

District Literacy Plan SD #38 (Richmond)

District Context

Richmond is an urban community situated in the Metro Vancouver region. According to 2006 BC Stats, the city population is approximately 185,000. The age structure has the majority (59%) between 25-64 years, 17.5% are in the 0-17 years category, 9.3% are 18-24 and 13.9 are 65+. Family structure represents approximately 80% as couples and 20% as one parent families. Richmond has a diverse population in regards to ethnic identity having approximately 60% representing visible minorities. Of these 40% are defined as Chinese, 7.4% South Asian, 4.4% Filipino, 2.2% Japanese and .7 % Aboriginal. Although Richmond has a significant number of households, 85%, earning between \$20,000-\$80,000+, there are 15% earning less than \$20,000. The unemployment rate is 1.9% In terms of general education the percentage of 18 year olds who did not graduate in 2004-2006 is relatively low – 3.3%.

Despite a high average family income, 23% of families in Richmond live at or below the poverty line. According to data gathered by Dr. Hertzman for the Human Early Learning Partnership, children in Richmond face the same range and severity of social, economic and educational challenges as those in other Lower Mainland municipalities. Results of the 2006 Early Development Instrument (EDI) indicate that 29.5% of the 1341 Kindergarten students were vulnerable, or scoring below the vulnerability threshold on at least one domain assessed, These domains include: Physical Health and Well Being; Social Competence; Emotional Maturity, Language and Cognitive Development and Communication Skills/ General Knowledge.

The Richmond School District has an enrolment of 23,450 students. This represents a decline in student enrolment of approximately 300 students from that reported in 2005-2006 and is part of a pattern of declining enrolment that will likely continue for the foreseeable future.

Currently 6,749 students (28.8%) are identified for funding purposes as having English as a Second Language (ESL). In addition, 13,417 Richmond students, or 15.1% come from households in which English is not the primary language spoken. At last count, 45% of Richmond residents were Canadian by birth, 54% were Landed Immigrants and 1% were living here on work permits. On the last census the city had the lowest percentage of households speaking primarily English in B.C.

Actions Taken

The District began meeting with community stakeholders around literacy in the spring of 2007 with two meetings in the fall and four additional meetings this spring. Invited participants include:

- Richmond Public Library
- Minoru Seniors Centre
- Richmond Children First
- Literacy Now
- Kwantlen University College
- Richmond Board of Education
- Richmond Sunrise Rotary club
- RCMP
- Richmond Review Newspaper
- Spirit of BC
- Touchstone Family Association
- Richmond Public Health
- Pathways Mental Health Association
- Richmond Food Bank Society
- Richmond Family Place
- Richmond Community Centres
- SUCCESS
- Literacy BC
- Richmond Women's Resource Centre
- Settlement Workers In Schools
- Big Sisters' Study Buddy Programme

The meetings have focused on three initial tasks:

- Reaching out in the community to expand participation in the meetings
- Coming to an understanding of the purpose of the district literacy plan we will ultimately develop
- Creating a data base of community literacy initiatives so that all participants have a community "map" of what is available
- Developing an Expression of Interest in creating a community literacy plan for submission to Literacy Now
- Making application to obtain a federal grant to support family and community literacy
- Planning for the Community Literacy Launch held April 12, 2008

Progress to Date

The expression of interest was submitted to Literacy Now and we were granted \$20,000 in start-up funding. Our launch, "A Taste of Literacy", which was a collaborative community literacy initiative, was held on April 12, 2008 at Richmond City Hall. Approximately 50 people were in attendance and the event was an opportunity to showcase the ways we currently support literacy as a community. We received feedback in both the areas of what the community has found successful as well as suggestions for additional programmes/activities. The process of developing the expression of interest has helped us to focus on the pillars of ReadNow BC: Early Learners, K-12 students, adults and Aboriginals as part of our discussion. Early Learners and K-12 students are currently supported by many agencies in the community, and more, such as Strong Start. Our application for federal money for family literacy has been submitted but as yet, we have not heard if it has been approved. The challenge is to increase coherence and awareness of these varied initiatives in order to make them more accessible for learners and their families. We are beginning to focus on services for adults, and given our local demographics, one goal is to highlight and connect literacy services for ESL learners. As we explore together and come to better understand our local community, we hope to focus more closely on those suffering from economic hardship. These are not insignificant numbers in Richmond, and will likely include, among others, Aboriginals and recent immigrants.

At this point we have made good progress in contacting and meeting with our local providers of literacy services and have built positive relationships in the interests of literacy. We are currently focusing on the planning process for the District Literacy Plan. Further to this, we have posted for a Community Literacy Planning Coordinator who will have a four-month contract beginning September 2, 2008. The coordinator's responsibilities will include developing a community profile, comparing asset inventories, identifying gaps and needs and preparing a literacy action plan for the Richmond community.