



**School District 87 (Stikine)  
District Literacy Report  
July, 2013**

## **District and community context and demographics:**

Covering an area of over 188,000 square kilometres, the Stikine region boasts several of the largest and most significant parks in Canada. Here can be found the mighty Stikine, Taku and Liard rivers, three of the last free flowing wilderness rivers in North America. The Stikine River has created the dramatic Grand Canyon of the Stikine -- a major geological wonder. Gorges up to 300 m (948 ft.) deep have been carved through sandstone, granite, and volcanic rock. The Stikine river basin, passing through two countries, abounds with a great variety of wildlife which still coexists in a natural balance between predator and prey. The Tahltan, Tlingit and Kaska Peoples are the original First Nations of the region. The Tahltan traded their goods frequently using the coastal Tlingit tribes as middlemen. Today the Tahltan people are actively involved in managing the resources of this region, most specifically in the communities of Telegraph Creek and Dease Lake. The Tlingit First Nation is prominent in Atlin, while the Kaska First Nation populates the Lower Post community. Each community is distinct within the District and offers opportunities to celebrate cultures.

We live in a beautiful rural and remote area. Our small communities (the largest has a population of about 350 people) are spread throughout this vast region which stretches north to the Yukon and west to Alaska. The trip from Atlin, starting at the furthest north-west point to Lower Post to Dease Lake to Telegraph Creek, the furthest south-west point, is distanced by almost 1500 kilometres. Leaving from Dease Lake, day trips to the other communities are virtually impossible.

Our school population is composed mainly of First Nation students. Hunting, fishing and gathering are important to community and family life. In June we see a drop in enrolment as many students and families go to fish camp to catch and preserve their yearly supply of fish. Leaders in the First Nations community are working hard to maintain and promote traditional languages and culture. This task is difficult due to the influence of and economic wealth from high paying jobs generated by mining and development. These impacts create social, emotional and cultural issues.

There is a strong desire for education. Parents want their children to do well at school. Grandparents and extended families play a huge role in the success of young people and given time, support and a variety of opportunities, students can and do succeed. The Stikine School District has much to offer our students. Small class sizes, dedicated District staff, Principals, teachers and support staff, as well as well-maintained schools and adherence to provincial curriculum and standards are in place. Educational programs and services are provided through two K to 9 schools in Atlin and Telegraph Creek, one K to 7 school in Lower Post and one K to 12 school in Dease Lake. Both Atlin and Telegraph Creek support High School enrolments from various age groups in their communities. Iskut has the Klappan Independent School. Each community has pre-Kindergarten programs: Iskut, Telegraph Creek and Atlin have active Head Start Programs, while Lower Post and Dease Lake run Pre-school programs.

Current Adult literacy programs are extremely limited with a Reading Centre in Dease Lake, a community volunteer-run Library in Atlin and a Tahltan Band Office Library in Telegraph Creek.

School District 87 is committed to literacy development. The District will support the efforts of community groups and recognizes the importance of its participation to assist with community literacy programs that address the needs of all community members, youngsters and elders, alike.

Our District Literacy Plan is simple. We must foster growth in all areas for all our preschool aged children, and our K-12 students, both school-aged and adult. Our public schools offer the educational setting for school-aged students, while the Learning Centre assists students of school age who are unable to attend school and adult students engaged in the completion of their Grade 12 Dogwood or adult equivalent. District efforts must provide opportunities for all staff to further develop skills to meet the vast and varied needs of all students. This will be accomplished through the successful implementation of our District Achievement Contract. Our capacity to support a District Literacy Plan that extends beyond K-12 is limited; however, we are committed to maintain connections with all agencies and community organizations and actively participate in initiatives that promote a wide spectrum of literacy development in all communities, whether a Literacy Now Task Force exists, or not. We are committed to strengthening individual school and community relationships by acting as liaison between partners and supporting activities that strengthen this aspect of public education.

## **The year in review ...**

### **Tahltan Nation**

The Nation has made it a priority to revive the language amongst its people both in the local community and amongst its members outside of the Stikine. Currently fluent speakers number less than 35 with the majority being elders. A team is dedicated to learning the language and using 21st century technology to bring it to the Tahltan. With language comes an identity and the school district will support this initiative as well as utilize what has been developed with its students to foster literacy development through aboriginal language development.

### **Dease Lake**

Dease Lake does not have a functioning literacy task force. It does provide opportunities for its families to participate in early learning groups where literacy is promoted.

### **Telegraph Creek**

Telegraph Creek does not have a functioning literacy task force. It does operate a head Start program for early learners

### **Lower Post**

Lower Post does not have a functioning literacy task force. The school does have a partnership with the local preschool and daycare facility.

## Atlin – report from the committee

### *Programs Initiated in 2013*

- 1. The local moms and tots group requested help with their program. Lit Now co-ordinated and implemented circle times for one month (twice a week) to assist parents with an understanding and awareness of the importance of literacy. Games, songs and activities were role played to equip parents to teach literacy skills in a fun atmosphere.*
- 2. Pre- Kindergarten sessions are available to families who require assistance with preparing their children for kindergarten. This has been a great opportunity to not only prepare the children for school but to role play different teaching techniques for parents. Literacy articles on the importance of reading to your children, activities to encourage literacy skills and websites have been passed on to parents to encourage them in their parenting. This has been and is a wonderful opportunity to reach those parents who do not attend the moms and tots group.*
- 3. **Introducing the classics to children.** This was a sleepover at our local Teen Centre where our girls between the ages of 6 and 12 years old watched the DVD Anne of Green Gables. We then discussed the movie. All ten girls left with a copy of the book and were encouraged to read both part 1 (which we viewed) and part 2 (which we have not yet viewed). The girls were not only grateful to receive the books but excited to read part 2 to see what happens to Anne. It should be mentioned that every girl in our community between these ages attended and only one girl had already seen the movie. We plan to have another sleepover in the fall to discuss part 2 and then view it. This event has already proven to be very successful and has hooked the girls into reading.*
- 4. An after school reading program is available on Fridays for those children in the primary grades who are struggling. This program has been very successful helping children who are struggling to come up to grade level.*
- 5. Leading our youth into volunteering. Atlin is a small community which depends on our volunteers. It has been brought to our attention that most of our volunteers are elderly and it is necessary that our youth see and understand the importance of volunteering. Lit Now has implemented various opportunities for our youth to volunteer. Some of these opportunities have been the following: a) ongoing chair repair at the local teen centre, b) fund raising for a local non-profit organization who raise education funds for Haitian children, c) helping with the Atlin Art and Music Festival, d) attending local meetings to understand how an unincorporated community operates eg. Atlin Board of Trade, Big Water Society and The Atlin Art and Music Festival.*
- 6. Planting for the library. Our local teens have volunteered to plant flower seeds and care for them until the library plant sale on the May long week-end. The plants are then donated and the sales go toward new library books. This program has given teens the*

*opportunity to learn new skills, be consistent and see the importance of volunteering and working together to better our community.*

7. *Workshops. This year we have partnered with the local college which has reopened their doors. The following workshops have been offered this year: a) measuring units, b) making blueprints for your cabin and c) seniors keepsake boxes.*
8. *Women's Car Maintenance - Atlin has a large number of single women who will benefit from this workshop. This knowledge is a must when living in the isolated northern realms of the province. Lit Now will offer this class in the fall of 2013.*
9. *Wine Making – Atlin's famous dandelion wine maker has offered to share her talent and teach others this wonderful art. This workshop was scheduled for February but has been delayed until September 2013.*
10. *Free weekly sewing classes - A local seamstress offers a weekly two hour sewing class to all age groups. Lit Now provides the minimal rental fee. These classes ended the end of April but will continue in September.*
11. *Summer Reading Program will extend into science/math sessions as well. Research and assessments in Atlin indicate that our children have scored high on language and reading skills but lower on math and science. This summer we are looking forward to working closely with our First Nations People. Lit Now will offer this reading program at the Tlingit Culture Camp to insure that all children are included.*
12. *BYTE Workshops - Lit Now continues to partner with TRT (Taku River Tlingit) providing youth workshops with BYTE (Bringing Youth Towards Equality) from Whitehorse.*
13. *Lit Now continues to pay for the ink and paper for our bi-monthly local newspaper the Whisper.*
14. *A local artist is willing to partner with Lit Now and offer a glass mosaic craft for children and teens. The purpose of this craft is to implement the importance of following instructions.*
15. *Writers Workshop. I am currently corresponding with author and creative writing instructor Alison Acheson to discuss the possibility of a writers workshop being offered in Atlin. An assessment will be completed to determine how much interest there is before proceeding. I am hoping to partner with the local college to reduce the expenses.*
16. *Gardeners Tea ... Lit Now has sponsored an annual tea for its local gardeners. The purpose is to encourage our seasoned gardeners to share their knowledge and skill with our new gardeners. A lot of growth comes out of this gathering!*
17. *Games Night ... Adult games night has been a Lit Now event from the beginning. One purpose was to provide a place for adults to gather once a week during the long winter months. It has been an opportunity for brain exercises and learning new skills and strategies. However, this year we feel it will be the last year as we have encouraged gamers to continue and gather in their homes. We will now use this time to implement new needed programs.*

*We will continue to serve our community and keep our ear to the ground to see how we can continue to meet the literacy needs of Atlin.*

## **Summary Reflections**

Student performance and achievement data for the Stikine indicates an urgency to attend to the academic needs of the K-12 students in our public school system. However, this task would be made all the easier with an investment of time and energy into the development of the literacy skills of its preschool age clients.

Community literacy is an important factor in the health of the community. The capacity of small communities is tested with demands of numerous committees and those with the personal resources to participate are often stretched amongst the competing needs.

We need to find ways to promote the literacy in the community in a way that is both effective and efficient. The school district will look to see how it can bring to fruition the goal of improved literacy development. Our starting point will be to strengthen the ties with service providers working with preschool aged children in addition to linking with those looking to promote the languages indigenous to the areas in which we operate.