

Nisga'a Community-District Literacy Plan, 2013-2014

Submitted to the BC Ministry of Education and Decoda Literacy Solutions

by School District 92 (Nisga'a) and the Nisga'a Literacy Outreach Coordinator

July 15, 2013

Introduction

It is a priority of School District 92 (Nisga'a), the Nisga'a Lisims Government, and the four Village Governments that education in the Nass Valley is grounded in Nisga'a culture and focuses on high achievement for all students.

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, the Literacy Task Force, the Hopes and Dreams workshops, community sessions on restructuring, community visioning meetings, and the Literacy Task Force held over the past several years. We value their voices and their commitment to education in the Nass Valley.

Reflections on Community-District Literacy Plan, 2012-2013

Task Group

The Nisga'a School District has, for years, scored very poorly on any number of measures of literacy. In the Achievement Contract for 2012-2013, Literacy and Special Education were identified as the most urgent issues facing the school district and the communities of the Nass Valley. The Literacy Task Group was re-formed in January 2012 to focus specifically on improving English language literacy levels for students in Nisga'a schools.

The Literacy Task Group has changed frequently over the years, as has leadership and coordination for the District-Community Literacy Plan. Since the beginning the Nisga'a Community-District Literacy Plan has always focused on bi-lingual literacy, Nisga'a and English. It continues to do so, although the emphasis is currently on English Language literacy.

In previous years, the Nisga'a Heritage Preservation Society worked closely with the Director of Instruction for Nisga'a Language and Culture, who was also the acting Literacy Outreach Coordinator, to develop Nisga'a language and culture curriculum with a primary focus on developing fluent Nisga'a speakers. The Society also provided vetting and guidance to the work of the school district and schools in areas of Nisga'a Language and Culture. This group acted in the capacity of the Task Force for Nisga'a language between 2010 and 2011 as reported in the Community Literacy reports for July 2011.

With new leadership in the school district beginning in January 2012, there has been a representative Literacy Task Force focusing primarily on increasing the level of English

language literacy for students in the schools. The task group is comprised of members of the school district and the communities:

- Primary Teachers
- Intermediate Teachers
- Secondary Teachers
- Nisga'a District Teachers' Union President
- School Support Staff
- District Literacy Support
- School Administration
- School District Administration
- Early Learning Coordinator
- Adult Learning
- Gitwinksihlkw Village Government
- Gingolx Village Government
- Nisga'a Valley Health Board

This group has worked very hard to review the current level of student achievement, learn and share information about student literacy instruction, review and assess program materials, develop a school district literacy plan, and commit to improving school performance and achievement for all students. The work has been informed by the community perspective brought by members of the Village Governments and the well-informed voice of the early learning coordinator in the Nass Valley.

Simultaneously, there are other groups within the community who are linked to the Literacy Task Force through the early learning coordinator. This connection includes, particularly, the Lisims Early Learning Partnership (LELP) which incorporates representatives from the school district, Head Start Programs, Nursery Programs, Nisga'a Valley Health Managers, CCRR, Success by Six, Nisga'a Supported Child Care Centres, Infant Development Programs, StrongStart Outreach Programs, and others.

Community Context

Since the new Superintendent of Schools arrived in January 2012, there has been and continues to be profound restructuring in the Nisga'a School District. This restructuring affects every community and every family in the Nass Valley. The restructuring has enabled most schools to eliminate three-grade split classes, so that teachers are better able to focus on literacy and mathematics.

As a result of the restructuring, one school became a Middle School, with grades 5-8, while a neighbouring school became an elementary school with Kindergarten through grade 4. A third

school, the largest in the Nass Valley, became a K-grade 6 and grade 9-12 school, with the students in grades 7 and 8 being bussed to the middle school. One school in the Nass Valley chose not to be part of the restructuring and remained a K-grade 8 school with three teachers.

Changes in administrative staff have also affected all of the communities. Since January 2012, there has been a new Superintendent and two new Directors of Instruction. Since March 2013, one of the Directors of Instruction relocated to another school district.

Beginning September 2012, there is a new principal and vice principal at the largest school, Nisga'a Elementary Secondary School. There is also a new District Principal for Special Services. One principal assumed responsibility for two schools and the Superintendent, the Director of Instruction, and the District Principal each assumed school principal responsibilities one day a week.

Another major change over the past year has been the strengthened relationship between the school district and the early learning coordinator who works in the Ksi Xy'ans HeadStart/Daycare Centre. Through her coordination and collaboration with the Lisims Early Learning Partnership and School District 92 (Nisga'a), she has worked with the StrongStart Outreach Facilitator to bring a number of early learning programs and initiatives to all four villages. Funding was provided from the Community Literacy Program budget to support the StrongStart Outreach Centres, enabling them to operate in all four communities and to open up opportunities for other programs that had previously been run in only one village. This is a major strengthening of the early learning programs in the Nass Valley.

The district is involved in two provincial literacy initiatives: The *Vancouver Island University Research Project* and the *Changing Results for Young Readers* project (Ministry of Education). The *Vancouver Island University Research Project* is designed to incorporate literacy and critical thinking practices in instruction, through coaching, networking, and professional inquiry. *Changing Results for Young Readers* has been implemented to increase the number of young engaged, successful readers. Over the past year, the HeadStart and preschool teachers have been involved in this project. Beginning in September 2012, our K-grade 3 teachers will be part of this initiative. The vice-principal of Nisga'a Elementary Secondary School is a Provincial Facilitator for this project.

Community Development and Literacy Collaboration

Early learning continues to be a priority throughout the Nass Valley and was the specific focus of the budget and literacy plan in 2011-2012. Through the leadership of the Early Learning Coordinator, the StrongStart Outreach Facilitator, the school district, Community-District Literacy, and the Lisims Early Learning Partnership, relationships and resources focused on building mutual understanding and increasing the number and quality of early learning programs.

The two major areas of focus for Community Literacy partnerships and resources in 2012-2013 have been the work of the Literacy Task Force and the development of a community/school district newspaper, *The Nass Valley News*. The newspaper is published regularly and is distributed throughout the country. It recounts community and school district news and includes

writers from within the community, the school district, and Nisga'a Secondary School. There is a full-time manager from the community of Laxgalts'ap, a journalist and part-time worker, and translations of articles into Nisga'a, French, and Spanish. This is also a vehicle to motivate students to write for the paper, as they are reimbursed for their contributions.

The school district is in consultation with other agencies to provide resources for the newspaper for next year. We are truly appreciative of the resources that came from Decoda Literacy Solutions to help fund the newspaper between September 2012 and June 2013.

Update on Goals and Actions

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

Goal 1: Promote and support English language literacy.

Promoting and supporting English language literacy at all age levels is a significant goal in the Nass Valley, for the communities and the school district. Actions to June 2013 include—

- Continued community involvement in significant restructuring of the schools and school district personnel, which began in September 2012. As mentioned before, three of the four schools in the Nass Valley were restructured to include a K-4 school in Gingolx, a Grade 5-8 Middle School in Laxgalts'ap, and Grades K-6/9-12 school in Gitlaxt'aamiks. Further restructuring will take place over the coming years, with frequent assessment and evaluation of its effects. It is anticipated restructuring will increase student achievement and performance by making the best use of facilities and personnel in small schools and communities.
- Leadership in early learning initiatives by the Early Learning Coordinator and the StrongStart Outreach Facilitator have increased collaboration and coordination of all early learning programs and initiatives in the Nass Valley. These coordinators have supported the StrongStart Outreach Centres in each community, the Welcome to Kindergarten Program, Ready-Set-Learn, supports for pre-school children, the Imagination Library, and early focus on Nisga'a language and culture with the Nisga'a Heritage Preservation Society. The Early Learning Coordinator also acted as the Early Reading Advocate for the district's involvement in the first year of *Changing Results for Young Children*, which included the HeadStart and preschool teachers and classes.
- Strengthening reading instruction throughout the school district, through the work of the Literacy Task Force, the development of a school district Literacy Plan, extensive coaching, and involvement in the Vancouver Island University research project. It has been five years since there has been a district-wide major literacy initiative. The goal for the current initiative is for all students to be reading capably by the end of Grade 3.
- The results of new leadership, extensive community meetings, major restructuring, increased communication, strengthened involvement of the early learning coordinator, and other changes that have happened over the past year, have resulted in significantly increased understanding and collaboration in schools and communities about learning and literacy.

Goal 2: Promote and support Nisga'a language and culture literacy.

It is our belief that School District 92 students can grow stronger and perform better if the learning process draws from their rich Nisga'a culture. As educators across the country would contend, education must be relevant for students to engage in the educational process.

The aspiration of the Nisga'a people for a quality education with strong academics and strong choices, yet with an emphasis on Language and Culture, was reflected in the Hopes and Dreams

report which concluded an extensive public consultation that took place in four communities during 2011.

Ongoing actions include—

- 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.
- 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.

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

The basic principles of learning 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. Actions for this goal include—

- A school district Literacy Plan that supplements the District-Community Literacy Plan, commits the school district to increase literacy levels, and sets a goal that all students will be reading capably by Grade 3. The school district Plan specifically focuses on these areas:
 - Ensure that students will be reading capably by the end of Grade 3
 - Develop intermediate and senior students’ capacity to ‘read to learn’ and to think critically
 - Establish a system to assist in monitoring the literacy performance of individual students, classes, schools, and the district as a whole
 - Develop a seven-year literacy plan to bring our students’ literacy levels above the provincial level
 - Establish a professional learning community amongst staff that incorporates a focus on learning, regular and deep collaboration, and a focus on results.
- Involvement in this Literacy Plan includes representatives at all age levels. Commitment includes teachers, support staff, administrators, early learning personnel, and community members.
- *The Nass Valley News* which provides a communication vehicle that involves the community in writing, publishing, and editing, is distributed to every household in the Nass Valley, is sent to others across the province and the country, and is published online.

- Extensive community meetings to discuss education and achievement, culminating in a major restructuring of the school district that began September 2012 and continuing for the next several years. Restructuring touches every family and community.
- The Nisga'a StrongStart Outreach Program started in September 2011 and will continue next year.

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 School District and the Nisga'a Nation, in order to support both Nisga'a and English language literacy.

Indications of Success

Our major successes have been—

- Community consultation and major restructuring of the school district and personnel to focus specifically on student achievement and literacy
- A district-wide renewed focus on literacy through a common literacy program and involvement in provincial literacy and reading initiatives
- Strengthening of the Special Services department through leadership and professional learning
- A community newspaper sponsored by the school district, supported through funding from Decoda Literacy Solutions, and employing community members in writing, editing, and publishing
- Increased focus on early learning in all the villages of the Nass Valley
- Increased student achievement as measured through various assessments

Challenges

- School District 92 (Nisga'a) has been in need of the profound restructuring that is occurring. Achievement results have been plummeting in the past few years, as indicated by several different measures. This past year brought new and increased leadership to the areas of literacy and special education. It also brought the implementation of a new reading program and provincial involvement and support. Once we analyze the results of end of the year achievement tests, we anticipate an increase in reading levels. Our ultimate goal is for each child to be reading at grade level by the end of Grade 3.
- Nisga'a Language and Culture are the essence of the Nisga'a Nation. Cultural and linguistic aspirations do not impede the establishment of a strong academic program, and one does not need to make a choice. Promoting and supporting Nisga'a language, culture, history, and values is a long-term goal, accomplished in collaboration with Elders,

governments, the school district, and community members. This remains an exceptionally challenging goal.

For the coming year

Our challenges and successes have long-term implications for improving literacy in the Nass Valley and the Nisga'a School District. They will continue over the coming years, as noted in the three year plan identified in the Nisga'a School District Achievement Contract.

Goals and Action Plan for 2013-2014

Goal 1: Promote and support English language literacy

Actions/Initiatives	Indicators of Success
<p>Continue to structure and support schools to enhance literacy and mathematics instruction, with teachers able to teach 1 or 2 grades within a class</p> <p>Continue strong leadership for literacy and special education programs within the schools</p> <p>Work toward enabling all students to read capably by the end of Grade 3</p> <p>Continue to support leadership for early learning initiatives and programs across the Nass Valley</p> <p>Continue collaboration between schools and communities</p>	<p>Improved school success, based on a range of student success indicators: initial results indicate a small but consistent increase in reading performance</p> <p>Nisga’a StrongStart Outreach Program accessible to all children, birth through five years old: accomplished</p> <p>Implementation of school district Literacy Plan: ongoing</p> <p>Early Learning Literacy Plan developed with partners: Strategic Plan developed by Lisims Early Learning Partnership</p> <p>Ongoing community consultation: community meetings, Literacy Task Force, communication with Nisga’a Lisims Government</p>

Goal 2: 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 community relationships and partnerships</p>	<p>Culturally responsive resources and instruction: ongoing</p> <p>Language resources to support teaching of Nisga’a Language: ongoing</p> <p>Nisga’a StrongStart Outreach Program in all four schools: ongoing</p> <p>Nisga’a Language and Culture Resource Center: ongoing</p>

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

Actions/Initiatives	Indicators of Success
<p>Continue community consultation and consultation with Nisga’a Lisims Government about the effects of district restructuring</p> <p>Ensure that learning and literacy programs are provided and 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>Community and government meetings: ongoing</p> <p>Learning and literacy programs are available, accessible, and utilized by members of each community through—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • StrongStart Outreach Program • School Libraries • Technology • Nass Valley News • Culturally relevant materials produced and used in schools

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: strong assessment results for Kindergarten children</p> <p>Transition planning is evident in overall strategies involving all main stakeholders and aimed at all transition points: continuing goal</p>