

Nisga'a Community-District Literacy Plan, 2012-2013

Revised

Submitted to Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Education

Submitted by School District 92 (Nisga'a)

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Introduction

It is a priority of School District 92 (Nisga'a), the Nisga'a Lisims Government, and the four Village Governments that education in the Nass Valley is grounded in Nisga'a culture and focuses on high achievement for all students.

School District 92 (Nisga'a) acknowledges, with sincere gratitude, the many people within the communities and the schools who have taken part in and contributed to community and school meetings, the Literacy Task Force, the Hopes and Dreams workshops, community sessions on restructuring, and community visioning meetings held over the past several years. We value highly their voices and their commitment to education in the Nass Valley.

Reflections on Community-District Literacy Plan, 2011-2012

Task Group

The Community Literacy Task Group has changed frequently over the years, as has leadership and coordination for the District-Community Literacy Plan.

In previous years, the Nisga'a Heritage Preservation Society worked closely with the Director of Instruction for Nisga'a Language and Culture, who was also the acting Literacy Outreach Coordinator, to develop Nisga'a language and culture curriculum with a primary focus on developing fluent Nisga'a speakers. The Society also provided vetting and guidance to the work of the school district and schools in areas of Nisga'a Language and Culture. This group acted in the capacity of the Task Force for Nisga'a language between 2010 and 2011 as reported in the Community Literacy reports for July 2011.

With new leadership in the school district beginning in January 2012, there is now a Literacy Task Force focusing on English language literacy. It is comprised of members of the school district and the communities. Included in this Task Group, which will continue next year, are representatives of the following:

- Primary Teachers
- Intermediate Teachers

- Secondary Teachers
- Nisga'a District Teachers' Union President
- School Support Staff
- District Literacy Support
- School Administration
- School District Administration
- Early Learning Coordinator
- Adult Learning
- Gitwinksihlkw Village Government
- Gingolx Village Government
- Nisga'a Valley Health Board

This group has worked very hard over the past months to review the current level of student achievement, learn and share information about student literacy instruction, review and assess program materials, develop a school district literacy plan, and commit to improving school performance and achievement for all students. The work has been informed by the community perspective brought by members of the Village Governments and the well-informed voice of the early learning coordinator in the Nass Valley.

Simultaneously, there are other groups within the community who are linked to the Literacy Task Force through the early learning coordinator. This connection includes, particularly, the Lisims Early Learning Partnership (LELP) which incorporates representatives from the school district, Head Start Programs, Nursery Programs, Nisga'a Valley Health Managers, CCRR, Success by Six, Nisga'a Supported Child Care Centres, Infant Development Programs, StrongStart Outreach Programs, and others.

Community Context

Since the new Superintendent of Schools arrived in January 2012, there has been and continues to be profound restructuring in the Nisga'a School District. This restructuring affects every community and every family in the Nass Valley. Changes in administrative staff include the new Superintendent and two new Directors of Instruction. There is a new principal and vice principal at the largest school, Nisga'a Elementary Secondary School. For next year, there will be three school principals instead of four, with one principal taking on responsibility for two schools. Beginning in September 2012, the Superintendent and the two Directors of Instruction will each assume school principal responsibilities one day a week.

All schools are being restructured. Presently schools duplicate services. For example, the schools in Laxgalts'ap and Gingolx are 30 minutes apart, yet they both run primary programs with three-grade splits. One school is functioning with classes entirely comprised of three-grade splits. The school district's first objective is to eliminate three-grade splits in the schools in Laxgalts'ap and

Gingolx and make sure that English Language Arts and Math will be taught at one grade level. The school in Laxgalts'ap will become a Middle School (Grades 5 to 8) and the school in Gingolx will become a K to Grade 4 school. Grade 7 and 8 students attending school in Gitlaxt'aamiks (New Aiyansh) will move to the new Middle School in Laxgalts'ap. This restructuring affects virtually every family with children in the Nass Valley.

Another major change over the past year has been the explicitly strengthened relationship between the school district and the early learning coordinator who works in the Ksi Xy'ans HeadStart/Daycare Centre. Through her collaboration with the Lisims Early Learning Partnership and School District 92 (Nisga'a), she has worked with the StrongStart Outreach Facilitator to bring a number of early learning programs and initiatives to all four villages. Funding was provided from the Community Literacy Program budget to support the StrongStart Outreach Centres, enabling them to operate in all four communities and to open up opportunities for other programs that had previously been run in only one village. This is a major strengthening of the early learning programs in the Nass Valley.

Community Development and Literacy Collaboration

Early learning is a priority throughout the Nass Valley, and was the specific focus of last year's budget and literacy plan. Through the leadership of the Early Learning Coordinator, the StrongStart Outreach Facilitator, and the Lisims Early Learning Partnership, collaborative relationships among the school district, the four village Headstart/Nursery Centers, and community agencies focused on building mutual understanding and increasing the number and quality of early learning programs. The Lisims Early Learning Partnership supports the following, along with funding and other support from various partners including the school district:

- Early learning goals of the District-Community Literacy Plan
- StrongStart Outreach Centres in all four schools
- Increased Nisga'a Culture/Language content and perspectives in the early years
- Working towards a seamless transition to kindergarten
- Coordination of Child/Student supports – Speech and Language, auditory testing, support for children with sensory disabilities
- Imagination Library in all four communities
- Infant Development Coordinator
- Welcome to Kindergarten Program
- Kindergarten orientation
- Ready, Set, Learn Program
- Welcome Baby Program
- Salmonberry Fair

- Shared professional development

The Nisga'a Early Learning Partnership identified the need for smooth transitions for children between preschool and Kindergarten. This transitional process is a work in progress with the end goal being a less stressful environment for children, parents, and teachers.

Update on Goals and Actions

We believe that the following actions have helped us get closer to achieving our goals.

Goal 1: Promote and support English language literacy.

Promoting and supporting English language literacy at all age levels is a significant goal in the Nass Valley, for the communities and the school district. Actions to June 2012 include—

- Extensive community involvement in significant restructuring of the schools and school district personnel, beginning in September 2012. As mentioned before, three of the four schools in the Nass Valley will be restructured starting in September 2012 to include a K-4 school in Gingolx, a Grade 5-8 Middle School in Laxgalts'ap, and Grades K-6/9-12 school in Gitlaxt'aamiks. Further restructuring will take place over the coming three years, with frequent assessment and evaluation of its effects. It is anticipated that the greater efficiency brought about by restructuring will increase student achievement and performance by making the best use of facilities and personnel in small schools and communities.
- Leadership in early learning initiatives by the Early Learning Coordinator and the StrongStart Outreach Facilitator have increased collaboration and coordination of all early learning programs and initiatives in the Nass Valley. Through their work in implementing programs and building relationships, they have supported the StrongStart Outreach Centres in each community, the Welcome to Kindergarten Program, Ready-Set-Learn, supports for pre-school children, the Imagination Library, and early focus on Nisga'a language and culture with the Nisga'a Heritage Preservation Society.
- Strengthening reading instruction throughout the school district, through the work of the Literacy Task Force and the development of a school district Literacy Plan. It has been five years since there has been a district-wide major literacy initiative. The Literacy Task Force was brought together by the newly appointed Director of Instruction (and currently acting Literacy Outreach Coordinator) to discuss the many aspects of literacy in the school district and communities and to draft a school district Literacy Plan. The goal for this initiative is for all students in the school district to be reading capably by the end of Grade 3. A summer institute is planned for August 29-31, during which there will be training in three new programs being incorporated into literacy instruction.
- The school district has initiated *The Nass Valley News*, a newspaper that includes news about communities, education, and the school district. It is distributed to 1500 homes and is also posted on the Nisga'a School District website. Volume 1, Issue 1 came out in May and there have been two additional issues since. There is a full-time manager from the community of Laxgalts'ap, a journalist and part-time worker, and translations of articles into Nisga'a,

French, and Spanish. This is also a vehicle to motivate students to write for the paper, as they will be reimbursed for their contributions.

- The results of new leadership, extensive community meetings, major restructuring, increased communication, strengthened involvement of the early learning coordinator, and other changes that have happened in the past six months, have resulted in increased understanding and collaboration in schools and communities about learning and literacy.

Goal 2: Promote and support Nisga’a language and culture literacy.

It is our belief that School District 92 students can grow stronger and perform better if the learning process draws from their rich Nisga’a culture. As educators across the country would contend, education must be relevant for students to engage in the educational process.

The aspiration of the Nisga’a people for a quality education with strong academics and strong choices, yet with an emphasis on Language and Culture, was reflected in the Hopes and Dreams report which concluded an extensive public consultation that took place in three communities on January 12th, 2011, and culminated in prioritizing goals at a meeting in the fourth community on February 28th, 2011.

Actions include—

- Including Elders as a key part of the Nisga’a Language and Culture Program.
- Supporting and promoting Nisga’a language and culture through administration, curriculum development, resources, and language support in schools.
- Providing Nisga’a language instruction through all grade levels.
- Supporting involvement in community cultural activities, such as Fishery Bay, Hobiye, oolichan and salmon fishing, stone moving, and dance groups.
- Supporting and celebrating Unity Day in each community.

Goal 3: Support and encourage family involvement in learning and literacy programs.

The basic principles of learning for the Nisga’a Nation state that a vision for education for the Nisga’a Nation now and in the future requires the involvement of everyone—Elders, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, children—and the support of all organizations and agencies. Actions for this goal include—

- The development of a specific School District Literacy Plan that commits the school district to increase literacy levels and to set as a goal that all students will be reading capably by Grade 3. The Plan specifically focuses on these areas:
 - Ensure that students will be reading capably by the end of Grade 3
 - Develop intermediate and senior students’ capacity to ‘read to learn’ and to think critically

- Establish a system to assist in monitoring the literacy performance of individual students, classes, schools, and the district as a whole
- Develop a seven-year literacy plan to bring our students' literacy levels above the provincial level
- Establish a professional learning community amongst staff that incorporates a focus on learning, regular and deep collaboration, and a focus on results.
- Involvement in this Literacy Plan includes representatives at all age levels. Commitment includes teachers, support staff, administrators, early learning personnel, and community members.
- *The Nass Valley News* which provides a communication vehicle that involves the community in writing, publishing, and editing, is distributed to every household in the Nass Valley, and is published online.
- Extensive community meetings to discuss education and achievement, culminating in a major restructuring of the school district to begin September 2012. Restructuring will touch every family and community. Classes in three schools will be re-configured so that no student will be learning English Language Arts and Mathematics in a three-grade split.
- The Nisga'a StrongStart Outreach Program started in September 2011. Although there was only enough funding to provide the StrongStart Outreach Program in one school, the Nisga'a District-Community Literacy Plan budget more than doubled the StrongStart Outreach budget and enabled the program to begin in all four communities. This resulted in new levels of support for the program and spread a number of initiatives across all four communities.
- The work of the Nisga'a Heritage Preservation Society in vetting and guiding Nisga'a language and culture learning in all schools and communities.

Goal 4: Work with partners to enable students at all levels to make successful transitions.

All of the previous goals emphasize the importance of the relationships that are being developed, nurtured, and supported throughout the School District and the Nisga'a Nation, in order to support both Nisga'a and English language literacy.

Indications of Success

Our major successes have been—

- New leadership within the school district has facilitated the process of community consultation and major restructuring of the school district and personnel to focus specifically on student achievement and efficiency.
- *The Nass Valley News* community newspaper is sponsored by the school district and employs community members in writing, editing, and publishing. It also provides a forum for student voices through student writing.

- The Nass Valley Early Learning Coordinator has provided leadership for last year's focus on early learning in all the villages of the Nass Valley. She provided both direct work in early learning and also support for the following
- Early learning initiatives and programs are found throughout the four villages, with the impetus of the StrongStart Outreach Centres as the focus for this work.
- The Nisga'a Early Learning Partnership provides a collaborative group focusing on all early learning programs in the communities.

Challenges

- School District 92 (Nisga'a) is in need of the profound restructuring that is occurring. Achievement results have been plummeting in the past few years as the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) results and Ministry data attest:
 - A high percentage of students have not met targets in academic areas over the past year. By June 2011 only students in Grade 8 met the 2011 target in Reading Comprehension measured by the CTBS, even though the targets were very low. More realistic and ambitious targets are being established to serve as indicators of success.
 - In almost all cases, fewer than half of students fully meet or exceed expectations on standardized assessments of reading, writing, and mathematics using the CTBS and the BC Foundation Skills Assessment.
 - Mathematics remains a particularly low area of performance. On the 2011 FSA, 17 Grade 4 students (77%) and 19 Grade 7 students (79%) did not meet expectations in Numeracy.
 - Our Six-Year School Completion Rate has recently dropped considerably. Between 2002 and 2009, there was a steady increase in school completion rate, starting at 39% in 2002 and increasing to 67% in 2003. The school completion rate dropped from 62% in 2009 to 36% in 2010, then to 21% in June 2011. The Six-Year School Completion Rate is the percentage of students graduating with a Dogwood Certificate within 6 years of beginning Grade 8.
- Nisga'a Language and Culture are the essence of the Nisga'a Nation. Cultural and linguistic aspirations do not impede the establishment of a strong academic program, and one does not need to make a choice. Promoting and supporting Nisga'a language, culture, history, and values is a long-term goal, accomplished in collaboration with Elders, governments, the school district, and community members. This remains an exceptionally challenging goal.

For the coming year

All of the changes and successes have long-term implications for improving literacy in the Nass Valley and the Nisga'a School District. They will continue over the coming years, as noted in the three year plan identified in the Nisga'a School District Achievement Contract.

Goals and Action Plan for 2012-2013

Goal 1: Promote and support English language literacy

Actions/Initiatives	Indicators of Success
<p>Structure schools to support literacy and mathematics instruction, with teachers able to teach 1 or 2 grades within a class</p> <p>Provide leadership for literacy and special education programs within the schools</p> <p>Work toward enabling all students to read capably by the end of Grade 3</p> <p>Provide strengthened support for leadership for early learning initiatives and programs across the Nass Valley</p> <p>Continue collaboration between schools and communities</p>	<p>Improved school success, based on a range of student success indicators</p> <p>Nisga'a StrongStart Outreach Program accessible to children, birth through five years old</p> <p>Implementation of school district Literacy Plan</p> <p>Early Learning Literacy Plan developed with partners</p>

Goal 2: Promote and support Nisga'a language and culture literacy

Actions/Initiatives	Indicators of Success
<p>Incorporate the knowledge and experience of Elders in literacy initiatives</p> <p>Support Nisga'a language programs in all four villages</p> <p>Strengthen community relationships and partnerships</p>	<p>Culturally responsive resources and instruction</p> <p>Language resources to support teaching of Nisga'a Language</p> <p>Nisga'a StrongStart Outreach Program in all four schools</p> <p>Nisga'a Language and Culture Resource Center</p>

Goal 3: Support and encourage family and community involvement in learning and literacy programs

Actions/Initiatives	Indicators of Success
<p>Continue community consultation about the effects of district restructuring</p> <p>Ensure that learning and literacy programs are provided and accessible to families in all four villages</p> <p>Utilize school libraries and the technology department to support family literacy and learning</p> <p>Ensure that culturally appropriate literacy materials are available and accessible</p>	<p>Community meetings</p> <p>Learning and literacy programs are available, accessible, and utilized by members of each community through—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • StrongStart Outreach Program • School Libraries • Technology • Others

Goal 4: Work with partners to enable students at all levels to make successful transitions.

Actions/Initiatives	Indicators of Success
<p>Ensure a successful transition for children entering Kindergarten from the Headstart/Nursery centres</p> <p>Ensure a successful transition for NESS secondary students entering post-secondary institutions</p> <p>Ensure a successful transition for students who leave the Nass Valley and then return</p>	<p>Students of all ages make successful transitions</p> <p>Transition planning is evident in overall strategies involving all main stakeholders and aimed at all transition points</p>