



**District Literacy Report
School District 64 (Gulf Islands)
2007-08**

Context



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 600 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.



Students arriving at Ganges 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 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)
- Salt Spring Island Middle School (6 to 8)
- Saturna Island School (K to 12)

This past year saw Saturna Island launch its Saturna Ecological Education Program (SEEC). This exciting and very successful new program has attracted students from several of the other islands and from out of district to take part in a high school program centred around ecological and environmental learning, as well as a high level of community interaction and independent directed study. Secondary students who participated in the program, some of whom had struggled with more traditional (20th Century Western European traditional) education settings, enjoyed great success, helping us all learn that even the most rigorous and demanding courses of study can be offered in quite non-traditional ways.

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.

Literacy: Early Learning - Progress to Date

The 2007-08 school year was a big one for literacy at the early learning level in our district. We started our first Strong Start Centre on Salt Spring Island, bringing in 180 families over the course of the year. As a result, we have been able to add another centre for September 2008 at a different location on Salt Spring. We also began a pilot in the Spring of 2008 that has seen Strong Start outreach programs on Mayne, Pender, and Galiano Islands. This pilot will continue through the 2008-09 school year. It has had a very successful start.

Aside from Strong Starts, after a need analysis (coordinated largely through our participation in the pre-school and early learning network that was created 2 years ago) we were able to support a number of varied programs throughout the district to meet the unique needs on each island.

Early literacy programs were run on Mayne, Galiano, and Pender Islands. Each of these programs 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 will start the programs throughout the district next 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 2008-09 school year. Two sessions of a preparing for parenting workshop was offered to families on all islands by Cindy Clark, a Salt Spring-based family counsellor. Both sessions were very well attended, helping us make early connections with our future students' families. Much of the emphasis of these sessions were about early reading and other unstructured play activities that allow for healthy development, ultimately supporting children when they reach reading-readiness.

We have also started a 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. We also offer professional development for our own and for community early learning program staff, building community capacity and helping us all speak a common language based in best practice. This strengthened connection has truly helped us get a sense of the literacy picture and to tailor needs for our kindergarten children before they even set foot in the classroom.

Literacy: K to 12 - Progress to Date

As in most districts, literacy has been paying a central role for some time. In ours, we conducted a survey (now also included in the Salt Spring Literacy inventory) of our various programs and practices that support literacy directly:

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

Program/Strategy Name	Grades/Students	Description
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.
Balanced literacy model	K – Gr. 12	All elements of literacy are taught and practiced: oral language, reading and writing.
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.
Devoted Literacy time	K – Gr. 12	Each morning from 8:15 to 10:00, the whole school sets aside designated literacy time. This facilitates reading groups and ensures that a significant portion

		of each day is spent reading, writing and speaking.
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.
Phonics Games and Songs	K-3	Adult led activities focusing on phonemic awareness and phonics principles.
Quiet Reading	Gr. 1-5	Daily quiet reading time of self-selected books. Sometimes called DEAR, USSR (uninterrupted sustained silent reading).

School wide writes	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 published a writing anthology.
Shared Reading	K- Gr. 12	Students read as a group – choral reading, Reader’s Theatre, poetry.
SQUIRT (Sustained, quiet, uninterrupted reading time)	K – Gr. 5	Students practice independent reading generally selecting material of their choice.
Writing workshop	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.

Literacy: Community – Progress to Date

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

On Salt Spring Island, the Salt Spring Literacy Foundation has moved very far in a very short period of time, making our coordination efforts that much easier on that island. Having completed a Community Profile, an Inventory of Literacy Programs and Resources currently available on Salt Spring Island, and extensive interviews with community members, Salt Spring Literacy, with the support of the literacy planning task group (on which SD 64 is well represented), has already developed a plan of action to address literacy needs on Salt Spring.

Goals of Salt Spring Literacy 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 literacy program inventory, a very worthwhile effort that allowed us to identify these goals, resulted in a comprehensive look at ourselves that we have not really ever had before. The inventory is posted on the Salt Spring Literacy website and now includes our own district's inventory.

On Pender Islands, Saturna Island, Mayne Island, and Galiano Island, at the time of our transitional literacy plan of last year, dialogue had taken place with libraries (the libraries have taken on literacy efforts in each of these communities) to begin to take stock of existing programs as a means of finding out what the service gaps might be. We formalized this needs survey by contracting staff to visit each of the four outer islands and get a deep sense of capacity and need. The findings of this survey are now compiled and are summarized 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 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, DVD's 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.

- The Student Learning Centre (SLC) at Pender School welcomes adult learners. This year adults have completed History 12 and Math 11 and 12 courses and have also been involved in some science courses. There are a number of 70+ year old participants who are keeping their minds sharp by being lifelong learners.
- The book store, Talisman Books & Gallery, contains a good selection of new and used books and sponsors book readings, particularly by local writers.
- There are at least 2 book clubs on the island.
- There is an individual on the island who is helping individuals with literacy needs, according to hearsay, but we have not been able to figure out a name as yet!
- 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
- StrongStart and similar programs may encourage young parents to think about literacy and seek help for their own needs if necessary.
- There seems to be a good supply of capable retired volunteers.
- Computer classes are offered at the library on Wednesday evenings.

Weaknesses or Needs

- The library is used almost exclusively by those over 50. There may be several reasons for this, including the usual opening times during the day. However, the fact that younger people are not using these facilities is concerning.
- The Penders are very spread-out, have no central core (except possibly the Driftwood Centre which is a commercial property) and provide no transportation system. It may be difficult for young adults (e.g. single moms) to get to the school or library.
- The SLC programs are currently very print-based and are seldom attempted by young adults with literacy challenges. When these young adults attempt the

program, their attendance has been marginal with little success.

- There are a number of young adults who have specific needs. These include at least 2 who are dyslexic and one who has short-term memory loss. They 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. One mention was made of a young man who completed grade 12 with help from talking books. This may be a necessary support, although it does not strictly -speaking increase literacy skills.
- Some young parents at the StrongStart program show signs of discomfort with literacy tasks (e.g. filling out a form) but have not revealed their need for help as yet.

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 Tincomali Bakery--in South Galiano.
- The Galiano Conservancy (next to the library) also 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 bus which allows people to be involved whether or not they have a vehicle.

- The SLC at Galiano Community School has about 6 adults enrolled each year working towards adult Dogwood diplomas with 1-2 graduates per year.
- The book store, Galiano Island Books, is exceptionally well-stocked and successful. The store owners work hard to bring many different kinds of readers into the store. For example, they recently had a reading by Meg Tilly, author and Hollywood star. They are particularly working to bring in younger adult readers (ages 20--40).
- Through the Galiano Activity Society a number of courses are offered during the year.
- There is free public internet access three times a week at the Community school and three times a week at the library
- A number of young parents with low incomes are nevertheless very literate and are passing their love of learning on to their children.
- 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 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 been introduced by Janice Prevedoros--and is being extended to Mayne and then the other outer islands. It involves adult mentors working with students on topics such as natural history, First Nations and immigration on their islands. This will also encourage literacy across the generations.

Weaknesses or Needs

- The library is squeezed into a tiny shop and is not able to offer very many services--or even house books. Their request for operating money was turned down, as was their application for a new library building. The community is organizing to build a library but in the meantime, the library is really not adequate.
- Community Services are only available via SaltSpring so needs may not be recognized or addressed.
- Approximately 15 young adults have been identified as having minimal literacy skills, and are unemployed or underemployed with a corresponding feeling of disenfranchisement.
- Approximately 10 adults are suffering from mental health problems with literacy as a side issue.

- A few "old-timers" have been successful in primary industries, but did not have the opportunity for full literacy because of geographic difficulties at the time.

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 CD's, and DVD's. 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 book store, 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 is planned for September.
- The community is committed to raising funds for the Uganda Library Project, including a building which is almost ready to go and books. Two young adults from the community have been to Uganda to help with this project, and fund-raising and

book donations continue on Mayne Island.

- 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, CD's, videos and a computer without charge (although people seemed to be donating a loonie). There is story time twice a week for children.

- The SLC is available for young adults who wish to upgrade their skills, although there have not been any requests in the past 2 years.
- There is a fledgling book store (part of the small store above the Saturna Pub) which opened in July.
- Volunteerism is a strong value in this community.
- Since the 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.
- There are at least 5 (and may be more) young working adults who would be able to upgrade their job prospects if their literacy skills were upgraded. For instance, one young adult was offered a job requiring a license but could not read well enough to take the driver's test.

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 is in regular contact with all early learning providers on each of the islands, as has been the case for a number of years.

Anticipated Next Steps

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

We plan to take further advantage of program integration opportunities that will enhance both community-based and school-based literacy programs. Our district is already looking 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 have already begun more formal conversations between our Board and the Board responsible for Community Education on Salt Spring Island.

One of our biggest next steps is to think of other words besides “literacy,” as the connotations of this word do not always attract people to “literacy” programs. This can be helped by combining literacy programs with other, more innocuously-described community programming. We know that if literacy is placed in a more specific context it will be more attractive, especially to adults who may be reluctant to take part otherwise. For example, we are in conversations with Camosun College regarding how we can address literacy needs through some trades training.

Through a continued building of a communication infrastructure, we plan to develop a more seamless approach to literacy in our communities.