



BRIGHT IDEAS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

LOCATION
Tumbler Ridge

POPULATION
2,000

ECONOMIC BASE
Mining, Tourism,
Renewable energy

INNOVATORS
Tumbler Ridge
Secondary School,
Conuma Coal



TUMBLER RIDGE'S CONUMA CHALLENGE

How go-karts improve education outcomes and build community

SYNOPSIS

Tumbler Ridge Secondary School had been working hard to create opportunities for students and the community. They found a novel solution in the Conuma Challenge, a student go-kart race which brought the community closer together, and amplified the wave of economic optimism running through the town.

INTRO

Declining coal prices had hit Tumbler Ridge hard, and students at Tumbler Ridge Secondary School were uncertain about their future. Less than one-third had plans to go on to trades or post-secondary education. School staff were working diligently on a way to create optimism in their students and the community. With the town's prospects looking up after Conuma Coal Resources bought three nearby mines in 2016, the time was right for something big.

THE STRATEGY

The Peace River South School District (SD59) had recently found success with a program in Dawson Creek, where elementary students built and raced wooden go-karts on a downhill track. The District knew it could make this program even bigger, and Tumbler Ridge Secondary School was the place to do it. They proposed using metal, gas-powered go-karts as a way to tie together trades, arts, math, writing and business skills



through the entire Grade 9 curriculum, using funding from the Industry Training Authority of BC.

The incoming Grade 9 class voted on whether they wanted to try to go-kart challenge, and overwhelmingly approved. Their first task was to find funding. Their English teacher guided them in crafting strong proposals and delivering compelling presentations. They took their

requests to local businesses, including Conuma Coal, which encouraged them to develop a pitch for a business partnership. After some hard work and negotiations, the students got the support they needed, and the go-kart competition got a name: the Conuma Challenge.

To make the challenge like a real workplace, students are assigned to their teams and find roles that fit their talents.



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Along with the persuasive writing in English, students apply math skills to the design of their go-kart, and use art class to design their team's branding. Representatives from Conuma, [Teck Resources](#), and the District of Tumbler Ridge visit to discuss business models and planning, and each team has someone in charge of business management. Teams get invaluable mentorship from students who have already done the challenge, from tradespeople in the community, and from parents who are thrilled to have students seeking their help. Everyone in Tumbler Ridge is integral to the students' success.

Of course, a go-kart competition needs go-karts. Students purchase a kit from Scotty's Specialty Services, a five-horsepower motor and additional parts from [Princess Auto](#), and complete their design with metal from the local transfer station. They have two weeks to put together the fastest go-kart they can, including a day of learning welding skills on the [Northern Lights College](#) campus in Dawson Creek.

School staff work tirelessly to ensure every aspect of the project integrates important life and workplace skills, while fulfilling the objectives of the Grade 9 curriculum. Throughout the process, students are graded and given the feedback they need to progress in their learning.

All of the teams' work – and their pride – are finally put on the line on race day. City council will have heard a formal presentation from the students asking permission to close down a street. Local fire and police departments provide

security, the [Tumbler Ridge Lions Club](#) provides food, students from Tumbler Ridge Secondary get things organized, and the whole community is on hand to support the racers.

One by one, drivers take their go-karts down the course and complete a pit stop, including a tire change. Every flat tire or breakdown is met with teamwork and co-operation. Some teams push their karts across the finish line, while some lend their karts to other teams to ensure everyone records a time. Awards go to the team with the fastest time, and who demonstrated the strongest teamwork throughout the challenge.

Finally, each team auctions off their go-kart. Half the proceeds go to next year's challenge, and half goes to the team's chosen charity. The auction shows students the value of social responsibility and raises thousands of dollars for local causes. Some families of Grade 8 students even bid on the go-karts, in the hope of studying the designs and finding improvements they can make when it comes their turn.

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SUCCESSES

MOTIVATION

- Tumbler Ridge Secondary School has seen a real improvement in students' focus and direction. This year, 80% of graduating students plan to pursue a trade or post-secondary education — well up from the one-third of students who shared that vision before the Conuma Challenge started.
- School staff attribute part of this change to the way the challenge lets students explore new aspects of their education and find new passions and talents.
- This has been especially true for helping girls discover how they can thrive in trades and leadership roles.

INSPIRATION

- The challenge's reputation as a true community event is spreading. Workers elsewhere in B.C. mention it as part of the appeal of moving to Tumbler Ridge.
- [Kitimat](#) is looking at developing its own go-kart challenge, and the Peace River South School District is working on a workbook to help other communities follow its success.
- These go-karts have the potential to empower and connect students across not just Tumbler Ridge, but all of B.C.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Investing time and effort in students has benefits for young people and the community as a whole.
- Tying the school curriculum together with exciting, ongoing projects is a powerful way to connect students with new career options.
- New economic opportunities also represent a broader opportunity to bring the members of the community closer together.
- Go-karts are really fun.



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