

A Fearless Student Finds a Flexible Program

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

Meet future educator Emma Cunningham

Even as a young child, Burns Lake high school student Emma Cunningham believed in herself. So, when she learned that an early childhood education training program was available in her school district, she submitted her application. Some of her fellow students were intimidated by the fact the program was at the post-secondary level, but Emma knew she was ready for the challenge.

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 Districts 91 (Nechako Lakes), 57 (Prince George), and 28 (Quesnel) partnered with the College of New Caledonia (CNC) to create a regional program. Their goal was to ensure that local students, including some who might not have considered post-secondary education, could access early childhood educator training despite the geographic challenges of accessing post-secondary education in the north. Physical attendance at classes isn't always possible in the northern areas of the province, especially in winter.



A local program with flexibility for remote communities

Wendy Kelemen, Nechako Lakes' District Principal of Early Learning and Child Care, said, "We recognize that our remote location can pose challenges, and for some, traveling to the Prince George campus may not be practical, so we offer online courses."

Their resulting local program included an online course in each semester; attending the CNC campus in Prince George was optional. Nevertheless, students had support, both virtual and face-to-face.

"Every couple of weeks, I go to engage with the students," said Wendy Kelemen.

And the students had access to high school teachers, counsellors, and their CNC instructors.

Christine Jackson, M.Ed., Faculty, Early Childhood Education Instructor at CNC, enjoyed providing that support and encouraging students to practice their new skills.

“What they learned in their courses has helped them contribute to reading programs at libraries or engage with nieces and nephews. In those interactions, students saw their learning lift off the page and into practice.”

In the first year, there were 16 students, and in the second that grew to 31 students. In the future, the program will be even more flexible, allowing students to create their own schedule, taking up to three ECE courses each semester.

“We’re opening more doors,” said Wendy Kelemen, “for students to explore this career path and a post-secondary education.”

Following up with Emma

Reflecting on dual credit, Emma said, “It’s a great opportunity that can help students better prepare for the future and help us learn about areas that interest us.” For her part, she gained valuable skills to launch a career. “This program has helped me better understand child development and the importance of early childhood education. I have become even more passionate about making a positive impact in the lives of children.”

Her decision to take early childhood educator training through dual credit came from believing that she can do anything, that everyone can, “as long as you set your mind to it.”

She has shared that with other students at her school, hoping to inspire them to push past any fear and check out dual credit and this flexible early childhood educator training opportunity.



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