

Nisga'a District-Community Literacy Plan, 2011-2012

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Acknowledgements

School District 92 (Nisga'a) acknowledges, with sincere gratitude, the many people within the communities and the schools who have taken part in and contributed to community and school meetings, including the Hopes and Dreams workshops, community sessions, and community group meetings held over the past several years. Their commitment to education in the Nass Valley is highly valued. It is their 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.

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.

It is a priority of both the school district and the Nisga'a Lisims Government that education permeates all aspects and age levels and that education is grounded in Nisga'a culture. This priority was clearly stated in all of the community meetings leading up to the first District and Community 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.

Implementation of the *District-Community Literacy Plan* joins other efforts to articulate and implement a vision and guiding purpose for life-long learning in Nisga'a communities, including the School District Achievement Contract, Raven House Language and Culture Centre, Nisga'a Language and Culture Curriculum Development, Elders' Council on Curriculum, the Fluent Speakers' Group, and School Growth Plans.

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.¹

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."*

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 have spoken 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."

¹ Nisga'a Lisims Government website

“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.²

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

Reflections on 2010-2011 District-Community Literacy Plan

Community Context

The communities in the Nass Valley are quite small, as are the schools. In September 2010, there were 422 students in Grades K-12, with school populations ranging from 46 students in the smallest elementary school to 241 in the combined elementary/secondary school. There are 44 students designated as having significant special needs. Half of our students—212 students—receive English Language Development programs and services.

In September 2010, all four schools had new administrators—two of these people had been administrators in the school district last year and two were new to the Valley. The school administrators are committed to working with their communities and to focusing on and supporting literacy in multiple ways.

Our school district and the communities have a dual focus for literacy—enhancing both English language and Nisga’a language literacy. This year we have spent considerable time working with the Nisga’a Lisims Government on issues related to education, especially the roles and responsibilities for the Nisga’a Language and Culture Program.

² 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.

Task Group

The Literacy Plan in the Nass Valley is implemented in consultation with both Nisga'a and English language groups. The Elders' Society works very closely with the Director of Instruction (who is also the acting Literacy Outreach Coordinator) to develop Nisga'a language and culture curriculum, with a focus on developing fluent Nisga'a speakers. Raven House, which is a collaborative community language and culture resource centre, houses collections of materials and also is the focus for development of resources and materials to support Nisga'a Language and Culture instruction. The development of curriculum and resources is a long, complex process that is necessary to support the Nisga'a Language goals of the Literacy Plan.

English language literacy is also a major focus of both the school district and the communities. Over the past year, this work was coordinated by the acting Literacy Outreach Coordinator (the Director of Instruction), the school principals, and a contracted literacy resource person who worked, short-term, with the schools and the community to support the literacy goals and to establish and support the English language literacy team.

Next year, the task group will include a broader multi-discipline, multi-age group, which will include a literacy resource teacher, the StrongStart Outreach Coordinator, early learning representatives, and other members of the communities and the school district.

Community Development and Literacy Collaboration

The major continuing community collaborations and connections include relationships among the Nisga'a School District, the Nisga'a Lisims Government, the Village governments, the Lisims Early Learning Partnership, and Raven House Nisga'a Language and Culture Resource Centre.

The Nisga'a School District and the Nisga'a Lisims Government have close fiscal and political relationships through the terms of the Nisga'a Treaty. The School District, the Nisga'a Lisims Government, and each Village Government maintain expectations for education throughout the Nass Valley. The Village Government Education Administrator oversees education in each village, is involved in educational concerns of village residents, and maintains a relationship with the local school.

Early learning is a priority throughout the Valley. Through the Lisims Early Learning Partnership, collaborative relationships among the school district, the four village Headstart/Nursery Centers, and community agencies focus on building mutual understanding about early health, learning, and literacy. The Lisims Early Learning Partnership supports the following:

- Early Learning goals of the District-Community Literacy Plan
- StrongStart Outreach Centres in all four schools, beginning September 2011

- Increased Nisga’a Culture/Language content and perspectives in the early years
- Working towards a seamless transition to kindergarten
- Coordination of Child/Student supports – Speech & Language, OT/PT, Vision, Hearing
- Welcome to Kindergarten
- Kindergarten orientation
- Ready, Set, Learn
- Welcome Baby
- Salmon Berry Fair
- Shared professional development

The early learning partnership identified the need for smooth transitions for children between preschool and Kindergarten. This transitional process is a work in progress with the end goal being a less stressful environment for children, parents, and teachers.

Beginning in 2006 Raven House, the Nisga’a Language and Culture Resource Centre, was established jointly by the Nisga’a Lisims Government, School District 92, and the Elders Council. The Nisga’a Language and Culture Resource Centre provides a repository for and public access to archival documents, historical and cultural resources, and resources related to Nisga’a language preservation and revitalization. Resource development, multimedia production, and reproduction services are important functions of the Centre.

Goals and actions for the current year

Based on the results of many community meetings, these foundational principles for learning in the Nass Valley emerged:

- 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 academic strength in our schools—in instruction, curriculum, resources, assessment, career counselling, transitions, and other areas.

We realized this year that we had included too many goals in our Literacy Plan. When the plan was written we believed that the original six goals and related actions reflected the desire of the communities, based on extensive consultation. While we still believe that they reflect the wishes of the communities, we also realize that we should focus our energies more specifically on areas where we feel able to make progress.

Therefore, in 2011-2012 we will have four goals instead of six goals. These goals are—

Goal 1: Promote and support Nisga'a language and culture literacy.

Goal 2: Promote and support English language literacy.

Goal 3: Support and encourage family involvement in learning and literacy programs.

Goal 4: Work with partners to enable students at all levels to make successful transitions.

We believe that the following actions have helped us get closer to achieving these goals.

Goal 1: Promote and support Nisga'a language and culture literacy.

Promoting and supporting Nisga'a language, culture, history, and values is a long-term goal, accomplished in continuing collaboration with Elders, governments, the school district, and community members. This remains an exceptionally challenging goal. As we learn more about this process, we become increasingly aware of the work needed to accomplish the goal of fluency in the Nisga'a language and deep understanding of Nisga'a culture. Within the schools, we are working to strengthen students' understanding of Nisga'a culture as we simultaneously develop curriculum, resources, strategies, and assessment processes. Actions include—

- Working with Elders, community partners, fluent speakers, and others to articulate Nisga'a language and culture goals.
- Including Elders as a key part of the Nisga'a Language and Culture Program.
- Supporting and promoting Nisga'a language and culture through administration, curriculum development, resources, and language support in schools.
- Continuing to develop and provide culturally responsive curriculum resources and materials and to embed Nisga'a content into curriculum areas.
- Providing Nisga'a language instruction through all grade levels.
- Supporting involvement in community cultural activities, such as Fishery Bay, Hobiye, oolichan and salmon fishing, stone moving, and dance groups.
- Supporting and celebrating Unity Day in each community.
- Continuing to build a toolbox of methodology, experiential activities, and culturally responsive resources to teach Nisga'a language and culture.

Goal 2: Promote and support English language literacy.

Promoting and supporting English language literacy at all age levels is a significant goal in the Nass Valley. Actions include—

- Continuing involvement in the Lisims Early Learning Partnership and working collaboratively on early learning initiatives.

- Continuing to implement the goals and actions of the District-Community Literacy Plan.
- Focusing early learning efforts on enhancing English language and literacy, supporting parents as they work with their children, and incorporating Nisga’a culture and language throughout all early learning.
- Continuing to strengthen the coordination of reading instruction throughout the school district, focusing on a balanced approach to literacy and language development.
- Using a range of technology to support people at all ages.
- Searching out and supporting research-based, effective instructional practices.
- Considering the role of Jump Math in the mathematics program.
- Using school and district assessment results to plan for and evaluate instruction.
- Promoting and supporting collaboration in schools around data and student learning.
- Sending clear and consistent messages throughout the district and the communities about our initiatives and how they all fit together.
- Reiterating and recommitting to our common purpose and goals.

Goal 3: Support and encourage family involvement in learning and literacy programs.

The basic principles of learning in for the Nisga’a Nation state that 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. We believe that learning begins at home and should include learning Nisga’a language and culture. Actions for this goal include—

- Continuing to review and revise the District and Community Literacy Plan, so that it becomes a greater guide for Nisga’a and English language literacy in the Nass Valley.
- Continuing community consultation in all four communities with the NESS Hopes and Dreams community meetings over the past year.
- Making learning and literacy programs available and accessible to members of each community through—
 - Nisga’a Language & Culture Education Resource Center
 - Nisga’a StrongStart Outreach Program, to start in September 2011
 - Access to school libraries

Goal 4: Work with partners to enable students at all levels to make successful transitions.

All of the previous goals emphasize the importance of the relationships that are being developed, nurtured, and supported throughout the Nisga’a Nation, in order to support both Nisga’a and English language literacy.

Indications of Success

Our major indicators of success have been—

- continued work to develop high quality, culturally responsive curriculum and instruction in Nisga'a language and culture
- new StrongStart Outreach Centres in all four schools, starting September 2011
- increasing focus on both English language and Nisga'a language literacy throughout the schools and communities
- JUMP math project with UBC
- school administration emphasizing English language literacy
- continued community meetings and involvement in learning within the Nisga'a Nation

Challenges

Our primary challenges have always been (1) the challenges and complexity of providing equitable resources for both Nisga'a and English language literacies, and (2) lack of sufficient personnel to fully implement the Literacy Plan.

For the coming year

In order for literacy development to move forward, in a culturally responsive and effective manner, a full-time coordinator position with supports is required for success. School District 92 Nisga'a has hired a full time, continuing District Based Resource Teacher to provide leadership and support to all four schools and to take on the role of Literacy Outreach Coordinator beginning September 2011. The position will continue to develop productive relationships and partnerships with main stakeholders in literacy across the continuum of lifelong learning.

Research permeates all aspects of the Literacy World and as a result a Nisga'a StrongStart Outreach Coordinator will open the doors to a new program in September 2011. This initiative is in response for the need to focus on early learning literacy, while including Elders and incorporating Nisga'a language and culture content and perspectives.

Action Plan for 2011-2012

Principles of Nisga'a Education

- 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.

Goals of the Literacy Plan

The goals for 2011-2012 have been reduced and simplified, to better reflect our ability to make progress in our plan and help meet the literacy needs of the Nass Valley:

Goal 1: Promote and support Nisga'a language and culture literacy.

Goal 2: Promote and support English language literacy.

Goal 3: Support and encourage family and stakeholder involvement in learning and literacy programs.

Goal 4: Work with partners to enable students at all levels to make successful transitions.

Goal 1: Promote and support Nisga’a language and culture literacy

Actions/Initiatives	Indicators of Success
<p>Incorporate the knowledge and experience of Elders in literacy initiatives</p> <p>Support Nisga’a language programs in all four villages</p> <p>Strengthen relationships and partnerships with key stakeholders</p> <p>Promote and support Nisga’a language throughout all four schools</p>	<p>Culturally responsive resources and instruction</p> <p>Language resources to support teaching of Nisga’a Language</p> <p>Nisga’a StrongStart Outreach Program in all four schools</p> <p>Nisga’a Language and Culture Resource Center</p> <p>Meetings and Presentations in each village</p> <p>Increased use of Nisga’a language throughout the school district workplace and within all four schools</p>

Goal 2: Promote and support English language literacy

Actions/Initiatives	Indicators of Success
<p>Initiate and promote an early literacy program to support families, Elders, and community members</p> <p>Use assessment to identify challenges, successes; plan for and support learning; inform planning; assess progress; make recommendations</p> <p>Provide specialized programming for students identified as requiring specific support in reading and mathematics</p> <p>Establish comprehensive, multi-year staff development plan</p> <p>Provide in-class monitoring, coaching, mentoring and support to classroom teachers, teacher assistants and principals</p> <p>Continue collaboration with main stakeholders and strengthen partnerships between schools and communities</p> <p>Provide student support aimed at addressing the gaps in literacy and encouraging lifelong learning</p>	<p>Improved school success, based on a range of assessment and instructional strategies</p> <p>Nisga’a StrongStart Outreach Program accessible to children, birth through five years old</p> <p>JUMP Math Project with UBC</p> <p>AutoSkills Academy of Reading and Academy of Math in intermediate grades</p> <p>Staff Development Plan in each school</p> <p>Meeting and Presentations at Community and School levels on academic achievement</p> <p>Schools and teachers have regular, on-going pedagogical support</p> <p>Early Learning Literacy Plan developed with partners</p> <p>Overall Literacy Plan refined with input from all main Stakeholders</p> <p>RTI (Response to Intervention) approach utilized at NESS using a Tier 1-3 system of providing supports</p>

Goal 3: Support and encourage family and stakeholder involvement in learning and literacy programs

Actions/Initiatives	Indicators of Success
<p>Develop a Task Force including all main stakeholders</p> <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>Ensure that culturally appropriate literacy materials are available and accessible</p>	<p>Task Force established; review and revision of overall District and Community Literacy Plan</p> <p>NESS Hopes and Dreams community meetings</p> <p>Learning and literacy programs are available, accessible, and utilized by members of each community through—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nisga’a Language & Culture Education Resource Center • Nisga’a StrongStart Outreach Program • School Libraries

Goal 4: Work with partners to enable students at all levels to make successful transitions.

Actions/Initiatives	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>	<p>Students of all ages make successful transitions</p> <p>Transition planning is evident in overall strategies involving all main stakeholders and aimed at all transition points</p>