the Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nation formed a partnership for the staffing and operation of the Houpitsas Kindergarten Preschool. The program is staffed by the District while the Band maintains its authority for the school's program content and daily operations. Prior to this agreement the Kindergarten/Preschool was operated solely by the Band. This partnership has created a much closer link between the programs and initiatives of the Kindergarten/Preschool and Kyuquot School.

Recruitment and retention is a challenge for the District with 12 teachers being hired new to the District for the 2006-07 representing approximately 30% of the District's teaching staff, six teachers new to the District for the 2007-08 school year and 13 teachers new to the District for the 2008-09. The District recognizes the impact that staff turnover can have on program sustainability and offers professional learning opportunities and training to all new staff.

In addition to staff resources at the school level, the District contracts special services to address needs such as speech and language, physiotherapy and services for the deaf and hard of hearing. The District also has a contract with a special education advisor to advise and support the special education staff and programs at the school level. Special Education is a priority for this District as we strive to overcome the issues of geography and, most importantly, to address the needs of the students.

Conclusion:

Literacy is a priority for the communities and schools of District 84. While sustainability continues to be a concern, with the commitment shown to date, success is sure to follow.