

# **Nisga'a District-Community Literacy Plan, 2010-2011**

**Submitted to  
Ministry of Education and 2010 Legacies Now Society**

**Submitted by  
School District 92 (Nisga'a)**

**July 15, 2010**

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## **Acknowledgements**

School District 92 (Nisga'a) acknowledges, with sincere gratitude, the many people within the communities and the schools who took part in and contributed to the community and school meetings held over the past several years. Their commitment to education in the Nass Valley is essential to the implementation of the Nisga'a District-Community Literacy Plan.

## **Background**

School District 92 (Nisga'a) is unique, with almost total Aboriginal population and a dual responsibility to both Nisga'a Lisims Government and to the B.C. Ministry of Education. As such, our school district and our communities have the potential to be lighthouse areas for Aboriginal education and learning, with high expectations and endless possibilities for Nisga'a learners.

The District-Community Literacy Plan joins other school district and community efforts to articulate a vision and guiding purpose for life-long learning in Nisga'a communities. Other, related, initiatives and documents include the District Achievement Contract, the Language and Culture Community Connections Project, Raven House Language and Culture Centre, Nisga'a Language and Culture Curriculum Development, Elders' Groups, the Fluent Speakers' Group, and School Growth Plans.

It is important that the vision and guiding purpose for Nisga'a education be developed collaboratively and in unity through community engagement and open dialogue in the four Nisga'a communities, with the village governments, with Nisga'a Lisims Government, and with early childhood and adult learning centres. Through the collaborative visioning process, we can all hear, understand, and benefit from community stories, knowledge, and understandings. It is the stories, knowledge, and understandings that provide the foundation for the vision, guiding principles, and long-term plans for Nisga'a people reflected in the Nisga'a District-Community Literacy Plan.

## History and Context

The Nisga'a people have lived in the Nass Valley since time immemorial. In the late 1800s, when much of Nisga'a traditional territory was declared Crown land, the Nisga'a people began petitioning government to recognize their connection to and ownership of Nisga'a territory. In 1998, a signing ceremony at New Aiyansh signaled the completion of a quarter century of negotiations and the birth of the *Nisga'a Final Agreement*, British Columbia's first modern treaty.

The Nass River flows through a land of sacred mountains, dense forests, and rugged lava beds on Canada's Pacific Coast. The resources of the Nass River Valley have sustained the Nisga'a people for millennia and allowed the Nisga'a Nation to develop one of the most sophisticated pre-colonial cultures in North America.

Today, the Nisga'a Nation includes over 6200 people belonging to one of four tribes: Laxsgiik (Eagle), Gisk'aast (Killer Whale), Ganada (Raven), and Laxgibuu (Wolf). Nisga'a people reside in the Nass Valley communities of Gingolx, Laxgalts'ap, Gitwinksihlkw, and New Aiyansh, as well as Terrace, Prince Rupert/Port Edward, greater Vancouver, and across North America. In Nisga'a culture, traditional authority and the ability to govern originates from the connection between families and communities, and land and resources.<sup>1</sup>

## Reclaiming Nisga'a Voice and Vision

A community member who had attended Boarding School in Vancouver because there were no secondary schools for Nisga'a students in the Nass Valley, stated: *"When we started the school district [in 1975], the number one vision was to bring us home – home from the places where we didn't have the opportunity to learn our culture. Our parents were there, standing beside us."*

During the community sessions held in 2008, the history of education in the Nass Valley was revisited, including how it was used as an assimilation tool to impose European ideology, which today is still evident in the culture of education. Many stories were told of personal experiences with rural schools, residential schools, Day Schools, Boarding Schools, and churches. It became evident that communities need to be heard in order for the healing to begin. A concentrated effort on decolonizing education is integral to discussions about literacy and learning in the Nass Valley.

Decolonizing is a multifaceted and multilayered process that requires and allows reclamation of voice and vision. Nisga'a voice, stories, experiences, and healing all contribute toward the process of decolonization. Community conversations, the visioning process, a strong focus on Nisga'a language and culture in the schools, Raven House, and the Community Connections partnerships are all part of the decolonization process.

The Nisga'a Elders say this about Nisga'a identity: *"The strength of the Nisga'a lies in our own way of life, and in our own language."*

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<sup>1</sup> Nisga'a Lisims Government website

## **Community Consultation: The Visioning Process**

It is a priority of both the school district and the Nisga'a Lisims Government that education permeate all aspects and age levels and that education be grounded in Nisga'a culture. This priority was clearly stated in all of the community meetings leading up to the Literacy Plan. In all, 355 people across the Nass Valley and in the secondary school took part in these meetings. Community conversations focused on the question: "What is the purpose of Nisga'a education today and in the future?"

During the visioning process, people's stories celebrated the strength of Nisga'a language and culture. The process recognizes and honours all Nisga'a learners and their words will become part of the educational plan for the Nisga'a Nation. Following community consultation, the school district, Nisga'a Lisims Government, and the communities will be better able to work together to meet shared commitments identified through the process of continued dialogue and engagement.

## **Culturally Responsive Education and Family Literacy**

Discussions about literacy and life-long learning in Nisga'a communities cannot be separated from Nisga'a context and history. The history and context of the Nisga'a Nation requires that we understand, develop, and incorporate a philosophy and vision that is grounded in an understanding of culturally responsive education and of the relationships among language, culture, learning, and literacy in the lives of the people of the Nisga'a Nation.

The urgency of reclaiming Nisga'a language and culture cannot be underestimated. In meetings that took place last year, an Elder quoted the late Peter Nyce speaking at Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a (Nisga'a House of Wisdom), "*We are the last generation that will be able to speak Nisga'a, understand it.*"

Reclaiming Nisga'a language and culture is a huge undertaking; discussion includes decolonization, decolonizing education, competing knowledge systems, language and culture needs, community/Elders involvement, leadership development, Nisga'a nationalism, traditional ways, youth engagement, advocacy, a vision for the future, and other major issues.

Discussions about literacy and life-long learning in Nisga'a communities also cannot be separated from an understanding of family literacy and the relationship between learning, language, and culture. Family literacy learning takes place every day within the context of people's families and communities and enables people to participate in and contribute to their own and other communities, as they wish.

Many voices spoke of learning that weaves through all aspects of a person's life, every day, in all settings:

*"We have a big school, Nisga'a Elementary Secondary School, but it isn't just there that our children learn. God has given us this valley to teach our children. You never stop learning; education is every day."*

*“My education started when I was very young. My teachers were my parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties, brothers and sisters.”*

*“Unity in the school—this is a vision—to have the matriarchs and chiefs walk through the village with the children on the first day of school and giving the authority to the school to teach the children.”*

Discussions about literacy and learning should also incorporate an understanding of culturally-responsive education. Culturally responsive education is—

*...predicated on the belief that a firm grounding in the heritage language and culture indigenous to a particular place is a fundamental prerequisite for the development of culturally-healthy students and communities associated with that place, and thus is an essential ingredient for identifying the appropriate qualities and practices associated with culturally-responsive educators, curriculum and schools.<sup>2</sup>*

An Elder put this into these words: *“We’re asking for a perfect balance between basics and Nisga’a language and culture.”*

Others echoed his thoughts:

*“The original philosophy of the school district—education as a total way of life with Nisga’a determining education.”*

*“Principles behind our tradition remain—we need to bring them into education.”*

At the end of the community meetings for the visioning process, Nelson Leeson, president of Nisga’a Lisims Government stated:

*“We have to accept—each and every one of us—our responsibilities. We all have to do things to bring about positive change. We have the ability and the power to make that change. I assure you that when the recommendations come down that we’ll take action. The potential is just so enormous.”*

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<sup>2</sup> Alaska Standards for Culturally-Responsive Schools, adopted by the Assembly of Alaska Native Educators, Anchorage, Alaska, February 3, 1998. Published by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1998.

## Reflections on 2009-2010

### *A Vision for Nisga'a Education*

The Steering Committee and the Advisory Group met in late June 2009 to develop a draft vision of Nisga'a Education. The draft Nisga'a Vision Statement enables people to continue discussions about what is truly important and how best to express the wisdom that is resident in the Nisga'a people—

#### **Nisga'a Vision for Education**

Hlaxwhl hli ganwilaak'ilshl Nisga'a, gan wilhl daxgat wil dip hooxhl Sayt-K'ílim-Goot, Yuuhlimk'askw, Ayuukhl Nisga'a ganhl Hawahlkws; nihl haniihitkwahl Nisga'a tgun ahl ts'im-ganwilaak'ils, ganwilxo'oskw ganhl kwahlxoosa'anskw sit'aatkwsit wil sgathl hlgtk'ihlkw.

Nisga'a Education is a way to learn and live the principles of life, which entails sayt-k'ílim goot, the Ayuukhl Nisga'a and the yuuhlimk'askw system. Living sayt-k'ílim-goot creates a secure foundation that respects a balance between Nisga'a language and wisdom rooted in the land, and the languages and wisdom of other peoples. Education is a way to learn and live the Ayuukhl Nisga'a. The yuuhlimk'askw system guides how to live. <sup>3</sup>

### *Elements of the Mission Statement*

In September and October, the entire staff of the Nisga'a School District came together to discuss the transcripts of the community meetings and to draw out key ideas from those discussions. This resulted in a list of elements of a mission statement, which will be used as a basis of discussion and action about policy, instruction, and curriculum:

Element 1: Standards and Expectations

Element 2: Parent Involvement

Element 3: Nisga'a Curriculum

Element 4: Nisga'a Language and Culture

Element 5: Fine Arts

Element 6: Nisga'a Identity

Element 7: Careers and Lifelong Learning

Element 8: Culturally Relevant Resources

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<sup>3</sup> Final Nisga'a Vision.doc

Motion to accept: Verna Williams (Ts'aagabin), Seconded by: Alice Azak (K'iigapks)

Question: Herb Morven (K'eeekw)

Adopted at Fluent Speakers meeting – June 23, 2010 2:42

### ***Lisims Early Learning Partnership (LELP)***

Early Learning has become a major priority. We continue to develop a collaborative partnership with the four village Headstart/Nursery Centers and with community agencies with a focus on early health and learning. The purpose of the partnership is to build mutual awareness among the school district, the community, and families about early learning and literacy. We also began a partnership with “Welcome to Kindergarten”. We continued the PALS (Parents as Literacy Supporters) program, and again school district staff collaborated with the pre-school staff and jointly implemented the program.

A transitional phase was identified as an area of focus for children leaving preschool and entering school. This transitional process is a work in progress with the end goal being a less stressful environment for children, parents and teachers. Through the District and Community Literacy Planning process, communities and families will gain greater understanding of family literacy and how families can help support their children’s learning. This has been done in past years through the Rec’ and Read programs which are offered to children in all four villages after school and during the summer.

A draft agreement is in place with Lisims Early Learning Partnership Team (LELP). The Coordinator for the Nass Valley-wide Early Learning Team is a community member who works out of the Laxgalts’ap Early Learning Center. The agreement provides for support for the following initiatives:

- Partial Coordination Costs
- LELP Meetings
- Developing a Strategic Plan with Common Goals
- Increased level of Nisga’a Culture/Language Content and Perspectives
- Working towards a Seamless Transition to Kindergarten
- Coordination of Child/Student supports – Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy, Vision, Hearing, etc.
- Welcome to Kindergarten
- Kindergarten Orientation
- Ready, Set, Learn
- Welcome Baby
- Salmon Berry Fair
- Shared Professional Development

### ***Raven House: Nisga’a Language and Culture Centre***

Beginning in 2006, the Board of Education established Raven House, the Nisga'a Language and Culture Resource Centre. In consultation with representatives of Nisga'a Lisims Government, School District 92, and the Elders Council, a successful application was made to the School Community Connections Program for a development grant. The past years have seen continued community consultation and partnership initiatives required to instill community ownership and sustainability.

The Nisga'a Language and Culture Resource Centre provides a repository for, and public access to, archival documents, historical and cultural resources, as well as those related to Nisga'a language preservation and revitalization. Multimedia production and reproduction services are important functions of the Centre. Much of the work of Raven House focuses on building strength in our ability to integrate Nisga'a culture, history, and knowledge throughout the curriculum.

This work is being done collaboratively with the Nisga'a Lisims Government, the communities, the Council on Curriculum, Fluent Speakers Group, Working Group, and Elders so that we can identify, understand, and begin to integrate Nisga'a ways of teaching and knowing into our school setting. The Community Connections partnership and Raven House support this process, which has already begun with the Primary grades and continues through each subsequent year.

Integral to infusing Nisga'a cultural content is the digitization project, which utilizes technology to support curriculum development. The school district technology department is located in Raven House and has sophisticated equipment needed to record and digitize documents, video tapes, archives, resource materials, and footage from the Fluent Speakers meetings. This project has included secondary students as part of the Workplace Mentoring Program.

## **Thinking about 2010-2011**

### ***English Language Literacy***

We have recently contracted the services of a part-time District Literacy Coordinator/Consultant to help implement the District Literacy Plan and to work with teachers in classrooms to increase the literacy levels of students in the school district. Although this person is not a resident of the Nass Valley, he has worked with teachers here in the past.

We have added an additional goal to our plan this year: To promote and support English language literacy within the schools and communities. The activities within the new goal reflect the work that the District Literacy Coordinator/Consultant will be doing this year and next year. Among the objectives of this position are the following:

- To find ways to bring forth, honour, and respect what students and families already carry within them that pertain to literacy. This requires the use of a balanced approach in Nisga'a literacy that reflects and incorporates the knowledge that students already know from their culture and community; that accesses Nisga'a people, that uses Nisga'a materials and resources, that brings Nisga'a and other Aboriginal storytellers in to tell stories, that teaches storytelling as a process to be developed through practice, and that integrates daily Nisga'a language use into all areas;

- To provide a literacy program that is lifelong and encompasses early learning, school aged children and youth, and the inclusion of families. There are other perspectives of literacy—specifically in the field of family literacy—that promote the idea that literacy is an integral part of communities and families and that we are all on a ‘literacy continuum’.

### ***Nisga’a Language Literacy***

This summer there will be a concentrated project designed to intensely increase the quantity of media education resources to support teaching and learning of Nisga’a language and culture. This project will contribute substantially to increasing the percentage of students who meet or exceed our expectations for Nisga’a language reading, writing, listening, speaking, and representing by providing engaging and relevant resources.

### ***Literacy Team***

We will be creating a new Literacy Team beginning early in the 2010-2011 school year.



## Current Programs and Initiatives

| Early Learning                                    | Primary                           | Intermediate                            | Secondary                               | Adult                            | Elders                            |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Toddler Program                                   | District                          | Assessment for learning                 | Counselling Services                    | Grade 12-Dogwood                 | Elder's social night              |
| Mother Goose                                      | Balanced Literacy                 | Tutoring                                | School to Work                          | ABE                              | Annual Elders gathering           |
| After-school program                              | Talking Tables                    | Nisga'a on Wireless                     | Tutoring                                | Tutoring                         | Sewing club                       |
| PALS  | PWIM                              | Lexia                                   | Nisga'a on Wireless                     | Adult Graduation Program         | Elders in the classroom           |
| Ready-Set-Learn                                   | Phonological & phonemic awareness | Nisga'a language                        | Nisga'a language                        | Training Preparation             | Elders in early childhood centres |
| Prenatal make & take                              | PALS                              | Rec' and Read                           | MALT program                            | WWN lifelong literacy program    | Elders' society                   |
| Nisga'a language                                  | Welcome to Kindergarten           | Nisga'a Valley Health Education program | Nisga'a Valley Health Education Program | NWCC partnerships                | Cultural activities               |
| Fathers' group                                    | Reading Power                     | Speech & Language services              | Deaf & Hard of Hearing services         | UNBC partnerships                | Elders' partnerships              |
| Pilates for moms                                  | Nisga'a Language                  | Deaf & Hard of Hearing services         | Special Education Services              | Library services through Terrace | Library services through Terrace  |
| Rhymes, Giggles & Baby Tickles                    | Nisga'a Valley Health Program     | Special Education Services              | Counselling Services                    |                                  |                                   |
| Big Buddy reading                                 | Speech & Language Services        | Counselling Services                    | Counselling Services                    |                                  |                                   |
| Moe the Mouse                                     | Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services   | Library services through Terrace        | Alternative Education Program           |                                  |                                   |
| Infant development Program                        | Early Learning language support   |   | Library services through Terrace        |                                  |                                   |
| Access to Books                                   | Special Education services        |   |   |                                  |                                   |
| Supported Child Development                       | Counselling Services              |   |   |                                  |                                   |
| Speech/Language Services                          | Library services through Terrace  |   |   |                                  |                                   |
| Training and workshops                            |                                   |   |   |                                  |                                   |
| Paraprofessional training: parents and caregivers |                                   |   |   |                                  |                                   |
| SD92 Collaborative Transitions                    |                                   |   |   |                                  |                                   |
| Production: Nisga'a resources                     |                                   |   |   |                                  |                                   |
| RCMP Safety                                       |                                   |   |   |                                  |                                   |

## Action Plan for 2010-2011

Based on community meetings, preliminary principles have emerged which include the following:

- 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.
- Learning begins at home and should include learning Nisga’a language and culture.
- Knowing Nisga’a language and culture is a priority in the Nisga’a Nation.
- It is important to build strength in our schools—in instruction, curriculum, resources, assessment, career counselling, transitions, and other areas.

### Goal 1: Continue community collaboration

| Actions/Initiatives   | Partnerships   | Indicators of Success  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Work with Elders to craft a final vision Nisga’a Education</p> <p>Develop a mission for the school district based on the elements of the mission</p> <p>Use the words of the communities to consider actions and initiatives for the schools and communities</p> <p>Extend community collaboration to support implementation of the District-Community Literacy Plan</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent Advisory Councils</li> <li>• Nisga’a Teachers Union</li> <li>• Canadian Union of Public Employees</li> <li>• Adult Learning Centres in each village</li> <li>• WWN (Nisga’a House of Wisdom)</li> <li>• Village Governments</li> <li>• Nisga’a Lisims Government</li> <li>• Nisga’a Elders Council</li> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Nisga’a Valley Health</li> <li>• Village Government Youth</li> <li>• Lisims Early Learning Partnership (LELP)</li> </ul> | <p>Continued collaboration</p> <p>Vision and Mission Statement for the School District</p> <p>Implementation of an Action Plan reflecting the wishes of the Nisga’a people</p> |

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

| <b>Actions/Initiatives</b>   | <b>Partnerships</b>  | <b>Indicators of Success</b>   |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Include the knowledge and experience of Elders in literacy initiatives</p> <p>Promote and revitalize the Nisga’a language</p> <p>Support Nisga’a language programs in all four villages</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent Advisory Councils</li> <li>• Lisims Early Learning Partnership (LELP)</li> <li>• Nisga’a Teachers Union</li> <li>• Canadian Union of Public Employees</li> <li>• Adult Learning Centres in each village</li> <li>• WWN (Nisga’a House of Wisdom)</li> <li>• Village Governments</li> <li>• Nisga’a Lisims Government</li> <li>• Nisga’a Elders Council</li> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Nisga’a Valley Health</li> <li>• Village Government Youth</li> </ul> | <p>Nisga’a language programs for adults in each village</p> <p>Culturally responsive resources and instruction</p> |

**Goal 3: Promote and support English language literacy in the schools and the communities**

| Actions/Initiatives  | Partnerships  | Indicators of Success  |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Use assessment to identify challenges, successes; plan for and support learning; inform planning; assess progress; make recommendations</p> <p>Initiate and promote an early literacy program to support families, Elders, and community members reading with preschool children frequently each week</p> <p>Provide specialized programming for students identified as requiring specific support in reading and mathematics</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy Team</li> <li>• Board of Education</li> <li>• Administrators</li> <li>• Lisims Early Learning Partnership (LELP)</li> <li>• Parent Advisory Councils</li> <li>• Teachers</li> </ul> | <p>Improved school success, based on a range of assessment processes</p> |

**Goal 4: Develop effective communication processes about literacy and learning**

| <b>Actions/Initiatives</b>  | <b>Partnerships</b>  | <b>Indicators of Success</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Develop workable methods for communicating about literacy and learning among the communities</p> <p>Identify strategies to reach all families and to include hard-to-reach community members</p> <p>Build a common understanding and a common vocabulary about literacy within the schools and communities</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent Advisory Councils</li> <li>• Lisims Early Learning Partnership (LELP)</li> <li>• Nisga’a Teachers Union</li> <li>• Canadian Union of Public Employees</li> <li>• Adult Learning Centres in each village</li> <li>• WWN (Nisga’a House of Wisdom)</li> <li>• Village Governments</li> <li>• Nisga’a Lisims Government</li> <li>• Nisga’a Elders Council</li> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Nisga’a Valley Health</li> <li>• Village Government Youth</li> </ul> | <p>Understanding of literacy and learning processes and initiatives throughout the communities</p> <p>Effective ways for communities and the school district to communicate with each other</p> <p>Each member of the Nisga’a Nation and others who live in the Nass Valley know about and have access to learning and literacy programs and initiatives</p> |

**Goal 5: Support and encourage family involvement in learning and literacy programs**

| Actions/Initiatives   | Partnerships   | Indicators of Success  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Ensure that learning and literacy programs and support are provided and are accessible to families in all four villages</p> <p>Utilize school libraries and the technology department to support family literacy and learning</p> <p>Continue collaboration with communities and strengthen partnerships between schools and communities</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent Advisory Councils</li> <li>• Lisims Early Learning Partnership (LELP)</li> <li>• Nisga’a Teachers Union</li> <li>• Canadian Union of Public Employees</li> <li>• Adult Learning Centres in each village</li> <li>• WWN (Nisga’a House of Wisdom)</li> <li>• Village Governments</li> <li>• Nisga’a Lisims Government</li> <li>• Nisga’a Elders Council</li> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Nisga’a Valley Health</li> <li>• Village Government Youth</li> </ul> | <p>Learning and literacy programs are available, accessible, and utilized by members of each community</p> |

**Goal 6: Work with partners to enable students at all levels to make successful transitions.**

| Actions/Initiatives   | Partnerships   | 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> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent Advisory Councils</li> <li>• Lisims Early Learning Partnership (LELP)</li> <li>• Nisga’a Teachers Union</li> <li>• Canadian Union of Public Employees</li> <li>• Adult Learning Centres in each village</li> <li>• WVN (Nisga’a House of Wisdom)</li> <li>• Village Governments</li> <li>• Nisga’a Lisims Government</li> <li>• Nisga’a Elders Council</li> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Nisga’a Valley Health</li> <li>• Village Government Youth</li> </ul> | <p>Students of all ages make successful transitions</p> |