



## ***School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes)***

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### **LITERACY PLAN**

## **School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes)**

**July 15, 2008**

Nechako Lakes School District actions in the District Literacy Plan align with the District Achievement Contract, and a more detailed description of the K-12 initiatives can be found within that document. A common thread that runs through all District actions is one that prioritizes respect for one another, the importance of positive relationships and the value of building supportive collaborative networks as its educators continue to develop their skills, and as the District reaches out to our communities to work more effectively together.

### **ReadNow BC Pillars**

This document follows the framework provided by ReadNow BC which aims to improve literacy skills by increasing the number of:

- Children entering school ready to learn;
- Children who read successfully;
- Aboriginal students who read successfully; and
- Adults who have the literacy and essential skills necessary to compete in today's labour market and to function in everyday life.

### **1) Improving literacy skills by increasing the number of children entering school ready to learn;**

- **StrongStart Centres:** Burns Lake and Fraser Lake StrongStart Centres were the district's first steps in getting involved in supporting families as they prepare their preschool children for life-long learning. They have been in operation since the fall of 2007 and have had many successes and celebrations. With enrollment for both approaching 70-90 children, these centres are filling a void in the two communities they serve. A goal for both centres next year is to increase the participation of Aboriginal families. School district bussing can be provided for the Fraser Lake centre from each of the two First Nations in the area. In Burns Lake, we believe the solutions will revolve around building stronger relationships with the First Nations communities by possibly including outreach as part of our work.
- **StrongStart Outreach:** Nechako Lakes is piloting a program designed to address some issues that occur in sparsely populated rural areas, where attendance at StrongStart BC early learning centres by families can be challenging due to significant travel time or lack of transportation. This StrongStart Centre involves the cooperation and participation of the local Saik'uz Nation and the Saik'uz Headstart/daycare program. The centre is housed on Saik'uz territory in a recently built Band school that is no longer in operation. The supervisor of the Saik'uz Headstart program allows daycare workers to make appointments to bring over one or two children at a time, especially those with

identified special needs or developmental delays, so they can be exposed to the enriched environment in the StrongStart program. The StrongStart facilitator also works at the Headstart program on a part-time basis and has positive relationships with the children and workers there. The evening sessions when a light dinner is served attracts working parents and their children who are unable to come during the day sessions. It is our hope that it will help us forge stronger and even more positive relationships with Saik'uz community members. Carrier Sekani Family Services is also working in tandem with us. We look to this organization as well as the local Band Office to provide us with input and direction as we try to help in the endeavor to meet the needs of the children in this community.

The outreach program will also stay open for limited hours over the summer, and include a second location in the town site of Vanderhoof to encourage more families to take advantage of its services. In the fall, the program will change to offer sessions in Vanderhoof at a local church, as well as two small communities nearby, Mapes and Fort Fraser. Both of these towns are more than 40 km from Vanderhoof.

- **Grassy Plains Early Learning Program:** The district initiated a similar, district-funded early learning program at Grassy Plains Elementary Jr.-Secondary School. It compliments a Family Centred Program run by the College of New Caledonia in the same location and is facilitated by the same Early Childhood Educator. It is open two days a week and provides a lunch for participating families.
- **EDI (Early Development Instrument) Data:** Nechako Lakes has been assessing kindergarten readiness skills with a locally developed tool for the past 4 years. The tool has shown that many children are entering school with fewer school-readiness skills in place. The district has also participated in the HELP EDI project, and is eager to join in the government's initiative to administer it each year. This tool has shown that there has been an increase in vulnerability risks that children bring with them. These two indicators, the locally developed tool, and the EDI are useful in helping us communicate with service groups and communities about the need for support for families in many areas, including literacy development. The data has been used to advocate for **phase 4 StrongStart Centres**, and we will be officially opening a third centre in Fort St. James in the fall of 2008. Both tools will help us evaluate the effectiveness of future programs over the next three to five years.
- **Community Involvement:** Nechako Lakes has had representation in many community organizations that work with children before they reach school age. To name a few, we have district staff, school staff, and principals as active members of Success by Six groups in the communities of Vanderhoof and Fort St. James; in the Child & Youth Committee in Fraser Lake; and in the Nechako Valley Community Services agency in Vanderhoof. The Burns Lake region is just beginning to organize a Success by Six group and we will likely have an employee participate in that committee. In addition, district funds are used on occasion to support You Make the Difference® Programs when funding for it has been scarce.

## 2) Improving literacy skills by increasing the number of children who read successfully;

To gain a thorough understanding of the initiatives for school age children, please refer to the more detailed District Achievement Contract, submitted to the Ministry of Education on July 15, 2008. The following structures are critical threads that run through most of the directions the district is following in the coming school year.

### District-wide Reading Assessments:

#### Formative Assessments

It is because the district strongly believes in formative assessments as powerful tools which positively impact student learning that it supports their administration and scoring financially. Release time is provided for district-wide grade group marking sessions in the fall and spring; kindergarten teachers are released or permitted to phase kindergarten in slowly to allow time for testing in the fall and spring; and grade 1 teachers are given release time for their assessments.

#### **Assessments:**

<u>Kindergarten:</u>	Locally developed fall & spring assessment
<u>Grade 1:</u>	PM Benchmarks: Target is level 15+
<u>Grade 3-9:</u>	DART (nonfiction comprehension)

#### Collaborative Learning Teams

Site-based collaborative groups will begin meeting in the fall to review assessments and plan for instruction at the K/1, 3/4, 7/8 levels. A framework focusing on formative assessment (classroom based as well as school and district assessments) will guide teams that include enrolling and non-enrolling teachers, CUPE support staff, principals and select district staff as they officially meet two to three times a year to reflect on student performance and set goals for strategically addressing the needs of each student.

#### Tracking Student Progress

The collection and collating of all this data is still in the beginning stages of becoming streamlined, but the district has committed to designing software that is sophisticated in its reporting and also stable enough to handle large amounts of data over time. With the assessment tools identified above, we will be able to track individual student progress as well as cohort group progress.

## 3) The number of Aboriginal students who read successfully;

In addition to the initiatives described in the previous sections, the District Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement and the District Achievement Contract, the following are new or recent developments:

- **PALS & NPBS:** For the last four years four elementary schools with high numbers of Aboriginal students have been funded by the First Nations Education Council (FNEC) and the School District, to offer a PALS (Parents As Literacy Supporters) program for their kindergarten families. Next year, two of these schools will apply to participate in the AESN, the Aboriginal Enhancement School Network, as part of the Network for Performance Based Schools (NPBS). They will each pose a question about how

Aboriginal parent participation in PALS will effect student achievement, and how it will build stronger relationships between schools and parents.

- The reading assessment data described above identifies students as either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, and we track the progress of both groups. Aboriginal student progress is a key discussion item in our planning for instruction at a classroom, school and district level. Aboriginal students in kindergarten continue to start school with fewer school readiness skills in place than non-Aboriginal students, but they make incredible gains. In 2006/07 Aboriginal students left with slightly higher scores on the Letter-Sound knowledge and text awareness subtests than the non-Aboriginal group.
- When students are unable to read the standard grade level assessment, a list of district approved diagnostic reading assessments are circulated so schools can choose the assessment that best suits the students' needs. These assessments dig deep into a student's reading skills and needs. The district will be focusing on the capacity of Learning Assistance teachers to use these more time consuming tools to collaborate with classroom teachers about student reading progress.

#### **4) Improving literacy skills by increasing the number of adults who have the literacy and essential skills necessary to compete in today's labour market and to function in everyday life;**

The district continues to fund Adult Education programs to assist adult learners as they attempt to graduate or upgrade their high school courses. This has been a hallmark of School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes) for many years, and will continue to be an endeavor it supports. The new work the district has embarked on with regards to adult literacy has involved consulting and collaborating with the communities it serves. At the beginning of this process none of the communities in the district's region had inter-agency committees, or even grass roots groups specifically focused on literacy. The work over the last 6 months was to initiate and inspire interest in this field throughout the numerous communities. The School District works with 13 Aboriginal Bands, 4 municipalities, and a number of smaller communities.

#### **Our Guiding Philosophy**

One of the goals in becoming involved in community literacy programming is to help improve the quality of life of people of all ages by enabling them to participate more fully in work, in their pleasure activities and in potential educational opportunities. Learning doesn't need to happen in a traditional, structured school setting, and, in fact, it may be inappropriate when thinking about meeting diverse community needs. Literacy learning can often be more effectively impacted when embedded in cultural, social, artistic and creative activities that people are passionate about. Literacy programming can also be more effective and relevant if modern technologies like the internet are used, especially in remote areas.

At its core, the district literacy plan will need to come from a strength-based model as opposed to a deficit model. The district needs to start from a place of respect and honour so it can contribute as a partner to help build on each community's diverse strengths. All of the communities in SD No. 91 have some literacy-focused programs already in place through the public libraries, public health, municipal funding, and the local college. There are story times for preschoolers, librarian visits to schools, adult book clubs, Rhyme Time and Mother

Goose programs, as well as Family Literacy Nights hosted by libraries and by some district schools. The role of the Board of Education will involve becoming a partner that can possibly enhance existing programs where needed, draw in new community agencies to the fold, assist in attracting new sources of funding, and help create sustainable services/program offerings where there are gaps and needs. A critically important task will be to listen to and work effectively with First Nations Education Council (FNEC) and our many Aboriginal communities. The Literacy Now tables in each community will lead this consultation and planning process.

As the district moves forward, it will be important that it keeps the tenets of life-long learning at the fore. The district will also articulate and plan for the evaluation of programs that are implemented over the next few years. In all communities, the district has become a partner at the table, rather than the director of the activities. Seeds for growth take hold and have a lasting impact when they are owned and directed by members of communities, and not by the managers of programs and systems.

### **The Process**

The district hosted major community meetings in each of the four main municipalities. Comprehensive lists of possible partners were generated and invitations were sent. Some meetings had fairly significant participation from community agencies and service providers, and others had smaller numbers. It was rare to see a community member participating out of personal interest. Even so, at each meeting important work was started. The groups began detailing their area assets with regards to literacy skills and services available, and the gaps and needs were also identified.

As a result of these consultations with communities, two ‘Literacy Now’ Task Force groups were established by April 2008, one for the Burns Lake area, entitled Lakes District Literacy Now, and the other in the east part of the District, entitled Fraser Lake-Vanderhoof Literacy Now. Simultaneously, a parallel process was being steered by the College of New Caledonia in Fort St. James, and the School District is participating with two employees as members of their literacy table.

All three task forces are in their infancy and all three represent a variety of smaller towns and First Nations Communities in their regions. The work of completing the asset inventories, and surveying community groups and the public about their hopes and dreams for the area are well underway. **Literacy Now Plans will be submitted by all three task groups by November 2008 and at that time the groups will be seeking implementation funds.**

### **Rationale for regional task groups:**

Establishing task forces that represent a number of communities enables smaller towns to network and coordinate their efforts. It also allows many towns to enter the process that wouldn’t otherwise qualify for Literacy Now funding on their own because their populations are too small.

**Literacy Now Task Forces:**

**Fort St. James Literacy Now**

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**Community Composition**

Fort St. James is located 910 km north of Vancouver and 152 km northwest of Prince George. The population of the District of Fort St. James is just around 2000, and with surrounding rural areas and four First Nations communities (representing 20% of the population) it constitutes about 4800 people. The First Nations in the area are Tl'azt'en Nation, Yekooche, Binche, and Nak'azdli. The traditional natural resource based economy has diversified slowly but continues to be forestry, mining, tourism and agriculture (mostly ranching) based.

There has long been a recognized need for literacy programming and services in Fort St. James. In 2005, 39.2% of 18 year olds did not graduate high school and 31.4% of people aged 24-54 had not completed high school. The recent changes in the forestry industry and related businesses bring forth an even stronger and more visible need for literacy programs. With respect to early learning, the Clyde Hertzman EDI (Early Development Instrument) shows that almost 50% of the children in Fort St. James are vulnerable on one or more domains, with cognitive and language development being the area of most need.

**Fraser Lake-Vanderhoof Literacy Now**

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**Community Composition:**

Vanderhoof and Fraser Lake communities are small, rural, and resource dependent towns in the central northern interior of British Columbia. The First Nations communities in the area are Stellat'en and Nadleh in the Fraser Lake region, and Saik'uz near Vanderhoof. Also in the local area are smaller unincorporated town sites or communities, including Fort Fraser, Cluculz Lake, Mapes, Engen, Endako, & Francois Lake resort area. Vanderhoof proper has a population of 4064 and Fraser Lake's population is approximately 1113, but they serve a larger area of ranches, and small pockets of communities totaling approximately 14 000.

According to statistics Canada, 30% of Vanderhoof residents do not have a high school graduation certificate, and 29% of Fraser Lake residents did not finish high school. This indicates a need for upgrading or further literacy skill development as these resource based

communities brace for changes in the industries. With regards to child development, the Clyde Hertzman Early Development Instrument data indicates that 27% of Kindergarten students in Vanderhoof are vulnerable on one or more domains, and in Fraser Lake the rate is 34%. This leads to the conclusion that there are needs to be met in many age groups in the region.

**Lakes District Literacy Now**

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**Community Composition:**

The Burns Lake region, located in the central northern interior of British Columbia, is comprised of many communities that are small, very rural, and largely resource dependent. Burns Lake proper has a population of about 2100 serving a larger area of ranches, and small pockets of communities for a total of about 10 000 people. They are Topley, Granisle, Decker Lake, Francois Lake, Grassy Plains, and Burns Lake proper. The First Nations Bands in the area are Lake Babine Nation, Wet'suwet'en First Nation, Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Burns Lake Band, Nee Tahi Buhn, and Skin Tyee. BC's second largest natural lake separates Cheslatta Carrier, Skin Tyee, Nee Tahi Buhn Bands and the Southside community from Burns Lake. They are accessible by ferry. In the opposite direction, Granisle is 100km from Burns Lake.

Recent statistics state that 36% of Burns Lake residents do not have a high school graduation certificate. The forest industry is changing and is under great stress, creating an even greater sense of urgency around improving literacy skills of adults in the area. The Early Development Instrument data indicates that 49% of Kindergarten students in the Burns Lake Region are vulnerable on one or more domains, with Cognitive and Language Development being the area of greatest need.

**Community Consultation; A Timeline of Events:**

**First Nations**

- The Literacy Coordinator met with First Nations Education Council on October 10, 2007, February 13, 2008 and May 7, 2008, to introduce the concept of community literacy initiatives in order to seek input, and invite participation.
- First Nations were represented at the Burns Lake District meeting on February 11, 2008, the Fraser Lake meeting on April 14, 2008 and Carrier Sekani Family Services was represented at the Vanderhoof meeting. The Fraser Lake Aboriginal Education workers offered to accompany the planners to any meetings on traditional territory.

- On June 25, 2008, the Literacy Coordinator met with Aboriginal Education workers at Nechako Valley Secondary School in Vanderhoof to invite their participation in the area Literacy Now Task Force and the Saik'uz StrongStart Steering Committee.
- The Literacy Now Provincial Aboriginal Program Manager attended each of the three Literacy Now Launch meetings in April and offered to return to assist us as we pursue Aboriginal participation. The literacy groups will be attempting to find out if they have a place in complimenting the work and services Bands already provide for their community members.

Future Goals:

- To increase Aboriginal participation by approaching individuals in Bands, by asking to attend Band meetings and functions to share information and develop stronger relationships.
- To ensure the Literacy plans have components that serve the needs identified by the First Nations for our involvement.

Burns Lake Region

- A District Community Literacy Meeting was held in Burns Lake on February 11, 2008. A fairly wide cross section of agencies and groups represented Burns Lake, but attendance from the surrounding communities was limited. That being said, many of the attendees provide services in the outlying areas and a valuable asset and needs identification process was started at this meeting.
- The official launch of a Literacy Now task group was held on April 9, 2008.

Community partners that attended or expressed their intention to be involved include:

- Burns Lake Public Library
- College of New Caledonia, teacher from Grassy Plains campus & program coordinator
- Cheslatta Carrier First Nation
- Burns Lake Chamber of Commerce
- SD No. 91 Trustees
- SD No. 91, teachers from Burns Lake, Decker Lake, Topley and Grassy Plains
- SD No. 91 Literacy Coordinator

Fort St. James

- A District Community Literacy Meeting was held in Fort St. James on November 26, 2007. Even though the area had a severe snow storm that night and the Fort St. James CNC (College of New Caledonia) representative spearheading the Literacy Now movement was unable to participate because of a prior commitment, a few community members did attend and some important asset and need identification work was begun. The district has continued to be involved in subsequent meetings, including the Literacy Now official launch on April 10, 2008. CNC is the steward holding the funds for this committee and a search for a planning Coordinator is underway.

Community partners that attended or expressed their intention to be involved include:

- Public Library
- Nak'azdli First Nation
- Tl'azt'en Nation

- S.D. 91, College of New Caledonia
- Success by Six
- Alcohol & Drug Services
- Chamber of Commerce

#### Fraser Lake-Vanderhoof

- The process for establishing the Literacy Now task group for this region began before the District Community Literacy meetings were held. The official launch was on April 10, 2008, in Fort Fraser, a mid-way point between the two main municipalities.

#### Community partners that attended or expressed their intention to be involved include:

- NeighbourLink, a coalition of ten Vanderhoof churches that operates a thrift store, offers a weekly community lunch, and monthly food distribution
  - College of New Caledonia
  - Vanderhoof and Fraser Lake Success by Six
  - Nechako Valley Community Services
  - Vanderhoof and Fraser Lake Public Libraries
  - Carrier Sekani Family Services
  - Nadleh First Nation
  - Fraser Lake Child and Youth Committee
  - Northern Health
  - The Bulkley-Valley Regional District
  - S.D No. 91 District Parent Advisory Council
  - The District of Vanderhoof
  - SD No. 91 Trustees
- The District Community Literacy meeting for Fraser Lake was on April 14, 2008. At this meeting, asset and needs mapping began and was submitted to the Literacy Now task group.
  - The District Community Literacy meeting for Vanderhoof was on April 29, 2008. At this meeting, asset and needs mapping began and was also submitted to the Literacy Now task group.
  - The Planning Coordinator was hired in June 2008 and the first task group meeting was held on June 9, 2008.
  - The task group is in the process of informally surveying various First Nations, community and ministry agencies, and the general public in an attempt to complete the asset and needs mapping. The group will meet again in the fall to begin preparing the plan, and to further consult with the community as the plan unfolds.

#### Next Steps

- 1) Include administrators of our electronic delivery school to explore pathways to deliver services to distant communities.
- 2) Meet with district adult learning and College of New Caledonia staff to gain insights about services offered, the gaps, the barriers to access, and an assessment of the need for beginning reading instruction for adults. The first meeting is scheduled for Nov. 8, 2008.
- 3) Connect schools and public libraries to expand and enhance National Family Literacy Night activities each January.

- 4) Explore options for piloting the Ministry of Education English Foundations curriculum for adult learners with low literacy skills. It will require that the District has the capacity for teaching adults with beginning literacy skills, and likely a non-institutionalized setting and atmosphere if it is to be successful.

### **Closing Thoughts**

The Board of Education of School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes) is moving forward in its mission to support and improve literacy services for all of its region's community members. With the passion and energy from service groups, the local colleges, agencies, and educators, the next few years will be productive as long as the notion of entering 'at the ground level' is the driver behind any new and expanded services. Meeting people where they are in their lives and letting them lead the way will be the key to success in improving literacy, and thus the lives of the people in this area.