



## **District Literacy Plan**

**2009 – 2010**

*“Literacy has the power to change people’s lives,  
forever, and for better.”*

**ReadNow BC**

## **Introduction**

The Government of British Columbia has introduced ReadNow BC, a literacy action plan to improve reading skills among its people. We are challenged to look for new ways to ensure students complete high school, preschool children have the skills they need to succeed in school and, adults and Aboriginal people improve their reading skills, including workplace literacy.

To help respond to this challenge, Boards of Education are required to prepare and submit to the Minister of Education a District Literacy Plan with respect to improving the literacy of all citizens within the District. A District Literacy Plan is a statement of commitment by a school district to collaborate with key community stakeholders to strengthen literacy within the community.

## **Community Context**

School District #60 serves the cities of Fort St. John, Taylor, and Hudson's Hope and surrounding rural communities. Fort St. John is located in the heart of the Peace River Valley. The population is now more than 18,000 people, comprised mostly of young families with children. The population represents the youngest median age (29.6 years) in the province after Whistler. Fort St. John is the largest regional service center in northeast B.C., servicing 64,000 in the city and outlying areas. Three industries employ the majority of people in Fort St. John; oil and gas, agriculture, and forestry. Service, retail, hospitality and construction are some of the robust industries and businesses thriving in the city.

Taylor is located on Mile 30 of the Alaska Highway, 18 km south of Fort St. John. It is home to 1,400 residents. Hudson's Hope is situated 90 km. west of Fort St. John and is a town of 1,200 people.

Fort St. John is a hub for the Northern B.C. Treaty 8 First Nations Communities. Three reserves are in the drawing area for School District #60; Blueberry River, Doig River, and Halfway River First Nations. First Nations students comprise 17% of the total population of School District #60.

There is a small but growing immigrant population in the area. Approximately 5% of students in our district speak English as a second language.

A more detailed review of community demographics can be found in the North Peace Regional Literacy Plan.

## **Community Connections**

The North Peace Regional Literacy Task Force was established three years ago, with representatives from education, industry, government and non-profits. The task force was mobilized in recognition of the need to increase the literacy and

numeracy skills of community members, as well as assist them in attaining their educational and career goals and increasing their quality of life. Focus groups were conducted with participation from task force members, service providers, employers, parents and interested individuals to identify literacy needs and to establish priorities for the region.

The Task Force has developed the North Peace Regional Literacy Plan, which had two main goals for the past year;

1. Develop and implement an Awareness Campaign to:
  - address the regional stigma and disregard towards literacy and/or increasing literacy skills.
  - create a positive attitude shift towards supporting literacy.
  - increase regional knowledge of literacy services by potential clients, other service providers and the general public.
  
2. Establish a Literacy Alliance to achieve:
  - integration of services and resources at a centralized location, in conjunction with continuing to provide and expand service delivery at a neighborhood level.
  - community coordination of literacy services and resources to work collaboratively to ensure its success and sustainability.

A part time Community Literacy Coordinator was hired to help the Task Force to achieve these goals. The second goal was eliminated from the Regional Literacy Plan upon the announcement from the Provincial Government to fund Community Literacy Outreach Coordinators. The part time Community Literacy Coordinator position was phased out and a new part time Community Literacy Outreach Coordinator was recently hired. Roles and responsibilities of this new Coordinator position are in the process of becoming clearly defined. The first step will be to connect with all service providers in the community, update the service directory and identify new members of the Literacy Task Force.

A senior administrator with School District #60 sits on the Steering Committee for the Literacy Task Force. The senior administrator and Board Chair attend meetings of the Literacy Task Force, acting as liaisons between community partners and the School District Board of Trustees. The District Literacy Plan is developed with input from the Literacy Task Force and is directly linked to the Regional Literacy Plan.

### **District and School Connections**

The District Literacy Plan is linked closely to the Achievement Contract, the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement and the individual School Improvement

Plans. Actions in the District Literacy Plan support selected goals and objectives in these other improvement documents. The District Literacy Plan is developed in conjunction with the Achievement Contract and follows the same Board approval process.

The S.D. #60 Literacy Rep Team brings a teacher from each of our schools together in a monthly meeting to discuss instructional practice and student achievement in literacy. Literacy Reps review and evaluate new learning resources, review the current professional literature, share examples of successful classroom instruction, and make recommendations for the structure and content of professional development opportunities. Literacy Reps bring information from the team meetings back to their school staffs and bring questions or concerns from their school staffs forward to the district meetings. The Literacy Rep team also provides input to the District Literacy Plan.

The Ministry of Education requires that the District Literacy Plan report on progress toward four overall literacy goals:

- increase the number of children entering school ready to succeed;
- increase the number of children in school who read successfully;
- increase the number of adults with the reading and literacy skills to function in everyday life and succeed in the workplace; and,
- increase the number of Aboriginal people who read successfully.

The plan has been developed around these four goals.

### **Early Learning**

School District #60 believes in the importance of all children having equal access to experiences supporting early childhood development. This includes “encouragement and exposure to begin a lifelong love of reading” (ReadNow BC), not formal reading instruction delivered at an earlier age level. School district and collaborative community initiatives supporting early learning and literacy development have all focused on parent or caregiver participation. The idea is to inform the adults about early childhood development, model activities and share resources to enhance the likelihood that these adults will continue to involve young children in developmentally appropriate activities at home and have fun together in the process! Children who arrive at school having been read to using a wide variety of developmentally appropriate children’s literature, having been engaged in “book talk” and story telling activities, and having explored rhythm and rhyme in oral language are better equipped to experience success as emergent readers.

The school district has partnered with community organizations to fund a position for a Community Early Learning Coordinator. The CELC is a certified teacher and the school district acts as the steward for the position. The role of the CELC is to

liaise with the school district and community organizations offering early learning/literacy services to preschool aged children and their families, and publish a monthly early learning event calendar. In addition, the CELC coordinates Mother Goose training and schedules program delivery, facilitates the Words On Wheels (WOW) bus outreach program, and supports the set up for StrongStart centers.

The WOW bus has been on the road since July 2007, promoting family literacy and learning by bringing ideas, resources and goodwill into neighborhoods. It has grown steadily in popularity and now serves seven rural communities, three First Nations reserves, and five outlying city neighborhoods at 28 different stops. A total of 446 children are registered this year and, along with their families, have signed out backpacks containing a selection of books and early learning activities.

Our first StrongStart center opened at Duncan Cran School in October, 2007, followed by Robert Ogilvie School in October, 2008. There has been a steady stream of visitors, with over 400 children now officially registered. We have recently been approved for a third center to open next Fall in the community of Hudson's Hope, as well as a StrongStart Outreach Program to serve outlying rural communities via the WOW Bus.

Early learning actions and next steps are summarized in the following table.

<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>NEXT STEPS</b>
<p>1. Look for sustainable funding for Community Early Learning Coordinator position, expand role to coordinate and publish district Ready Set Learn events and build an early learning component into the SD #60 annual parent conference.</p>	<p>1. Reduce Community Early Learning Coordinator to part time position and explore where some responsibilities can shift to the new Community Literacy Outreach Coordinator position. Provide common office space to permit some collaborative working time. Build on the success of the annual parent conference and Ready Set Learn events.</p>
<p>2. Review bus route and stops, expand backpack and parent lending library including First Nations resources, Develop a schedule of special guests on the bus, build a volunteer list.</p>	<p>2. Implement recommendations from the WOW Bus Focus Group and review commissioned by independent researcher, Sylvia Vilches. Continue work to establish a guest schedule and volunteer list.</p>

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| <p>3. Open second StrongStart center at Robert Ogilvie School, connect StrongStart facilitators for collaborative planning and sharing of resources for literacy development</p>                         | <p>3. Open third StrongStart center at Hudson's Hope School, begin a new StrongStart Outreach program serving four rural schools and pilot a Virtual StrongStart program at the Distance Education School. Connect StrongStart facilitators for collaborative planning and sharing of resources for literacy development.</p> |
| <p>4. Partner with Child Development Center to plan for a new interactive play center with an emphasis on infant and toddler development.</p>  | <p>4. Continue with collaborative work to open the new interactive play center at the Child Development Center January, 2010.</p>   |
| <p>5. Provide LEAP training for the CELC and StrongStart Facilitators and offer program to families.</p>   | <p>5. Provide LEAP training for the new StrongStart Facilitators so the program can be offered at the new sites.</p>  |
| <p>6. Implement the Understanding The Early Years (UEY) child assessment process and parent survey as well as the Early Development Instrument (EDI), analyze data and interpret neighborhood needs.</p> | <p>6. Analyze data from the 08/09 UEY and EDI projects as soon as they become available to help identify neighborhood needs and develop a strategy for intervention and support.</p>  |
| <p>7. Research interest and need for on-going training for certified Early Childhood Educators in the community.</p>   | <p>7. Initiate joint planning for ECE training workshops with representatives from the School District, Northern Lights College, And the ECD table.</p>   |

## **K – 12 Literacy**

SD #60 has a strong early literacy program at the Kindergarten/Grade 1 levels, which focuses on identifying students who may be encountering difficulty early on and providing intervention before they develop unproductive habits and negative self-esteem. Kindergarten students are screened in October and April, using a locally developed assessment tool for phonological processing ability. All

Kindergarten teachers teach phonological processing using district approved instructional resources. Students who do not meet expectations on the April post-test are offered additional instruction. In Grade 1, students are screened using Marie Clay's Observation Survey. The weakest students are enrolled in Reading Recovery, where they receive daily one-on-one instruction in reading and writing with a specially trained teacher for up to 20 weeks.

Students in grades 1 – 7 participate in a district year-end reading assessment. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding the target for their grade level is monitored at the school and district level. At schools characterized by weak cohort performance, follow up conversations take place to seek understanding. Is there additional performance data to confirm that students are struggling? What strategies may be employed to build student success? The district differentiates support and resources to the schools with the most challenging student populations. Schools, in turn, differentiate support and resources to the individual students with the greatest need.

The school district offers a reading intervention class at the two largest junior secondary schools, designed to give additional support to students who are reading 2 or more years below grade level. The purpose of the intervention class is to better prepare students to experience success in their regular English class. Results to date have been very positive, with 83% of participating students passing their English class with regular credit.

The school district seeks to nurture cultures of collaborative practice, where teams of teachers make on-going adjustments to their teaching based on a process of inquiry. In such cultures, new teachers are welcomed and supported. Additionally, teachers exiting the system should have less impact on the culture of practice in the school. Effective instructional strategies and resources are shared. These cultures have the potential to both improve and sustain high levels of student achievement. To build instructional capacity at schools and support collaborative practice, teams of teachers are able to apply to the district for collaboration grants. Grants may be used for teacher-on-call time to release classroom teachers to collaboratively plan, debrief, or co-teach lessons. Literacy support teachers are available to help facilitate the work of collaborative teams as requested.

To help ensure that classroom teachers offer consistent and strong literacy instruction across the grades, literacy support teachers offer an on-going program of professional development. Workshops, demonstration classrooms, and coaching are available on balanced literacy, SMART Learning, 6+1 Traits of Writing, Wireless Writing, and Literature Circles.

Actions and next steps for improving the literacy skills of school-aged children are summarized in the following table:

## **ACTIONS**

1. Continue to offer early identification and intervention for at-risk readers at the early primary levels
2. Continue to differentiate district support and resources to schools with cohorts of the most challenging to teach students
3. Review the district reading assessment tool for grades 3 – 7. Pilot a new assessment with updated reading selections at two school sites.
4. Provide a varied program of professional development on effective literacy instruction including workshops, demonstration classrooms, coaching, and facilitated collaboration time with teacher teams.

## **NEXT STEPS**

1. Ensure that all schools have the necessary training and resources, identify school sites experiencing success and share good practice.
2. Encourage schools to build instructional capacity through facilitated collaboration time
3. Provide training for all classroom teachers, grades 3 – 7, on the new district assessment tool that was implemented successfully last year at two school sites. Use the new assessment for year end data collection.
4. Teach elements of formative assessment and differentiated instruction explicitly in all literacy workshops, offer follow-up support to all workshops to ensure transfer of training to the classroom.

Evidence and targets for improving the literacy performance of school-aged children are detailed in the District Achievement Contract.

### **Adult Literacy**

Initiatives to support adult literacy outlined in last year's Regional Literacy Plan and District Literacy Plan did not take place in any coordinated way. The speaker from 2010 Legacies Now who was scheduled to be in Fort St. John last September to speak to organizations and businesses on raising awareness of workplace literacy skills was cancelled. The work of the Literacy Task Force has been delayed due to the change in the coordinator position. Adult literacy remains as an area of focus for next year.

The school district literacy support teacher has coached the instructor for the High School Culinary Arts Program on elements of formative assessment and strategies to improve content area reading. The instructor, who is not a certified teacher, quickly applied these strategies to support students in reading and understanding their difficult and lengthy required textbook, and preparing to write the Level 1 Industry Exam. Results were very positive, with all students successfully passing their exam and receiving their certificate. There is potential for offering similar training in content area reading and assessment strategies to college level trades instructors in order to improve student success.

Culinary Arts is an example of one High School Program that may be of interest to adult students. There is potential for other career preparation programs, not currently available in the community, to be offered through the school district with a focus on supporting literacy needs. The new Ministry of Education funding permits adult students without dogwood completion to continue studies in the high school setting. Clearly, this is an area that needs to be explored.

Actions and next steps for improving adult literacy skills are summarized in the following table:

<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>NEXT STEPS</b>
1. Support the community awareness campaign on workplace literacy skills.	1. Work with community partners, local businesses and organizations to develop training opportunities for workplace literacy skills .
2. Continue to offer professional development on formative assessment and reading strategies for the content areas to our trades training instructors.	2. Explore ways to extend this professional development to the trades training instructors working in the college setting.
3. Explore ways to serve adult continuing education students in school district programs.	3. Establish a committee and work with our adult education partners to determine needs and make recommendations.

## **Aboriginal Literacy**

We are concerned that many of our Aboriginal students do not enjoy the same level of success in school programs as their non-Aboriginal peers. There are a disproportionate number of Aboriginal students in special education categories. While our Aboriginal students typically perform above the Provincial level for the Aboriginal sub-group on Ministry of Education measures of academic achievement (Foundation Skills Assessment and Provincial Final Exams), there is still room for improvement.

We monitor Aboriginal student performance when reviewing district achievement data in all academic areas, including literacy. Evidence and performance targets for literacy are detailed in the Achievement Contract. We are pleased to see a very positive trend developing this year in improved Aboriginal student performance on the district year-end reading assessment at the grades 3-7 levels.

We work very closely with our Aboriginal Education Program staff when developing intervention plans to support literacy development. Aboriginal Education Program staff is represented on our District Literacy Rep Team. We have worked collaboratively to implement early reading intervention programs, introduce the use of literacy manipulatives in primary classrooms, and to infuse culturally relevant reading materials in all elementary school bookrooms. While our Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement has not yet been officially signed off, we have been working toward the objectives listed in the agreement specifically addressing literacy achievement of our Aboriginal learners.

We have recently received an Industry Training Authority grant to increase Aboriginal enrolment in Secondary Apprenticeship Programs. An important part of this goal will be to build in support for the development of literacy skills in order to ensure success in the program.

We have a committee of educators working to review data on secondary student attendance and school withdrawal. We are looking at information from exit interviews to better understand factors that might contribute to keeping students in school, particularly with our Aboriginal students. We are looking at designing a different kind of alternate program that might better meet the needs of these students. A critical component of any such program will be literacy development.

Actions and next steps for improving Aboriginal literacy are summarized in the following table:

## **ACTIONS**

1. Follow the objectives and implement the strategies for improving the literacy achievement of all Aboriginal learners as listed in the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement.
2. Work with the new Strong Start and WOW bus programs to include resources appropriate for Aboriginal students and their families
3. Collaborate with Aboriginal Education Program staff to determine strategies for increasing Aboriginal student enrolment in Secondary Apprenticeship Programs.

## **NEXT STEPS**

1. Sign and officially adopt the AEA
2. Aboriginal Education Program staff meet with the Community Early Learning Coordinator and the new StrongStart facilitators to ensure Aboriginal content when ordering reading and early learning resources, liaise with the CELC to develop the WOW bus program for the First Nations reserve sites.
3. Include plans for addressing literacy development in this initiative .

## **Conclusion**

We are working on establishing a process and timeline that will support the development of our District Literacy Plan, with broad staff and community involvement, in time for Board approval and submission to the Ministry of Education for July 15 each year.

Through sharing the good work already in place, and building and extending community partnerships, we believe we can positively impact literacy levels and contribute to the health and wellbeing of our citizens.