

The Importance of Answering the Call

A profile of an early childhood education dual credit program and student

Meet future educator Ashton Louis

Ashton Louis, a member of the Okanagan Indian band from the syilx nation and a student of W.L. Seaton Secondary School, understands that the transition from high school into adulthood, post-secondary study, and jobs is a matter of balance. On one hand, there are practical considerations. “I want to find steady, reliable work,” he said. On the other hand, there are aspirational matters. “When I was young, I had a teacher that made a difference in my life—I want to be that person for other children.”

“A career in early childhood education,” he said, “offers me both of those things.”

That’s why Ashton enrolled in a new Indigenous-focused early childhood education training program created in Vernon thanks to B.C.’s Early Childhood Education Dual Credit Project.

Provincial investment inspires local design

Dual credit empowers grades 11 and 12 students to take tuition-free college and university courses that count toward both their high school diplomas and future post-secondary credentials. While school districts and their post-secondary partners choose what dual credit to offer, the Ministry of Education and Child Care directed an additional \$6.3 million between 2022 and 2025 to enable them to design and launch early childhood education programs to serve local students for years to come.



In response, School District No. 22 (Vernon) first developed a program in partnership with Okanagan College.

Hearing the need for an Indigenous early childhood education dual credit program, the district advocated for a second pathway built from their strong connection with Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) and B.C.’s Indigenous public post-secondary institution: the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology.

This collaboration focused on including Indigenous perspectives, teachings, and community values throughout the educational experience. Recognizing that early learning environments should reflect and celebrate Indigenous identities, the partnership chose to offer students three foundational courses with a practicum in the Indigenous Early Childhood Education certificate program.

A local program grounded in Indigenous perspectives

Rachel Marchand, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology faculty, is Project Coordinator, “I wanted to build an education model by and for the Indigenous community.”

Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and local community leaders contributed to the curriculum, ensuring that traditional teachings were integrated into what students would learn and take forward into their careers as early childhood educators.

Ashton and his classmates were keenly aware of those Indigenous perspectives, teachings, and community values woven throughout their educational experience. They reported feeling seen and safe. The Vernon School District quickly recognized this first-of-it’s-kind program was a strong fit for all students and is building regional partnerships so students in other districts can participate.

While it is no longer OKIB-student-specific, the program continues to be delivered through an Indigenous model, which speaks to its strength, relevance, and success.

Following up with Ashton

For Ashton, that sense of safety helped him succeed despite the demands of post-secondary-level learning. “The work and workload were overwhelming at times. I had to make sure to take care of myself and stay aware of how I was feeling. For that, I was in right place.”

As for his practical plan to find employment, and his aspirational wish to give back to his community by taking inspiration from an impactful educator, he has already achieved both in balance. After graduation, Ashton completed the rest of the Indigenous Early Childhood Education program, obtained his Early Childhood Educator certification and began working in his community. His dual credit experience, he said, was “transformational.”



To learn more about dual credit in British Columbia, visit:

www.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/dual-credit

To learn more about early childhood professionals, visit:

www.gov.bc.ca/childcare/ecestrategy